Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Xiaoping Deng's 1978 economic reform and subsequent related reforms have substantially transformed China from a planned economy to a market economy and wrought changes in ownership systems, property rights, and labourers' relationship to the means of production (C. Lin, 2006; Putterman, 1995; Walder, 1994). Meanwhile, this national economic reform has also changed the country's social class structure and class relations, generating the rise of capitalism and substantial social inequalities in Chinese society.

The rise of the capitalist mode of production in post-1978 China

China has witnessed the increased privatization of publicly- and collectively-owned means of production since economic reforms in the late 1970s. As a result, the country's former socialist economic system, which was based on public and collective ownership, has been dramatically transformed towards a mode of production focusing on one's profits rather than needs, like that found under capitalism (C. Lin, 2006; Putterman, 1995; Walder, 1994). In the pre-1978 period, two kinds of ownership systems predominated in China. The first one was public ownership, in which the whole Chinese population shared the means of production and the profits thereof. So-called state-owned enterprises (SOEs) were examples of public ownership, as the state ran them on behalf of the people, but the government did not genuinely own them. The second was collective ownership, in which a particular collective owned the means of production and the profits thereof; an example is township and village enterprises (TVEs), whose operational responsibilities and benefits were equally shared among the local government, TVE managers, workers, and community residents in the collective. People outside the collective

could not own or benefit from the means of production for TVEs.

However, in the post-1978 period, collectively-owned TVEs were gradually privatized and sold en masse to former managers or local state officers (Oi, 1995, 1999; Walder, 1994). Similar privatization has also occurred among publicly-owned SOEs since the mid-1990s, with small- and medium-sized ones being sold to their former managers at reduced prices. At the same time, a great number of significant SOEs were transformed into joint-stock corporations partially owned by foreign capital investors. The growing privatization in SOEs gave rise to the layoffs of 26.8 million state workers (C. Lin, 2006; Putterman, 1995). In effect, private property rights have been legitimized, leading to the concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of private property owners; meanwhile, the property rights of workers – previously the owners of the means of production in pre-1978 China – have been substantially reduced.

Due to the change in the mode of production and the resultant rise of privatization in the post-1978 period, the class structure and class relations in China have also changed. In the pre-1978 reform period, most Chinese people were bound to the 'iron bowl system' of *danwei* model (work units, 单位 [1]) in urban areas and the commune model[2] in rural areas. Under the socialist mode of production, people's labour force was not a commodity exchanged in the labour market, unlike in capitalist societies. A contracted employment system was then established in the post-1978 period to replace the *danwei* model in urban areas. By 1997, 52.5% of all workers in SOEs were contract employees (Q. Wu, 2010). In 2008, private-sector employees accounted for over 50% of all labour in the most critical sectors of the national economy, including industry, wholesale, retail, and services (National Bureau of Statistics of China [NBSC], 2008). Unlike the *danwei* model, the contract-based

employment system is primarily responsible for employee salaries and less so for such other expenses as housing, living expenses, and medical costs. As working-class people's employability increasingly depends on their employers, their job security is significantly jeopardized. Private property owners, thus, have gained power over workers in the employment relationship (W. Leung, 1988; Meng, 2000). Additionally, along with the prevalence of the contract-based employment relationship in China, workers' manual labour has been degraded to a commodity in the free labour market, making their lives highly dependent upon employers' willingness for job offerings. In other words, they are engaged in a productive relationship with capitalist characteristics.

In rural areas, the collective production process has shifted dramatically to a household contract responsibility system (*jiating lianchan chengbao zerenzhi* 家庭联产承包责任制) since the 1980s (C. Lin, 2006; Putterman, 1995), releasing surplus labour from the land and later leading to the breakup of rural communes. Rural people, therefore, have had to take full responsibility for the production costs and living costs that previously had been shared with the collective rural communes and the state (Cheng & Selden, 1994; C. Lin, 2006).

