

Migrant Children's Schooling Culture and Social Mobility

Based on the Study of A Designated Public School for Migrant Children

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Abstract—Taking a public school designating recruitment of migrant children in Nanjing City in China as a case, this paper analyzes the schooling life of migrant children under culture production theory. Study shows “culture of self-abandonment” prevailing among migrant children in weak public schools. Different from what counter-school culture implies, they still believe in the value and significance of education, knowledge and diploma. They are more self-abandoned than resisting learning, challenging authority or attacking classmates, while they don't abandon themselves willingly, for they just feel hopes are dashed, which is rooted in “reality constrains and influence”. This culture plays a profound and diversified influence on migrant children, which will bring no benefits to education mobility but bring unexpected results to non-migrant workers.

Keywords—migrant children; culture of self-abandonment; reproduction; non-migrant workers

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the household mobility of migrant workers, the scale of migrant children is becoming bigger and bigger. According to the results of the sixth national census data of China, number of migrant children aging from 0 to 17 has reached the level of 35810000, an increase of 10480000 compared with 2005 [1]. Because of the large scale, fast growth and the concentrated distribution, migrant children have attracted wide attention from scholars. And because most of the migrant children are in the school age, their education has become one of the most important research topics.

Up to now, the research on the education of migrant children has exceeded 20 years since an article named “Migrant children can go to school?” was published on China Youth newspaper in 1995 [2]. And research focus extends from the macro policy level to the micro level of the school, such as learning process, the relationship between teachers and students [3]. However, as Willis said, the school is not just educational tools, but territory of cultural insight and production [4]. Inspired by this, in recent years, some Chinese scholars have begun to explore the schooling culture of migrant children in poor private school for migrant children. The common finding of these studies is that, migrant children generally make no effort to seek progress,

resist learning and authority, and are obsessed with fun, which seemingly constructs counter-school culture as Willis said [5][6].

However, the above research judgment only stems from the study of the poor private school for migrant children, not all types of schools. Nowadays, With the implementation of the “Two-main” education policy (i.e. Local government and public schools should be responsible for the education of migrant children), public schools are replacing them as the main channel for their education. By the end of 2013, migrant children at the national compulsory education stage are up to 12.77 million, accounting for 9.3% of students at this stage. The proportion of students entering public schools reached 80.4%, slightly elevated compared with 2012 [7]. Public schools and the poor private school for migrant children differ greatly in assessment index, teaching quality, teaching equipment, leading to two different campus environments [8]. So, what changes do the increasing open public schools bring to migrant children's schooling life and culture? What is schooling culture of migrant children in this field? Whether does Willis' counter-school culture prevail or not? What kind of influence can the culture have on them?

II. CULTURE PRODUCTION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

A. From Culture Reproduction to Culture Production

How to think about and analyze the schooling culture of children and its consequences at different social classes? There are two influential and classical theoretical interpretation paradigms. One is the cultural reproduction theory with arbitrary features, the other is the cultural production theory with initiative characteristic. Under the two theoretical modes, students present different schooling practice and culture.

The theory of cultural reproduction mainly pays attention to the production and reproduction mechanism of social inequality. In its view, the school serves as a mirror of society and replicates social relations. School education is but a tool just to realize “the reproduction of relative relationship between classes” and exacerbate the inequality. Bourdieu pointed out that the school is an important place for the production and reproduction of social and cultural inequality. The culture that school education requires and

rewards is the class culture, while the school taking upper-middle class culture as the education contents is actually implementing symbolic violence on the lower class children [9]. Children of the upper-middle class, as the “successor” of dominant culture, enjoy the congenital advantage and can easily internalized and naturally fit school culture as habits. In contrast, children, born in the bottom of society, are mostly active bearers of the power of the education system, under the premise of their identity for this power: the success of symbolic violence, in order to achieve “consistency” of school culture and student culture.

