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Rural dispositions of floating children within the field of Beijing schools: Can disadvantaged rural habitus turn into recognised cultural capital?

Abstract

The rapid pace of urbanisation in China has seen a massive increase in the movement of the rural population to work and live in urban regions. In this large-scale migration context, the educational, health, and psychological problems of floating children are becoming increasingly visible. Different from extant studies, we focus our investigation on the rural dispositions of floating children through interviews with leaders, teachers, and students in four schools in Beijing. Drawing on Bourdieu's key notions of habitus, capital, and field, our study indicates that rural habitus of floating children can differentiate these children from their urban peers. This habitus can be marginalised and stigmatised in certain fields but can be recognised and valued as capital in other fields. Our paper offers some implications for research and practice in relation to the schooling of floating children.

Keywords: floating children; China; rural dispositions; Bourdieu

Introduction

Over the past six decades, urbanisation in China has increased in speed. During Mao's era, although the then government placed strict controls on intra-country mobility (Kojima 1995) and sent millions of urban youth to rural China during the Cultural Revolution (Wu and Riskin 1999), the percentage of urban population grew steadily, from 10.6% in 1949 to 17.4% in 1976 (National Bureau of Statistics 1992). Following the initiation of the Reform and Opening-up policy in 1978,

urban population grew dramatically. By 2012, 52.6% of the Chinese population lived in the urban regions (National Bureau of Statistics 2013).

The accelerating urbanisation has seen a growing rate of migration of the rural population to urban China. This migration is largely generated by a massive surplus labour force emerging from industrialised rural regions and countless employment opportunities produced through urban markets. Accordingly, there is an ever-greater rural population bent on moving to work and stay in urban spaces. These internal migrants are doing this against their historical and traditional inclinations of living and working on the farmland where their ancestors have inhabited for thousands of years. In 2012 only, a total population of 236 million internal migrants was involved in the rural-to-urban migration (National Bureau of Statistics 2013) – probably the most sizable migration in human history. Some migrant parents choose to bring their children when moving to urban China. These children are called 'migrant children' or 'floating children'. In the current paper, we use the latter term to name these children because of their transient nature and inaccessibility to sound social welfare and equal educational opportunities in urban China (Mu et al. 2013).

In recent years, equal social and educational rights for floating children have become a high priority on the government's agenda in line with the political ideology of harmonious society (Wang 2008). Accordingly, problems associated with floating children have received increasing attention from educational, health, and psychological literature. However, there is a dearth of sociological investigation of these children. We aim to make a contribution in this regard. Specifically, our paper examines the rural dispositions that floating children bring with them when entering Beijing schools. We develop our paper in four stages. First, we review the literature that offers empirical evidence on the educational, health, and psychological problems associated with floating children. The existing literature leaves enough room for our sociological analysis of the rural dispositions of these children. Then, we count on Bourdieu's signature notions of 'habitus', 'capital', and 'field' to frame the theoretical domain of our examination. Next, we present our

qualitative data emanating from interviews with leaders, teachers, and students in four schools in Beijing. Finally, we conclude our paper by providing some implications for research and practice in relation to the schooling of floating children.

Literature review

The 'hukou' system of household registration has long been recognised as the underlying factor that generates social problems for the urban lives of floating children (Chen, Wang, and Wang 2009, Guo 2002, Liang and Chen 2007, Lu and Zhou 2013, Nielsen et al. 2006, Sun et al. 2010, Woronov 2004). Under this system, floating children remain official residents of their rural origin. Although they are currently residing in the cities, they are deprived of full citizen rights to many social welfare and public services enjoyed by their urban peers. Consequently, floating children are suffering from various educational, health, and psychological problems. We review these problems in turn.

Educational problems

The funding system of compulsory education in China is decentralised. That is to say, local governments decide the distribution of, and allocate resources to, public schools in their administered region according to the distribution of school-aged children of permanent or officially registered residents in that region (Yan 2005). Without an urban hukou, floating children are often confronted with considerable difficulties in household registration and are thus deprived of free compulsory education in urban public schools (Goodburn 2009, Hu and Szente 2010). To send their children to public schools, migrant parents have to pay the educational cost, which is beyond the means of the majority of them who are at the bottom of the social strata (Kwong 2004, Lu and Zhang 2004).