The post-1978 market reforms, as a socialist self-adjusting movement, have generated great economic success. Meanwhile, China's opening domestic market to foreign investors and joint ventures has proven its acceptance of global capitalism, leading to the rapid accumulation of economic capital in minority hands and an immense wealth gulf between entrepreneurs and wage-labourers, and between urban and rural areas. The 2013 Hurun Wealth Report on Chinese millionaires reported there were 1.05 million millionaires (those with assets of more than 10 million RMB), 64,500 super-rich (those with assets over 100 million RMB), and 8,100 billionaires

in China in 2012 (Hurun Report, 2013). In addition, the enormous rural-urban inequalities also reflect the polarization of wealth distribution in China. For instance, in 2012, the national average annual salary level of urban, non-private sector employees was 46,769 RMB, while rural migrant workers in urban industrial enterprises averaged 27,480 RMB annually – only 58.8% of what their urban, non-private sector employees were paid (NBSC, 2014). In 2014, the PGDI (per capita disposable income) of urban citizens and rural dwellers was 28,843.9 RMB and 10,488.9 RMB, respectively, with the national average being 20,167.1 RMB (NBSC, 2015). All these figures disprove Xiaoping Deng's claims that market reforms would not lead to polarization and that it would be challenging to have millionaires in China's socialist system (People's Daily, 1986).

The emerging 'new' working class of rural migrants in China

Following the relaxation of migration policies in China, the huge rural-urban economic inequalities stimulate rural people to leave their home villages and seek working opportunities in urban areas to earn more money and live a better life (C. Lin, 2006; H. Wu, 1994). As China's urban economy continued to boom after entering the 21st century, its rural migrant population experienced unprecedented expansion, growing dramatically from around 60 million in 1993 (Tan, 2010) and 79 million in 2000 (Liang & Ma, 2004) to roughly 274 million in 2014 (NBSC, 2014). In 2016, China's rural migrant worker population reached 281.7 million, a 115% increase from 2015 (NBSC, 2017), making it the major portion of China's working-class population. Most (169.3 million) were going-out rural migrants (*waichu nongmingong* 外出农民工 [3]), 80% of whom worked in urban areas, aiding city construction and benefiting local, national, and international markets by providing a sizeable second-level labour force (J. Chan & Pun, 2010; NBSC, 2017; F. Wang, 1998).

According to the 2000 census, an estimated 68% of jobs in the manufacturing sector, 80% in the construction sector, and 52% in the service sector were held by rural migrant workers (S. Li, 2010; Project Team of Research Office State Council, 2006). Fifteen years later, these rural migrants were still predominantly engaged in manual labour, with 50.2% employed in manufacturing and construction and 46.7% in service industries (NBSC, 2017). To distinguish them from workers under the old socialist system, these migrant workers are called 'China's new workers' (T. Lü, 2013).

They are 'new' workers because – unlike the 'old' socialist workers, who were entitled to a full range of protections in health-care, housing, education, and political power – rural migrant workers enjoy little labour protection and endure long working hours, subsistence-level wages, and harsh working conditions (China Labour Bulletin [CLB], 2012; P. Huang, 2009; T. Lü, 2013). Moreover, some researchers highlight the current trend of diversification and stratification among the rural migrant population (P. Huang, 2009; Ling, 2015; Qiu & Zhao, 2013). Besides being factory workers, many migrants toil in the informal economy as self-employed construction contractors, small businesses, cab drivers, street peddlers, and garbage collectors.

However, it is also well noted that the majority of these 'new workers,' despite having made significant contributions to China's economic reforms and growing competitiveness in the global market, are locked near the bottom of the production chain and face consistent oppression and exploitation (CLB, 2009, 2011, 2012; Démurger et al., 2009; Duan & Ma, 2011; S. Li, 2010; Solinger, 1999). Philip Huang (2009) estimated 120 of the 168 million rural migrants worked in the informal economy instead of as industrial workers; yet, they still suffered 'no security of employment, receive few or no benefits, and are often unprotected by labour laws (p.

51).'

Despite their mass population, Chinese rural migrant workers rarely take collective action against the injustices they experience. Instead, their ways of resistance are usually accommodative and individualistic, such as changing their workplace, committing suicide, or merely relying on their children's academic success for upward social mobility of the whole family (A. Chan & Siu, 2012; J. Chan & Pun, 2010; Z. Liu & Yang, 2010). In recent years, when wage arrears and labour maltreatment took place in the workplace, rural migrant workers gradually became aware of their right to report their employers' illegal practices to relevant governmental departments, such as the judicial system for lawsuits and arbitration schemes for governmental intermediation. Since 2010, a growing number of rural migrant workers have participated in or initiated strikes and protests to appeal for improved working conditions (CLB, 2011; P. Leung, 2015; Siu, 2011). In 2016, 36.8% of rural migrant workers chose to negotiate with their employer to resolve right violations, while 30.1% chose to report the issue to local governments, and 27.2% chose legal approaches (NBSC, 2017).

