

# Why Parallel Beats Sequential: A Structural and Quantitative Reappraisal of China's College Admissions Reform

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## Abstract

This paper revisits China's reform from the traditional sequential (CS) mechanism to the parallel (CP) mechanism in college admissions. We show that, although both mechanisms can exhibit instability and manipulation, their defects originate from fundamentally different sources. Under the CP mechanism, all priority violations and strategic incentives are confined to a small, policy-determined buffer group. Under the CS mechanism, by contrast, defects arise endogenously from its sequential design and increase sharply as competition intensifies. We derive tight structural bounds for each mechanism and quantify their magnitudes using simulations calibrated to key features of China's admissions process. The results explain why the CP mechanism performs consistently across market conditions while the CS mechanism breaks down under competitive pressure, providing a unified and evidence-based rationale for China's move toward the CP mechanism.

**Keywords:** college admission, information constraint, dummy quota, parallel mechanism.

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