Ironically, some migrant parents are reluctant to send their children to public schools even if places are available or affordable. Some migrant parents cited discrimination from urban children as the reason behind this reluctance (Goodburn 2009). Some parents worried that their children may be looked down upon or even bullied by their urban peers (Chen and Liang 2007). This parental concern was echoed by public school teachers (Li et al. 2010). In response to their "unfriendly", "bullying", "detesting", and "isolating" environment, floating children reportedly lamented the social exclusion in the cities and felt "very uncomfortable", "angry", "lacking a sense of security", and "annoyed"(Wang 2008, 697).

Recognising the school-attendance problems associated with floating children in public schools, migrant parents and communities have long been committed to establishing schools specifically for floating children. These schools are called 'migrant-sponsored schools'. In contrast to the high cost and the risk of discrimination in public schools, migrant-sponsored schools charge a reasonable and affordable cost (Li et al. 2010) and demonstrate a more friendly and inclusive environment (Han 2004). Many floating children prefer migrant-sponsored schools where students are of similar (rural) backgrounds (Wang 2008). In response, migrant parents often choose to send their children to these schools. Consequently, these schools are proliferating (Chen and Liang 2007, Han 2004, Lu and Zhang 2004, Wang 2008). Nevertheless, migrant-sponsored schools are not the imagined sanctuary for floating children. Despite the recent, increasing support from the local government (Kwong 2004), these schools often suffer from the scarcity of educational resources – lack of professional management, qualified and motivated teachers, sound concrete building, adequate classroom facilities, sports grounds, and sometimes safe and hygienic environment (Chen and Liang 2007, Han 2004, Li et al. 2010, Lu and Zhang 2004, Wang 2008, Woronov 2004, Yan 2005, Zhu 2001). Even worse, these schools have to relocate frequently because of their usually unlicensed nature and temporary school-sites (Li et al. 2010). In addition, floating children in these schools are from complex demographic backgrounds, which is hard to divide them into different

grades and classes by age and academic standings as the regular schools do (Han 2004). Since the quality of migrant-sponsored schools is of concern, many of them are often at risk of being closed down by the local government (Mu et al. 2013).

The education of floating children has to negotiate these dilemmas: the largely inaccessible public schooling and the general low quality of migrant-sponsored schooling. Consequently, school enrolment of floating children has drawn extensive attention from empirical research. Using data from the 2002 China Nine-City Survey of Floating Children, Liang, Guo, and Duan (2007) revealed that the enrolment rate of floating children aged between seven and 16 was above 90% in eight out of nine surveyed cities, contending that enrolment of school-aged floating children in these cities "seems to be not particularly problematic" (37). This was echoed in a study conducted in Beijing where the majority of floating children (88%) was found to attend schools (Guo 2002). In contrast, other scholars tend to have less positive views towards the school attendance of floating children. Liang and Chen (2007) estimated that the enrolment rate of floating children in Guangdong was 80%, much lower than that of the local school-aged children who were almost fully enrolled; and floating children with less than one year of urban residence suffered the most, with an enrolment rate of only 60%. In brief, though estimates vary from city to city and from survey to survey, the enrolment rate of floating children is generally lower than that of their urban peers.

Considerable studies have unearthed various impact factors associated with the schooling of floating children. Children of younger age (Liang, Guo, and Duan 2007), with better educated parents (Guo 2002) – either better educated fathers (Liang, Guo, and Duan 2007) or better educated mothers (Nielsen et al. 2006), from intact (Liang, Guo, and Duan 2007) or higher-income families (Nielsen et al. 2006), or living longer in urban cities (Nielsen et al. 2006, Liang and Chen 2007, Guo 2002, Lu 2007) were found to be more likely to attend school. Lu (2007) complemented the previous studies by looking at the ever-delayed schooling of floating children. The study indicated that children of older age, from lower socioeconomic background, larger family size, with a shorter

stay in cities, or residing in high-cost coastal regions tended to be more likely to be at risk of school delay. Many other colleagues further enriched the literature by discussing the academic achievement of floating children. Better parent-child and teacher-student relationships as well as school climate were found to contribute to the academic achievement of floating children (Wu, Palinkas, and He 2010); while teachers in migrant-sponsored schools noted that floating children, who lived in poor physical family environment, or whose parents had limited involvement in their schooling due to parents' stressful urban life, poor parenting skills, or low educational levels, often suffered from poor school performance (Li et al. 2010). In addition, some scholars link the educational problems of floating children to their high mobility. These children suffered from the inconsistency of different curricular used in different schools (Chen and Liang 2007, Kwong 2004). Many of these children reportedly struggled to adjust to the new curriculum and sometimes had to repeat their previous school year each time their family relocated (Han 2004).

