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From hobbies to examination progression: a study of art-track candidates' motivations for participating in non-academic tutoring

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Abstract. Non-academic tutoring is an important channel through which families help their children accumulate cultural capital. Existing studies have mostly analysed parental motivations from a static perspective, and few have examined how students' motivations change across educational stages. Based on in-depth interviews with 22 art-track candidates, this article finds that their motivations for participating in arts tutoring show a marked shift from value rationality to instrumental rationality. In primary school and before, the intrinsic motivation of personal interest dominated their participation in interest classes. At the two key educational transitions of the high school entrance examination (zhongkao) and the college entrance examination (gaokao), they chose to study art majors out of the extrinsic motivation of examination progression. In this process, the form of tutoring they attended shifted from arts interest classes to professional intensive training classes, and the learning content was replaced by examination subjects for art majors.

Keywords: non-academic tutoring, cultural capital, art-track candidates, behavioural motivation

1. Introduction

In contemporary China, with the rise of the educational consumption market, intensifying educational competition, and the popularity of the discourse of quality-oriented education, parents not only invest in academic extracurricular tutoring but also enrol their children in extracurricular interest classes [1]. Data from the China Child Development Report (2019) show that more than 60% of Chinese children have attended off-campus training classes, and cultivating interests and hobbies is regarded as the primary purpose [2]. With the implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy[1], the number of academic off-campus training institutions has shrunk substantially[2], further pushing families' educational consumption towards extracurricular interest

[1] The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. (2021, July 24). Opinions on further reducing the burden of homework and off-campus training for students in compulsory education. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-07/24/content_5627132.htm

[2] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2022, February 25). "Double Reduction" information card. http://www.moe. gov.cn/jybxwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/202202/t20220225_602315.html

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classes [3]. As the "Double Reduction" policy reshapes the landscape of off-campus training, the question of why families participate in non-academic off-campus training has increasingly become a research topic worthy of attention.

Similar to South Korea [4] and Japan [5], which are also located in East Asia, China's education system is characterised by high-stakes examinations, and admission to high schools and universities is mainly based on examination scores [6]. After entering the secondary stage, students spend long hours at school and carry a heavy academic burden [7]. In such a society, participation in non-academic off-campus training does not improve academic achievement [8] and may even have a negative impact on it [9]. How, then, should we understand the behavioural logic of individuals' participation in non-academic tutoring, including extracurricular interest classes? What are individuals' behavioural motivations or purposes?

Existing studies have mostly approached this question from the perspective of cultural capital theory, arguing that the middle class uses non-academic tutoring to help their children cultivate cultural tastes or habitus, with the aim of achieving class cultural reproduction (or cultural mobility). Given the characteristics of China's education system, existing research has noted the complexity of participation motives and found that parental motivations combine two dimensions: value rationality and instrumental rationality [10]. For example, one study found that parents enrol their children in music, calligraphy, or art interest classes to enhance cultural taste, whereas dance, sports, and chess classes are used to cultivate practical skills [11]. Other studies have found that parental motivations combine both instrumental rationality and emotional expression [1]. However, existing studies all approach the issue from a static perspective, and almost no literature examines how actors' behavioural motivations change with educational stage. In discussing the influence of the education system on behavioural motivation, existing research tends to set the macro characteristics of the education system as the institutional background, and few researchers examine how actors strategically respond to specific admission and examination systems. This has also led researchers to treat students as a homogeneous whole when selecting research subjects, neglecting the various types of specialty students at the secondary stage and those high school graduates who simultaneously apply for special majors.

To address these gaps, this study takes high school graduates who simultaneously apply for art majors (hereafter "art-track candidates") as its subject. According to statistics from China's Ministry of Education, undergraduate enrolment in art majors accounted for 10% of total undergraduate enrolment in China in 2022. Among the 13 discipline categories, enrolment in art studies ranks third, after engineering and management[3]. We emphasise that the art-track candidate group has value as a typical case. These students often attended arts interest classes in preschool and primary school, and the cumulative effect of cultural capital has shaped their subsequent educational trajectories. Some of them entered high school as art-specialty students and often had experience of intensive professional training during high school. Accordingly, this study aims to answer the following specific research questions through in-depth interviews: at different educational stages, what kinds of arts tutoring have art-track candidates attended? How have their behavioural motivations changed?