With the growth in rural migrants' initiations of legal approaches and labour movements, there has been an increasing consciousness, especially among the young generation, of the need to protect their rights and interests (CLB, 2011, 2012; Siu, 2011; X. Wang, 2008). However, these resistance moves have been driven more by rural migrant workers' occasional anger and individual interests than their collective interests as a unified working class (CLB, 2009, 2011, 2012; Lee, 2007). As a result, most rural migrants' labour movements were easily diffused and pacified by institutional or legal motions, such as promoting (or simply arresting) strike leaders (Lee, 2007) and firing the protesting workers. Without the right to initiate regular negotiations with

employers, the gains won by rural migrants in previous strikes and protests cannot be easily protected nor further improved upon after the rural migrant workers' anger has been appeased.

Collective action is the central element for class formation, as Jenny Chan and Ngai Pun (2010) concluded in their study of migrant industrial workers in south China. Even though some rural migrant workers may achieve temporary increases in wages or social benefits through using accommodative and resistant strategies as passive reactions, neither their exploited situation in the production process nor their employers' domination can be changed in the eventual. Migrant workers' reliance on capitalists' compromises and interpersonal networks to cope with oppression in the labour market, and their failure to go beyond personal and private interests, demonstrate a lack of consciousness of their collective working-class status (J. Wu, 2011).

Thus, as the emerging 'new' members of the Chinese working class, rural migrant workers are still at the state of 'class-in-itself [4]' with 'pre-consciousness' (A. Chan & Siu, 2012) or 'muted class consciousness' (Lee, 2007). This phenomenon calls for attention to the formation of migrant workers' class consciousness.

The consciousness construction in childhood

The consciousness of social class structure has been defined in various ways in previous studies by different researchers. For instance, Ossowski and Patterson (1963) described one's ideas of social environment and social position as 'class consciousness.' In their work, 'class consciousness' refers to class identification and a consciousness of the social status of one's class in the hierarchical class structure, a realization of differences from other classes and distinct class interests, and, possibly, of class solidarity. Freire (1970a, 1970b, 1973)

situated all social classes into an oppressing-oppressed relation and defined consciousness as one's perceptions of social, political, and economic contradictions and beliefs about taking actions against social oppression. In the *International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology* (Beckert & Zafirovski, 2006), consciousness is defined as one's ideas, beliefs, and values about class relations, class structure, and class interests, which is built upon and limited by one's empirical experiences. Based on these given definitions, the class consciousness in this book is defined as one's ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes about class structure, class relations, one's self-position in society, and feasible options of changing one's present social position.

In the extant studies, one's consciousness of social position and social structure is more embedded within one's social class status and emerges from one's experience in the workplace and social surroundings. However, social psychologists have illustrated that one's consciousness of society and its class structure can begin forming long before one enters any specific workplace. In other words, individuals' consciousness construction could be shaped or affected by their multiple group identifications, lifestyles, personal goals, and self-image developed continuously since their childhood (Connell, 1970; Danziger, 1958; Davies, 1965; Davis, 1979; Rosenberg, 1953). Thus, although children cannot fully comprehend or picture society, they can gradually develop their perceptions of society and interpretations of social phenomena.

In Connell's (1970) study, children five to eight years of age were unable to form an image of class differences in society, and they started classifying and ordering social classes from the age of eight years old and onwards based on their understanding of occupational hierarchy; at 12 years of age, children could build a moderately detailed picture of the whole society and the relationships between individuals and the social system.

Nevertheless, recent studies suggest that children of this century start constructing their perceptions of social stratification and economic inequality earlier than in previous eras. Findings indicate that children start developing an awareness of the unfairness between rich and poor in early and middle childhood (five to eight years old), and attributing one's wealth to good education, a good job, good luck, and personal merit (Hazelbaker et al., 2018; Mistry et al., 2015, 2016). Furthermore, the older children grow, the more likely they are to attribute social stratification and economic inequality to personal traits like education, ability, and effort (Flanagan et al., 2014; Sigelman, 2012, 2013). These images of society and class structure constructed in childhood can be fundamental elements of the more explicit forms of one's class consciousness construction in later adulthood but are still under-researched in the Chinese context.