Health problems

In addition to educational problems, floating children often have health risks. Similar to fiscal planning for education, health care planning in China is also projected on the basis of the potential health care needs of the officially registered population (Liang, Guo, and Duan 2007). Without an urban hukou, floating children are largely excluded from many public health services enjoyed by their urban peers. This is evidently indicated by the health literature. Drawing upon the national database, Liang, Guo, and Duan (2007) found that the vaccination rate for Tuberculosis, Measles, Pertussis-Diphtheria-Tetanus, Poliomyelitis, and Hepatitis B among the surveyed floating children was about 10% lower than the national average. This is largely consistent with the data associated with floating children in Beijing, which indicated the considerably low age-appropriate immunisation rates for Diphtheria, oral Poliomyelitis, Hepatitis B, and Tetanus-Pertussis combined vaccine (Sun et al. 2010), as well as the remarkably lower Measles vaccination rate (83.4%) than the officially reported rate (96%) (Hu et al. 2012). The low coverage of these vaccines were partly

attributed to the high mobility of floating children, the low educational level of their primary caregivers, and the insufficient immunisation notification services and supplementary immunisation activities provided to these children (Hu et al. 2012, Sun et al. 2010). Similarly, an epidemiological study conducted in Guangzhou revealed that oral health of floating children was poorer compared to the national statistics of urban children (Gao, McGrath, and Lin 2011). This study indicated that the poorer and deteriorating oral health of floating children partly resulted from children's dietary changes during rural-urban relocations, coupled with the unaffordable healthier food choices and dental care services in Guangzhou. The low immunisation rate would greatly increase the susceptibility of floating children to vaccine-preventable diseases and therefore would have negative impact on their health conditions.

Previous studies have indicated that floating children are more likely to suffer from both health and education problems. Interestingly, a large-scale study seems to indicate the health-education link among floating children in Southwest China. The study found that poorer health was associated with lower academic achievement, negative learning attitudes, learning disabilities, antisocial and risk behaviour, and social maladjustment (Zhang, Li, and Liu 2010). This study is very informative – floating children are dually suffering from both educational and health disadvantages.

Psychological problem

Alongside the education and health literature, the psychological scholarship is also engaged in the investigation of floating children. Large scale surveys in Shanghai suggested that floating children with better parent-child and peer relationships, as well as stronger sense of self-esteem and perceived social support from family, friends, and people around were more likely to have a stronger sense of life satisfaction (Wong et al. 2010); while those who experienced parent-child conflicts, discipline from teachers, and discrimination in schools were more likely to suffer from symptoms of separation anxiety, depression, and generalised anxiety disorder (Wong, Chang, and

He 2009). A large-scale comparative study conducted in Beijing found the sense of loneliness among floating children isolated in migrant-sponsored schools was greater than that among those enrolled in regular public schools; while there was little difference in the sense of loneliness between urban children and floating children who attended public schools (Lu and Zhou 2013). As such, migrant-sponsored schools were considered unlikely to contribute to social inclusion of floating children (Wang 2008). These studies seem at odds with the findings from an interview study (Li et al. 2010) in which public school teachers observed the loneliness and low self-esteem of floating children in their classes. These inconsistent findings indicate that psychological problems of floating children are not fixed or static; instead, they are socially contingent on time and space.

In brief, educational, health, and psychological literature is concerned with various problems associated with floating children. However, there is a paucity of sociological research that helps to theorise how these problems and risks come to challenge, disadvantage, and marginalise floating children in urban China. Although Wang (2008) has made an attempt to conceptualise this marginalisation through the sociological notions of institutional, financial, and cultural exclusion, the author overlooked the underlying theoretical entanglement among the three notions. Another study (Mu et al. 2013) briefly discussed the rural dispositions of floating children from a sociological perspective but largely missed the nuances of this phenomenon. To complement the extant literature, we revisit some sociological issues associated with floating children through Bourdieu's signature notions of 'habitus', 'capital', and 'field'.

