

The Application of Bourdieu's Theory: Challenges faced by Master Chinese International Students during the Capital Conversion

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Abstract: This essay is divided into five sections. The first section is a brief introduction about this essay. It points out the theory employed by the author and introduces the research background, the research significance and the essay's structure. In the second part, the author provides a description about what Master Chinese international students face in the British university. The third part gives a literature review about Bourdieu's Theory: capital, habitus and field. In the next section, the previously mentioned theory will be applied to the Master Chinese student in the UK university, and the author will analyse it. At last, the conclusion will be presented.

1 Introduction

Over 700,000 Chinese students are studying at universities in other countries^[8]. Many Chinese students choose to study abroad, and one of the most popular destinations is the United Kingdom (UK). Numerous factors, including the British thriving economy, abundant educational opportunities, perceived increase in employment opportunities, and English language provision, draw students from China. There has reportedly been a rise in the number of Chinese students attending universities in the United Kingdom over the past decade, with 143,920 enrolled in the 2020–2021 school year alone^[5]. British universities now attract more Chinese students than any other foreign market^[11]. On the other hand, studying and living in the UK may present unique challenges for Chinese students. To maintain the Chinese market, it's necessary to study how we can help Chinese international students to overcome the difficulties they face and improve their study experience.

There have been numerous studies on challenges faced by international students from China who study Master programmes in British universities, the majority of the previous studies have analysed the challenges faced by Master Chinese international students, like language proficiency, academic expectation, financial problem, social integration etc. However, there are few studies focused on the difficulties that Master Chinese international students face during the capital transformation and to figure out how to improve Master Chinese students' experience in UK universities. In this essay, the author chooses Bourdieu's Theory: capital, habitus and field to frame this study. Master Chinese students studying in UK are chosen as the research object.

To sum up, based on Bourdieu's Theory, this essay explores the difficulties encountered by China's postgraduate students in the UK in the process of conversion among capitals, so as to improve their learning experience.

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2 The Experience of Master Chinese International Students in UK Higher Education in the First Month

As a newly arrived Master Chinese student in the United Kingdom, the author frequently feels overwhelmed during the first month of the semester. Due to her admiration for British academic achievements, the author has chosen the master's programme in Britain. Because of the different charge towards international students, the author's tuition fees are significantly higher than those of local students, but the author does not receive an equivalent return in academia. Even though the author has completed the required reading tasks before class and listens attentively during lectures, the author is still confused about the course. The author believes this is due to the fact that she and professors come from different educational

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backgrounds, and thus she cannot adapt to the professors' teaching models. Clearly, the local students in the author's class are more integrated into the lectures than their Chinese counterparts. However, professors frequently organise group discussions during lectures and students always freely form groups by themselves. The author observes that British students frequently form groups with British exclusively, while Chinese students can form groups only with other Chinese students. As a result, the author is deprived of the chance of discussing with classmates who understand the course thoroughly. In addition, the author uses English in group discussions rarely in an all-Chinese group. Even if the group members occasionally use English, the other classmate's questions and explanations are likely incomprehensible because they are not native English speakers. Chinese international students are therefore unable to gain knowledge or solve puzzles through group discussion. The author has few opportunities to communicate with professors directly, too. As a result, as an international student in UK, the author no longer has the chance to solve puzzles in class and is isolated from the classroom.

The author not only lacks the opportunity to interact with local classmates, but also has very limited opportunities to interact with local professors. Confucian philosophy has had a significant impact on the author, who was born in China. It would have been extremely disrespectful and offensive for the author to question the professor in front of all of her fellow students when she has been attending schools in China; consequently, the author never questions the professor during the lectures. In China, professors try to avoid contact with their students outside of the classroom and place a strong emphasis on their own personal time. As a result, the author never asks the professor face to face after class because doing so can be considered impolite in China. Emailing the instructors with questions is something the author does on occasion, but the effect of this is not positive.

The author notes that growing one's network of personal connections in Britain is challenging, in addition to the challenges presented by the difficulty of acquiring new knowledge. Even in seminars, which have fewer people in attendance than lectures and more opportunities for discussion because of the smaller class sizes, the author does not have the opportunity to communicate with local students who are enrolled in the same class. Even if the author achieves the IELTS score required by the master's programme when entering school, it is very difficult for the author to communicate with the local students. The author believes that this difficulty is more due to some misunderstandings that are caused by different cultures. The author's mother tongue is not English, and she comes from a different cultural background than the local students. The social challenges that the author faces have an indirect impact on the discussion that takes place in class between the author and local students as well as the resolution of academic challenges that the author faces while enrolled in class.