2. Literature review

2.1. Non-academic tutoring and academic achievement

In practice, off-campus training is usually divided into academic and non-academic categories, the main

[3] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2023, December 29). 2022 educational statistics: Undergraduate enrolment by discipline category. http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/moe_560/2022/quanguo/202401/t20240110_1099511.html

difference being whether the course content involves academic subjects. In academia, academic off-campus training is usually called "shadow education" or "private tutoring", and its curricular goal is to improve students' academic achievement in high-stakes examinations; non-academic off-campus training is classified as "structured extracurricular activities" [12] or "non-academic tutoring" [13], and its curricular goals are not related to academic improvement but aim to cultivate students' artistic taste, athletic talent, or other interests and hobbies. This article defines non-academic tutoring as follows: paid courses oriented towards enhancing cultural taste, developing talents, or cultivating interests and hobbies, mainly including arts, sports, and technology courses, whose content is usually not directly related to academic improvement and whose teaching services are provided by off-campus training institutions. Non-academic tutoring has three characteristics—non-academic, private, and supplementary—and its greatest difference from shadow education lies in its non-academic nature [14]. Despite its non-academic character, it may still affect individuals' academic performance.

There is considerable disagreement in academia about whether non-academic tutoring affects individuals' academic performance in school education. On the one hand, existing research has confirmed that non-academic tutoring can have a positive effect on student development through competence spillover. One study showed that participation in non-academic training significantly improves primary school students' non-cognitive abilities, such as interpersonal communication, collective integration, prosocial behaviour, and emotional regulation [15]. Another study found that, below a certain threshold, participation in non-academic off-campus training has a significant positive effect on junior high school students' academic perseverance and school adjustment [16]. Still another study found that non-academic training can reduce junior high school students' subjective academic burden and thereby improve their psychological state [17]. On the other hand, some studies show that non-academic tutoring has no positive effect on academic achievement or access to higher education. A study of junior high school students showed that participation in after-school interest classes does not directly or indirectly positively affect academic achievement [8]. Some studies even find that non-academic tutoring has a negative impact on junior high school students' academic performance [9]. Other research has compared the effects of the two types of extracurricular training on access to higher education, finding that participation in academic training is significantly and positively correlated with receiving higher education, whereas participation in non-academic training has no significant effect on access to higher education [18]. In a society like China that places particular emphasis on academic achievement, why do individuals participate in these seemingly "useless" forms of non-academic tutoring, and what are their underlying motivations?

2.2. Behavioural motivations for participating in non-academic tutoring

In research on motivations for participating in non-academic tutoring, cultural capital theory is the dominant analytical paradigm, and its theoretical origins can be traced to Bourdieu's classic discussion of forms of capital and educational inequality. Bourdieu proposed that students who possess abundant cultural capital are more likely to succeed in the education system [19]. On this basis, studies outside China have treated non-academic tutoring as a channel through which parents help their children accumulate cultural capital. For example, a study of middle-class child-rearing practices in the United Kingdom showed that parents tend to have their children attend extracurricular interest classes in music, art, and drama from early childhood; these arts courses are used to enhance children's cultural taste and artistic appreciation so as to cultivate a "typically middle-class child" [12].