Theoretical framework

Capital, habitus, and field are the three main "thinking tools" (Wacquant 1989, 40) of Bourdieu's sociological approach. The triad implies that certain dispositions (habitus) and given positioning resources (capital) within a particular social arena (filed) largely mark class distinction (Bourdieu

1984). Informed by this framework, we consider urban China as a 'field' – a structured social space of forces where "constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate" (Bourdieu 2011, 40). To enter a field or to secure a position in a field requires certain quantity and quality of resources valued and recognised in that field (Bourdieu 1986). These resources are what Bourdieu meant by 'capital', which has "a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form" (Bourdieu 1986, 241-242).

As forcibly argued in the extant literature, floating children are deprived of full citizen rights in urban China because of the hukou system. In this respect, hukou is a form of institutionalised cultural capital – an institutionally recognised object form (household book) that symbolises distinction and confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to various resources in particular social fields (Bourdieu 1986). The rural huhou of floating children does not accrue any symbolic value in urban China. Therefore, it at best struggles to help floating children capture a favourable position in social field of urban China and at worst fails to help these children enter such field. Consequently, floating children often come to urban China with a sense of inferiority wrought by their second-class status (Irwin 2000).

The second-class status of floating children is identifiable. Their style of dress (Goodburn 2009), their dirty hands and faces as well as their loudness and impoliteness in public (Woronov 2004) make them easily distinguishable from their urban peers. Their particular ways of speaking, doing, and being, acquired through their rural cultural history, are what Bourdieu meant by 'habitus', or "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu 1977, 72) that work "on the basis of the premises established in the previous state" (Bourdieu 2000, 161). These particular rural dispositions were reportedly perceived by urban teachers, parents, and children as "out of control", "not disciplined", "dirty", and "ignorant" (Goodburn 2009, 498), which stands in dramatic contrast to their urban peers associated with the embodied cultural capital valued in the field of urban public schools. To clarify, embodied cultural capital refers to cultural inclinations, integrated within the

lasting dispositions of mind and body, which is recognised in certain fields and can engender authority and show class distinctions in those fields (Bourdieu 1986). Partly due to the unrecognised rural habitus, floating children can be stigmatised or rejected to enter certain fields within urban public schools. For example, teachers observed that floating children were not welcomed by urban children in school activities (Li et al. 2010).

Extant research has discussed the different and often disadvantaged rural dispositions of floating children, but fails to theorise the nature and dynamics behind this phenomenon. Our study aims to unveil how rural habitus becomes a mechanism that underpins the school life of floating children. Since our focus is on the rural dispositions of floating children that discriminate them from their urban peers, we set our research sites in the urban public schools with a certain proportion of floating children, whose parents can afford the extra education cost, a form of economic capital that enables floating children's entry to the field of urban schools.

The study

We conducted our study in Beijing where a large number of floating children are currently living. The population of floating children in Beijing has increased consistently from 268,155 in 2004 to 529,295 in 2011 (Beijing Bureau of Statistics 2005-2012). Figure 1 demonstrates the growth of this population over the past decade.

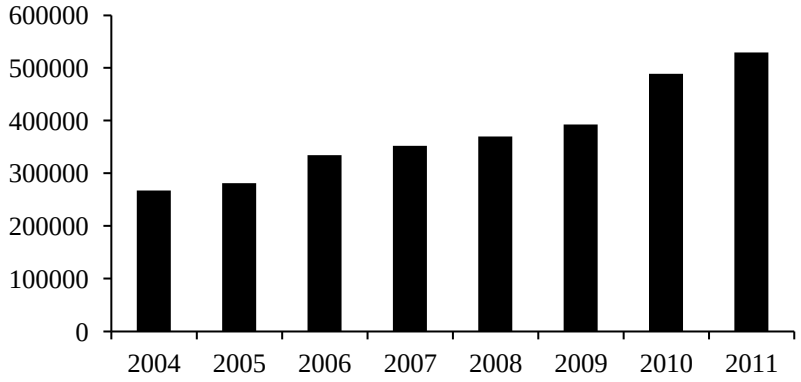


Figure 1. The growth of floating children in number in Beijing (2004-2011)

We selected two elite high schools and two ordinary primary schools to collect our data. The two elite schools are located in Xicheng and Xuanwu respectively, with 4% and 10% of their students being floating children correspondingly. In each of the two schools, we interviewed one head teacher and two subject teachers, and conducted two focus-group interviews with six floating children and six Beijing students respectively. The two ordinary primary schools are both located in Haidian, with 11% and 10% of their students being floating children correspondingly. In the first school, we interviewed the principal, three head teachers, and nine subject teachers, and conducted two focus-group interviews with five Beijing children and four floating children respectively. In another school, multiple interviews were conducted with the principal, who reportedly has extensive and deep contacts with students and their parents, particularly with floating children and their parents.

