

# Cultural Capital Theory and College Students' Cultural Competitiveness

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**Abstract:** Bourdieu's cultural capital theory is one of the important contents of his sociological theory system. Cultural capital includes three forms, namely specific cultural capital, objectified cultural capital and institutionalized cultural capital. The three forms of capital in contemporary college students' cultural capital composition are shown as cultural competence, cultural products and cultural system. The stock of the cultural capital of the contemporary college students influences and determines their cultural competitiveness.

**Key words:** Cultural capital, college students, cultural competitiveness

## Introduction:

Cultural capital is a typical example of Bourdieu successfully applying the concept of economics to the cultural studies, and also a sociological concept proposed by Bourdieu after he made a non-economic interpretation of Marxian capital theory. Bourdieu went beyond the narrow view of single form of capital formed in the pre-capitalist productive mode, and divided the society into various fields interacting with each other in which the capitals were divided into different forms, including economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital and so on, greatly broadening people's understanding and research ideas on capital. It played a very important role in the whole system of humanistic science.

Bourdieu believed that cultural capital was a kind of ability which included language ability, social communication ability, professional skills, personal demeanor and the ability to grasp the opportunity to succeed. Culture is also a kind of capital, which is the capital that can bring value addition. Advanced culture which can cause people to resonate with will be able to bring huge value addition.

## Organization of the Text:

### I. Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory

Bourdieu, a French contemporary sociologist, was the first to completely propose cultural capital theory in the context of *The Forms of Capital*. He thought that cultural capital, in form, was shown as a kind of specific cultural resource, in essence, was an accumulation of human labor results. Cultural capital can exist in three forms:

Firstly, the specific state of cultural capital, namely "it exists in the form of lasting mental or physical temperament". Specific forms of cultural capital can also be referred to as cultural competence, and Bourdieu described it as the basis for the other two forms of cultural capital. "Individual cultural competence is got on the premise of internalization, and learning, time and individual hands-on are needed in the process without any alternative principle." Specific forms of cultural capital is closely linked to specific individuals, not delivered by gift, purchase, exchange between individuals, and the cultural capital will decline, disappear with the decline or disappearance of individual. The cultural capital can only be achieved relying on family education

and school education. Once the individualized cultural capital is got, it will become the fixed asset to people and the cultural quality of the individual determining the individual's cultural competitiveness.

Secondly, the objective state of cultural capital, "cultural capital is shown in the forms of cultural products (books, pictures, dictionary, tools, etc.) which were traces left by or specific manifestation of the theory, or criticisms of these theories, questions and so on". This is the objective form of cultural capital, i.e. cultural products. The value of cultural products is given by the individual with cultural competence based on the internalized cultural content, and the cultural products can be delivered in the form of material. On the carrier of cultural products, objective cultural capital is a special commodity in the market mechanism, namely the cultural goods. The particularity of cultural goods lies in its manifestation in materiality on the one hand and symbolization on the other hand. In terms of material, cultural goods have value given by the economic capital; but in respect of symbolization, cultural goods bear the cultural value of cultural capital.

Thirdly, the system state of cultural capital, namely "it exists in an objectified form which must be treated differently, because it gives a completely original capital to the cultural capital, and cultural capital is sheltered by the property." [Institutionalized cultural capital is the existence form of cultural competence after qualification authorization of cultural system. The culture management departments control cultural capital through the institutionalization of the cultural capital so that it becomes a label under constant pressure to prove. Therefore, institutionalized cultural capital is the institutional qualification and status obtained by the subject under a certain cultural system, typically reflected in the academic and professional qualifications which give their owners a socially concerted, legally protected value. According to the criterion of system evaluation, the higher the academic certificate and vocational qualification certificate levels are, the greater the amount of cultural capital will be, and the stronger the cultural competence will be.

