

Comparative Study on the Stratification of Education between Urban and Rural Areas in China

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ABSTRACT

I explored how students and their parents in both urban and rural areas of China perceive their own educational experiences, as well as their ideas and perceptions of urban-rural educational stratification. Through in-depth interviews as well as thematic analysis, I identified three themes: the cultural spiral of the constructs of "identification" and "exclusion"; the differences in risk tolerance in sunk costs; breakdown and reconstruction of the moral order. Through the analysis of the themes, I came to the main conclusion that the stratification of education between urban and rural areas in China is very serious and is largely shaped by the social ideological cleavage between urban and rural areas. In the process of shaping the urban-rural education stratification phenomenon, the "Smallholder mentality" plays an important role and mechanism, and it is precisely because the "Smallholder mentality" exists in different depths and breadths between the urban and rural areas that the stratification between urban and rural education in China has not been able to be bridged. An in-depth study of the social and ideological mechanisms behind the urban-rural education stratification will help to better understand and solve the problem of urban-rural education stratification in China.

KEYWORDS

Smallholder Mentality; Educational Stratification; Urban-rural Differences; China.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the more than 40 years since China's reform and opening-up policy was implemented in 1978, the number of illiterates in urban and rural areas in China has been declined greatly. Despite this marked overall decline, given China's population base, there are still many education problems in both urban and rural areas that need to be resolved, and the level of education in rural areas at this stage still lags significantly behind that in urban areas. Previous research on urban and rural education in China has focused on exploring the role of rapid urbanization in the stratification of urban and rural education in China, and how the Chinese government's policy of 'hierarchical school management' has shifted financial pressure from the central government to the rural government and finances, leading to the stratification of urban and rural education. The root cause of urban-rural education stratification in China lies in the urban-rural dichotomy and antagonism, specifically in the urban-rural dichotomy of economic structure. Regarding the impact of the urban-rural dichotomous economic structure on educational development, argue that challenges related to regional and small-scale educational inequalities cannot be properly addressed in the urban-rural dichotomy due to differences in social class. Therefore, some researchers have also shifted their focus to the impact of structural differences in the economy between urban and rural areas on educational stratification, but in their studies found that even in some of the more economically developed southern regions, some of the rural populations

who migrated to the cities still have difficulty in accessing higher-quality education in the same way as the urban natives, and that even in the economically developed regions of the south, the integration of urban and rural education process Even in the economically developed areas of the south, the process of urban-rural education integration is difficult to advance. Therefore, [Zhang Letian 2004], in his study on the institutional causes of urban-rural education stratification in China, mentions that although there is a clear "urban-rural divide" in China's education system and economic structure, it is impossible to comprehensively and objectively explain the current problem of education stratification, and the urban-rural dichotomy has already been internalized into the different value orientations of the urban and rural populations and societies. The urban-rural dichotomy has been internalized into different value orientations and social perceptions of the urban and rural populations and societies, and these different social perceptions and value orientations are in turn reflected in the urban-rural education stratification. Therefore, the focus and innovation of this study is to try to uncover and explore the fragmentation of the social value system behind the problem of urban-rural education stratification in China.

