

You are kindly invited to the public defense to obtain the degree of

**DOCTOR OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES**

of drs. Huiqi HU

Which will take place on the **6th of May 2026** at **10:30 am** CET  
**Aula I.0.01** ([building I](#)) – [VUB Main Campus Brussels](#)  
Pleinlaan 2 – 1050 Brussel  
Or if you wish to attend online, [click here to join the meeting](#).

**PROMOTING EQUITABLE EDUCATION: SCHOOL  
ENGAGEMENT AMONG DISADVANTAGED STUDENT  
GROUPS IN CHINA**

**CHAIR**

Prof. Dr. Jo Tondeur (VUB)

**JURY**

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Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Jacquet (VUB)

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Coming by car? Please [register your licence plate in advance](#) to have access to the campus.

You are also invited to the reception afterwards.

Please confirm your attendance before 5/5/2026 via [huiqi.hu@vub.be](mailto:huiqi.hu@vub.be)

## SUMMARY

This dissertation examines educational inequality in China, with a focus on school engagement among disadvantaged student groups, particularly those in vocational high schools. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of capital and a multidimensional model of school engagement, the study investigates how family background, school climate, and structural factors shape students' academic experiences.

Using nationally representative data and multiple empirical studies, the research identifies persistent and widening gaps between vocational and general high school students in both academic achievement and family background. It further highlights the critical role of school climate, especially teacher–student relationships, and family dynamics, such as parent–child relationships, in promoting student engagement.

The findings contribute to a understanding of how educational inequality is reproduced within tracked systems and provide evidence-based recommendations for improving equity in vocational education. The study has implications for educational policy and practice in China and other contexts facing similar challenges.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Huiqi Hu is a PhD candidate in Education Sciences at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Belgium. Her doctoral research focuses on educational inequality, school engagement, vocational education, and disadvantaged student groups in China.