



Intergenerational Transmission and Reproduction of Family Cultural Capital

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Abstract

Family cultural capital, as an important means of maintaining class status, has become a key concern for sociological scholars in recent years. Using Bourdieu's capital theory as the basic theoretical support, the study uses literature, fieldwork and interview research methods to comprehensively analyse and explore the content, links and characteristics of the dynamic process of intergenerational transmission and reproduction of family cultural capital. The study finds that: firstly, parents who have more family cultural capital and benefit from it tend to have stronger motivation to transmit family cultural capital. Secondly, the intergenerational transmission and reproduction of family cultural capital is manifested through two arenas: primary transmission at home and indirect transmission at school. Thirdly, the transmission of family cultural capital is a dynamic process that includes three stages: transmission, reproduction and transformation. Fourthly, the process is uncertain, long and persistent. In addition, this study makes recommendations on the role of fathers in family education.

Keywords

Family Cultural Capital, Intergenerational Transmission, Reproduction

1. Introduction

Intergenerational career mobility has always been a social issue of great concern to scholars, and the phenomenon of class entrenchment, such as “like father like son”, has attracted widespread attention. In addition to the role of parental differences, the cultural capital of the family, as an important means of maintaining class status, has also become a key concern for sociologists.

Willis suggests that “the difficulty in trying to explain why the sons and daughters of the working class are willing to do working class work is to explain why they are willing to do so.” (Willis P, 2013). Class is truly produced when social stratification is transmitted among individuals and groups, and reproduced in scenarios of individual and collective consciousness of autonomy. Why do children want to do the same jobs as their parents? To what extent do factors such as genes and parental expectations influence children? How do these factors come into play?

In order to answer these questions, this study takes Bourdieu's capital theory as the basic theoretical support, and starts from the perspective of “intergenerational transmission” and “reproduction”, using fieldwork, literature and interview research methods to investigate the intergenerational transmission and reproduction of family cultural capital. The study identifies the factors and mechanisms that influence the intergenerational transmission of family cultural capital, and explores the internal logic and external factors that influence it.

2. The mechanisms and processes inherent in the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital in family

2.1 Motivations for the intergenerational transfer of cultural capital in the family

To explore how cultural capital is transmitted in families, it is important to first understand the cultural capital that families possess. The cultural capital of families can be divided into two aspects: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic cultural capital is the “materialised” or “physical” capital. The external cultural capital is the “objectified” and “institutionalised” cultural capital (Bourdieu P, 2002). Parents who want their children to acquire certain behavioural habits and qualities will help them to build up this capital, which is the capital that they value.

The desire of parents to pass on the cultural capital of their family comes from their own internal motivation and is influenced by the external environment. Firstly, this internal motivation from the importance parents place on the family and education, their own status and their concern for the future of their children. Under the influence of traditional attitudes, people tend to place greater importance on the family and the future development of their children, and the idea of 'like father like son' is deeply ingrained in traditional families. Therefore, when parents make choices for their children, they are not only constrained by the class they live in, but also by their own experience in choosing the safest rational choice. Secondly, in the intergenerational transfer of cultural capital, external realities can further push parents to pass on more capital to their children. External realities here include the scarcity of resources for study and work, the intensity of competition and peer pressure.

2.2 The field of intergenerational transmission and reproduction of cultural capital in the family

The intergenerational transmission of cultural capital in the family is a dynamic process that can only be better understood in a concrete context. The author will elaborate on the specific pathways of intergenerational transmission of cultural capital in the family by analysing the direct transmission from the family and the indirect transmission from the school.

The family is the first place where children acquire cultural capital, and the process by which children accumulate cultural capital in the family plays a very important role in individual achievement. Parental expectations, habits, preferences and inputs directly influence the intergenerational transmission and reproduction of cultural capital. Firstly, there is the influence of parental expectations on intergenerational transmission. Expectations of children's education are positively correlated with parents' educational attainment and social status, and the extent to which these differences affect intergenerational transmission varies according to parents' expectations of their children in terms of motivation, degree and behaviour. Secondly, there is the influence of parents' own habitual preferences. Research has shown that regular physical activity by parents promotes, reinforces and sustains the influence of their children's behaviour in participating in physical activity and helps to develop good habits of physical activity participation. Thirdly, there is parental investment in education. The effective transfer of cultural capital depends not only on the stock of cultural capital in the family itself, but also on the time, energy and money invested in it.

Bourdieu's cultural reproduction focuses more on the influence of cultural capital within schools (DiMaggio, Paul, 1982) and this paper focuses on the influence of parents' cultural capital on the transmission of cultural capital in the school context. This is reflected in two ways: firstly, in the parents' choice of schools for their children, with parents who have more family capital tending to choose better schools for their children. This is also reflected in the involvement of parents in schooling. Families with more cultural capital have parents who are more accepting of education and therefore more actively involved in their children's education.

2.3 Processes of intergenerational transmission and reproduction of cultural capital in the family

Family cultural capital can only be passed on in a continuous flow, thus influencing the development of children, the process of intergenerational transfer of family cultural capital is a dynamic process. Specifically, the intergenerational transmission of family cultural capital needs to go through three processes: transmission - reproduction - transformation.