## II. Cultural Capital Elements of the Contemporary College Students

College students' cultural capital is a system which contains multiple capital elements that interact with, influence and promote each other, and also can be converted to each other. When the college students' scientific and cultural knowledge capital is accumulated to a certain extent, it can be converted into comprehensive ability capital whose promotion will enhance the cultural competitiveness. The composition of cultural capital of college students is rich and varied.

(I) Practical experience capital. It refers to a variety of experience obtained in order to better participate in social work and improve their professional skills. In colleges and universities, the accumulation of knowledge is limited, or circumscribed, experience in social practice will greatly make up the defect, and enrich their cultural capital stock, providing the guarantee for future competition in the job market. The practical experience capital is also an important part of college students' cultural capital.

(II) Scientific knowledge capital. Students will learn in the relevant departments after entering the university, which requires them to master the professional knowledge of related systems, and create certain cultural products, obtain the corresponding diploma, certificate, title and academic qualifications during their study in university. This is an important part of college students' cultural capital, and it is also an important factor to determine their cultural competitiveness.

(III) Moral personality capital. It refers to the ideological and moral qualities of college students formed since adolescence, including their world outlook, outlook on life and values,

namely their attitude towards society, life and value. This is a very important part of college students' cultural capital, also reflecting the important role of the cultural capital in cultivating and personality shaping.

(IV) Comprehensive ability capital. These abilities include the ability to analyze problems, solve problems, continue to learn, organize and manage, adapt to the society, master interpersonal communication and innovate, etc. Ability capital is one of the important sources of college students' cultural capital accumulation which always runs through college students' pursuit of cultural capital, reflects and evaluates the achievements of college students' cultural capital.

(V) Behavioral habit capital. It refers to a person's habits, interests, hobbies formed from his childhood, way of life inherited from parents and later school education, language style and personal manners, etc. These are also an important part of college students' cultural capital, and the expression form of cultural capital on college students, becoming an important aspect of their cultural competitiveness.

The mutual relation and interaction between various elements of college students' cultural capital play an inestimable role in its value increment. The capital elements of cultural capital are inseparable, and the ratio between them will determine the present state of college students' cultural capital and play a powerful role in guiding the realization of the college students' personal value and social value.

### III. The Value of College Students' Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is highly value added. An important feature of capital is that it is accretive. The accretion of cultural capital in some degree equals to the multiplication of economic capital and social capital, because the multiplication of economic capital and social capital is supported by the operation of cultural capital. Labor and capital can't be organically unified without operation of cultural capital, and it will be difficult to add value. Real economic growth depends not only on physical capital, but also on cultural capital. The profundity of cultural capital is: when the modern society has strong economic fundamentals, the economy is inevitable to nature culture. Any economic activity lack of cultural capital investment as a basis is doomed to be unsustainable and hard to develop harmoniously. In today's information society, the cultural capital's weight is increased in the whole social capital formation, the development of social economy increasingly relies on the social culture and environment, so to speak, cultural capital as a new form of economic practice will play a huge role on the development of human society.

From the perspective of colleges and universities, their social function has greatly changed. They are no longer pure places for imparting knowledge, but play an important role in the social power and knowledge "field". School, as a kind of specific social existence, for its own survival and development, also often consciously takes advantage of its own cultural capital to transfer and use various social resources to serve its own development. School is no longer a land of idyllic beauty for imparting knowledge, but become an important means and tool of cultural capital reproduction. The progress of a young generation of college students marks the progress and development of the society, as we often say that the college students are the main force of the development of the times, so college students' cultural capital has a unique position in the individual development, and its value also has a considerable degree of importance, mainly displayed in:

(I) Cultural capital is an important embodiment of the quality of college students

In the information society today, the weight of cultural capital in the whole capital formation is increased increasingly, and cultural capital acquisition and owning have already become a major

way of any social members to adjust and improve his position and role in the social “field”. Cultural capital is the aggregation of cultural resources including cultural competence, cultural power, cultural habits and cultural products shown in the forms of a person’s competence, education quality, language style, behavioral pattern, life style, taste and so on. The accumulation and cultivation of college students’ cultural capital is helpful to improve their inner quality, and the cultural capital stock of college students is mainly influenced by their family background and education level. Cultural taste and cultural interest of college students, as an important cultural capital, can create their own good overall images and improve their cultural competitiveness and employment opportunities.