“Consistency” is the embodiment of “obedience” and shows the success of social and cultural reproduction, but such judgment on schools and students’ schooling life is too simple, which ignores contradiction, struggle and conflict in school, unable to carry a rational interpretation about what happened on earth in school. On the basis of introspection and practical exploration of the theory of culture reproduction, the cultural production theory with initiative is opened up. Willis clearly put forward the concept of counter-school culture in his work:

Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs in 1977 [4]. Willis believes that emphasis on cultural production is forming a theoretical point of view. Compared with the reproduction theory, culture production theory at least has the contribution of two levels: one is to highlight the importance of culture as a relatively independent level, and the other is the emphasis on human’s subjectivity makes the theory of reproduction deepening and expanding. In the theory of culture production, students’ subjectivity is brought back. They are no longer passive bearers of the school culture of, but active constructors. The students culture does not mean “consistency” in culture reproduction theory (mainly refers to compliance) for active groups of students have produced diversified cultural forms, such as docility, resistance and compliance. Similarly, the functional consequence of the students culture is not the single copy of the reproduction theory, with the possibility of achieving “mobility”, “spanning” and “structural reorganization”.

B. Analysis Steps of Migrant Children’s Culture Production

Culture production is not only a developing theory, but a kind of perspective and method. Willis proposed the next three stages for the analysis of culture production: Firstly, we need a pre-culture analysis of the economic position and relationship; Secondly, we should focus on the cultural characteristics of the formation process of the actor’s meaning; Thirdly, the structure and culture are once again put into a dynamic and interrelated movement [10]. In this article, I will analyze migrant children’s culture production according to the above steps.

III. THE SCHOOLING PLACES OF MIGRANT CHILDREN: THE PARALLEL CLASSES OF A POOR PUBLIC SCHOOL

From October, 2013 to July, 2016, the author repeatedly entered the XZ middle school to carry out field research, to understand the school lives of migrant children. XZ junior

school is a public school which gives access to migrant workers’ children in QH District of Nanjing city. XZ middle school is an overall public middle school with a long history, including two departments of junior middle teaching and senior middle teaching department, located between downtown and suburban area, which is also an ideal gathering place of migrant workers. At present, the school covers an area of 92,972 square meters, of which the construction area is 33,000 square meters. Also the school is equipped with the relatively complete hardware facilities, standard classrooms, a canteen where nearly one thousand students can dine, the dormitories which can hold nearly 500 students, a gymnasium, an auditorium and other facilities. The number of the teachers and students is about 1500.

While the senior middle school department has a four-star honors status, junior middle school department was obviously inferior, which is regarded as a weak school owing to its poor basic education the region, as the Principal W said, “for the local parents, as long as their children’s grades are a little bit better, they will choose better schools.” There are 8 classes in junior high school (2 characteristic classes and 6 parallel classes). Among them, migrant children accounted for a large proportion, at least one third, about 40%. and W president also said “at present there are a large number of migrant children in school, accounting for the a large proportion, so it’s obvious that the school mainly orients its services to the needs of migrant children. And the school will focus more attention on them in the future.”

The investigation is done on Class 3 Grade 9, a typical parallel class. There are a total of 25 students, of which 7 are in the school district, 4 are from other districts, 5 are from other cities and 9 are from other provinces. According to the strict definition about migrant children, there are 14 migrant workers’ children, accounting for 56%, but if the students from others districts are included, the proportion will be 72%.

IV. THE SCHOOLING LIFE OF MIGRANT CHILDREN : MOST OF SELF-ABANDONMENT

School culture is built in class, between classes, after school and other specific scenes, in which, they settle their affairs with teachers, classmates and parents. And through activities, authority relations, informal groups, goal-targeted plans endowed with special meaning and group learning experience of cultural factors highlight the unique schooling practice, migrant workers’ children is no exception.

A. Study Life

The author found that, in XZ public schools, migrant children’s learning habits and performance is not satisfactory, for example, most children in Class 3 don’t take their studies seriously, even so do some outstanding students in class, breaks, homework and exams.

1) *In Class:* As with other parallel classes, the students of Class 3 are varied, and the foundation of each course is generally not good, especially in English and mathematics, and the behavior habits are not good, either. Based on these facts, the teachers generally instill the knowledge repeatedly, and even slow down the progress of the

teaching in order to complete the knowledge teaching through many times. Nevertheless, the teacher's intentions for the students are overlooked by students. In class, a few classmates in the front row stare at the blackboard, follow the lecturing of the teacher and respond to the teacher sometimes, difficult to completely devoted to study. However, instead of studying other students just killed time by distraction, silence, nap, pretension or avoiding answering questions, sometimes they also entertain themselves by tickle fights.