Unlike Western societies, education systems in East Asian societies emphasise a unified curriculum and high-stakes examinations, so parents generally attach importance to their children's academic achievement

[20]. Against this social background, parents' motivations for enrolling their children in non-academic tutoring are more complex. First, different extracurricular interest classes correspond to different behavioural motivations. The motivation behind parents' enrolling their children in interest classes varies by type: participation in music, calligraphy, or art activities is an act of accumulating cultural capital and enhancing taste, whereas dance, computer, sports, and chess courses are acts of learning practical skills to cope with future competition [11]. Second, parental motivations combine two dimensions: value rationality and instrumental rationality. Extracurricular interest classes point both to the cultivation of children's deeper individual qualities and values, that is, the value-rational dimension, and to children's educational attainment and future social mobility, that is, the instrumental-rational dimension [10]. Third, parental motivations combine the dual attributes of instrumental rationality and emotional expression. Arts and sports interest classes are used by middle-class families to improve their children's overall quality; in this process parents must invest considerable money, time, and energy, through which they convey their love for their children [1]. However, the above studies all approach the issue from a static perspective and do not explore how parental motivations change across different educational stages of their children. Moreover, because cultural capital theory focuses on the intergenerational transmission of family advantage, the above studies all start from the perspective of the family or parents and neglect students as acting subjects. Therefore, when we focus on the art-track candidate group at the high school stage, a question that has not yet been clearly addressed is: at different educational stages, what kinds of arts tutoring have art-track candidates attended? How have their behavioural motivations changed?

3. Research methods

To answer the above questions, this study adopted the in-depth interview method. This method was chosen for two reasons. First, in-depth interviews are both focused and flexible, which is conducive to tracing art-track candidates' experiences of arts tutoring from childhood to high school and to capturing the key junctures at which participation motives changed. Second, in-depth interviews can break through surface discourse through follow-up questioning and uncover interviewees' real behavioural logic and dimensions of consideration, making them an effective method for exploring students' behavioural motivations [21].

The interview questions in this study consisted mainly of three parts. The first concerned interviewees' basic information, specifically their art major, whether they were art-specialty students, and the type of high school they attended. The second concerned their experiences of attending arts interest classes in primary school and before, mainly when they started, why they participated, the course content, and their learning experiences. Finally, the interviews focused on art-track candidates' learning experiences in art professional courses at the secondary stage, specifically when they decided to study an art major, why they chose to study an art major, the content of art professional courses, and the process of professional intensive training. In addition, during the interviews, interviewees were encouraged to compare and evaluate arts interest classes, school arts courses, and art examination intensive training classes, which helped the researchers better examine art-track candidates' intrinsic motivations for attending different courses.

To select eligible interviewees, this study adopted a strategy combining purposive sampling and snowball sampling. This also helps ensure that the sample conforms to the principle of maximum differentiation [22], thereby reducing the possibility of research bias caused by interviewee homogeneity. Selected interviewees had to meet three requirements simultaneously: having attended at least one arts interest class in primary school or before, having simultaneously applied for an art major when registering for the college entrance examination, and having attended off-campus professional intensive training classes. Ultimately, the

researchers identified 22 interviewees and conducted in-depth interviews with them lasting 45–90 minutes. Specifically, the sample included 6 students majoring in fine arts and design, 4 in music, 5 in dance, 3 in performance (acting and directing), 2 in broadcasting and hosting, and 2 in calligraphy; it included 17 high school students and 5 undergraduates; ages ranged from 17 to 21; and there were 15 females and 7 males (see Table 1). The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with 17 high school students in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, and interviewed the other 5 undergraduates by WeChat voice call; interviews with minors were conducted with the permission of their guardians. With interviewees' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded. After the interviews, the researchers transcribed the recordings verbatim, obtaining more than 210,000 characters of interview material. After obtaining the transcripts, the researchers used NVivo 12 to carry out further data analysis.

