Culture and Education: The Narrative Reconstruction from "Cultural Capital" to "Cultural Resources"

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Abstract: Educational equity is one of the crucial issues of educational development and one of the core theses of sociology of education. For now, cultural capital theory is still the most prevailing narrative, which became an obstacle to exploring the problem "how to be more equitable". It's necessary to reflect on the limitations of cultural capital narrative and to discover a new type of research narrative. This paper firstly deconstructs the cultural capital narrative through theoretical reflection and practical discussion, and then demonstrate the cultural resource narrative's manifestation and transcendence. Based on the above viewpoints, we propose that it's critical for the sociology of education to realize narrative reconstruction—from "cultural capital narrative" to "cultural resource narrative", which could be beneficial to the practice of "high quality education equity".

Keywords: Sociology of Education; Educational Equity; Cultural Capital; Cultural Resources; Narrative Reconstruction

1. INTRODUCTION

Educational equity is the fundamental educational policy in our country. With the gradual realization of the goal of "equal educational opportunities," "quality-oriented educational equity" has been put on the agenda, becoming a new direction for educational reform. How to better promote human development, embody the developmental ideology of "putting people at the center," and achieve a shift in perspective to the domain of assessment centered around "people" are essential considerations for the "new educational equity" (Chu, 2020). The "double reduction" policy introduced in 2021 explicitly emphasizes "promoting balanced development of educational resources and fostering educational equity," emphasizing "advancing the balanced development of high-quality compulsory education and accelerating the narrowing of educational level gaps between urban and rural areas, regions, and schools." Whether it is "fully leveraging the role of schools as the main battlefield" or "comprehensively standardizing off-campus training institutions," the implementation of the "double reduction" policy is bound to aim at promoting "quality-oriented, people-centered educational equity" (Zhang,

2021). Such an era and policy background call for a transformation in the field of educational sociology research-from revealing "why inequality exists" to asking "how can we achieve greater fairness". Looking at the current field of educational sociology in the country, studies on topics like "urban-rural balance," "class equality," and "regional fairness" often follow the path of cultural capital theory. It's widely believed that families, schools, and extracurricular training institutions gradually form a process of "reproduction," and even "triple reproduction," through the accumulation and utilization of cultural capital. Within this research path, "culture" as "capital" becomes the catalyst for educational inequality. Such a narrative in research constructs the significance of "culture" as "capital" in education and highlights education's role in the "reproduction" of dominant culture, which confines researchers within the framework of "cultural capital and educational inequality." This narrative of studying "cultural capital" affects our exploration of the relationship between culture and education from the perspective of "what culture can do," thereby obscuring the important role of socio-cultural factors in promoting educational equity. This stands as one of the significant challenges faced by educational sociology research. This text contemplates the core issue of how educational sociology research can transcend the narrative of cultural capital. Through theoretical reflection on the narrative of cultural capital, discussing its real-life challenges, deconstructing the narrative of cultural capital, subsequently advocating for the manifestation and transcendence of cultural resources narrative, this paper aims to explore the possibility of reconstructing the narrative of educational sociology research.

2. CONSTRUCTION: THE GENERATION OF THE NARRATIVE OF "CULTURAL CAPITAL"

The theory of cultural capital is rooted in Bourdieu's concept of cultural stratification. Bourdieu emphasized the close relationship between cultural practices and social stratification, dividing people based on their lifestyles and using culture as a selector in stratified societies, thereby strengthening the cultural factors' explanation of social stratification. The explanatory power of the theory of cultural capital is based on Bourdieu's contemplation of structure and action from a cultural perspective, especially his assumptions regarding the relationships between "culture and structure" and "culture and action." Firstly, the relationship between culture and structure: The diverse lifestyle and behavioral patterns among different