(II) Cultural capital is an important weight of college students’ career choice

Cultural capital is the capital in the form of quality, and a kind of capital stock condensed in the individual itself. The capital will play a role in value addition only by inputting certain labor services into the overall operations of the object of labor, and materializing to certain physical or mental products. Bourdieu also pointed out that it was very hard for the capital trading to completely shake off its owner because it could not exist without individuals. Therefore, we can say that college students’ cultural capital is the basic requirements for the pursuit of personal development. Under the condition of market economy, the development of knowledge economy emphasizes speed and innovation, all of this puts forward new requirements to employers. Talent acts as a resource, a commodity, and the talent resource configuration plays an important role in the market. From microscopic perspective, there is a fierce competition among talents. For college students, the essence of talent competition is the competition of cultural capital. Under relatively standardized market economy conditions, the person’s ability is a necessary factor in job hunting. In a word, the cultural capital of college students is the prerequisite for their survival and employment.

(III) Cultural capital is the foundation of the college students to realize self value

Cultural capital appreciation is the process in which investors input their own cultural capital as factors into cultural production. What makes this kind of investment different is that it is not a direct investment like economic capital investment, but blending cultural capital in the living labor of investors thus exerting its effect and producing new cultural products. “In modern society, education makes people get access to modern society, the difference of educational degree and cultural symbols divide people into groups and individuals with different knowledge and ability”. Only with enough cultural capital, college students can find a place in society, and individuals will be in an impregnable position in the intense society competition, thus realizing their own value increment, academic and career success. Therefore, the cultural capital of college students is a favorable tool to realize their self value. They will gain status and wealth in society, improve the quality of life, accumulate cultural capital of their own and the next generation, provide a solid foundation for the satisfaction of personal interests, thus realizing all-round development and getting self value only with strong cultural capital.

(IV) Cultural capital is necessary for college students to create social value

Cultural capital is needed by talent competition and social development. In the world today, economic competition has become the main form of international competition, but the economic competition depends on the competition of science and technology, as well as talents. For a country, the number and quality of talents, to a large extent, are determined by the position of the country in the global economic network. In the era of knowledge economy, the development of science is supported by high and new technology. The soul of the international competition is the competition of knowledge innovation, namely the competition of creativity and creative talent. Only with high

quality cultural capital and constant appreciation of value, a country will hold an impregnable position in the international competition. To take the initiative in the future international competition, it is necessary to improve the quality of college students' cultivation and improve the content of the cultural capital. This is the only way to apply the knowledge they mastered to the production practice and social practice, to make it into productivity, creating great material wealth and spiritual wealth for the society.

#### IV. Contemporary College Students' Cultural Capital and Cultural Competitiveness

Cultural competition refers to the cohesive force, guidance force, inspiring force and driving force generated by various cultural factors in promoting the all-round development of society and people, mainly reflected in the following four aspects: Firstly, the cultural innovation ability. Compared with innovation in other areas, cultural innovation is of special significance. The sustainable cultural innovation ability is an inexhaustible source of cultural competitiveness. Secondly, the cultural products' competitiveness. Culture cannot be separated from some form of carrier, and it must be presented through a certain product or service no matter what form of culture. Cultural product competitiveness refers to the ability of cultural products to attract the attention and arouse the resonance of consumers, prompt consumers to purchase. Both cultural products and cultural enterprise are branded. Brand, as intangible assets and an important strategic resource, plays an important role in the cultural competitiveness. Thirdly, the high-quality talent. Neither promotion of cultural innovation nor development of cultural industry with application of high and new technology is inseparable from the high-quality talents. Fourthly, the cultural image competition. The stand or fall of the overall cultural image affects not only the competitiveness of cultural products, cultural enterprises and cultural brands, but also that of normal products. Cultural image competitiveness refers to the whole attraction, cohesion and appeal of culture.