2) *During Classes*: In Class 3, the majority of children apparently ignore the school rules, the performance is entirely dependent on the teacher visits. Over the past year, many times during recess the author observed the children's activities and had a profound impression on a game called "hide-and seek", especially the lunch break. When the teacher is absent, a few students often engaged in learning or just rest quietly, while others gathered to chat, chase, play tricks or play computer games on the platform. And even the civilized behavior of some students was often interfered, even involved their tricks. When the teacher came, they quickly stopped and returned to seats, looking through books or taking out the notebook to write.

3) *Homework and Examination*: In class 3, to complete the task, impunity is the goal of students from special families. Independent operations to ensure quality, extra work are just individual pursuit. They have more multi-strategy to cope with different courses, and different types of homework tasks. But the exam is different. They are not indifferent to the exam, and not so randomly. Everyone has a basic score expectations. For most children, to achieve their desired score is not easy, with a certain risk factor. Therefore, every time the exam, they rarely sit still or do alone, cheating, peeking, assaulting, procrastinating and trying to ask the teacher for help are also becoming a Opportunistic choice for them.

B. Authority Relationship

Children in school life except for self-learning activities, but also need to deal with two basic relationships: themselves and teachers, companions.

1) *Students and Teachers*: Interaction is a necessary condition for the formation of the authority, the authority of teachers and students relationship status is also reflected in the numerous interactive details, interactive roughly divided into two categories: First, action-oriented interaction, the second is based on interactive discourse. And Willis discloses resisting different manifestations. XZ observed children in front of the teacher show the image of obedience and politeness. Knocking on the door into the office before the teacher and shouting report, smiling and saying hello are very good positive examples. However, in the discourse-based interaction, the situation is slightly different. I often see migrant children chipping in , booing, or Silent in class, and this is not so much an offense as a "simple" or "naive".

2) *Students and the Conventional Values*: The school is an important institution of socialization. Here, the love of knowledge, the pursuit of a diploma, cherishing the time, and other conventional values are affirmed and praised, which is also posted at school. However, long-term study found that the majority of children to these conventional values exhibit complex contradiction: on the one hand they recognize its importance from the heart or the concept level, but on the other hand, their behavior is often the exact opposite orientation.

Diploma obtaining are inseparable from learning. The cognition of knowledge and attitude are always related together. One afternoon in November 2013, with one teacher introducing, I first stepped into the class 3. When teacher Z told the students I was achieving my master's degree, the students immediately stared, his face revealing a look of envy. Then teacher Z left, I went to a group of space to sit down, and pretty soon, many students came around us, many are curious about the author's educational background. At this point, I asked if they wanted to read college, their answer was yes, but they blamed themselves for not learning, worried not passing the test. Compared to the cognition, their behavior or performance orientation is difficult to match, "Just go" enough to get a glimpse of the learning activities.

C. Informal Groups

Processing self and peer relationships is an important part of Children's life in school. Now they are in adolescent time. They are super active. In class 3 in a junior high school, informal groups almost cover all members of the class. Most people have their own circles. Children who formed joint activities or participation in these informal groups are mainly entertainment, few have specialized learning exchanges to the school for the community, which can be divided into school activities and extracurricular activities. They have different forms and other aspects of different intensity.

1) *Campus Activities*: School is a formal field, with a clear structure and management: school buildings, regulations, class conventions, teacher authority, etc.. It is in the form of a strict discipline environment. In spite of this, it is actually not what Foucault described "can always be panoptic". This is because migrant worker's offspring, action reflective monitoring depends on teacher presence instead of text regulation. According to the teacher's presence or the degree of patrol control, the campus learning scenario can divided into three aspects : in class, short break, lunch time. In the above scenarios, the informal group members can always find opportunities to have fun, intoxicated in common activities , such as chatting , chasing, playing computer.

2) *Out-school Activities*: A long term research showed that, the informal activities of migrant children are "playing games together", "going shopping together", etc. Compared with female informal group, playing games together are male's unique hobby. They often gather together to go to internet bar, Game Center in Friday's afternoon, weekend or holidays. And they are addicted to playing the popular game "LOL" or the classic games "CF", "CS" and "Happy Farm".