Table 1. Basic information of interviewees

No.	Gender	Art Major	Art-Specialty Student (Yes/No)	Type of High School
S1	Female	Fine Arts and Design	Yes	Provincial Key High School
S2	Male	Fine Arts and Design	No	Regular High School
S3	Female	Music	No	Regular High School
S4	Female	Performance (Acting and Directing)	No	Regular High School
S5	Male	Music	Yes	Provincial Key High School
S6	Female	Dance	No	Regular High School
S7	Female	Performance (Acting and Directing)	No	Regular High School
S8	Male	Music	Yes	Regular High School
S9	Female	Dance	No	Regular High School
S10	Male	Calligraphy	Yes	Regular High School
S11	Female	Broadcasting and Hosting	Yes	Provincial Key High School
S12	Male	Calligraphy	Yes	Regular High School
S13	Female	Broadcasting and Hosting	No	Regular High School
S14	Female	Performance (Acting and Directing)	No	Regular High School
S15	Female	Music	Yes	Provincial Key High School
S16	Female	Dance	No	Regular High School
S17	Female	Dance	No	Regular High School
S18	Male	Fine Arts and Design	Yes	Regular High School
S19	Female	Fine Arts and Design	No	Regular High School
S20	Female	Fine Arts and Design	Yes	Regular High School
S21	Female	Fine Arts and Design	Yes	Regular High School
S22	Male	Dance	No	Regular High School

4. Cultivating interests and hobbies: predominantly value-rational in primary school and before

Bourdieu proposed that the accumulation of embodied cultural capital begins in childhood: "parents, other family members, or professionals hired by the family invest time in cultivating children's sensitivity to cultural differences" [23]. In the present study, this is reflected in the fact that art-track candidates usually attended arts interest classes in primary school and before. At this stage, the motivations of art-track candidates and their parents were mainly to expand interests and hobbies and did not point to examination progression or professional development. To a certain extent, this constitutes what Weber called social action "based on a conscious belief in the intrinsic value of a certain mode of conduct" [24], that is, it is predominantly value-rational.

4.1. "See whether I like it": parents respect my choice

When art-track candidates were in early childhood, the arts tutoring they attended mainly took the form of extracurricular interest classes. In their recollections, parents fully respected their preferences when making decisions, for example, when to start attending interest classes, which interest classes to attend, and whether to keep studying. At this stage, parents supported and encouraged them to try and explore more; in the course of learning, drawing could be replaced by an instrument, and dance by elocution, and no one was forced by their parents to attend a particular arts interest class. As S2 put it:

When I was in kindergarten, I liked drawing quite a lot, so my parents enrolled me in a children's art class at a training institution near our home. By the second grade of primary school, I began to show an interest in music, so my mother took me to trial lessons at a training institution, and among the various instruments I chose the piano. However, I only kept learning the piano for a little over two years in primary school before giving up. My parents did not expect me to reach any great level; they were fairly supportive of my trying things out and experimenting.

In our interviews, this passage from S2 is broadly representative. In childhood, many art-track candidates attended more than one arts interest class. Because children's interests shift easily, many people show only a "three-minute passion" when trying a new hobby. When their interest in a particular arts activity fades, or when they find that they are not good at a particular art form, parents mostly respect their wish to quit. S7 described her experience of attending interest classes as follows:

I am the type with fairly broad interests; I attended interest classes in the arts, technology, and sports categories. As I recall, the arts interest classes alone included calligraphy, fine art, dance, and elocution. I am not a very patient person, and I stuck with any one interest class for a year at most; sometimes I did not want to go to class after less than a month. My mother is fairly open-minded; when I decided not to continue, she would not force me to finish the course.

In the course of art-track candidates' participation in interest classes, their parents placed greater value on the enjoyment or growth experience that arts learning brought, and whether a high-level grade certificate could be obtained was of secondary importance. S16 described her experience of taking dance grading examinations as follows:

What I mainly learned at the interest class was Chinese dance, and I took the grading examinations of the Beijing Dance Academy. I obtained the Grade 10 certificate in junior high school, which is an intermediate level. The highest is Grade 13; the advanced-level examinations that follow involve professional skills and are relatively less enjoyable. Considering that I was mainly treating dance as a hobby at the time, my parents did not require me to obtain the advanced-level certificates.