All participants from the four schools voluntarily participated in our interviews. Each of these interviews took about half an hour. Questions were asked around topics in relation to the differences, if any, between floating children and their Beijing peers. Data emerging from our interviews suggested that accent and routine behaviours were the two major forms of dispositions that distinguished floating children from their Beijing peers. These rural dispositions, or rural habitus, received different treatments in different school fields, being differentiated or marginalised at some times, while being valued and recognised at other times. We report the differentiation, marginalisation, and recognition in turn.

Rural habitus: a set of different dispositions

Rural habitus was reportedly a set of different dispositions that distinguished floating children from their urban peers. While the discussion of the accent of floating children is largely absent in the existing studies, the accent of floating children became a focus of our investigation because it was

frequently mentioned by the teachers during the interviews. Consider a comment by a Chinese literacy teacher in the Xuanwu school:

> *I teach two classes in Year Seven. I have a couple of floating children in each class. Because I am a Chinese teacher, I am particularly concerned with their accents. I have students from the Northwest and the Southwest in my classes. They came to our school with very strong accents. In class, I had to correct them when they read. I had to correct them frequently. At first, they were a bit shy to read aloud in class but I kept encouraging them. It took me months to get rid of their accents…You know the Education Law requires every student to speak Mandarin. Our school is an elite school. Student performance is high. Everyone is supposed to speak Mandarin well.*

During the focus-group interviews, floating children seemed to be very aware of the linguistic difference associated with their accents. One of them from the Xicheng school gave evidence of this difference:

> *I was definitely conscious sometimes when I went to the dining hall, talking with my classmates. People looked at me because of my funny accent. I felt embarrassed at that time. Everyone speaks Mandarin here but I can't speak it properly. I have to catch up.*

Another one from the Xuanwu school recalled:

> *Back then I did not like to answer questions in class. I did not want to be called by the Chinese teacher to read the text. I felt very nervous and shameful because she (the Chinese teacher) kept correcting my wrong accent while I was reading. I kind of felt all my classmates couldn't help laughing at me. But she said I am much better than before so I feel more confident now. It is a heavy training but I push myself to speak good Mandarin.*

Accents of floating children were also commonly mentioned by principals and teachers in the two ordinary primary schools. One of the principals acknowledged that 80% of the floating children came to school with strong accents, which he considered as a "historical trait that takes time to change".

These interview accounts indicated that floating children came to Beijing with different accents, a habitus that is durable over time and transposable over space unless subject to repeated counter-training, for example the teachers' continuous correction of the "wrong accent" or floating children's incentive to speaking "good Mandarin". The good and wrong here structures "a field of forces" (Bourdieu 2011, 40), or a social space of power relations between the dominate group and the subordinate group. Within such a field, teachers could wield their symbolic power to "get rid of" the wrong accents of floating children and Beijing students could laugh at any accent different from Mandarin, a language legitimised by the Education Law. In contrast, floating children were conscious of their dominated positions in particular situations. Their feelings of shyness, shame, embarrassment, and nervousness were generated by the experience of subordination wrought by their unauthorised accents. From a Bourdieusian perspective, these feelings can be understood as forms of bodily emotion, "the practical recognition through which the dominated, often unwittingly, contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting, in advance, the limits imposed on them", often taking the forms of shame, timidity, anxiety, guilt, blushing, inarticulacy, clumsiness, and trembling (Bourdieu 2000, 169). Interestingly, floating children sometimes used their own understanding, consciously or unconsciously, to feel for the rules of the game as a means of furthering and improving their own standing within the field of Beijing schools. They intended to adapt their dispositions to "catch up" with Mandarin or "push" themselves to speak it properly. They were internationalising the external conditions through their habitus, a system of internalised cognitive and motivating structures (Bourdieu 1977, 1990).