In this book, I attend to the class consciousness construction of the 'new workers.' However, I choose not to focus directly on its constructive process among migrant workers *per se*, as many researchers have done in their studies of social movements and class experience of the migrant group. Instead, I address this issue by focusing on its constructive process in childhood; in other words, I focus on class consciousness construction among rural migrant children, who are highly likely to reproduce their parents' migrant working jobs and become China's next wave of 'new workers' when they eventually join the workforce (Yuanyuan Chen & Feng, 2013; F. Lai et al., 2014; N. Li & Placier, 2015; Ling, 2015, 2017; Pan & Ye, 2017; Lu Wang, 2008; Woronov, 2011). As discovered in Song, Zeng, and Zhang's (2016) five-year longitudinal study of 1,866 junior secondary school students in 50 migrant schools in Beijing, less than 40% went on to high schools or vocational schools, and less than six per cent were admitted to universities; most remained in Beijing, working for a pittance or

merely walking the streets.

More importantly, I believe that inquiries on migrant children's consciousness of social class structure and inequalities could offer a significant window for understanding the genesis of adult migrant workers' class consciousness (or lack thereof). Also, as rural migrant children's mindsets are still malleable and open to new possibilities of class consciousness construction, by analyzing the constructive process in childhood, I may discover whether any form of education – in family, school, and community contexts – might foster critical consciousness among these migrant children.

Theoretical perspective

This book borrows Paulo Freire's framework of two states of consciousness – false and critical – of the oppressed to conceptualize a four-dimension framework to analyze rural migrant children's consciousness of social inequalities experienced by their families and themselves in urban China. In the following sections, the characteristics of false and critical states of consciousness addressed in Freire's works are first categorized; second, through comparing and contrasting, four dimensions are abstracted to analyze the constructive process of class consciousness among rural migrant children in this study. Finally, but importantly, I also review social theories of the schooling function in shaping one's social values and norms, to seek the theoretical backbone revealing social consciousness construction (or reproduction) process in childhood and supporting the possibility of developing disadvantaged children's critical consciousness via school education.

False consciousness and critical consciousness of the oppressed

Freire (1970a, 1970b, 1973) detailed two states of consciousness among the oppressed – the states of false consciousness and critical consciousness. The state of false consciousness contributes to the reproduction of oppression. With false consciousness, people in oppressed positions, such as ethnic minorities, females, and workers, fail to recognize their exploited situation and the possibility of transforming the oppressive social structure. Instead, they adopt accommodative strategies in reaction to class inequalities and social oppression (Freire, 1970a, 1970b, 1973). Additionally, oppressed people adopt societal beliefs and values that work against their interests but enable the oppressor to maintain dominance. I summarize seven main points from Freire's (1970a, 1970b, 1972a, 1972b) classic works to characterize the false consciousness of the oppressed:

- Belief in adaptation: An individual believes it is their responsibility to be an adaptive person, to fit the so-called good, better, and just society (Freire, 1970b). Thus, working-class people are likely to behave according to the social rules prescribed by the dominant class, such as complying rather than inciting violence. For example, rural migrant workers seldom complain about their unsatisfying working conditions (CLB, 2009, 2011, 2012); instead, they endure hardships and expect their endurance to lead to a promotion or upward social mobility. In this vein, the oppressed are much like an object owned and directed by the dominant class, lacking engagement of their own will (Freire, 1970b, 1973).
- Fear of freedom/change: Due to their belief in adaptation, the oppressed become resigned to the structure of domination. Having gotten used to being directed instead of directing themselves, workers lack confidence in social movements and fear initiating them. Given this fear of freedom and change, the oppressed tend to perpetuate their existing relation towards the oppressor and depend on the

oppressor to make any needed changes (Freire, 1970a, 1970b, 1973).

- Belief in meritocracy: In the ideology of meritocracy, opportunities for success are distributed according to individuals' efforts and achieved merits, not ascribed factors. By internalizing the oppressor's image, workers become convinced that their employers are hardworking elites and assume that the oppressed need only work hard enough to live a better life (Freire, 1970b). If they fail to achieve that goal, they should blame themselves only, not others. Driven by their belief in meritocracy, workers are more likely to seek personal benefits and pursue individual success than take collective actions against the oppressor to serve common interests. They also attribute their harsh living conditions to their failure to study hard when they were younger. Therefore, many parents from disadvantaged social positions in China, like rural migrant workers and farmers, have high educational expectations of their children (Y. Li et al., 2020; J. Wu, 2011; Xu & Montgomery, 2021).
- Duality in the mind of the oppressed: Freire (1970b) argued that there is a duality in the oppressed's mind that reflects not only their submission to authority but also their internalized image of that authority (Freire, 1973; Freire & Macedo, 1993). On the one hand, the oppressed internalize the negative image the oppressor hold of the oppressed. For example, the oppressed workers are taught to believe that they are born deserving of blame and inferior to their employers. Given this depreciation of their abilities, the oppressed will develop a belief in submission to authority (Freire, 1998), believing their submission may eventually satisfy their desires. On the other, the oppressor's social position and life patterns are portrayed as the ultimate goal for all (both the oppressor and the oppressed) to pursue.

