

The Dual Logic of Global Inequality: Structural and Cultural Forces in Class

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Abstract. In the context of deepening globalization, transnational economic interaction not only reshapes the global industrial pattern, but also intensifies the social class differentiation and cultural identity tear within and among countries. Based on the cross-perspective of sociology and political economy, this paper constructs an analytical framework with the world system theory, cultural capital theory and risk society theory as the core, and explores how global value chains, capital flows and cultural reproduction work together to reconstruct social class structure. The study points out that the bottom labor groups in the global South are institutionally marginalized in the global system, and although they formally participate in the global production network, they fail to achieve effective social mobility. At the same time, the logic of global distribution of cultural capital creates "soft oppression" through education, language, aesthetics and other mechanisms, which further aggravates social inequality. Global identity ambiguity and cultural homogeneity have also caused large-scale identity anxiety, forming a "global aphasia" group and an "identity tearing class". This paper proposes that "the redistribution of cultural capital," "the construction of inclusive identity," "the construction of the voice mechanism of the global bottom group" and "the structural reconstruction of social mobility" are the policy breakthrough points to deal with the class consolidation and cultural repression brought by globalization, so as to provide critical perspective and the theoretical support for global social justice, cultural equality and structural reform.

Keywords: Globalization, cultural capital, cultural identity, social class

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, globalization refers to the increasingly close interdependence between the economies, cultures, and populations of countries around the world. With the increasing flow of people, capital, goods, services, and information across borders, the world is becoming increasingly interconnected [1]. Transnational economic interaction has not only brought unprecedented development opportunities at the macroeconomic level, but also stimulated more complex structural changes at the social level, including the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the differentiation of social classes, and the conflict of cultural identities. This change not only challenges the traditional social order, but also puts forward new requirements for global governance and social justice.

In the process of continuous reconstruction of global value chain, the status of different countries, regions and classes shows an obvious trend of differentiation. The middle class in developed countries has gained a relatively stable economic dividend from capital expansion, financial liberalization and the development of knowledge economy, while the bottom laborers in developing countries have long been in a marginal position with low wages, high risks and lack of social security. Although a large number of people are integrated into the global production network, they have not really achieved upward social mobility.

At the same time, globalization has reconstructed the distribution logic of cultural capital through education, language, technology and other ways, making culture a new "screening mechanism" and further exacerbating intergenerational inequality and the block of social mobility. Globalization not only brings the impact on the material level, but also has a profound impact on the individual's cultural identity and value structure. Cultural homogenization caused by cultural globalization not only spreads mainstream values, but also leads to the marginalization of local culture, making some groups gradually lose their language in the global mainstream cultural system. The ambiguity, exclusion and tearing of global identity make many marginalized groups fall into identity anxiety, further weakening their participation and initiative in the social structure, thus consolidating the original class boundaries and forming the cultural nourishment of class solidification.

This paper will explore how transnational economic interactions affect class structure and mobility in different countries and social groups from both sociological and political economy perspectives. This will help us better understand the complexity of social classes in the context of globalization, and provide a new perspective and theoretical basis for policy makers, sociologists and global governance institutions to formulate more equitable and inclusive social policies and address the social inequalities caused by globalization. The purpose of the analysis is to emphasize structural factors and critical perspectives, and to weaken the list of pure macroeconomic data, in order to fully understand the problem of social class under the transnational economic interaction.

2. Theoretical framework

This paper will focus on the analysis of key concepts such as "social class," "social mobility," "cultural capital" and "cultural homogeneity," and introduce the theory of cultural capital and class reproduction, the world system theory and the risk society theory to build a theoretical framework integrating structural and cultural analysis paths.

2.1. Definition of core concepts

"Social class" A social class is a relatively persistent group composed of members of society with the same or similar social status. "Social mobility" refers to the possibility of a change in the position of an individual or group in the social structure. Traditional research focuses on indicators at the economic level (such as income and occupation), but in the context of contemporary globalization, cultural factors, institutional barriers and identity structure also profoundly affect mobility opportunities. The concept of "cultural capital" was put forward by Bourdieu [3], which refers to non-economic resources obtained by individuals through family and education, such as language expression ability, aesthetic interest and educational certification, which play the role of implicit screening mechanism in the process of social mobility. Cultural capital not only determines a person's "fit" in the institutional system, but also exacerbates the stabilization of social inequality in the intergenerational transmission.