2. LITERATURE REFERENCES

2.1. Educational Stratification

Educational stratification is a part of social stratification, and it is at the forefront of the structure of social stratification. Individuals achieve different social statuses and rewards in the future by receiving different levels and quality of education, so inequality of access to education and differentiation in the quality of education lead to different people being in different positions in the social hierarchy. Similarly [Chirkov, V. 2020] argues that unequal access to education is the key to educational stratification, and that the younger the age at which students are exposed to quality educational resources, the more likely they are to achieve higher social status and fulfilment in the future compared to their counterparts. More researchers tend to argue that educational stratification is closely linked to economic development, which suggests that education is the fulcrum of the social stratification process in economically advanced societies, and that although educational attainment is largely dependent on people's birth status, it is in turn an important determinant of the direction and quality of their later lives. determinants of the direction and quality of their later lives. There are commonalities but also regional differences in educational stratification in different parts of the world. Previous researchers on educational stratification between urban and rural areas in China have partly focused on the commonality of educational stratification - class differences in access to educational resources, while others have tried to shift the focus of the study to compulsory education in China, which is the most important factor of social stratification. Some researchers have tried to focus on China's educational streaming system, which bundles compulsory education with vocational education [Zhang, L.2004] and have found that there is a close relationship between the popularity of educational streaming policies behind the phenomenon of educational stratification between China's urban and rural areas. Some researchers have suggested that educational differences between urban and rural areas in China should also include consideration of socio-cultural and ethical aspects, in addition to institutionalized features. Such considerations should focus on how different social values alienate the views of residents in different regions about the education system, and this research suggests that groups with different views about education will largely exacerbate the status quo of educational stratification. In the Blue Book of China's Education Development [Yang Dongping 2009], it is mentioned that the core idea of China's current education system is the "test-based education mentality", which determines the degree of importance that Chinese people attach to education. However, this idea does not explain why the "test-based education mentality" does not have the same effect in both urban and rural areas, and why the disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of education has been deepening.[Hao Dahai 2007], in his study of urban education,

mentions that "rooted in the background of the differentiation of educational development is a social and cultural value system with deeper connotations".

2.2. Smallholder Mentality

The term "smallholder mentality" comes from "From the Soil" [Fei Xiaotong 1948], which refers to the formation of a village-centered social system in most parts of China, which is also called "the Pattern of Difference-Sequence". In this sequence all people and things operate in strict accordance with "smallholder mentality". Previous researchers on this issue usually focus on the background of the emergence of "smallholder mentality", [Li Fagen 2019] mentioned that smallholder society is the foundation of authoritarian rule, and authoritarian power further shapes and strengthens smallholder society, the study argues that "smallholder mentality" is tied to the 5,000-year-long feudal monarchical authoritarian system in China. Other researchers have deconstructed the "smallholder mentality" into its economic and cultural dimensions. China has always been a country that relies on an agrarian economy, with agriculture being the main source of employment and income for farmers, and both individual households and the state's food supply being borne by small farmers themselves. Smallholder mentality has been rooted in Chinese society for a long time, and some studies have mentioned that smallholder mentality is a way for the rulers to bind the people through political power and disperse them in different regions to strengthen their control over human and material resources and to prevent the people from being mobilized by "The other". After more than 30 years of rapid urbanization in China, the rapid rise of urban areas and their encroachment on rural areas has significantly reduced the influence of the 'smallholder mentality' in urban areas, marking a shift in social attitudes. Some researchers have examined the relationship between the "smallholder mentality" and the ancient Chinese imperial examination system, mentioning that the Chinese bureaucratic selection mechanism is a social redistribution mechanism rooted in the smallholder mentality. The smallholder mentality still plays an important role in Chinese education today and shows more and more significant differences between urban and rural areas. Studying and discussing the role of this social value in urban-rural education stratification can better explain "the Pattern of Difference" behind China's urban-rural education stratification.

3. RESULTS

3.1. The Cultural Spiral of the Constructs of "Identification" and "Exclusion"

Identification with culture and values is a broad concept, and unlike ethnic and national identity, cultural identity is based on the uniqueness of the idiosyncratic community. In contrast, relative rejection of a particular culture is based on an inherent identification with another characteristic culture. After analyzing the personal narratives of the interviewees, I found that the interviewees in Ankang City and the interviewees in Dahanu Village expressed their notions on "Should I get an education?" Or "Is it necessary to get education?" When analyzing the personal narratives of the respondents in Ankang City and those in Dahanu Village, I found that there was a clear contradiction in the attitudes of the respondents in the two areas towards the "exam-oriented education culture" that is under of the current Chinese society.