When art-track candidates were in primary school and preschool, the pressure of daily study and examination progression had not yet become explicit. Their parents' horizons in making educational decisions were relatively broad, and extracurricular interest classes only vaguely pointed towards promoting individuals' all-round development, which allowed art-track candidates to experiment with various arts interest classes. At this point, participation in extracurricular interest classes reflected more the mode of cultural capital accumulation described in Bourdieu's classic work: art-track candidates and their parents helped the children explore and internalise aesthetic sensibilities in the arts by extending the accumulation period as much as possible.

4.2. "Great fun": arts learning driven by interests and hobbies

When art-track candidates recounted their childhood experiences in arts interest classes, they repeatedly used words such as "interested", "like", and "fun". These words are connected to an arts learning experience completely different from professional intensive training for the art examination: in early childhood interest classes, the act of learning art was driven mainly by intrinsic interests and hobbies. Recounting his experience of attending interest classes in primary school, S21 spoke in a slightly nostalgic tone:

When I was little I did not like talking much; I liked reading comics and scribbling on paper. I still remember the first time I took a creative art class outside (at a training institution): the teacher did not give me a brush but had me dip my whole palm in paint. In that class I scribbled freely on the paper with my palm covered in various paints, and I found it extremely fun and joyful. Every weekend holiday, the extracurricular activity I looked forward to most was going to art class. I really want to go back to that time, when I could explore freely in art class.

According to self-determination theory, the motivations driving human behaviour mainly include intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The former refers to engaging in an activity because of inner interest or satisfaction, while the latter refers to devoting oneself to an activity in order to obtain external rewards or avoid punishment [25]. From this theoretical perspective, interests and hobbies are intrinsic motivations. When art-track candidates were children, the enjoyable experience and satisfaction brought by attending arts interest classes were important prerequisites for persisting in learning, rather than treating interest classes as a means to achieve external academic goals. As children, art-track candidates often tried more than one type of arts interest class; if they found that they were not truly interested in a particular arts activity, they would choose to give it up after studying for a period, whereas for the arts activity they were genuinely interested in or even loved, they would often persist in long-term practice. In preschool and primary school, art-track candidates' participation in arts interest classes exhibited the characteristics of "low intensity, long duration". In S10's memory, the calligraphy interest class in childhood met very infrequently:

I started practising calligraphy in the third grade of primary school, and it has been almost ten years now. Unlike the intensive training I have just finished, attending calligraphy classes at the institution during primary school never felt tiring. Normally there was only one class a week, each class lasting only 90 minutes, usually scheduled at weekends. During winter and summer vacations, sometimes I would complete a whole course in consecutive sessions. One course consists of ten classes, which can be finished in two weeks if no leave is taken.

For art-track candidates, a low-intensity schedule was one of the important conditions for maintaining their interests and hobbies. It contrasts sharply with the high-intensity, tedious training of the intensive training stage, and childhood arts learning experiences often became memories worth cherishing. S6 described her childhood experience of attending a dance interest class as follows:

At that time there was no examination pressure. Leaping to the beat of the music in the dance studio put me in a state of self-forgetfulness, and I felt that time passed very quickly. Being able to perform various dance movements was great fun, and the accompanying music and movements made me feel especially energetic. In summer, my clothes would be soaked with sweat after dance practice, but I did not find it hard; I still very much enjoyed the dance class.

To some extent, arts interest classes became part of art-track candidates' childhood lives. When giving retrospective narratives of their childhood arts learning experiences, they placed particular emphasis on the importance of interest in choosing or quitting a particular arts course, and many recalled the good times spent in interest classes. Perhaps this is because, after entering the secondary stage, the purpose of their participation in arts courses shifted to examination progression, and extrinsic utilitarian motives gradually replaced intrinsic ones.