Contemporary college students' cultural competence is the concentrated reflection of its comprehensive quality. Cultural competitiveness is the unification of humanistic spirit, scientific literacy and innovation ability. Cultural capital often manifests itself in three forms: Cultural competence, cultural products and cultural system, which affect the cultural competitiveness of college students through different ways and methods. Third, the scientific and technological content of cultural industry. The rise of cultural industries brings science and technology, market and culture together, and gives culture a new pattern of development.

##### (I) Cultural competence and college students' cultural competitiveness

According to Bourdieu's point of view, embodied cultural capital is cultural competence. The main utility of embodied cultural capital is that it brings extraordinary value to the individual, and it can provide "protection in terms of material benefits and symbolic benefits to individuals with cultural capital: Any specific cultural competence will depend on its position in the distribution of cultural capital to obtain an exceptional value and bring the visible benefits to its owners".

Therefore, the formation of college students' cultural competence is the result of family generation-to-generation inheritance, family education and school education. College students in colleges and universities in fact are completing the socialization process of self-shaping which is an extension of the primary groups such as family. In colleges and universities, college students have had strong or weak cultural competence that determines their competitiveness in cultural activities. "Students with strong cultural competence can gain more cultural resources in the cultural activities, so as to further enhance their own cultural competence." It means that students improve their own influence and role in the cultural field by strengthening their own cultural competence. Cultural

competence decides the cultural competitiveness of college students and plays a role in promoting their all-round development.

#### (II) Cultural products and college students' cultural competitiveness

Cultural product is the objective form of cultural capital. Bourdieu believed that cultural products were the unification of objective cultural capital and economic capital. The cultural capital can be transformed into economic capital, hence cultural products have the different characteristics from the normal products. A cultural product always contains a certain cultural value, and its value is given by the individuals with cultural competence according to its internalized culture.

For college students, objectified cultural capital can be materially possessed as economic capital, which includes campus building, library, sculpture, human landscape and other cultural items. The cultural products are external presentation of college students' cultural competitiveness. "In the students' cultural field, the cultural competence is implicit, closely combined with the subject". In the cultural field in order to get the recognition and understanding of other members, college students must show their cultural competitiveness in the objective form, cultural products, so as to communicate and compare with other members to establish their position and role in the field of cultural activities.

#### (III) Cultural system and college students' cultural competitiveness

Institutionalized cultural capital means cultural system. Bourdieu thought "the role of the certificate of academic qualifications and cultural competence is very big, it gives the owner a kind of cultural, established and long-time unchanged, legally protected value". Thus we can see clearly the institutional power and the power forcing others to accept the "social recognition". Institutionalized cultural capital includes diploma certificate and all kinds of technical grade certificate, etc., and it makes the cultural capital go beyond the specific forms of biological limitation. Cultural capital is legalized. The existence of academic qualifications makes the comparison or even substitution between the qualification owners to be possible.

For college students, the cultural capital of institutionalized form comprises the school spirit, style of study, rules and regulations system and students' identification and other aspects. Different cultural systems are criteria of measuring university level and college students' acceptance by the society. Cultural system means that a person's cultural competitiveness should be identified by the academic qualifications or the education voucher system. Every college student has the cultural capital to be recognized from the system. It is the identification of academic qualifications and the access to the education certificate, which makes the students obtain the corresponding cultural status, with a greater authority, thus obtaining a strong cultural competitiveness.

#### **Summary:**

Culture has increasingly become a key factor in the development of economy. The more developed the society is, the more advanced the economy is, the more prominent the role of culture will be. The essence of talent competition is the competition of cultural capital. Cultural capital is quality-centered capital of a college student, critical for his pursuit of personal development and fundamental for his cultural competitiveness.

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