3 Bourdieu's Theory: Capital, Habitus and Field

3.1 Capital

Bourdieu (1986, 241) defines capital as "accumulated labour", which encompasses both tangible material values and intangible cultural attributes. It is possible for a person's capital accumulation and distribution to influence their position within a particular social space. In other words, capital can be a determining factor in gaining privilege and power over others in society or in locating oneself appropriately within a (often hierarchical) social structure in academic contexts. Bourdieu (1986) claims that economic capital, cultural capital and social capital are the three forms of capital, and each of them can be converted between one another. Financial assets are what economists call "economic capital". What this term means, in other words, is the acquisition of material goods or monetary resources that can be used to augment one's own financial situation. Knowledge passed down through generations (i.e., the embodied state), an appreciation of artefacts like books, machines, and instruments (i.e., the objectified state), and formal education are all examples of cultural capital (i.e., institutionalised state). A person's social capital consists of their networks of friends, family, and coworkers, and it provides them with access to a wide range of advantages. According to Bourdieu (1986, 249), a social network is "the product of investment strategies" that are maintained through ongoing exchanges of valuable resources and are not a "natural or social given". Bourdieu's concept of capital sheds light on the ways in which individuals can become legitimate community members by amassing various forms of capital.

3.2 Habitus

"System of durable, transposable dispositions...principles which generate and organise practises and representations," as Bourdieu puts it, habitus is another key concept in his theory of practise (Bourdieu, 1990, 53). The term "habitus" is used to describe the ingrained behaviours and bodily dispositions that people have as a result of their environments. In this way, a person's worldview is shaped by their habitus, which is formed over the course of their entire lives across multiple locations and periods of time. According to Bourdieu, a person's habitus is composed of both a "structured structure" and a "structuring structure" (1984, 170), with the former having a significant impact on the latter.

3.3 Field

According to Bourdieu and Johnson (1993), society is segmented into "fields" that operate under their own sets of norms and capitalization structures. It's important to keep in mind that the legal system, classrooms, churches, studios, athletic fields, etc. all operate independently of one another. There are art colleges that combine art and education, for example. However, according to Bourdieu, these areas remain relatively autonomous and should be

allowed to continue to function independently. He also pointed out that different areas have their own sets of power structures and struggles. Competition to increase one's capital forms is present in every industry.

3.4 Application and Analysis

Inspired by critical theory and her own experiences, the author finds Master Chinese international students face the uneven distribution of power between themselves and educators which causes they cannot convert their capitals they own to the capitals they desire. There is an issue between the long-term residents (educators) and newcomers (Chinese international education) in an academic context (UK universities). Despite its widespread use in academic context, the theory of communities of practice does not explicitly highlight power differences in communities where old-timers and newcomers are involved^[1]. Learners are more likely to remain on the periphery of the community if the unequal power dynamic between long-term residents and newcomers prevents them from making the transition from legitimate peripheral participation to full participation. In order to address the absence of power relations in the theoretical construct, the experiences in this study are analysed through the theoretical lens of Bourdieu's theory^{[4][5]}.

In this study, my practices are used to conceptualise habitus. These practices are "structured" by Master Chinese students' prior learning experiences as non-native English speakers from China, and these practices are "structuring" Master Chinese students' current practices.

Multiple fields, defined as locations where "forces" and "struggle" are present, and where the protagonist or agents distribute and accumulate multiple forms of capital, determine the value of these capitals^[3]. In a field, "the state of power relations between protagonist in the struggle" is what ultimately shapes the field's structure^[2]. A field is a social position within a hierarchical system from which protagonists can extract resources (such as money and power) for their own benefit. Different conceptualizations of the field and its subfields are explored here. The for Chinese international students in UK serves as the field, and the various subfields represent the various educational settings in which the author has interacted with seasoned professionals, such as departmental cohorts and educators.