social groups and classes constitute diverse structural cultures. Groups in advantageous positions transform their held structural cultures into culturally recognized ones through cultural domination, thus achieving their own reproduction. At this level, the "possessiveness" "competitiveness" of culture become prominent, naturally linking it with the concept of "capital." Secondly, the relationship between culture and action: Bourdieu believed in a continuous mediator between culture and action- "habitus." The cultural background of a group (especially family cultural capital) often determines their habits, which consequently become stamped with a class imprint, becoming a significant aspect that distinguishes different groups. Bourdieu's hypotheses regarding the relationship between structure, culture, and action have given rise to the concepts of "cultural capital," "habitus," and "field," thereby constructing the discourse of cultural reproduction. Specifically, proponents of the theory of cultural capital believe that family socio-economic status often predicts differences in cultural capital and habits, which in turn predict differences in children's educational attainment and academic achievement. In modern industrial societies, educational attainment largely determines occupational achievement, and occupational achievement is positively correlated with income. Consequently, education becomes a crucial element in societal reproduction. Several empirical studies support the theory of cultural capital, establishing cultural capital as the most significant intermediary variable between family background and academic achievement (Gaddis, 2013; Hoff, 2003; Morgan et al., 2009). The role of cultural capital in educational inequality and social stratification has also garnered widespread attention among domestic scholars. Many researchers believe that the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital further delineates the boundaries between social strata, exacerbating differences and inequalities between strata, reducing social mobility, and even creating barriers between social classes (Li, 2006; Wen & Li, 2018). The theory of cultural capital offers a deeply insightful explanation from a cultural perspective regarding the forms and essence of societal reproduction. However, within this theory's framework, culture serves as an intermediary between the interests of the dominant class and everyday life, reflecting the economic and political interests of this dominant class. In this sense, culture becomes a static structural category, with its characteristic traits of "possession" and "competitiveness" emphasized, ultimately hiding the implicit "reconciliatory" and "shared" aspects of culture. The theory of cultural capital diminishes the value of cultural nurturing concepts, instead

fostering a belief that one can benefit from cultural conflicts. Consequently, the competition among different groups in the educational domain for cultural capital further erodes the inherent meaning of culture as "creation" and "interaction," weakening the understanding and interpretative significance of culture. In summary, the theory of cultural capital constructs the significance of "capital" in the relationship between culture and education, along with education's role in the "reproduction" of dominant culture, thus making "cultural capital and educational inequality" the predominant narrative in educational sociology research.

3. DECONSTRUCTION: REFLECTING ON THE NARRATIVE OF "CULTURAL CAPITAL"

The value of Bourdieu's educational theory lies in scrutinizing how mainstream culture is produced within schools-education appears to neutrally disseminate culture, thus seemingly promoting inequality under the guise of fairness and objectivity. Undoubtedly, the theory of cultural capital stands as a potent tool for educational sociologists to question "why inequality exists." However, Bourdieu's analysis becomes deeply entrenched in a one-sided, overly deterministic view of power dominance, stifling the potential for exploring social change. The concepts of "cultural capital" and "habitus" curtail the possibilities of examining individual upward mobility. This limitation arises from neglecting the fact that culture is both a structural and transformative process. Additionally, the narrative of "cultural capital" subtly constructs a form of social knowledge and drives public opinion, leading to an excessive concern in society about issues related to educational equity, thereby creating a feedback loop that reshapes societal realities. Hence, it becomes essential to engage in reflective discussions on the narrative of "cultural capital" from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