"Cultural homogenization" is a form of cultural globalization, which refers to the gradual convergence of cultures around the world driven by transnational capital and mainstream media, resulting in the marginalization of local cultural characteristics. Cultural homogeneity has not only changed people's value system and identity structure, but also constructed a set of unified "mainstream culture entry threshold" on a global scale, which has become one of the cultural mechanisms solidified by contemporary social classes.

2.2. Theoretical perspective and critical path

First, the world system theory emphasizes the structural division of labor and class differentiation under the capitalist world system. Wallerstein proposed that the global system consists of core countries, semi-peripheral countries and peripheral countries, the former obtaining long-term excess surplus through institutional advantages and technological monopoly, while the latter falling into a vicious cycle of low value-added, resource dependence and labor output [2]. In contemporary global value chains, this structure is constantly strengthened, and the positions of groups from different countries and regions in the labor market are increasingly solidified, thus limiting the true transnational social mobility. Especially for the working class in developing countries, even if they integrate into the global system, their social status is not improved, but they fall into a state of "marginalization."

The risk society theory provides this paper with a perspective to understand the crisis of culture and identity in a globalized society [3]. Beck pointed out that although modern society has become increasingly rich in material terms, it has bred structural social risks, including identity loss, cultural fragmentation and the collapse of institutional trust. In the context of globalization, the "identity crisis" brought about by cultural homogeneity is intertwined with global inequality, causing serious psychological and social tears, especially to transnational immigrants, youth at the bottom and culturally marginalized groups. This mechanism of "risk redistribution" is not only reflected in the class differentiation of disaster tolerance, but also hidden in the cognitive system and values, which leads to the decline of the subjective perception of social class mobility and strengthens the internalization and obedience of class identity.

Cultural capital theory provides a fundamental perspective for analyzing the implicit mechanisms of social class mobility. He pointed out that cultural capital exists in three forms: materialized, objectified and institutionalized, and is reproduced through family and education. In the context of globalization, the explanatory power of this theory is further expanded: the establishment of transnational elite education, international language standards, and global aesthetic taste not only perpetuates the threshold of cultural capital within a country's society, but also creates new structural inequalities in the global dimension. For the bottom group, the lack of cultural capital often becomes an implicit barrier to their social mobility, especially under the double attack of unequal educational opportunities and the rejection of mainstream identity, forming the cultural hotbed of class reproduction.

To sum up, this paper will build an analytical framework from both structural and cultural paths: on the one hand, with the help of the world-system theory, it analyzes the institutional locking of transnational capital flows and global division of labor to the class structure; On the other hand, through cultural capital theory and risk society theory, this paper discusses how the global mainstream culture forms "soft oppression" on the bottom group through education, language, identity and other mechanisms, and internalizes into an obstacle to social mobility at the level of individual identity.

3. Literature review

In recent years, under the background of globalization, the impact of transnational economic interaction on social inequality, especially the differentiation and change of social classes, has become the focus of scholars' attention, and such research has been heating up in the fields of economics and sociology. Especially from the cross-perspective of global value chain, capital flow and the reproduction of cultural capital, scholars have tried to reveal the "class logic" behind globalization and the reproduction mechanism of social inequality.

From the perspective of economics, Pleninger et al. pointed out through transnational empirical research that globalization has significantly compressed the income shares of the middle class and low-income groups, and concentrated more economic dividends on high-income groups, thus leading to the gradual decline of the status of the middle class, which originally assumed the function of social stability, especially in middle and low-income countries [4]. This finding provides new empirical support for whether globalization exacerbates structural breaks in domestic society.

Coveri et al. focused on the functional positioning in the global value chain, pointing out that a country's "position" in the global division of labor will affect its internal income structure and class mobility [5]. If a country is mainly engaged in low value-added and labor-intensive links in the value chain, its labor class is more likely to be fixed in a low income and low security state. Countries located in high value-added and knowledge intensive links can increase the profit space of the bottom group. This finding highlights that the distribution of the "globalization dividend" depends not only on the degree of participation, but also on "what" and "how."

