

On the Balance of China's Educational Development from the Perspective of Cultural Reproduction

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ABSTRACT

Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction has significant implications for the study of educational inequality between urban and rural China. Firstly, the article analyses the impact of economic capital, which mainly includes an analysis of the income gap between urban and rural areas leading to different affordability of tuition fees, which further affects the issue of enrolment and dropout rates in rural areas. In addition, this section suggests that the post-university careers of rural children are limited by family background. Secondly, the article looks at the role of cultural capital in education, discussing the differences in access to art lessons between rural and urban areas, and the significant differences in teaching conditions and teacher qualifications between rural and urban areas. Furthermore, the issue of the lack of participation of rural children in out-of-school programs is also raised. Finally, the article considers the role of social capital in education, finding differences in the networking of children's families between urban and rural areas, differences in the ability of parents to mentor children, and exploring differences in the attitudes of urban and rural children towards club activities at university. By analyzing the concepts of economic capital, cultural capital and social capital and the impact they exert on education, the article concludes that there is inequality in education between urban and rural China and that it also has a significant negative impact on rural children.

Keywords: *education, capital, social reproduction, urban-rural inequality.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between schooling and social reproduction has been a common concern in pedagogy during recent years. Related to this, Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction refers to three different types of capital - economic, cultural and social, which can be used to explain the inequality in education between urban and rural China. With the further acceleration of the urbanization process, urban-rural income inequality might get worse (Jin & Lee, 2017) [1], which has risen the awareness of education problems of rural areas in China (Hannum, An & Cherng, 2011) [2]. However, due to the disadvantaged social class, schooling is more likely to lead to the reproduction of inequality. More specifically, most of the children in rural areas come from families of manual workers, low-income condition of them leads to the lack of economic capital, which in turn impedes the accumulation of social and cultural capital. The scarcity of these three types of capital makes them in a disadvantaged education position, which probably causes an increasingly wide gap in education with urban children eventually and even exacerbate the social

inequality between them. By analyzing this phenomenon, more help can be brought to bear on the issue of inequality between urban and rural education, and in particular the current situation of deficiencies in rural education.

There are significant educational inequalities between rural and urban China, and rural children are more negatively affected by such inequalities. Based on Bourdieu's social reproduction theory, will analyze the link between three types of capital related to cultural reproduction and educational inequalities between urban and rural China. This paper will be mainly divided into three parts, first, the impact of economic capital will be explored in three parts, affording the education cost, the choice of higher education, and the planning for career development. Second, the three dimensions of inequality arising from cultural capital include accessing arts-based skills training resources, school infrastructure and quality of teaching, and participation in after-school activities at university. Finally, factors related to the creation of social networks, parental involvement in education, and social

activities in the university will be taken into consideration.

2. THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC CAPITAL ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN CHINA

2.1. The concept of economic capital and its role in education

Economic capital is “referring to financial and material resources that can be directly converted into the desired goods and services” (Johnstonbaugh, 2018, p. 594) [3]. Based on this definition, economic capital is considered to refer to the financial strength of a family in the context of education. Hence, the greater the accumulation of economic capital, the more likely it is that the family will have sufficient funds to support the child's schooling for education.

Economic capital plays a fundamental role in a family's ability to support children's education. Johnstonbaugh (2018) states that “economic capital has a positive effect on educational attainment”, and he also points out that “students from high-SES families have access to greater economic capital than their low-SES peers” (p. 594) [3]. In this way, urban children's families have more economic capital, which gives them a greater advantage financially to achieve academic success in education. More simply, it is understandable that money is essential to afford school fees and to support a child's extra-curricular learning and development. For this reason, parents and teachers will exchange economic capital for basic necessities and extracurricular activities like music and athletic instruction to help children (Moore, 2004) [4]. Therefore, the imbalance in economic capital and the disparity in the economic power of families undoubtedly affects the equity of education in urban and rural areas.

2.2. The impact of economic capital imbalance on affording the education cost

Firstly, the imbalance in economic capital between urban and rural children affects the ability of families to afford children education (Zhang, Li & Xue, 2015) [5]. Not surprisingly, most families in rural areas of China are from a disadvantaged class, which means less likely to have adequate economic capital. In other words, compared with urban areas, rural families have financial difficulties in supporting children's education.

