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A Critical Review of Social Mobility after Higher Education Expansion in China : Exploring the Relevant Social Capital Factors in Stratification

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Abstract. The 1999 expansion of higher education in China did not provide students from typical family backgrounds with more access to the job market. Concerning the issue of social stratification and social mobility, this paper tries to find the key factors. Based on the social capital as well as the cultural capital, this paper explores the related elements among the students' performance and their family background, the parents' economic status and social class. This paper utilizes literature review to explain the reasons contributing to the phenomenon. The conclusion is that social capital is more essential to students than their individual efforts due to the parents' socioeconomic status rather than other elements that make sense to their success. Additionally, this paper also draws a conclusion that the political as well as the other social factors, such as gender, marriage and fertility, also make sense to the issue, which are currently widely acknowledged.

Keywords: higher education expansion, social mobility, stratification, social capital

1. Introduction

In 1998, aiming to implement the plan to "positively develop education and expand the scale of higher education", the CPC and the State Council promoted a plan to meet the new demands of the twenty-first century (Higher Education Act 1998). The plan evoked a rapid growth in higher educational Opportunities, the rate of enrollment was rising up to 78%. However, their performance in the labor market was not as good as it should have been in terms of social mobility and stratification. The distribution of educational opportunities, to a certain extent, related to the basic characteristics of social stratification and the levels of social inequality , which makes sense to the following social issues as well as the relevant debaters[1].

Currently, many scholars have studied the main contributing factors to this problem. Li Chunling put forward the point of view that the Hukou registration system is an essential priority to social mobility, creating a significant gap between urban and rural students [2]. Bourdieun The Inheritors, stated that the education system inherently perpetuates inequalities, with lower-class individuals facing greater disadvantages [3].

This study investigates the relationship between parental values, socioeconomic status, and adolescents' engagement in shadow education during secondary school. It highlights how social

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capital and academic background influence social stratification and mobility following the expansion of higher education in China since 1999. This study aims to provide insights for further research on these critical factors affecting educational outcomes and social mobility.

2. Political factors

The rise of higher education in China has its own distinct characteristics because of the unique national circumstances, including economic, social, and political aspects. The growth of education in many other nations is usually accompanied with a decline in educational spending and general selection standards. However, given China's particular circumstances, the backdrop of profound societal change influences the growth of higher education.

In the mid-1990s, China transformed from a planned economy into a socialist market economy. Actually, the cost of enrolling in Higher education indeed increased. When it comes to the issue of being admitted to the prestigious university, the socioeconomic contexts and structural and organizational changes of China’s higher education expansion make sense of how the reform may have an impact on social class and gender inequalities [4].

The students’ performance in Gaokao determined whether they had access to universities to a large extent. The vocational schools also took students’ scores into consideration. Hence, the selection system became stricter than before. Regarding the matter, this study concludes that the current criteria impacting the allocation of possibilities for higher education are, in fact, numerous and beyond an individual's control; family history, gender, and household registration are unavoidable. Ethnic minorities, female students, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds face barriers to higher education. While the reality is that the students who possess better family backgrounds are privileged communities when they are admitted to prestigious universities. Moreover, living in the southern provinces in China is intended to make it easier to have access to being enrolled in the prestigious universities. The phenomenon even can date back to their secondary school stage; the students from lower-income families have no capacity for their shadow education, owing to the insufficient economic resources. Luo, Guo & Shi also demonstrated that the essential factor making the system problematic is the different regulations of the central government regarding student admission and the tuition fees criteria [5]. The sole method used to choose pupils in the past was the national standardized Gaokao.

As part of a plan to increase university autonomy, special admissions procedures were modified in 2001. According to institutional standards, certain prestigious colleges were permitted to hire a specific percentage of students (3 in 2001, 22 in 2003, 80 in 2011, and 90 in 2017). A number of measures known as the Gaokao Bonus Score were put into place by the federal government. In the meanwhile, a discussion about the connection between the growth of higher education and social mobility arose, drawing on contentious opinions from academics worldwide. Several previous research also show that the relationship is ambiguous and intricate. The maximum maintained inequality (MMI) model is a noteworthy theory that summarizes the relationship.

3. Social factors

3.1. The impact of family background on educational opportunities

The existing research indicates that after the students completed their compulsory education stage, their intellectual capital had positive correlations to their parents’ social capital. For instance, the

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social network as well as the economic status, when it comes to the issue of labor market, it would be apparent that the family background plays an essential role in their occupation.

The privileged class would be superior in quite a few aspects in general, not merely in cultural capital. The common sense ideas of social justice, which usually presume a distributive framework, not only neglect but also, and perhaps more crucially, conceal and obscure critical institutional assessments of dominance and oppression, according to a number of empirical evidences presented in recent study [6-7]. Other scholars maintain that the most important determinant of income and social mobility is not just factors related to education. This paper argues that social equality is not just the dominant distributive paradigm that holds that social equality is the morally correct distribution of social benefits and burdens among society members. On the other hand, family history is what counts most when it comes to educational opportunities, labor market competitiveness, occupational and social mobility, and other factors [8-9].

