

# What are the aims of working-class education in China

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**Abstract:** This essay explores the aims of working-class education in China. The word ‘working-class’ is seldom used nowadays but social stratification still exists. Different groups of people in working-class changes with social changes so who are the working-class in China now will be identified firstly. The current aims of working-class education in China will be critiqued through four ideologies in education that are highlighted by Schiro (2013). The Social Efficiency Ideology, the Social Recontribution Ideology, the Scholar Academic Ideology in China will be discussed at the same time. Relative theories like aim-based education to achieve flourishing lives (Reiss & White, 2014) and knowledge-based curriculum reported by Young (2013) are relevant in leading education policies and provoking for future schools and education system. Finally, I will conclude the aims of working-class education and give the implications.

**Keywords:** Working-class education; The Social Efficiency Ideology; The Social Recontribution Ideology; The Scholar Academic Ideology

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## 1 Who are working-class?

Before analyzing working-class education in China, who are the working-class needs to be identified. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, working-class and the peasantry became the leaders of this country. The word ‘working-class’ is seldom used in contemporary China, but social class still exists, people use other words to describe the social class. After entering the 21st century, social class is an ‘absent presence’ (Woodin, 2007: 484).

Descriptions like ‘disparities between rich and poor’ are used to describe social stratification to the public. Officially, socioeconomic status is used rather than social class.

New working-class appeared with the industrial transformation. There are three layers in working-class people in contemporary China: firstly, workers in state-owned corporations or other corporation workers; workers and officers in local government and township enterprise; and high-tech workers. People who take higher education are reluctant to take manual jobs, which causes the lack of labourers in some industries. In such instances, peasants find a new way to get higher income. Peasants leave their home to big cities and they are called migrant workers.

In this essay, working-class refers to white collar, blue collar and new working class like migrant workers.

## 2 The aims of Chinese working-class education

Based on the curriculum theories, according to Schiro (2013), there are curriculum ideologies: The Scholar Academic, the Social Efficiency, the Learner Centered and the Social Reconstruction Ideology. How these four curriculum theories reflect the aims of Chinese working-class education will be discussed.

## 3 The Social Efficiency Ideology

Under the Social Efficiency Ideology, the purpose of schooling is to train youth to gain the skills and other functions that the society need when they are mature to take the responsibilities of making contributions to the society (2013). Chinese education towards the youth of working-class seems in view of the Social Efficiency Ideology. The Article 5 of the general principles of Education Law of the People’s

Republic of China explains Education must serve Socialist Modernization and work with productive labor to nurture the constructor and successor of Socialist Modernization (Education Law of the People's Republic of China, 1995). This explication of education reflects the aim of Chinese education is educating people to work for the national mission. The social efficiency as the aim of working-class education towards the youth in China might causes some disadvantages for working-class children. In academic year of 2002-2003, the gross enrolment ratio of secondary education is 97% (UNESCO, 2005:78).

Educating people to obtain the knowledge, skills and qualifications to future occupation is a part under the Social Efficiency Ideology. Under economic aims, people are educated to fulfill their duties as a member of the society, to complete their functions. Economic aim demands what is necessary to a particular range of jobs. A country also needs creative technology to protect themselves and develop.

Social Efficiency Ideology not only emphasizes the technical skills that society requires but the culture and ideology traditions. Confucianism is the core, both for working-class and middle class. Related morals like benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faith influence people in everywhere. In China, ideological and political education contains morality, values and political views like Marxist philosophy, Maoist other theories. Among the civilization and cultural education, no matter children or adult, everyone learns the advancement of Chinese Communist and support the leadership, especially working-class since they are the leader of Chinese Communist Party.

Current Chinese working-class education towards the youth, including primary and secondary education is based on the Societal Efficiency Ideology which shapes people to become the people that social development needs. However, when emphasizing the importance of economic development, individuals' values are ignored.

#### **4 The Social Reconstruction Ideology**

Social Reconstructionists concern the problems of our society like gender discrimination and racial and educational inequality, and they assume that current society is unhealthy and people have to

make changes to help people survive. One aim of education under the Social Reconstruction Ideologist in China is changing the potential labor to real labors. Before October 2017, the social basic contradiction is the contradiction between productive force and productivity. Politicians use education as a mean to improve economic conditions through helping worker to equip the certain qualifications or attitudes. As workforce, the working-class is actually the core of social economy activity. In China, unemployed workers, like those who were fired by their local Grain Department and a large number of workers who cannot find a satisfactory job, could get free training. Unemployed workers would be trained for a period of time and then get certificates to obtain the qualifications, jobs like wire-man and maternity are popular among those unemployed workers. These policies successfully changed the potential labor to real labor in order to improve social productivity. Therefore, Chinese educators intended to improve social productivity and solve social economic problems through adult education for working-class. Education has the power to educate people analyze the social problems that existing around themselves and try to create a better society. Education under the Social Reconstruction Ideology aims at create the best for the society. Facing social conflicts and problems, working-class seems to be the group of people that should obey the arrangement especially when the Social Reconstruction is the aim of education for Chinese working-class towards adult.