This study classifies capital into three categories: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. During her Master education in the United Kingdom, as a Chinese international student, the author has substantial economic capital to pay tuition fees, acquire knowledge in the course of education, and obtain a degree in order to obtain cultural capital, and hopes to complete the initial socialisation of British academic circles in order to obtain social capital. However, the author has run into problems during the process of capital conversion. In the first month of the semester, the author is eager to escape the dilemma described in the second section. After studying Bourdieu's theory, the author has recognised that after years of education in China prior to his arrival in Britain, she already possesses the cultural capital of China's

educational environment, bilingual cultural capital, and social capital of China's academic circle. The author chose to utilise these underestimated capitals in order to resolve the issues.

The author chooses linguistics as an optional course. After a month of study, the author deemed this to be the most assured and least challenging course. During the bachelor education in China, she has worked as a research assistant for a linguistics project. Therefore, she sent an email to the lecturer of this course, asking if a research assistant for a linguistics project was required. The author has included her own research experience as well as letters of recommendation from professors whom she has worked for. The author has received a prompt affirmative response and become a research assistant in the linguistics laboratory. During her work as a research assistant, the author has developed genuine friendships with a large number of British local master's and doctoral students who are her laboratory colleagues. As a result of introductions from the author's local coworkers, the author has made friends with a large number of local students majoring in the same field. During the group discussion, local friends start to group with Chinese students actively. As a result of this modification, the author and other Chinese students are ecstatic, as they now have more reliable mates to discuss about questions. By working as a research assistant, the author successfully converts cultural capital into social capital and has enhanced the classroom experience of herself and her Chinese classmates.

The frequency of communication between the author and the lecturer has also increased dramatically. As a result of guiding the author in the laboratory, the lecturer has a better understanding of the educational needs of Chinese students. The lecturer has started to initiate communication with Chinese students in class and encourages them to discuss academic matters with him during office hours. Chinese students have become more vocal in class and have taken the initiative to discuss academic issues with professors during office hours after being encouraged by the lecturer. The author's and her Chinese classmates' experiences have been significantly enhanced, and the knowledge imparted by professors is more readily understood and accepted by them. In addition, this research experience and working as a research assistant in the laboratory provided the author with additional practical experience in academic research. With the academic support of lecturers, the author has successfully entered British academic circles. She gets a legitimate position as a newcomer. The lecturer has recommended the author to another professor's project as a research assistant following the completion of his project. Before enrolling in the master's programme, the author has only a brief background in linguistic research. The author's practical knowledge of linguistic experiments has vastly been enhanced by her experiences as a research assistant in the United Kingdom. With the professor's assistance, the author has completed her own research proposal and has been invited to numerous doctoral interviews. The author, a newly enrolled master's student, does not anticipate this outcome. Through this experience, the author is able to convert her existing cultural capital

into new cultural capital (knowledge gained in lectures and research experience gained in laboratory) and social capital (contacts in British academic circles), thereby resolving the dilemma she has encountered during the first month of the semester.

As we can see, the author has completed the capital conversion by using her own cultural capital and social capital, and improved her class experience. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers recognise the cultural capital that international students possess as valuable intellectual and cultural resources for pedagogical practices^[10]. When the curriculum makes use of the various forms of cultural capital that students bring to class, it is possible for students to have the experience that their identities are acknowledged as legitimate and valuable assets. In addition, it is essential for teachers to understand how the native cultures of international students approach education and to foster a welcoming environment in which students' opinions can be considered. It is crucial for teachers to develop culturally and linguistically relevant programmes by adapting course content to better suit the needs and interests of international students^[9].

In addition, university professors can assist students in the process of the conversion of capitals in the classroom by understanding students' original educational context. It is essential for educators to comprehend the unique requirements of each student in order to provide appropriate instruction. Rather than viewing international students as a homogenous group, it is preferable to take this approach.

4 Conclusion

This study is analysed according to the author's own experience of the difficulties the author has encountered in the process of conversion of capitals. Inspired by Bourdieu's Theory, the author has noticed the cultural capitals and social capitals she has been ignoring. She put forwards suggestions for Master Chinese students in UK through introducing Bourdieu's Theory and analyzing its application in Master Chinese students' practices in UK. Due to the uneven power distribution between students and educators, Chinese students has been marginalized and cannot complete the conversion of capitals they desire. Thus, the author calls on Master Chinese students in UK to learn to discover their cultural capitals and social capitals to help themselves to complete the conversion of capitals to improve their educational experiences. In addition, educators should also help students realize the cultural capital they have been ignoring, and improve their teaching by understand students' requirements. Thus, Master Chinese students' learning experiences can be improved.

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