3.1 Theoretical Critique

Firstly, as mentioned earlier, Bourdieu's ideas about cultural stratification are based on his assumptions about culture. In his framework, culture is seen as "structural culture," "possessive culture," and "competitive culture," suggesting that different cultural communities have distinct cultural patterns. These patterns determine the psychological and behavioral modes of individuals and groups within their contexts, seemingly implying the existence of solidified and homogenous cultural

communities. This excessive emphasis on cultural specificity exaggerates its shaping influence on different groups. In the realm of educational sociology research, the overreliance on the narrative of cultural capital reflects a narrow understanding of cultural significance and presents a onesided interpretation of the relationship between culture and education. Secondly, the theory of cultural capital overlooks the differing ways in which culture influences actions in various social periods and stages. As Swidler pointed out, culture operates differently during periods of cultural stability and cultural transformation (Swidler, 1986). Compared to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, which is more applicable to societies in stable cultural stages where culture is often linked with social structures, in transitional societies like China, where stable social classes and cultural divides are yet to fully form, this approach might not entirely apply. Educational research and practice during social transition periods require guidance from mainstream ideologies. It's not only about examining cultural differences but also emphasizing cultural commonalities to universality in promoting educational highlight culture's Furthermore, the theory of cultural capital denies the possibility of children being "re-socialized" within the education system. It assumes that children's habits are primarily determined by family cultural capital, which tends to be stable and challenging to alter, thus diminishing the role of schools and other educational institutions in shaping these habits. This theory dismisses the potential impact of other avenues on children's development, such as school knowledge, societal values, classic works, and humanity's shared cultural heritage (Kingston, 2001). Multiple empirical studies indicate that, contrary to maintaining the cultural advantage of certain strata, schools offer disadvantaged children opportunities to access cultural resources (Heath & Ridge, 1980). School education can be a creator of culture and even accelerate social mobility. From Bourdieu's perspective, the educational field opposes the assumption of education as a system based solely on functionalism, emphasizing conflicts between various factors within the educational realm instead of assuming a functionalist theoretical foundation. This viewpoint represents his pursuit of constructing a theory that is "biased yet profound," allowing for a deeper understanding and critical analysis of education from a realistic standpoint. However, this should not lead educational sociologists to solely focus on "conflict" and overlook "function." Nor should it serve as a sanctuary for educational practitioners to evade their responsibilities. Considering the current state of educational sociology research and discourse, it's regrettable that there has been a lack of consideration for the shortcomings

of functionalist assumptions over the long term. Due to the close relationship between education and society, educational sociology should not merely be a branch of social science; rather, it should embody societal concern. It should not only address the imperfect state of education in current society but also focus on its potential for achieving a better state in the future.

3.2 Realistic Challenges

Under the narrative framework of cultural capital research, family upbringing has become a tool for class segregation. Lareau distinguishes between the "accomplishment of natural growth" in working-class families and the "concerted cultivation" in middle-class families, presenting starkly different parenting methods. These approaches offer children distinct learning experiences and life trajectories. Children from middle-class families, under "concerted cultivation," acquire a dominant set of cultural skills. These skills successfully transform into cultural capital when they interact with institutions like schools. In contrast, children raised through "natural growth" tend to develop a constrained sense of agency and struggle to leverage institutional rules for accumulating cultural capital in their life development. In practice, while explaining the causal mechanism of educational inequality, the narrative logic of cultural capital research unexpectedly stigmatizes the cultural upbringing of disadvantaged families, imposing even greater pressure on them. A reflection is warranted regarding whether there are class differences in family education philosophies and parenting styles. Do differences in educational philosophies lead to parental behavioral differences, or is it due to a lack of resources causing variations in parental involvement? Just considering "maternal roles" reveals part of this complexity. The narrative of the "knowledge and emotion-intensive" ideal maternal role has ensnared urban women. Professional "maternal brokers" pursue managing their children's performance in the educational market, aiming to help their children gain an advantage in intense educational competitions. Rural mothers are also not exempt from this scenario. Increasingly, rural families send their children to urban schools to meet the demand for high-quality education, resulting in the emergence of a group known as "accompanying mothers." From this perspective of pursuing high-quality education through "intensive parenting," there seem to be no inherent differences between different social strata. Hong Yanbi also concluded, through extensive quantitative research, that different social strata in China do not significantly differ in inherent disposition, and family nurturing concepts