From the perspective of sociology, the research focuses more on cultural dimensions and identity mechanism, revealing how globalization changes class consciousness, cultural capital structure and educational reproduction path. Choi et al. took China's transnational migrant families as an example and pointed out that under the background of globalization, middle-class and elite families realized class reproduction by consciously cultivating their children's transnational cultural capital (such as bilingual education and international identity experience) [6]. This practice not only continues Bourdieu's theory on the role of cultural capital in social mobility, but also reveals the internal logic of globalization and cultural capital, which aggravates the original inequality in the distribution of educational resources [7].

In summary, the current study portrays the deep impact of globalization on social class structure from multiple dimensions. On the one hand, economic mechanisms, such as capital flows, value chain positioning and the distribution of gains from trade, reconstruct the logic of redistribution of wealth and resources among classes; On the other hand, cultural mechanisms, including the globalization of cultural capital, the tearing of identity and the reproduction of education system, further strengthen social stratification and identity exclusion through soft and invisible ways. Although the focus of the different studies is different, they form a clear picture: globalization is creating, perpetuating and even amplifying structural differences between social classes through multiple paths.

However, there are still some gaps in current research, especially at the intersection of cultural mechanism and structural mechanism, and how to understand the internal synergistic logic of risk, cultural identity and cultural capital in class differentiation remains to be explored in depth. Based on the existing research, this paper tries to combine the cultural capital theory and the risk society theory to establish an analysis path of culture-structure integration to explain the differentiation and change of social classes in the era of globalization.

4. Cultural capital and identify fragmentation: an analysis of class reproduction mechanisms in globalization

4.1. Educational and cultural capital: the "illusion of mobility" and class reproduction in globalization

While globalization has brought unprecedented opportunities for development at the macro level, real opportunities for upward mobility have not spread equally. On the contrary, many countries, regardless of their stage of development, face challenges of varying degrees of stratification. On the surface, education is regarded as the main channel for class transition, and even deified by the global society as a tool to "change the fate", but the reality is far from it: educational resources themselves are embedded in the inequality of the social structure. Middle and upper class families can not only provide better preschool education and extracurricular resources, but also send their children to first-class schools through acquaintance networks and geographical location, thus monopolizing future development opportunities.

French sociologist Bourdieu's cultural capital theory provides a profound explanation [3]. He pointed out that a person's social class determines not only his economic position, but also the cultural capital available to him - such as language ability, aesthetic taste, educational background, etc. - which in turn reinforces the existing class structure. In the context of globalization, upper-class families are more able to create an "international starting point" for their children: overseas study, bilingual education, and the establishment of a global perspective, which further pushes cultural capital to the "transnational" level. Research shows that access to "transnational cultural capital" is itself a class privilege rather than an inclusive resource. Parents from the middle class and above will take the initiative to cultivate their children's cross-cultural adaptability and global competitiveness, and turn globalization into a tool to consolidate their established status.

In contrast, the children of the bottom group are generally backward in terms of preschool education, school quality and educational resources, and the myth of "winning at the starting line" has become a real social portrayal. This asymmetric accumulation of cultural capital further intensifies the illusion of so-called "educational equity" and creates a "flow illusion" in global society: seemingly open educational opportunities have actually been dominated by the higher classes through cultural capital packaging. Therefore, under the premise of the lack of structural opportunities, the cross-generation replication of social classes is not broken, but shows a trend of strengthening.

4.2. Identity tearing and emotional class consciousness: subjective class experience in transnational economic interactions

Globalization has not only changed the flow of resources and the industrial pattern, but also profoundly reshaped individuals' subjective feelings about themselves and class. Especially between the middle and lower classes in the global South and Western developed countries, identity tearing and identity anxiety have become important psychological dimensions of class experience. In the global context, it is increasingly difficult for people to use the traditional "occupation-income-status" trichotomy to locate their class belonging, and they turn to the emotional and empirical identification mechanism. This trend is the manifestation of emotional class consciousness.