On one hand, the main source of economic capital is household income. The income disparity between rural and urban areas has an impact on household income, which leads to different pressures to cover the expense of education. For example, Wu et al. (2008) suggest that “1986–2002 the growth rate of education expenditure

was 15% each year for the high-income family, while that was 11% each year for the low-income family” (p. 315) [6]. It seems that family income and education expenditure show a positive correlation. Meanwhile, Zhang et al. (2015) find that “On average, the family of rural children spend just CNY844 a year on schooling, or CNY1,388 less than their urban counterparts”(p. 209) [5]. In this way, households with higher incomes tend to spend more on education, while low-income families are unable to invest in children's education. It can be deduced that “income difference was an important factor to induce unequal education expenditure” (Wu et al., 2018, p. 315) [6].

On the other hand, because of the income gap between rural and urban families, rural parents may be forced to give up their children's education. According to research launched by Wan (2021), rural parents seem easier to discourage support for children's education when facing financially challenging pressure. This indicates that financial hardships can deprive rural children of being educated [7]. Similarly, Rao and Ye (2016) find that it is difficult for rural children to receive financial support from families, so this high financial burden leads to a tendency to drop out of school [8]. On the contrary, urban students tend to not face economic pressures with the help of wealthy family backgrounds. Apparently, negative factors will not be considered by urban students when facing learning opportunities.

2.3. The impact of economic capital imbalance on the choice of higher education

Secondly, the negative impact of these economic factors can be even more pronounced in higher education. According to Xie and Reay (2019), the percentage of rural students enrolled in prestigious public research universities has been declining [9]. What are the possible reasons behind this? It is worth mentioning that compulsory education reform in rural China mainly makes “all rural students are entitled to receive tuition fee exemptions, and students from poor families are provided with free textbooks” (Tang, Zhao & Zhao, 2019, p. 604) [10]. This means that for rural families, the cost of living still needs to be considered during the elementary and secondary school years of children (Zhang et al., 2015) [5]. Due to the inconvenient transportation, most rural children will choose to live in school dormitories (Ding, 2012) [11]. Hence, the accommodation fee is also a part of the fund that needs to be considered. In this way, following the introduction of China's compulsory education policy, the educational inequalities between rural and urban areas have expanded (Zhang et al., 2015) [5].

More importantly, after children enter high school and university, the pressure brought by tuition fees is increasing for parents of rural children. There is evidence that Hu (2017) states that “In 2012, the national average

cost of high school tuition was around 1842 RMB, which constitutes approximately 23% of an average rural Chinese person's annual net income" (p. 644) [12]. This example demonstrates that the tuition of higher education is astronomical and unaffordable for rural families.

Fortunately, Cao and Wang (2016) have found that "the number of subsidizing finance reaches to RMB 84.797 billion in 2015", which has shown a remarkable achievement (p. 2) [13]. Although this can be helpful and supportive for poor rural students, shortcomings concerning granting approaches can be inhumane (Cao & Wang, 2016) [13]. Poverty-stricken students are psychologically sensitive and prone to low self-esteem, so they are likely to be reluctant to apply. Even if they muster the courage to apply, they still have to wait a long time for the application process (Cao & Wang, 2016) [13]. Consequently, this situation undoubtedly weakens the role of bursaries in helping needy students financially.

2.4. The impact of economic capital imbalance on the planning for the career development

Finally, through the above analysis, it is not difficult to find the plight of rural students in undergraduate studies. What's worse, rural students' further studies and career choices after graduation are also affected by families economic backgrounds. Jing chose to work in a small company, believing that she is not qualified for a high-status job (Li, 2013) [14]. Similarly, another student gave up the opportunity to study abroad and a decent job in Beijing for financial reasons (Li, 2013) [14]. These cases illustrate how rural children are clearly limited in education in terms of the highest qualifications and career development. Moreover, children from rural backgrounds are also likely to end up choosing rural jobs, whereas urban children do not have this tendency. Rural children's family background from rural areas is a key factor among students who are willing to work in rural areas (Tao, Haycock-Stuart & Rodgers, 2016) [15].