D. Future goals and Plans

School life not only refers to learning activities for the current, authoritative relationships and peer relationships, but also includes the future vision of the Target Plan, which often depends on the former, and react to the former, is an important aspect to understand the individual school life. I have repeatedly asked the migrant children's plan. However, the majority of children said, "I did not think so much about it temporarily." "I do not know" ...

To strengthen junior students plan awareness, a special meeting was held in XZ School to request class advisers urge students to make a plan and achieve their goal after first mid-term examination. We can see from investigation that 25 students have a low-level plan. Only 6 students that occupied 27.27% expect to enter into high school; 4 students have a wish to colleges that is equal to 18.18%; the rest 54.55% , also the majority, is aimed to enter into secondary technical school.

V. "CULTURE OF SELF-ABANDONMENT" IS DIFFERENT FROM COUNTER SCHOOL CULTURE

A. "Culture of Self-abandonment"

We summarize public school life for migrant workers' children from study and activity, authority, informal group and goal and plan these four parts. So, what's its feature and characters overall? Is it can be summarized as Willis' Counter-School Culture?

To a great extent, the culture style of a group shares consistency in both inner and outer cognition. Willis' research shows that guys seem to prevail anti-school culture in school, no matter how about the people around them (e.g. career development facilitator, teachers, and friends) even themselves^[1]. So in order to survey the culture style of the children of migrant workers, it is needed to show the attitude of the people around them. Teachers, accompanies and parents are the group that children usually facing to and they are the most insider for the children's study. We found that there is common recognition for the children to give up themselves. Teachers frequently say to children: "you cannot give up this and that", "checking carefully and all things could be finished so do not give it up" "there is still a hope so do not give up"; they comment on students: "they are not going to change", "just pretend to be wise"; the words that they use are meant to blame: "do not work hard", "do not want to learn".

And of course, the abandoned cognition for the children is not a subjective suppose; it is based on the practice of their study. In class 3 of XZ middle school, researcher found that students were not studying hard and finished their task carelessly. The relationship between teachers and students are complicated which means the main trend is the contradiction. Students are always challenge teacher's authority. There is significant cognitive and behavioral bias about "knowledge, diploma, punctuality, diligent and conscientiousness" conventional value concept that school advocates. Informal groups who are addicted to the game share vacant, empty, depressed future plan. So, "Culture of Self-abandonment" is the objective description of the actual

state of the actor who is in a certain field of opportunity frame. In this state, actors not only do not make progress, but stop muddling along. The word "abandon" can be used to describe all of above behaviors.

But "culture of self-abandonment" is different from counter-school culture. Because the lads are more rebellious and resistant in the perspective of counter school culture. Firstly, the lads are born with anti-intellectualism. Secondly, the lads are the thoroughly rebelling against authority. Thirdly, seeking fun is the most obvious ways for the lads to express superiority. Last but not least, the lads want to express a positive resist form of self-quest [4][10].

B. Formation Mechanism of "Culture of Self-abandonment"

On the one hand, migrant children believe in education, knowledge and value, but on the other hand the vast migrant

children in poor public schools have gradually formed a "culture of self-abandonment" and negatively response to school education. This paradox seems puzzling, but intriguing.

We found that the majority of migrant children in Class Three Grade Three in XZ Junior Middle School generally lack hope, which seriously eliminates their driving force in school life, and become their common interpretation of the current schooling life. When asked why "attend class absent-mindedly", "do homework carelessly", or "not review", most migrant children give answers like "efforts are of no use", "It matters little for review does not count", there is little possibility for me to be admitted into senior high school".

Inspired by the theory of Ogbu [11], we believe that current negative thinking orientation of migrant children and consequent negative behavior is rooted in "reality constraints and influence", which is inseparable from the institutional and structural factors and individual/group behavior towards the system structure. Firstly, due to the restrictions of the household registration system, the majority of migrant children were placed in the awkward position, with a prominent feature that most migrant children were arranged in weak public schools. Secondly, for the human and social capital restrictions such as Language, education, skills and networks, parents of migrant children have low market ability, most of whom work in the secondary labor market. This significantly affects migrant children's learning environment and family education. Thirdly, As the powerful external factors, system structure not only directly influences migrant children's schooling environment and process, making them at educational disadvantages position, but also affects their behavior response and debugging skills, which efface the belief and possibility of self-saving, further exacerbates cumulative disadvantages and eventually results self-abandonment of the vast migrant children. It is mainly reflected in perception expectation and self evaluation. We found that, migrant children have lower self assessment and Confidence.