and parenting habits do not constitute class barriers (Hong & Zhao, 2015). However, the narrative of "cultural capital" inadvertently constructs a form of societal knowledge and drives public opinion, provoking concerns among families about educational equity and intensifying parental distrust in school education. With the backdrop of a declining public education system and the rise of market-oriented education, parents are drawn into the education market, competing for cultural capital for their children. Family economic and cultural capital continually intertwine with market capital. These aspects encompass sociological issues of educational opportunity fairness, social status attainment, and the reproduction of For instance, "shadow education" becomes a crucial influencing factor leading to unequal childhoods between urban and rural areas and among different social strata within cities. It operates as a "third layer" of cultural capital reproduction outside the family and school realms, hindering positive social mobility. Consequently, if individual freedom of choice under marketization is left unchecked, it might lead to vested interest groups monopolizing the distribution and utilization of educational resources, further solidifying the societal reproduction process and exacerbating the extent of educational inequality.

4. TRANSITION: EMPHASIZING THE NARRATIVE OF "CULTURAL RESOURCES"

Critiquing the theory of cultural capital does not imply discarding or neglecting Bourdieu's intellectual legacy: the significant influence of cultural factors on children's academic performance and achievement. However, what causes inequality is not the "culture" itself but rather the forms and pathways through which "culture" engages in education. While "culture" as "capital" acts as a catalyst for educational inequality, "culture" as "resources" has the potential to serve as the logical starting point for promoting educational equity. Despite the mere difference of a single word between "resources" and "capital," it embodies profound implications of decompetition and de-segregation, encompassing the potential shift from competition over culture to its sharing, from segregation toward integration.

4.1 Empirical Research: Beyond "Capital"

In recent years, numerous scholars have challenged the explanatory power of cultural capital theory, asserting that the influence of cultural capital on academic achievement and educational attainment should not be overestimated. They also emphasize the cultural production function within school education. They argue that families aren't the sole domain where children acquire cultural resources beneficial for educational achievement. Particularly in modern society, schools serve as crucial environments for acquiring both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. National policies, when applied to educational practices within schools, can compensate for disadvantaged children. These policies help them develop good study habits, even encourage parental involvement to ensure children acquire reading skills. Educational reform experiments like the KIPP Charter School in the United States demonstrate that offering academic assistance to students from low-income families and providing counseling services and cultivating parent-child interaction habits within families can bridge the academic performance and achievement gaps among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Angrist et al., 2012). Similarly, within China, scholars continuously challenge Bourdieu's cultural capital theory and its explanatory power in contemporary Chinese society. They believe that the impact of cultural capital on Chinese students' academic achievement and educational attainment should not be overestimated. For instance, Cheng Meng proposed that innate drive, moral thinking, and a school-oriented mindset constitute the "cultural capital" allowing students from lower strata to achieve social mobility through academics (Meng & Yongjiu, 2016). Xu Chengshu suggests that understanding cultural capital based on cultural diversity could pave the way for developing "differential advantages" for individuals in the differentiated urban and rural societies (Chengshu & Zhihui, 2021). Despite uneven distribution in urban and rural settings, rural cultural capital such as innate characteristics, ethical traditions, and close relationships can imbue rural children with positive cultural qualities like responsibility, respect, and giving back. This could empower them spiritually to achieve higher academic success. In fact, both "lower-strata cultural capital" and "rural cultural capital" transcend the scope of Bourdieu's cultural capital concept, pointing toward a more inclusive notion of "cultural resources."