#### **5 The Scholar Academic Ideology**

The aim of education under the Scholar Academic Ideology is to help children the accumulated knowledge of our culture and extend the disciplines by introducing young people into them.

One crisis of curriculum theory is that the knowledge taught mechanically by teachers under the aim of school. Based on the purposes of the country, the knowledge that is taught at school sometimes replaces the powerful knowledge that should be taught. In China, working-class culture is not very depth but for the culture that are taught in schools, western culture is highly valued in some subjects like music (Du, 2017:153). They have preference on the type of music they believe are elegant. I think that the reason that they have inclinations on the certain

culture might not only because the power of middle class but the inferiority feelings that working-class people have. Powerful knowledge helps to make the equivalent of subjects so that the inequality caused by social stratification can be weakened.

Social class influences the choices of majors and jobs in education. Knowledge-based curriculum reflects the difference between family education and school education-school education could bring knowledge that students could not know from daily life. Powerful knowledge is beyond the general knowledge that students could learn from daily life. Teaching students the general knowledge sometimes just requires students to memorized disciplines rather than really think and explore the truth. For example, Chinese teachers and parents pay more attention to math, English and Chinese, the core subjects, because they account for high proportions in almost every important exam. There is a saying said that “You will have no trouble throughout the world once you've learned mathematics, physics and chemistry well”, which reflects people’s appreciation to certain subjects. I think core curriculum reflects national aim of education and for some extent reflects the values of these subjects. Changing the management level so that students and teachers could treat all subjects equally.

## 6 The Learner Centered Ideology

The Learner Centered Ideology not only focuses on the needs of society and the academic disciplines but also individual’s pursuits (Schiro, 2013: 5). Different with the Social Reconstructionists which focus on the whole society, the goal of education led by the Learner Centered Ideology emphasizes on individual development and personal contributes.

In China, parents and educators have noticed the importance of educating students through their own characteristics mainly in higher education (Wu & Li, 2017:162). Educators believe that in higher education, the main focus is leading students to learn automatically. However, for some students in universities, lacking motivations are not only caused by the boring teachers but their own values on subjects they learned because sometimes students find their expectations are not reality.

In addition to the learner and teaching, the general conditions influence the implementation of Learner

Centered Education. The learner Centered education is popular in private school where is luxury for working-class. Flourishing life could be a meaningful and fulfilling life that people could pursue their own values of life. It could also mean a good citizen that creates a positive social environment and help others to become a flourishing people. Working-class people who got used to a fixed form of productivity lacked autonomous consciousness. It should be mentioned that survival may be a genuine concern for working-class than the middle-class. In China, working-class might spend higher proportion in living and housing as well as education than middle-class, the cost proportion of education in income of a working-class family increase from 5.37% in 1990 to 11.18% in 2000 (Gong, 2003:15). Many working-class parents treat education as an investment which should get more money in return. Working-class people and children from working-class family prefer decent jobs and jobs with good pay, like works in the fields of economy, accounting, pharmacy and etc. While jobs related to arts seem to be the subordinate choices for working-class because the salaries of these jobs are potentially lower and working on art has higher risks in getting the return than working on finance.

In order to achieve flourishing life, education could be based on different purposes that social development needs and is not unchangeable (John White, 1982). New China needs economic development to achieve good lives for people the core of Chinese education is an economic aim. But for working-class children, their aim of education is shaped and have no personal choices sometimes. One difficulty is combining personally flourishing and help others to achieve personally flourishing. Students from working-class might focus on the pursuit of money. Problems like this influence both personal autonomous development and cooperative.

## 7 Conclusion and implication

The Scholar and Academic Ideology emphasizes the importance of knowledge and students should inherit and convey the knowledge. While both Young (2013) and Woodin (2007) noticed that the knowledge taught in schools and universities are middle-class culture and it seems that working-class culture is abandoned. Powerful knowledge rather than knowledge of power should be taught by teachers. The knowledge are

equal and should be valued, education should not have inclination towards the culture led by power. Students' personal choice of learning is highly recommended in the Learning Centered Ideology. Students have rights to choose their future occupation and school education help them to find what they like and prepare them to pursue what they want. Humans activities are all based on certain aims and purposes. This Ideology of education is what Chinese working-class education needs.

Seen from long-term, working-class education towards adult shapes working-class within the systems that caused by social stratification. Both children from working-class education or not their want to have great personal achievement. One difference is that working-class children value occupation more.

To sum up, aim of education for Chinese working-class in should achieve flourishing life through the Learner Centered Ideology. In achieving flourishing life, Chinese education should emphasize on autonomously thinking personal pursuit and achieve personal flourishing life. Education should not the tool to control people and individuals are not the objects that politicians manipulate. Individuals have the rights to hold the values of their own nature rather than the values shaped by others. The Ideological and moral education could be helpful to balance personal

flourishing and enables the society to become flourishing as a whole.

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