However, privileged family background and a high-spending upbringing in the city also gives urban children higher expectations of job wages, compared to rural children. Tao et al. (2016) also find that one interviewee from an urban background emphasise that it would be almost impossible for her to work in a rural area in her current career development plan [15]. It seems likely that the reason why city children are likely to go to work in the countryside is that incentives to go to the countryside have been introduced so that urban children can benefit from purpose-oriented policies.

Meanwhile, when rural children choose to work in rural areas or give up employment opportunities in big cities, there will be probably a further widening of the gap between their earnings and those of urban children after graduation. Tao et al. (2016) find that "salary for nurses in rural areas was usually reported to be lower than

for their urban counterparts" (p. 166) [15], meaning that income wages for rural work are very low. In the longer term, rural students will still lack sufficient economic capital to support education compared to urban students. In this way, it will once again lag behind the next generation of urban children on an economic level. For this reason, this will lead to a circular effect between one generation and the next in which economic capital is not available to support education.

Consequently, the impact of inadequate economic capital can be crucial, which can even be further linked or affected by social and cultural capital.

3. THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL CAPITAL ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN URBAN AND RURAL CHINA

3.1. The concept of cultural capital and its role in education

Cultural capital has been used to explain "the impact of family background on social and educational outcomes" (Wallace, 2017, p. 908) [16]. This capital is typically the acquisition of valuable items that can be used to achieve real-world goals. This accumulation is not due to the accumulation of money, but rather to the accumulation of information and skills, as well as the educational benefits that come with them (Legg, 2012) [17].

It can be seen that within the field of education, each person has a different quantity of collected knowledge and skills based on their socioeconomic status. Those with more knowledge and skills have more cultural capital will have a higher educational advantage. It means that the information and skills training that rural children receive is considerably inferior to that received by urban youngsters.

Besides, cultural capital is a "stock of high-value status symbols – a set of convertible resources" (Wallace, 2017, p. 908) – that are generated and transferred within educational systems, home contexts, and related social domains to generate returns [16].

When the importance of cultural capital in education is considered from this standpoint, it can be seen that cultural capital symbolizes a high or low social standing due to the fact that its accumulation is directly tied to socio-economic status. Meanwhile, as children are taught, this cultural capital has the potential to be turned into other values. As a result, because urban children have greater cultural capital, they will continue to improve their abilities and knowledge, leading to a wide gap between urban and rural education.

3.2. The impact of cultural capital imbalance on accessing arts-based skills training resources

Cultural capital refers to the possession of recognized knowledge, behaviour patterns, or skills that one can tap into to demonstrate one's cultural competence (Houston, 2002, in Wang & He, 2019) [18]. More simply, cultural capital is manifested in people's spiritual knowledge, painting skills, music skills and social etiquette (Lareau, 1987) [19]. Most urban students have a well-off family environment, which forms a basis for substantial economic capital as the support for education. It seems that they have many opportunities to take interest classes, such as art lessons, vocal and craft training. While for rural children, the main subjects can be taught by the same teacher, which is mainly due to a severe shortage of teachers. Wang and Li (2009) state that rural schools have fewer and less well-trained instructors than urban schools, as well as less access to professional development and support for teachers [20]. This can be explained by an interview in a study, "the teachers in my hometown were very versatile, they could teach everything! My math, history and PE teachers were actually the same person!" (interview, January 25, 2015, in Wang & He, 2019, p. 290) [18]. This reveals the fact that it is incredibly difficult to hire teachers of art courses, which means that they have very limited opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills. Even for the existing physical education or art classes, the lack of qualified teachers leads to a lack of professionalism and a decline in the quality of education.

3.3. The impact of cultural capital imbalance on school infrastructure and quality of teaching

It is also worth mentioning that the process of acquiring knowledge, needs to be complemented by certain hardware facilities, in addition to a group of qualified and excellent teachers as a necessary condition. It is easy to find that in rural areas, because of backward economic development and inadequate infrastructure, rural schools have very limited teaching facilities (Zhang, Jin, Torero, & Li, 2018, in Wang et al., 2021) [21]. Even when the government establishes county primary schools, many parents are reluctant to send children there because of the distance from home and the rising cost of living (Rao & Ye, 2016) [8]. Instead, the wealthy part of rural families is willing to send children to primary schools in the county for education. For example, Rao and Ye (2016) find that only 34.9% of children from relatively poor families choose to go to primary schools in the township centre [8].