4.2 Conceptual Shift: Cultural Resources

The "cultural resources" discourse, although not yet forming a complete theoretical framework or research paradigm, emerges sporadically in the thoughts of sociologists as a spark of insight. Social theorist Swidler proposed the basic premise of "culture in action," emphasizing that

individuals aren't mere puppets of cultural systems. Through a process of culturalization, individuals acquire a symbolic toolkit or "toolbox" of cultural skills that they can mobilize in their actions. These cultural symbols continuously evolve and expand as individuals strategically select and balance these symbolic resources in their actions (Swidler, 1986). Swidler's theory of cultural toolkits shifts from cultural specificity to a dynamic construction of culture and aligns more closely with the notion of "cultural resources". British sociologist Goldthorpe, while criticizing cultural capital theory, further proposed that "cultural resources" are a more inclusive and adaptable alternative concept. Initially based on rational action theory (Goldthorpe, 1996), Goldthorpe posits that parents and students are rational actors. They have their goals and make educational choices and decisions based on the resources available to them and the constraints they face (Goldthorpe, 2010). Goldthorpe and his supporters believe that parents and students are not unconscious followers of "social norms" nor entirely swayed by the culture of their social strata. Rather than education gaps stemming from family cultural capital, they argue that it originates from the judgments parents and students make based on their resources and limitations. In this scenario, the "cultural resources" provided by the education system or society play a crucial role in the academic performance of children from different strata. Farkas and others have also used the concept of "cultural resources" instead of "cultural capital" in studying academic achievement and attainment(Farkas et al., 1990). Advocates of the "cultural resources" approach argue that, compared to the highbrow "cultural capital" like art, ordinary and commonplace "cultural resources" such as family reading behavior are better predictors of children's academic success. Additionally, cultural resources are available to children from different strata in family, school, and community contexts through parentchild, teacher-student, and peer interactions. The cultural resources discourse focuses on variables or factors that truly influence educational attainment, rather than always fixating on limiting factors that disadvantaged children cannot overcome. In essence, the cultural resources needed to realize educational values are inclusive across strata; children from different social strata can possess these resources and enhance their educational achievements using them (Goldthorpe, 2007). These cultural resources not only are easily achievable within families but also can be supplemented within the school or educational system. Furthermore, recent empirical research on children's academic performance finds a convergence between psychology and sociology, suggesting that the key

variables explaining differences in educational attainment are "academic skills and work habits" (Farkas, 2018). These skills and habits can be fostered through school education and also emphasized and implemented within the home-school context, where the cultural resources available to families and the cultural support provided by schools significantly impact the development of students' learning skills and habits. The article attempts to contrast the differences between 'cultural capital' and 'cultural resources' in three aspects. Firstly, they differ in their understanding and assumptions about culture.

The former emphasizes the structural and segregating aspects of culture, viewing it as patterns of life that differentiate groups, whereas the latter values the shared and universal nature of culture, regarding it as cultural resources acquired by individuals in societal environments continuously enriched and expanded in action. Secondly, they hold different assumptions about the relationship between culture and education. The former emphasizes the exclusivity of cultural domination in the educational domain, highlighting the dominance of the privileged class in institutionalized culture and the exclusion or segregation of other class cultures. Conversely, the latter emphasizes the inclusivity of culture in the educational society, suggesting that families of different socioeconomic statuses may possess it. Thirdly, they diverge in their research approach to school education. The former stresses the formation of a symbolic violence through the transmission of family cultural heritage and the conformity of school symbols, leading to dual reproduction. Meanwhile, the latter emphasizes schools as creators and compensators of culture, highlighting their cultural production function.

5. RECONSTRUCTING THE PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 'CULTURAL RESOURCE' NARRATIVE

As George Farkas suggests, the future direction of educational sociology research should take a dual approach. Firstly, it should delve into the mechanisms through which skills and habits influence educational attainment. Secondly, it should investigate how to structure school education to assist disadvantaged students in acquiring these skills and habits (Farkas, 2018). While educational sociology traditionally emphasized how 'cultural' as 'capital' leads to educational inequality, the focus should shift to explore how 'cultural' as 'resources' affects students' acquisition of 'skills and habits'. Cultural resources' not only serve as an academic