5. Serving examination progression: predominantly instrumental-rational in secondary school

Some scholars have proposed that Chinese families generally adopt an educational strategy of "educational downward mobility avoidance". Unlike Western countries, which regard education as an intermediate link to occupational attainment, they directly regard educational attainment as the main driver of social mobility, or even as the goal of intergenerational social mobility [26]. When children are at key educational transitions, parents are most concerned with access to educational opportunities at the next stage. Under the current education system, the two most important educational transitions in basic education are the zhongkao and the gaokao. For the art-track candidate group that this study focuses on, their choice of an art-major development path was mainly based on their academic performance at the secondary stage and their progression goals for the zhongkao and gaokao. Once students have preliminarily determined their direction in an art major at the secondary stage, the arts interest classes of childhood are replaced by art professional courses. This means that arts learning at the secondary stage begins to serve extrinsic motives and goals, thus becoming "instrumental-rational" action in Weber's sense.

5.1. For progression: motivations for studying an art major at educational transitions

In China, the dual pressures of streaming at the zhongkao and selection through the gaokao place secondary school students' time allocation within a strict "countdown to progression" logic. When academic performance is insufficient to help them achieve their progression goals, secondary students and their parents must make a choice: time is either used for shadow education to improve academic performance, or used to cultivate other talents in order to gain advantages in progression beyond academics. When secondary students decide to study an art major, this means they have basically established their identity as art-track candidates, and their motivation for studying art is converted into the goal of achieving examination progression. Those who determine their art major before the zhongkao enter high school as art-specialty students at the zhongkao stage. In this regard, S11 described why she decided to study art in the third year of junior high school:

My grades in junior high school were generally above 560, and I scored 583 in the zhongkao. My score could get me into a decent high school in the urban district, but not the provincial key high school I wanted. So my family had me apply for the art-specialty student admission of the target high school; once you pass the professional examination, the requirement for academic subject scores can be lowered. To take the broadcasting specialty examination, I specifically went to a training institution in the third year of junior high school to study script reading and impromptu topics for a period of time.

Secondary students often choose to become art-specialty students at the zhongkao stage in order to gain additional advantages in progression, that is, to be admitted to a high-quality high school on the strength of their professional scores. The premise for this progression strategy to work is the autonomous admission system for high schools at the zhongkao stage; some prefecture-level cities stipulate that art-specialty students need only reach 70% of the unified admission score line of the high school they apply to[4]. This means that, if specialty students pass the professional course, they can obtain a place at a high-quality high school with a lower score. Similarly, some high school students, in order to increase their chances of entering an undergraduate university at the gaokao stage, choose to switch from academic-track students to art-track candidates during high school. S20 decided to study an art major only in high school, and she made the following statement about her decision motive:

In my first year of high school my grades were not very good; I could only score 380–390, and the high school I attended was also quite poor, so I thought I would definitely not get into university that way. Our high school art teacher said I could take the art examination, and at the time I thought that if I could get into a (undergraduate) university by studying art, that would be no loss at all. I think getting into university is like climbing a mountain: academic-track students and art students are on different climbing routes; whichever route you take, you are still climbing the mountain, and as long as you get up there it is fine.

To some extent, China's admission system for art majors at the gaokao has given rise to the behaviour of high school students treating the art examination as a "shortcut to progression". According to China's art examination admission system, art-track candidates who take the provincial unified examination need, if their professional scores reach the qualifying line, only to reach about 75% of the score required in their province to apply to undergraduate universities. Taking Jiangxi Province in 2024 as an example, the admission control line for academic-track students in the history group applying to undergraduate universities was 463 points, whereas the academic control line for the vast majority of art-track candidates applying to undergraduate universities was 336 points, a difference of 127 points[5]. For academic-track students and art-track candidates successfully admitted to the same "Double First-Class" university, the difference in their gaokao scores in academic subjects can even exceed 200 points.

In summary, after entering the secondary stage, students' motivation for participating in non-academic tutoring shifted from cultivating interests and hobbies to serving examination progression, showing a distinct instrumental-rational orientation. Of course, art-track candidates still take their own interests and hobbies into account when choosing the category of major to study, but the ranking of goals has been adjusted. In childhood, interests and hobbies were the most important basis for deciding which art form to study; after secondary school, however, the main concern is whether an art subject can help them progress in education. The change in the ranking of goals has brought about changes in the content of arts learning and the focus of attention.