Apart from their accents, floating children's routine behaviours were also reportedly different from their urban peers. Principals, head teachers, and teachers in the primary schools all commented on this difference. A head teacher spoke of the hygienic habits of floating children:

> *When they (floating children) first came to our school, they didn't have good hygienic habits. They didn't wash their hands before lunch or after toilet. Many of them didn't shower regularly. Their parents never told them to so they didn't know. We work really hard to help these children formulate the daily hygiene routine.*

Teachers in the two high schools also noted that floating children were not as disciplined as the Beijing students. One head teacher recalled:

> *Our grade (Junior One) has more floating children than other grades. You can easily tell they are different because of their ways of doing things. Once, our grade went to the Summer Palace. As soon as we entered the park, they (floating children) ran into everywhere. Sometimes they ran into people but didn't say sorry. I saw them littering and spitting in public and felt embarrassed. These behaviours stood in dramatic contrast to our Beijing students.*

Other teachers reported that floating children were very loud in public, shouting and even speaking dirty words. These behaviours were also observed by the primary school principal with whom we had multiple interviews. He described in one of the interviews:

> *Our school organises parents meetings regularly. We don't encourage parents to bring their children to these meetings but parents may if they have lower-grade children and there is nobody looking after their kids while they are at the meeting. Quite often, migrant parents will choose to bring their kids because they usually don't have extended family members in Beijing to help take care of the kids. Kids will play at the back of the meeting room, sometimes quite loud. If they are too loud, I will ask them to*

stay quiet, but their parents never remind the kids to behave. They just take it for granted, I think.

The loudness and impoliteness of floating children were also reported in a previous study (Woronov 2004). However, the previous study missed the social mechanism behind these behaviours. We considered the routine behaviours of floating children to be gradually developed through their habitus. This habitus, as Bourdieu (1993, 86) has explained, "is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions". "So the term constantly reminds us that it refers to something historical, linked to individual history." (1993, 86) To clarify, many floating children were brought up in rural regions, a home to their ancestors for thousands of years. The rural population has long been physically and socially connected to farmlands, a field that nurtures freestyle being and doing. Through family upbringing, floating children inherit a raw model of life, which is at odds with the so-called disciplines shaped by the urban school fields. The rural habitus captures how floating children carry their rural culture, experience, and history within themselves, and how they make choices to act in the observed rural ways rather than the expected urban ways. The habitus integrates past experiences and functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions, making possible the dispositional sense of action (Bourdieu 1977).

Interestingly, the rural habitus also comes to shape migrant parents' internal attitudes, values, perceptions, and dispositions in ways which they are seldom aware of. As evident in our data, migrant parents never taught their children daily hygiene routines and took it for granted that their children's loudness in public were default, normal behaviours. In this vein, the continuity and regularity of their rural habitus is not a rational mechanism and action is not principally a matter of rational choice (Bourdieu 1977). Instead, it is the bodily inscription of their past, present, and even future positions in the social structure carried by them at all times and in all places.

Nevertheless, habitus can change constantly in response to new experiences (Bourdieu 2000). As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, 133) argue, "being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures." The body is "open to the world, and therefore exposed to the world, and so capable of being conditioned by the world, shaped by the material and cultural conditions of existence in which it is placed from the beginning" (Bourdieu 2000, 134). As indicated in our data, accents can be corrected and rural habits can be recast into urban daily routines. In other words, rural dispositions are always potentially subject to modification. This can occur when floating children's accents and rural propensities generated by their habitus no longer make sense in urban schools. However, changing habitus requires an ongoing "process of counter-training, involving repeated exercises" (Bourdieu 2000, 172). As such, teachers reportedly had to "frequently" correct the wrong accents and work "really hard" to formulate the daily routines of the floating children.

Rural habitus: marginalised or recognised dispositions?

Different accents and undisciplined behavioural patterns of floating children reportedly distinguished them from their urban peers. Unfortunately, these different dispositions sometimes resulted in exclusion or even penalties in certain situations. For example, teachers reported that floating children came to school with different accents, making these children "easily recognisable as coming from other places". It will be recalled that one teacher used "they" to refer to floating children and "our" to refer to Beijing students. In these cases, the linguistic politics translated 'difference' into 'otherness'. This otherness not only excluded floating children from being legal cultural citizens in Beijing, but also could be translated into disadvantage. During our focus-group interviews with Beijing children and floating children, we asked about any observed difference between rural and urban students. Both groups spoke of the accent difference. "Strange" and "funny" were commonly used by urban students to describe the accents of floating children while

"nonstandard" and "rustic" were the vocabularies used by floating children to describe themselves. Floating children lamented that some of their classmates "commented on their accents with contempt" and some echoed their "rustic accents" and made fun of them.