theoretical concept but also present a more experiential, tangible, and operationally feasible practical concept. From an educational research perspective, 'cultural resources' can construct a new discourse system and narrative logic for equity research in education, delving into the mechanisms through which school culture influences skill acquisition and habit formation, thereby questioning how public education systems can enhance their nurturing capabilities. From an educational practice standpoint, starting with 'cultural resources' returns to the authentic meaning of cultural education, following the principle of 'resource compensation' to assist disadvantaged or academically struggling students, promoting educational equity, and enhancing educational quality. These elements are the pressing concerns demanding responses from 'dual reduction' policies in China. As Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is intricately linked to 'habitus' and 'field,' 'cultural resources' should not stand as an isolated concept. Firstly, the universality and public welfare of cultural resources require a well-functioning 'education society' as a support base. Secondly, cultural resources do not directly impact students' academic performance but influence educational attainment through the cultivation of students' learning skills and habits. Only through this can the beneficial operation of cultural resources be realized, fostering equitable educational development (Lane, 2012).

To illustrate briefly using the 'dual reduction' policy as an example: the implementation of the 'dual reduction' policy should be driven by cultural resources, constructing a suitable 'education society,' promoting homeschool cooperation, and focusing on cultivating students' 'skills and habits.' Firstly, through multilateral collaboration, construct a suitable 'education society.' Secondly, advance integration and build inclusive 'cultural resources.' Thirdly, foster home-school collaboration to cultivate 'skills and habits.' In fact, the 'dual reduction' policy has taken a significant step by fostering a positive societal atmosphere for nurturing, vigorously reorganizing extracurricular training institutions, guiding their transition from profit-driven to public service-oriented organizations, strengthening the role of schools as the main educational institutions, providing afterschool services, and continuously expanding post-school service resources. Additionally, the Ministry of Education emphasizes leveraging various resources to broaden students' horizons, support comprehensive development, and provide platforms for practical experiences. Specific strategies include offering off-campus activity spaces and resources, exploring community education services, among others."

6. CONCLUSION

The realization of 'quality-oriented educational equity' requires scaffolding from relevant research. Educational sociology should focus on constructing a discourse and practical vision of educational equity in China. Compared to the narrative of 'cultural capital,' the narrative of 'cultural resources' is more conducive for researchers to understand culture from a more inclusive perspective, reshaping the discourse system of 'culture and education.' Simultaneously, the narrative of cultural resources can broaden people's perspective from 'why' to 'what for.' While uncovering 'why inequality' through the cultural lens, it's essential to continually question what culture 'can do' and 'how it can contribute' to fostering educational equity. 'Why' and 'what for' have always been two sides of the same coin; seeking 'why' ultimately leads us to 'what for.' Just as 'capital' and 'resources' represent two sides of a coin, the 'cultural capital' theory helps us glimpse the possible mechanisms behind educational inequality, while the concept of 'cultural resources' aids in understanding the role of education in promoting fairness and social mobility. The narrative of 'cultural resources' can steer educational researchers and practitioners towards the development and enhancement of the public education system. Considering this perspective, this study proposes that the discussion in educational sociology about the relationship between culture and education should shift from the narrative of cultural capital to the narrative of cultural resources.

This paper explores, at a theoretical level, that educational sociology should consider the relationship between culture and education from the perspective of 'resources.' It does not merely paint a harmonious picture of achieving social mobility and upward mobility for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Admittedly, the paths to activate cultural resources during academic processes are often indirect. Factors such as unequal resource allocation and policy constraints remain objective challenges to educational equity. This study, while discussing the alignment of the narrative of cultural resources with the strategic direction of the 'dual reduction' policy, also raises questions and challenges regarding the implementation of related policies. How do we drive the combination of macro forces and micro practices? How can we construct and activate cultural resources centered around the public education system? How do we return to the genuine essence of cultural education, thereby achieving the ultimate goal of promoting education and equity through culture? These questions require further exploration in both educational research

and practice."

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