5.2. Examination-oriented: changes in learning content and experience

Whether secondary students progress as art-specialty students at the zhongkao stage or simultaneously apply

[4] Shangrao Municipal Education Bureau. (2022, April 25). Implementation plan for the admission examination of students with subject specialties in ordinary high schools in Shangrao City (trial). https://www.zgsr.gov.cn/jyj/qtygwj/202204/2481c21af4824c5893e29b97c d15069a.shtml

[5] Jiangxi Provincial Education Examination Authority. (2024, June 25). Admission control score lines for general higher education institutions in Jiangxi Province in 2024. http://www.jxeea.cn/jxsjyksy/gsgg91/content/content_1856072801083396096.html

for art majors at the gaokao, it means that they have embarked on the progression track of studying an art major. As art students at the secondary stage, in addition to their regular study of academic subjects, they must also spend part of their time studying art professional subjects. The content of art professional subjects differs from that of arts interest classes: it points more to professional skills than to interests and hobbies. Specifically, fine arts and design majors focus on sketching, quick sketching, and colour; music majors focus on selected vocal or instrumental repertoire; dance majors focus on bodily technique and dance repertoire choreography; performance and directing majors focus on recitation, improvisation, and story writing; and broadcasting majors focus on prepared scripts, impromptu commentary, and verbal image. S18 was admitted to her target high school as a specialty student at the zhongkao stage, and she described the changes in the content of art classes at the secondary stage as follows:

Before the second year of junior high school, studying art was mainly a hobby; in ordinary classes I would draw creative pictures and anime characters. In the third year of junior high school I decided to take the art specialty student examination, so the teachers at the training institution changed my class type, moving me from the interest class to the professional course class, and the learning content also changed. In the art professional course, we mainly practised plaster geometric solid drawing and still-life quick sketching. In class, the teachers taught us composition techniques, the proportions of still-life objects, and perspective relations, and placed emphasis on practising form-building skills.

For art-track candidates who had previously attended arts interest classes, when they first encountered art professional courses they clearly felt the major differences in learning content between the two types of courses. S3 decided to study an art major only in the first year of high school; before the third year of junior high school he had been taking piano lessons at an interest class. He admitted in the interview:

After I decided in the first year of high school to pursue an instrumental music major, the content of the piano lessons changed completely. In the interest class I could play pop songs I liked; in the professional course the teacher had us play the frequently tested pieces that are easy to score high on every day, and also required us to study the three minor subjects included in the examination scope. The teacher said that spending energy on songs unrelated to the examination content was a waste of time.

When the learning content of art classes changed, what art-track candidates cared about most in the learning process shifted from interests and hobbies to professional scores and rankings. From the perspective of self-determination theory, art-track candidates' intrinsic motivation for learning art was replaced by extrinsic motivation: the drive to learn art no longer stemmed from "being interested" but from "scoring high". In art professional courses, what students cared about most was "what score I can get", not "what I like". S21 described her intensive training classroom and after-class life as follows:

In quick sketching class, the teacher often pinned everyone's homework on the wall and graded it by tier. It was generally divided into tiers A, B, C, D, and E, and then a specific score was assigned within the tier. My classmates all very much hoped that their drawings would be rated above tier B, which means a score above 80. For me, every drawing assessment was a blow, because my quick sketches were often rated tier D, corresponding to a score of 60–69. When eating in the canteen, some classmates would discuss how to raise the tier of their work.

In summary, once secondary students have determined to study an art major, professional skills and professional scores become the core criteria governing daily training, teacher–student interaction, and self-evaluation. Arts learning activities no longer revolve around interests, hobbies, and self-exploration, but around the examination content and scoring rules stipulated in the examination syllabus. In the process of studying an art major, what to practise, how long to practise, and what level to reach are all based on the

examination requirements of the professional subject, and arts learning becomes a test-preparation activity that is quantifiable, comparable, and rankable.