These data indicated that urban schools can be construed as a field, or a linguistic market (Bourdieu 1991) with a hierarchy of languages (Gogolin 2002, Mu 2013). Within this market, Mandarin, the legitimised language, was positioned at the top of the hierarchy and consequently accrued more value; in contrast, any accent different from Mandarin was placed at a disadvantaged position. In other words, urban students were associated with a recognised language – a form of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986), or specifically the linguistic capital in the school field. Due to the unequally distributed cultural capital, there was an asymmetry of power structured by the field where urban students felt privileged but floating children reportedly felt "annoyed" and "insulted".

Even worse, the negative attitudes of urban residents further marginalised floating children who were already at a disadvantage because of their unrecognised accents. In one of our interviews with the primary school principal, the principal spoke of the negative attitudes of urban parents towards floating children:

> *I had one mum come to see me, saying she was reluctant to have her child in the same class with floating children. Some parents were resistant to involving their children in group activities with floating children during school holidays, even if all these children were living in the same community. In the eyes of many (urban) parents, floating children are impolite, dirty, uncultured, and undisciplined and migrant parents are poorly educated. These (urban) parents didn't want to get their children ruralised by floating children.*

Our interview data here was largely consonant with the findings from a previous study (Goodburn 2009). However, the previous study fails to uncover the social order embedded in this phenomenon. We offer a sociological explanation. In Beijing, rural habitus of floating children was unfortunately stereotyped by urban parents as a set of disparaged bodily traits. This particular form of body politics was transcribed onto the physical dispositions that constructed a disadvantaged, marginalised identity for floating children. The urban field of Beijing contains urban parents who dominate and floating children who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationship of inequality operate inside this field and all individuals in this field bring to the relationship all the relative power at their disposal, which defines their position in the field (Bourdieu 2011). The rules of the urban field grant Beijing parents the legitimised cultural citizenship, a symbolic power to influence the rules of the urban field according to their own interest. In this respect, they only recognise urban routine behaviours of their children and devalue the rural routine behaviours of floating children that are at odds with their own interest.

Nevertheless, the same habitus may be valued in other situations. We present several examples emerging from our interview data. During the focus-group interview with floating children, when asked how they felt about their accents, feelings of "shyness" and "embarrassment", amongst many other bodily emotions, were frequently echoed by these children. When asked whether their schools did anything to help them cope with these difficult situations, one of them recalled:

> *My teacher is really nice. She cares about me. I talked to her about my hesitation in speaking in front of my class because of my strong accent back then. I think a week later or something she organised a theme activity. She said we have many different languages and dialects spoken in our country and asked us to prepare a blurb of ourselves in any dialect. When it came to my turn, I felt very confident and proud because they (urban peers) tended to learn a few words from a dialect while I was speaking my own dialect. I felt I have something they don't have.*

Consider another example emerging from one of the interviews with the primary school principal, who indicated that some attributes of floating children are typically absent in their urban peers. He illustrated:

> *Compared to urban children, floating children are more independent. Their parents are busy all day, starting early and finishing late, so they often have to look after themselves. Many of them help with cooking, laundry, and cleaning. Some help to look after their younger siblings. You know urban children usually don't do these things. They are kind of spoiled by their parents and grandparents. But floating children start doing these early, even from Year One. We always praise them in front of our Beijing students and ask the Beijing students to learn from them.*

This interview account was largely echoed by a head teacher in the Xicheng school:

> *We have several (floating) children who help with considerable housework and also do very well at school. We showcased their attributes and attached their photos on the wall. We made them role models. We try our best to make these floating children feel safe and valued. Over the years, I have watched them develop into more confident students.*

These interview accounts are inconsistent with a previous study in which Han (2004) seemed to view floating children's involvement in housework as a problem. Although excessive involvement of housework may impinge on the school performance of floating children, our interview data indicated that floating children's commitment to housework was considered as an attribute rather than a problem.