In terms of attitudes towards the social culture of "exam-oriented education", the urban respondents showed a certain degree of "identification", which may be due to passive obedience or subjective motivation. This "identification" is characterized by: (a) unconditional trust in the current educational objectives and processes; (b) fear and anxiety about the possibility of lagging behind others in education. Urban areas are a distinct community from rural areas, and three decades of rapid urbanization in China have largely eroded the once dominant position of the 'small farmer mentality' in urban areas. Behind this change in social values is the fact that the once interconnected "the Pattern of Difference-Sequence" groups are now broken and fragmented [Fei Xiaotong 1948], so that

residents of urban areas do not have to be confined to a certain set of facts set by the old society in terms of cultural identity. Instead of limiting their cultural identity to a certain set of facts set by the old society, residents of urban areas can choose to be enthusiastic about education and recognize the role of education.

The concept of cultural exclusion refers to the fact that a particular culture is regarded as 'undesirable' by a certain group of people [Randeria, S., & Karagiannis, E. 2020], and that when a certain culture dominates a society for a long period of time, the groups in the society will spontaneously reject and resist the foreign culture. From the personal narratives of the respondents in the rural areas, this 'cultural exclusion' is manifested in (a): opposition to the notion that 'education leads to a better life'. (b): eagerness to engage in agriculture in the future and thus readily give up the opportunity to learn. This cultural exclusion is also related to the "Smallholder mentality". Even today, the basic structure of the traditional "the Pattern of Difference-Sequence" society is still preserved in rural areas of China, under the dominance of "Smallholder mentality", it is difficult for people in rural areas to identify with other cultural concepts and values, and because China's rural areas retain a large amount of land that can be cultivated, people in rural areas are not able to shift their mentality from "planting - reproducing - planting", so they cannot identify with the foreign cultural concept that "education can bring a better life".

3.2. The Differences in Risk Tolerance about Sunk Costs

The concept of sunk costs is a historical cost that is uncontrollable to existing decisions and sunk costs can greatly influence the way people behave and make decisions. In the field of education research, this sunk cost refers to the time, effort, and money that has been spent to receive education. There is a huge difference in the risk tolerance of sunk costs related to education between people in urban and rural areas in China. In analyzing the personal narratives of the respondents, I found that respondents in urban and rural areas had different perceptions of "the uncertain future that education may bring" and "whether they are willing to increase their consumption and spending on education" these two questions.

Respondents in rural areas had little tolerance for sunk costs in education. It was constantly emphasized in their narratives that investing extra money and time in education was unacceptable for their families and that education did not lead to a better future than farming. The contrast in the attitudes of the respondents in the two districts shows that the difference in tolerance for sunk costs in education is directly related to their level of support for the education system. Behind this difference in tolerance is still the role of the "Smallholder mentality". Although the economic structures of urban and rural areas in China are very different [Deng K, 2010], the difference in tolerance of sunk costs in education is more likely to come from the internalized values of urban and rural residents. "Smallholder mentality" has existed for a long time in rural areas and has formed an institutional "certainty", which has been internalized into the rural population's attitude towards everything. This institutional "certainty" has been internalized into a low tolerance of uncertainty among rural residents. On the other hand, residents in urban areas have lost this pursuit of internalized "certainty" and have a higher tolerance for "uncertainty", which is a kind of alienation of people by social values.

3.3. Breakdown and Reconstruction of the Moral Order

The concept of moral order consists of two components, "moral practice," which refers to an individual's efforts to conform his or her behavior and attitudes to the requirements of the moral community, and "moral expectations," which refers to the expectations of those around the individual regarding his or her behavior and attitudes. In China's urban-rural education stratification problem, moral order specifically exists in two forms: broken and rebuilt. In the respondents' narratives, those in the urban areas responded more positively to the expectations of those around them in terms of

learning, while at the same time developing deeper negative feelings about "not being able to accomplish the set learning goals". In contrast, the narratives of respondents in rural areas show the opposite attitude.