6. Conclusion

This article focuses on art-track candidates' long-term arts tutoring experiences and, based on in-depth interviews, examines changes in the forms of training and behavioural motivations of this group at different educational stages. Through in-depth interviews with 22 art-track candidates, we obtained two main findings. First, in primary school and before, art-track candidates attended arts interest classes, and the content they learned mainly revolved around expanding interests; when they entered the secondary stage, especially at the two key junctures of the zhongkao and gaokao, the arts tutoring they attended shifted to professional intensive training classes, and the training content was adjusted to professional examination subjects. Second, art-track candidates' motivations show a marked shift from value rationality to instrumental rationality: in primary school and before, learning art was driven by intrinsic interests and hobbies, and they learned art for the pleasure itself rather than to obtain high-level grade certificates; however, after entering the secondary stage, extrinsic examination-progression motives drove them to study an art major, and professional course scores and rankings became their core concern. Unlike previous research, this study emphasises that students are important acting subjects in participation in non-academic tutoring, and that the student group is not a homogeneous whole; the similarities and differences with existing findings are discussed below.

Existing research has taken into account the characteristics of China's education system and emphasised the complexity of the motivations behind parents' enrolling their children in non-academic tutoring. For example, one study found that parents divide extracurricular interest classes into two types: attending art, music, and calligraphy interest classes serves to cultivate children's cultural capital, whereas dance, computer, sports, and chess interest classes serve to enhance practical skills [11]. Other research has explicitly proposed that parental motivations combine the two dimensions of value rationality and instrumental rationality: on the one hand, parents use extracurricular interest classes to cultivate children's individual qualities and values; on the other hand, parents also use extracurricular interest classes to help children develop specialties, thereby bringing advantages in educational progression [10]. Similar to the conclusions of existing research, we also find that art-track candidates' motivations for participating in arts tutoring include both value-rational and instrumental-rational aspects. We argue that when art-track candidates attend arts interest classes on the basis of interests and hobbies, this shows that intrinsic motivation is driving them to learn art, and their behaviour at this time has a clear value-rational aspect; when art-track candidates decide to study an art major for examination progression, behaviour driven by extrinsic motivation mainly reflects the instrumental-rational aspect. On this basis, this article further proposes that art-track candidates' motivations show a marked shift from value rationality to instrumental rationality, and that this shift mainly occurs at the two key educational transitions of the zhongkao and gaokao. In addition, unlike existing research, we find that in the process of this motivational shift, the form of arts tutoring attended by art-track candidates also changed, mainly from arts interest classes to art professional intensive training classes, and the two differ considerably in course content and learning intensity.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reveals the "alienation" of art professional education at the basic education stage under the logic of examination preparation, and provides empirical material for understanding the particular path of cultural capital accumulation in the Chinese context. Bourdieu's discussion of cultural reproduction presupposes the intergenerational transmission of aesthetic habitus and long-term immersion, but the process of studying an art major is oriented towards examination progression and mass-produces

"examination experts" proficient in professional skills. At the practical level, this study provides a reflective perspective on the articulation between art examination reform and art professional education. The art examination reforms implemented by the Ministry of Education in recent years—such as gradually increasing the weight of academic subject scores and achieving full coverage of provincial unified examinations—can, to a certain extent, alleviate the problem of "low cultural literacy among arts practitioners"[6]; however, if dimensions such as aesthetic understanding, art criticism, and cultural depth are not incorporated into the professional examination evaluation system, the "skill-oriented" inertia in the process of art professional learning will be difficult to fundamentally reverse. This study nevertheless has the following limitations. First, in terms of sample selection, we selected only art-track candidates from regular high schools. Future research might further extend the interview subjects to students in high schools affiliated with art colleges and universities, whose experience of studying art may differ from that of our interviewees. Second, in exploring art-track candidates' motivations for studying art, this article obtained data mainly through interviews; future research could enter the teaching sites of arts interest classes and art professional intensive training classes to collect more diverse empirical material.

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