The transmission process is a fundamental part of achieving a smooth transmission of cultural capital in the family. This process is mainly achieved through conscious parental teaching and unconscious role modeling. Parents with superior capital often want their children to be better off than they are, or at least to remain in their own class. Therefore, parents influence their children to acquire the cultural capital they already have in the family through verbal communication and behavioural guidance. On the other hand, the unconscious behavioural habits of parents

also influence their children to a great extent. For example, the formation of their own good habits will inadvertently influence their children, thus unconsciously promoting their development and achieving the transfer of family cultural capital.

In receiving the transmission of cultural capital from their fathers, children are not simply objects that receive it, but also subjects that are always developing themselves. In particular, as children continue to grow up, their awareness of the world, their knowledge of themselves and their motivation to make choices grows. Through their contact with family, school and society, they discover where their interests and strengths lie and then strive to allow themselves to accumulate their own cultural capital. This accumulation is consciously chosen and carried out by the children, it from the existing cultural capital of the family and the surrounding environment as a “growing point”.

The family's cultural capital is difficult to justify on its own and must be mediated in order to manifest its importance. Therefore, this capital needs to be transformed in some form in order to be socially recognised and legitimised so that children can develop successfully. In the case of most Chinese families, the intermediary through which cultural capital is legitimised is the Chinese examination system. Children need to pass exams, especially the college entrance exams, and eventually obtain diplomas and qualifications to gain social recognition and legitimacy for the family's cultural capital.

3. Characteristics of the intergenerational transmission and reproduction of cultural capital in the family

3.1 Uncertainty

Cultural capital is relatively stable, and although it can be passed on like a bloodline, it is at the same time uncertain due to external circumstances and internal developments, and this uncertainty is mainly reflected in the increase or decrease of the amount of capital.

The increase and decrease in the amount of capital can be explained by the debate between the “cultural reproduction” theory and the “cultural mobility model”. In terms of the first theory, families with higher social class status have more cultural capital in the family, which in turn influences their children's access to more educational resources. However, in the case of the “cultural mobility model”, cultural capital is acquired throughout the life course of a person, and even lower class groups can gradually move up the ladder through cultural capital. The argument between the two theories is that the “cultural reproduction” theory places more emphasis on the structural forces of culture, while the “cultural mobility model” focuses more on the agency of the individual (Aschaffenburg, Karen, & Ineke Maas, 1997). By comparing the differences between the two models, it is possible to understand how some households with more cultural capital can increase or decrease the amount of capital they have over time.

3.2 Lengthiness

The transmission of family cultural capital is a very long process. Unlike the transmission of money, family cultural capital, as an intangible asset, has to be “passed on - reproduced - transformed”, and from the time it is passed on to the time when children finally acquire. It can take as little as ten years or even decades before the capital is finally acquired by the children.

The accumulation of cultural capital is a concrete, physical process, and just as a muscular body or a tan cannot be acquired through the exercise of others, the accumulation of cultural capital is an extremely time-consuming process that must be carried out with the personal involvement of the investor. The way in which family cultural capital influences children is to a large extent achieved through subtle education over a long period of time, a span of time that extends from even before the child's birth, through the child's early family education to the child's acceptance and internalisation of the family's cultural capital as an adult. The process of passing on the family's cultural capital is therefore a very long one.

3.3 Durability

The influence of parents on the development of their children throughout their lives is indelible. Once the cultural capital of the family begins to be transmitted and comes into play, the character, values, habits, interests, attitudes to life and work, etc. acquired by the children are gradually internalised and thus formed into something that is intrinsic to them. These traits remain in the children for the rest of their lives and continue to influence them in all aspects of their behaviour and habits.

The life course theory is fully argued by the famous American sociologist Elder in *Children of the Great Depression*, where it is stated that “Each person's life affects the next generation's life, and education has a great impact on every aspect of a person, especially from the family. Especially when one has children and then looks back at the impact that family has on a person, it's just too great.” (Elder G, 2002). The lasting nature of the family's cultural capital legacy is such that its impact stays with people even throughout their lives.

4. Research recommendations

In the course of my research, I have found that there are some common problems in families regarding the education of children, for which I make the following recommendations.

Firstly, parents should be involved in their children's education. The importance of the father's role in the development of the child has been well established in education and psychology, and the involvement of both parents in the child's development is more conducive to the child's harmonious physical and mental development. The lack of a father's role in the education of his children can affect their learning, emotional management and interpersonal relationships. This is why it is important to involve both parents in the family education in order to achieve a harmonious development of the child's body and mind.

Secondly, a proper understanding of the role of fathers. In sociology, a role refers to the responsibilities that society expects or mandates of a person of a particular status. Paul Amato's Resource Oriented Model of Fatherhood suggests that fathers provide children with “human capital”, “social capital” and “economic capital”. It is important for men to learn to properly understand the role of fatherhood and the responsibilities and duties that this role entails (Fenax V, 2003). This has an important role to play in making men competent fathers.

Thirdly, rebuilding the role of fathers in the family. For fathers to be genuinely and substantively and proactively involved in family education, a combination of efforts is needed. The first is the awareness and behaviour of fathers themselves. Men need to improve their motivation and skills to participate in family education. In addition, there is a need for understanding and support from society, and for the government to develop effective social policies, laws and regulations and other social protection. The media should have a positive effect and provide positive public opinion support for fathers' role in family education.

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