Many researchers have pointed out that a large number of people in today's society have formed a "bicultural identity" : they not only maintain their local cultural background, but also have to obey or imitate the global mainstream cultural norms in daily life. This "double burden" of identity often

creates strong tension. Young people in non-Western societies, for example, want to integrate into the global market and cultural context while feeling pressure and separation at family, ethnic, and religious levels. The homogenization pressure of globalization has given rise to a wide range of experiences of "identity tearing," in which many young people fall into confusion of self-positioning, loss of sense of belonging, and even choose to withdraw from the mainstream and seek identity refuge in local closed communities or fundamentalist cultures.

At the same time, within the developed world, the working and middle classes that once supported the national backbone are experiencing structural decline: the exodus of manufacturing, weakening labor security, and rising living costs make them feel deprived of being "betrayed." The economic mobility brought about by transnational economic interaction has not benefited everyone, and the lower classes have been squeezed to the edge of the system, resulting in a deep sense of exclusion and anger. At the psychological level, this anger has gradually evolved into an emotional class perception, which is manifested as hostility to the "global elite," nostalgia for the "local tradition," and a renewed embrace of the "national identity."

It can be seen that when traditional structural dimensions (such as wealth and occupation) are no longer sufficient to explain class perception, subjective identity fracture, cultural anxiety and belonging emotions are becoming new components of contemporary class consciousness.

4.3. The "global aphasia" : structural marginalization of groups lacking cultural capital

In a global society where cultural capital is highly important, the power of different groups to "speak" and "be heard" presents obvious inequalities. The global governance mechanism, international market rules and mainstream narrative system formed under transnational economic interaction tend to favor those elite groups with global cultural capital. This means that although some groups objectively exist within the global system, they are subjectively "ignored" and "silenced," constituting the contemporary "global aphasia class."

This "aphasia" is not only reflected in the absence of political representation, but also in the power asymmetry of cultural expression. For example, people with English fluency, international educational background and mainstream aesthetic habits are more likely to enter the global agenda and influence policy making. On the other hand, immigrants at the bottom, citizens of non-English-speaking countries and traditional cultural groups are marginalized in the global discourse platform, and it is difficult to speak and be heard even if the oppression they suffer is real. The globalized public sphere thus presents a "selective empathy" structure, in which only groups that "speak the dominant language and express themselves in the dominant way" are eligible for attention and sympathy.

In this structure, the lack of cultural capital becomes a new form of institutional exclusion, which constructs the "entry threshold" in the cultural sense. A large number of underclass groups are forced to "self-silence" in the global competition and communication, becoming a replaceable background plate in the global development discourse. This kind of deep cultural structural inequality constitutes the "soft violent class suppression mechanism" in the context of globalization.

5. Limitations

The theoretical path adopted is mainly based on the reinterpretation of the classical model. On the other hand, this paper mainly adopts literature review and theoretical deduction, lacking empirical support for specific countries, classes or cultural groups, limited data support, and abstract case embeddedness, which weakens the realistic fit of the analysis. In addition, no operable index system

and measurement mechanism have been established for the proposed new perspective, which limits the feasibility of subsequent verification.

6. Conclusion and future

Through both structural and cultural approaches, this paper reveals how transnational economic interaction is deeply embedded in the reproduction mechanism of social classes in the context of globalization. Under the pattern dominated by global value chain reconstruction and capital flow, the bottom labor group in developing countries is trapped in the marginal position of low added value and low security, while the intergenerational monopoly of educational resources and cultural capital makes the "class transition" become a superficial illusion, forming the "illusion of structural flow."

At the same time, cultural homogeneity and the strong output of mainstream value standards have prompted the bottom individuals in the global South to fall into the situation of identity tearing and expression aphasia, further depriving them of their initiative in the social structure. Phenomena such as "global aphasia" and "identity tearing classes" reflect the deep crisis of lack of cultural capital and identity marginalization.

Nevertheless, the development of digital technology, the reconstruction of multicultural identity and the exploration of independent cultural paths in the global South are providing the possibility to break the class solidification and cultural oppression. Future research should strengthen the empirical exploration of the interaction between cultural mechanism and structural mechanism, pay attention to the subjective experience and identity construction of class consciousness, and promote the systematic reform from social policy to cultural governance. Only in this way can the global inequality caused by transnational economic interaction be deconstructed and transformed in a real sense in the two dimensions of institutions and culture.

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