These examples suggested that rural habitus could accrue value at a certain time in a certain place, or a field in Bourdieu's term. Embodied dispositions of floating children became capital when they were recognised in a particular field, since capital only exists and only produces its effects in the field in which it is produced and reproduced (Bourdieu 1984). That is to say, each

field only generates and consolidates the values recognised in the field and rewards the relevant capital by adding value to it. It is the field that produces, reproduces, and legitimises what counts as resources. A given field may place a higher value on one form of capital than on another, although that form of capital may be worth less or worthless in another field. The existence, efficacy, and value of capital depend upon the nature of the rules within the field (Bourdieu 1993) in such a way that capital is produced differently in different fields (Bourdieu 1996). As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, 117) further explain, "each field simultaneously presupposes and generates a specific form of interest incommensurable with those that have currency elsewhere." In our case, different accents and routine behaviours of floating children in certain fields were often defined as otherness, and sometimes were disparaged by their urban peers, considered undisciplined by school leaders and teachers, or perceived uncultured by urban parents. Nevertheless, these dispositional inclinations were valued and recognised in some school fields and therefore translated into capital.

This finding is informative because it points to the transformable social orders and cultural structures within urban school fields through pedagogical practices. As is evident in our data, teachers organised theme activities to revaluate the traditionally disrespected accents of floating children, and praised and showcased the normally disregarded attributes of these children. These strategic pedagogical practices can reshape and reconstruct the power relations within urban school fields. Consequently, this 'rational pedagogy' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979), in contrast to the 'repeated counter-training' (Bourdieu 2000), recasts the rules of the fields, according to which floating children's disadvantaged social destiny predetermined by their rural habitus becomes their natural gifts produced by their embodied cultural capital.

Conclusion

Rural habitus of floating children represents a dispositional sense of sentiments, inclinations, and propensities. Certain dimensions embedded in this habitus, such as particular accents and

behavioural patterns, are inherited from their ancestral heritage, rooted in their cultural history, inculcated through their family upbringing, and shaped by the structures of rural field. Because these embodied dimensions of habitus are durable and transposable, these past dispositions can stay with floating children and be carried by these children into the present urban field of Beijing. Nevertheless, the rural habitus is not immutable. When certain accents and behavioural patterns no longer make sense in given urban fields, floating children have the tendency to internalise the external structures and powers imposed on them and to make due adaptations to the interests and rules of the urban fields. On the contrary, when the same set of accents and behavioural patterns do make sense in other fields, the habitus survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future. This is particularly true when this habitus is recognised and valued as capital.

It is arguable that floating children are associated with many educational, health, and psychological problems in urban China. It is also evident that floating children, who are already placed at a disadvantaged position, are marginalised and stigmatised because of their rural dispositions. By analysing some forms of these rural dispositions, specifically the accents and routine behaviours of floating children in Beijing, our study complements the existing literature by providing a Bourdieusian framework to discuss the nature and mechanism of the marginalisation and stigmatisation. Powerful others, such as Beijing parents, teachers, and students who dominate the urban field of Beijing, impose their symbolic power on floating children and wield this power to shape and reshape the rural dispositions of floating children according to their own wills.

By analysing the accents and routine behaviours of floating children in different fields, our study also challenges the static views that stereotype the rural habitus of floating children as disadvantaged dispositions at all times and in all places. Floating children are not uniform heathen peasants bent on flooding Beijing with their migrant parents. Instead, they are associated with many attributes worth being valued – they were indeed valued in some cases in our study. We expect that more schools and communities in Beijing can construct a friendly field that includes different

dispositions of floating children rather than excludes them. In this vein, we look at the rural habitus of floating children from a pluralistic perspective of 'unity-within-diversities' and 'togetherness-of-differences'.

In summary, our paper started with an overview of the various problems associated with floating children through an extensive review of the educational, health, and psychological literature. This set the scene for our sociological investigation of the rural habitus of floating children in Beijing. By virtue of Bourdieu's sociology, we revealed that the rural habitus distinguished floating children from their Beijing peers. This habitus was often positioned at a disadvantage by powerful others in some fields but was transformed into capital in other fields. Urbanisation is an ongoing process in China. Whether floating children will keep drifting and floating in urban China is a big question for policy makers, schools leaders and teachers, as well as scholars. At the same time, urban-born floating children become emergent and increasingly visible. How these children negotiate their rural habitus within urban fields remains largely unknown.

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