Simultaneously, rural children do not have access to better schools due to economic reasons and geographic location, so the quality of education they receive is far

inferior to that of urban children. Even at the same level of achievement, rural children have less chance of getting into elite universities. Li (2013) indicates that given the same attainment levels, students from big cities are more likely to go to prestigious universities while rural students are denied access (Yang 2006; Yin 2008, in Li, 2013) [14]. In some schools, differentiated treatment is even used to enforce class placement. For this reason, rural children who perform less well may be forced to drop out of school directly and indirectly, which leads to an increasing dropout rate. For example, Pan has (2018) found that "9 students out of the original 50 within one 'bad' class (almost 20%) dropped out before the end of their third year and went to work in the cities as migrant workers" (p. 195) [22]. In contrast, Zhang, Li and Xue (2015) point out "that almost all urban children finished junior high school education, of whom 63% entered senior high schools" (p. 200) [5]. It means that the dropout rate for urban children is very low, and only 3 out of 100 rural children will graduate from high school under the same conditions (Zhang et al., 2015) [5].

3.4. The impact of cultural capital imbalance on participation in after-school activities at university

Finally, what is even more tragic is that even if rural children are given the opportunity to study at university, they will still have a sense of inferiority without strong financial family backgrounds. For instance, Li (2013) states that "various social activities on campus" and "some popular but expensive English training outside" seems to be impossible for them to participate in (p. 834) [14]. Due to low social status, rural children are reluctant to participate in activities related to learning skills outside of school to avoid the extra financial burden on parents and families (Johnstonbaugh, 2018) [3]. As a result, they are still not to be exposed to equal opportunities to acquire extra-curricular knowledge or to learn skills and improve themselves at university. This means that the cultural capital acquired by rural children does not increase as a result of gaining access to university. Instead, they remain far less disadvantaged than urban children after the same level of tertiary completion. Therefore, it is understandable that rural children are at a disadvantage in the spiritual development of culture and art. Furthermore, this is a knock-on effect triggered by the lack of economic capital, which in turn can further affect the accumulation of social capital.

4. THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN URBAN AND RURAL CHINA

4.1. The concept of social capital and its role in education

Social capital refers mainly to aspects of economic activity that are beneficial to all, such as interpersonal relationships. Therefore, human capital is also part of social capital (Parvanov & Petkova, 2019) [23]. According to Parvanov and Petkova (2019), the ownership of a long-lasting network of more or less institutionalized mutual cognition and acknowledgements is defined as social capital, which is a combination of real or potential resources [23].

Additionally, social capital is linked to factors such as information networks and social channels. Moore (2004) maintains that using the social capital they have, people can access information and resources of value to them through their own social networks [4]. As a result, children with a high social status are more likely to have access to or acquire valuable resources and information (Moore, 2004) [4]. In particular, through parents' channels, they have access to a wider range of social work and activities.

4.2. The impact of social capital imbalance on the creation of social networks

Firstly, social capital is often associated with social networks and relationships, which means parents are indispensable elements. People and social networks are clearly linked by social capital (Parvanov & Petkova, 2019) [23]. Urban parents, who are from the middle-upper class, tend to take the initiative to help children participate in some social occasions. This means that they might have opportunities to attend reading salon sharing sessions or excellent entrepreneur lectures. Moreover, parents will help children keep in touch with elites, which can be beneficial to children's future development. Urban children may benefit, for example, from parents who come from the middle class. Urban parents will tend to interact with teachers on a daily basis, building good relationships that will benefit their children (Johnstonbaugh, 2018) [3]. This means that urban students, children of high socioeconomic status, can make full use of family resources to have more economic capital while also having access to more social resources and accumulating social capital (Costa, Taylor, Goodfellow & Ecochard, 2020) [24].

In addition, parents' behaviour can unconsciously influence children. For example, Wang and He (2019) suggest that middle-upper class parents are more likely to exhibit high parenting qualities, especially when it is associated with manners [18]. A case in point is using

civilized or courteous language to communicate with others on social occasions. In a word, parents' behaviours and values are passed on to the next generation, which might influence children's education subconsciously as they grow up.