From the narratives of the urban respondents, he emphasized "meeting expectations" and "achieving goals" many times, which indicates that the respondents in urban areas have strong "moral burdens", and for them studying hard is a "moral practice" in China's exam-oriented education environment, and the achievement of "moral practice" can meet their own and others' "moral expectations". For them, studying hard is a "moral practice" in China's exam-oriented education environment, and the achievement of the "moral practice" can fulfill their own and others' "moral expectations". After the decline of the "Smallholder mentality" in the urban areas, the local people were able to reconstruct the "moral order" at the education.

In the rural interviewee's narrative, he repeatedly expressed a lack of concern for academic performance and denied the existence of educational "expectations" for himself and others. There was little sense of "moral burden" in education among the rural respondents. They do not set for themselves goals related to "moral practice" in education, and they do not have emotions attached to the fulfillment of their own or others' "moral expectations". Respondents in rural areas show indifference and detachment from the moral order in education. In rural China, where the "Smallholder mentality" is still prevalent, education is not a core social value, and the complete structure of moral order exists only in the theme of "land and inheritance", and the moral order in education is still in a fragmented state.

4. IMPLICATION

previous studies on educational stratification in urban and rural China have mostly used quantitative analysis methods, using data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the China National Conditions Survey. In contrast to quantitative analytical methods, using qualitative research in urban-rural education stratification can yield rich and extensive personal narratives that play an important role in exploring the social ideological shaping and mechanisms behind urban-rural education stratification in China. Unlike previous studies on urban-rural education stratification, this study no longer focuses on the shaping of social structures on urban-rural education stratification. The focus of previous related studies was on the shaping of urban-rural educational stratification by differences in economic structure and rapid urbanization development. The socio-ideological mechanisms that contribute to urban-rural educational stratification have received little research attention. The dichotomous structural dichotomy between rural and urban China has always existed, and that with China's rapid urbanization, the educational stratification between urban and rural areas has increasingly been categorized as a systemic dilemma, ignoring the socio-ideological cleavage behind this stratification phenomenon [Ellen Van de Poel & Owen O'Donnell 2012]. The conclusions drawn from this study can provide constructive additions to the research question of educational stratification in urban and rural China. It can also provide a theoretical perspective for further research on "How to address or mitigate this increase in stratification?" that is "examining how stratification in education can be eliminated and mitigated by bridging the social-ideological divide." In China, due to the uneven distribution of social ideologies such as the "Smallholder mentality" it is foreseeable that the status quo of urban and rural educational stratification will remain for some time. As education is part of the process of social reproduction and distribution [Sarah Pickard 2022], if the phenomenon of education stratification between urban and rural areas becomes more and more serious, the ideological split between urban and rural areas caused by the "Smallholder mentality" will become more and more obvious, thus turning into a vicious circle.

5. CONCLUSION

The study found that "Smallholder mentality" plays an important role and mechanism behind the problem of urban-rural education stratification in China. Specifically, there are three points: (a): "Smallholder mentality" has led to the alienation of attitudes towards education and culture between urban and rural residents, with urban residents "identification" and rural residents "exclusion". (b): The "Smallholder mentality" has led to a different degree of tolerance for sunk costs in education between urban and rural residents; in rural areas, the institutionalized small farmer economy has been internalized into a fixed mode of thinking among rural residents, who have a very low degree of tolerance for sunk costs in education. In urban areas, due to the decline of the "Smallholder mentality", urban residents are no longer bound by a single mindset and show a higher tolerance for sunk costs in education. (c): The "small farmer mentality" leads to two opposite states of moral order in education in urban and rural areas. In rural areas, the moral order of the residents focuses on "land and inheritance" rather than "education", and the residents in rural areas don't expect to engage in "moral practice" in education or realize "moral expectations" in education, and the moral order in education is in a broken state in rural areas of China. On the other hand, residents in urban areas are very eager to engage in "moral practice" in education and are happy to fulfill their own and others' "moral expectations" after getting rid of the constraints of the "Smallholder mentality". The moral order in education in urban China has been rebuilt. These three mechanisms together shape the stratification of education between urban and rural areas in China, based on the theoretical background that the alienation of social values is an obstacle to the system.

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