3.2. Gender differences and educational returns

Fang et al. found the men's returns to education induced by the 1986 compulsory education legislation in China were about five times larger than those for women [10]. They clarified that the gender gap in incomes and job chances might be the cause of such pronounced gender disparities. Nonetheless, education can have an impact on a variety of aspects of people's life, both inside and outside of the job market, including marriage, criminal behavior, and health [11–18].

3.3. Marriage and childbirth

Women will inevitably face gender bias even if they accept their university stage. Men are more dominant than women in many areas, and there is an intriguing relationship between education level and fertility. Prior research has shown that higher educational attainment is associated with lower fertility, older ages at first marriage and childbirth, and higher socioeconomic status among a spouse [19, 20, 21, 11, 22]. The well-educated women were intended to have more years getting married than others which are merely completed their compulsory education stage. Hence, the better socioeconomic status as well as cultural capital are also indicated more sacrifice in other aspects such as time cost as well as opportunity cost.

4. Economic factors

4.1. Government regulation and education expansion

In actuality, the central government of China regulates and controls the growth of higher education. The process mediating expansion and access to educational possibilities may differ from other nations where education expansion is market-oriented, given the rapid rise in educational chances in such a short period of time. According to certain perspectives, the development of education, particularly in the US and other European nations, is primarily motivated by students' internal motivation to meet modernization processes or, more simply, to find fulfilling employment. Nonetheless, the supply side may also be the driving force behind educational growth, i.e., the trend or policy of improving educational quality, which is comparable to what is happening in China at the moment [23].

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4.2. Student motivation and international education choice

Maslow theorised the two following kinds of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation relates to personal growth while extrinsic motivation is to satisfy deficiencies. Extrinsic motivations include promoting the academic background and competitiveness in the employment market and accumulating social and personnel capital [24]. Later, Pyvis and Chapman maintained that 'positional' and 'trans-formative' investments as two factors affecting students' choices for international education. It is conspicuous that positional motivation is pragmatic and instrumental. Furthermore, international education is considered as a means to accelerate students to enhance their social status and seize employment opportunities, which is beneficial to social mobility [25].

4.3. Industrialization of education and international student mobility

The industrialization of education is impacted by a combination of both demand and supply-side factors, for instance, China's efforts to popularize higher education and improve the quality of its people have led to more people having access to universities, which in turn has led to the idea of going further study, possessing overseas study experience also tests a family's financial capacity, and social networks, and people from better-off families are more likely to perform better academically. More Chinese students are opting to study abroad, notably in English-speaking nations like Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as a result of the growing tendency towards globalization and internationalization of higher education [26].

Drawing on Bourdieu's capital theory to explore factors affecting mainland Chinese students pursuing their PhD studies in Hong Kong universities. There are three main elements in Bourdieu's capital theory, including economic capital, social capital and cultural capital. For the economic capital, it refers to the access to material and financial resources [27]. Conversely, social assets resulting from social networks, relationships, and affiliations are associated with social capital. Furthermore, people's abilities, expertise, titles, and sensibility are all considered forms of cultural capital. The idea of cultural capital includes the institutionalized (like educational credentials), the objectified (like literature and artwork), and the embodied (like language proficiency and style) [27]. Significantly, there is an increasing number of researchers utilized Bourdieu's capital theory in the last few decades and show the effectiveness of the pivotal theory [28]. Furthermore, cultural capital is also increasingly a barrier.

Many more studies use Altbach's push-pull paradigm to examine the mobility of foreign students. Altbach noted that while some students were drawn to the host country by scholarships and other possibilities, others were pushed by unfavorable circumstances back home [29]. Although some host communities have had mixed feelings regarding international students, especially when those students have received financial aid from the host governments, other cultures have embraced international students as a means of expanding the horizons of domestic students as well as an investment. Advanced research facilities, friendly socioeconomic and political settings, and the possibility of international classmates have all been draw factors for the host nations. While the pull variables are unique to possible host nations and institutions, the push elements generate a generalized desire in studying abroad without providing students with particular guidance [30]. To support the homogeneous and heterogeneous variables underlying the models of Hong Kong and Macau, Li & Bray, for example, used a case study and comparison study to show the main portion of the research [31]. They discovered that pupils are influenced to seek education by two inherent

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variables. The students' desire for financial and cultural wealth was one of the internal motivations. The equilibrium between push and pull variables was the focus of external influences [32].

5. Conclusion

This study aims to determine whether social capital, rather than individual efforts, makes sense for the students' process. It does this by using a literature review to uncover pertinent aspects of social mobility and stratification. After the higher education expansion in 1999 in China, tremendous students have access to universities, but merely a few could emerge into a better social class that is superior to their original family. Nonetheless, the individual efforts can not be supposed to be ignored when it comes to the issue of success. Even the female performances in occupation could also date back to the higher education expansion policy, the relevant elements between the years of education and fertility, and the social as well as cultural capital about the married women.

While the challenge is that that above findings are based on the formal existing literature, the evidence may be sufficient, reflecting the individual cases as well as the data this paper sorted out before. The future research may narrow down the relevant areas that possess common variables; for instance, the policies in southern provinces are definitely different from the rural underdeveloped provinces in China, which could not be generalized in a totally same conclusion.

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