4.3. The impact of social capital imbalance on parental involvement in education

Secondly, parental involvement is also significantly lower for rural children compared to urban children. It seems to be impossible for rural parents to teach social strategies when children need particular support, such as supervision of homework. On one hand, this may be accounted for by the limited level of education and social network of rural parents, which is generally lower than that of urban parents. For example, the research has found that "rural parents' low educational levels (institutionalised cultural capital) leads to a lack of confidence in their own educational competence and a sense of inferiority when faced with their children's education" (Reay, 2004, in Xu & Montgomery, 2021, p. 562) [25]. On the other hand, leaving aside the fact that rural parents lack tutoring skills, they also objectively do not have enough time to spend with their children in their studies. For instance, Wang and He (2019) also mention that "because parents must focus on subsistence, they may have very limited time left to monitor their children's education" (p. 295) [18]. These two reasons highlight the truth that rural parents are unable to help children with their studies. More importantly, most of the parents of rural students are migrant workers, educational guardian role of left-behind children is not even played by their parents. Unfortunately, parents' absence will inevitably result in negative educational outcomes, especially dropping out. A study has shown that "the percentage of children of compulsory school age who drop out of school is highest (5.4 per cent) among left-behind children who live alone" (Zhou, Murphy & Tao, 2014, p. 275) [26]. Therefore, it seems that the high dropout rate is often linked to parents involved in education.

In reality, there are other negative consequences of parental absence from children's school life that can occur. Because the children left behind are generally aware that parents choose to work in the cities in order to support their families, the extreme lack of parental companionship while growing up makes them invariably aware of the importance of money. Pan (2018) has found that "28.6% of left-behind children agreed that making money is more important than growing up with their parents" (p. 191) [22]. As a result, there is a tendency towards many rural children to be more eager to earn money than to continue education. Ultimately, they choose to become the new generation of "migrant workers" in cities, which is a vicious circle of inequality.

4.4. The impact of social capital imbalance on the choice of social activities in the university

Finally, in addition to the objective factor of parents' inability to help children build social capital, rural children also have certain social barriers that hinder the formation of social capital. Johnstonbaugh (2018) takes the view that low-income students will face psychological difficulties as a result of their disadvantages, such as feelings of failure, inadequacy, and loneliness [3]. In this way, they are more likely to be reluctant to participate in clubs due to low self-esteem in university (Li, 2013), which undoubtedly results in the inability to build social capital through networking [14]. Li (2013) also focuses on the importance of social activities, pointing out that "it will provide an important platform to acquire social and symbolic capital" (p. 838) [14]. Some studies have shown that participation in clubs at university is useful and those city children tend to show better leadership and integration tendencies in teams. Such traits and abilities will give them access to meaningful social resources and capital and are more likely to play an irreplaceable role in their career path (Xie & Reay, 2019) [9]. In conclusion, all these factors mentioned above have explained the importance of social capital, ranging from daily educational supervision provided by parents to social strategies training.

5. CONCLUSION

It can be seen that the education system is reinforcing social inequalities. Behind these educational inequalities are family economic disparities, socioeconomic status, and patterns of thinking. It can be found that the three types of capital are inextricably linked to each other. In the absence of economic capital, rural children are unable to receive a quality education and are even at the risk of dropping out of school. As a consequence, they fail to take advantage of opportunities of acquiring knowledge and learning skills, which prevents them from acquiring cultural capital. At the same time, the social circles are to some extent restricted, which hinders the accumulation of social capital. In this context, the inequality between rural and urban students can be attributed to education.

Reviewing some main points, firstly, the imbalance in economic capital between rural and urban areas affects children's education in three ways: rural families are less able to afford school fees, rural children have less access to higher education and are more likely to give up decent job opportunities after graduation. Secondly, rural children receive less variety and quantity of training in the arts, they objectively receive a poorer quality of education are less likely to be involved in off-campus learning at university. Finally, rural children have difficulties with establishing rich social networks, parents are less involved in children's education, causing inactivity in university clubs. Consequently, it is clear

that this essay has demonstrated that there are significant inequalities between urban and rural education in China and the reality that rural children are more disadvantaged.

To sum up, more attention is required to pay to the education of children in rural areas in China in the future, and more research should be directed towards how to improve rural infrastructure and teachers, taking into account the actual situation of rural development. Measures should be taken, for example, introducing arts-based resources for rural areas to narrow the gap with urban education and to explain social equity in the field of education to the maximum extent possible.

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