

华裔学生学业成功的秘方

The Chinese Recipe for Academic Success

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Sunday before Christmas, as schools close their doors and students have put away their textbooks, Wang Yizhou, 11, is sitting at a desk. As he does every Sunday. Around him, as well as in neighboring classrooms, primary and secondary students listen attentively to the teachers at Elite College, a private tutoring school where more than 60% of the pupils are Chinese.

Many of them would come back the next day for "Winter Camp". The program for the holidays: French, mathematics and English courses, among others.

Yizhou, who came to Montreal with his father in March, from Nanjing, China, is preparing for the secondary school entrance exams. His goal is to attend the private school Regina Assumpta, he asserts fluently in French, even though he was only monolingual in Mandarin less than a year ago.

For his father, Yijun, registering his only son for tutoring classes, in addition to regular school, was a given. It was imperative, according to him, that Yizhou catch up as quickly as possible in French to successfully pass the admission exams.

To boost their chances, they even pushed ahead their arrival to Montreal, leaving behind mother and wife, who still cannot immigrate for several months. "We planned our arrival in Montreal based on our child's education," says Wang Yijun.

A Surge towards Private Schools

Among Chinese students in Montreal, academic success often is associated with private tutoring. And they are not short of academic success. According to figures from the Ministry of Education collected between 2002-2003 and 2013-2014 in private Montreal high schools, the number of students whose first language is Mandarin or Cantonese increased from 24 to 175 in Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf, from 5 to 243 at Jean-Eudes, from 30 to 229 at Regina Assumpta, and from 16 to 106 at the Pensionnat du Saint-Nom-de-Marie.

At the Jean-Eudes private school, where Asians represent about 20% of the student body, the Director General, Nancy Desbiens, clearly notes that the use of private tutoring is more common among these students. "And they perform very, very well. They really do everything to succeed," she said.

Chinese Tradition

According to Bradley Zhao, director of Elite College, education is a priority for the Chinese. "It's tradition, he says. In China, if you have \$10 and you have the choice between paying for food and educating yourself, you opt for education. The level of sacrifice that we are willing to make is very high."

To Julian Dierkes, a sociologist at the University of British Columbia who has studied private tutoring in Asia, "the Chinese are largely convinced that a good and prestigious education leads directly to a good career. It's an investment. And, unlike in Canada, there is a strong consensus in China on the hierarchy of prestige between schools and universities. It can be very competitive. [...] In this context, private tutoring is a normal part of the education system."

The majority of Chinese students attend these *bu xi ban* – evening and weekend tutoring schools. And this is a practice that, in many cases, Chinese immigrants bring here with them.

Cultural Differences

In the Montreal school system, competition is light years away from the fierceness which prevails in China, concur Xiaonan Feng and his son, Shuzhao, who is in secondary 2 at Jean-de-Brébeuf. "People here see Chinese kids working really hard, but it's not that bad. In China, it is more difficult, we work harder," assures the father, also separated from his neurologist wife who remained in China, unable to find a similar job in Quebec. "Here, the proportion of students who pass the secondary entrance exams is much higher than in China."

"In China, I was good at math. But, no offense, I'm much better here!" adds Shuzhao, who did his first five years of primary education in the province of Henan. Yet for him, tutoring remains essential to improve results in subjects in which he excels less.

Besides French, which he neither spoke nor read before arriving in Montreal, he must make additional efforts in history, geography and other disciplines that move away from pure sciences. "The history of Christianity in the West, I do not know much about it," he admits. Add to this the contrasting learning styles. "In China, we are told to memorize. A lot. Even texts. Here, one must understand, extrapolate and give his opinion. I am not used to it. That's a huge difference," says Feng Shuzhao.

According to Mr. Feng, without tutoring, never the doors of Jean-de-Brébeuf would have opened to his son, who dreams of following in the footsteps of his mother and going to study neurology at McGill University. He also retook his first year of secondary in this private school, after spending a year in a public school and finally passing the admission exam. And now there is no question of slowing the pace of studies. "Getting into medicine, it's not that easy!" Shuzhao says. "I must continue to work hard."