C. Pluralistic influence of "culture of self-abandonment"

"Culture of self-abandonment" has brought a far-reaching impact on migrant children's future development. When placed in the framework of generalized social mobility, it is mainly reflected in education mobility and life mobility which are closely connected but not completely equal terms.

1) *Education mobility*: From the education mobility of individuals, it is a complete course that includes the primary, junior middle, senior middle school, and college. As to the third-year junior school migrant children, they are at a major turning point - entrance examination for senior high school. In the survey of over one year, the author found that, "culture of self abandonment" has profound influence on the majority of migrant children in preparing for the exam and college entrance examination, which largely determines the education streaming: very few people have been admitted to the ordinary high school, while due to academic failure the vast majority choose to abandon or repeat or enter a vocational school with "negative honor".

2) *Life mobility*: Compared with the education mobility, life mobility more emphasizes the individual's career development and the improvement of economic status, more far-reaching and widespread. It can be said that the education mobility is one of the main means of life mobility, but the two are not corresponding. As mentioned before, the "culture of self-abandonment" has erased the possibility of education mobility for this group. So, how does it play a role in their life mobility? Survey shows that "culture of self-abandonment" does not play so pessimistic a role on migrant children as life mobility does. With the prevalence of reproduction vortex, it is possible for "alternative rebirth" to breed, especially in diversified current situation.

3) *Reproduction Vortex*: Many scholars have some common understanding of the relationship between education and life mobility: education contributes to life mobility. In the "culture of self-abandonment", the majority of migrant children's schooling performance is not satisfactory, so, they would get a lower diploma and come to work in secondary labor market like their parents.

4) *Alternative Rebirth: Non-migrant Workers*: While abandoning oneself, a new field has been opened. They have learned many ability elements or qualities in communication with teachers, parents, and students, such as "loyalty", "authority" and "playing tricks", "bargaining power", "insight ability", "communicative competence" and "social experience". Training and learning of these elements add important weight to them when integrating into society, adapting to workplace, achieving promotion, and also getting rid of vortex of reproduction intergenerational improvement. Compared to parents who generally entered the town to be engaged in low position in secondary and tertiary industries, they on the one hand will no longer position themselves as migrant workers in the long-term development, and on the other hand they can embrace more diverse employment. They are no longer restricted at the

low employment level. Instead, they can select jobs from all walks of life.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the theory of culture production and taking Class One Grade Three in Nanjing XZ Junior Middle School as a study target, this paper analyzes migrant children's schooling situation and culture in public schools. It is found that, under the influence of "Two-main" education policy of China, although public schools have opened the door to migrant children, the majority of migrant children are placed in poor public schools, which due to reasons like uneven distribution of educational resources, concentrated distribution of high-quality resources and diversified interest groups. In this environment, cumulative disadvantage of education is increasingly obvious for migrant children, and gradually "culture of self-abandonment" comes into being.

But, unlike the Willis' counter school culture, the seemingly identical counter-school behavior has essential differences. As to the enormous migrant children, they do not intend to resist learning, challenge the authority or attack classmates, neither will they regard it as a means to express misfits, resist the school, or assert masculinity to seek superiority. On the contrary, they still believe the value and meaning of education, knowledge and diploma, for they need to kill the time and entertain themselves after their sense of hope is suspended or dashed, which can interpreted as self-abandonment.

They are not willing to abandon themselves, for which is rooted in the "reality constraints and influence". Because, in the city, unfavorable education arrangement is difficult to guarantee migrant children with the equal treatment, and makes parents' relatively barren capital stock unable to obtain a favorable position in the market, which in turn makes it difficult to change the unfair treatment of children or to provide the effective supervision and education guidance. And "culture of self-abandonment" plays a profound and diversified influence on migrant children, which will bring no benefits to education mobility but bring unexpected results to non-migrant workers.

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