For example, the capitalist way of life is legitimized and promoted as the template for human beings in the capitalist society. As a result, the oppressed workers feel attraction towards the oppressor, hoping and expecting to become oppressors or 'sub-oppressors' (Freire, 1970b, p.22) themselves, and consciously or unconsciously denying being members of the oppressed class.

- Culture of silence: A culture of silence is found among the oppressed, in that they accept being ignored and depreciated by the oppressor (Freire, 1970b). If the oppressed workers are consistently submissive towards authority, they will get used to being mute and docile in creating and developing their communities (Freire, 1970a, 1972a, 1973). The more they get used to their oppressed situation, the more their voice becomes muted, and the more quickly they can be dominated (Freire, 1970b, 1972b). Rural migrant workers' preference for choosing accommodative reactions towards social oppression rightly reflects the culture of silence held by this new working class.
- The consciousness of inevitability: Consciousness of inevitability refers to fatalistic attitudes towards the situation of oppression (Freire, 1970b). In other words, workers are convinced that the social realities they encounter, such as worldwide unemployment and low wages, are because of inevitable forces and thus unchangeable (Freire, 1998). This shows a passive belief in their helplessness to make changes (Freire, 1970b, 1998).
- Mystification of reality: The oppressor transmit myths to maintain the status quo, insisting that everyone is free to make choices (Freire, 1972a). The oppressed would claim that there is a free labour market available to workers, such that if a worker were not satisfied with their boss, they could leave

the factory to find a job elsewhere. In reality, however, it could be difficult for such a worker to find better appointments elsewhere, given the high unemployment rate and the prevailing tough working conditions for all low-end labour jobs. Suppose the oppressed believe the mystification of social reality promoted by the oppressor. In that case, they cannot problematize the oppressed situation due to structural relations between the dominant and the dominated classes.

The state of critical consciousness, in contrast, enables people to penetrate the systematic mechanisms of exploitation and domination and identify common interests within their class. With critical consciousness, the oppressed workers would transform their individualistic resistance into collective actions that embed individuals' futures into the shared destiny of their class (Freire, 1970a, 1970b). It is significant to have a critical cyclic process of reflection and action in developing critical consciousness among the oppressed. Through reflecting on the current situation, the oppressed would realize the social inequalities and seek changes in the sense of collectiveness. The state of critical consciousness possesses six primary traits in Freire's (1970b, 1973) arguments:

- Awareness of problematic situation: Through problematizing inequality and oppression, the working class can reveal the true reason for social oppression – the structural relationship between the dominant class and the dominated class (Freire, 1985). Given an awareness of the problems in their current situation, working-class people will become conscious that their present condition is still an unfinished state and not predetermined by fatalistic factors (Freire, 1998). Rural migrant workers will problematize their employment relationship with their employers and realize there is still a chance to

change their challenging workplace situation. However, it will be difficult to do so.

- The consciousness of autonomy: It is essential that the social individual develops a consciousness of self-autonomy (Freire,1970b). Workers are expected to identify themselves as working-class members, not followers of the capitalist class. The consciousness of autonomy and self-identification are necessary for the oppressed to struggle against social oppression (Freire, 1985). Furthermore, it is crucial for workers to be aware of their social rights and build confidence in their autonomy when initiating social change to protect their rights (Yu Chen, 2009).
- The consciousness of resistance: Consciousness of resistance is based on one's faith in man's capacity to destroy and reconstruct social structures – the oppressed live in a world of substantial social inequality and injustice. Given a consciousness of resistance, oppressed workers will realize that the social orders prescribed by the authority can be questioned and opposed (Freire, 1970a, 1972a, 1972b). Eventually, they will unite to strike and protest against capitalist exploitation.
- Belief in transformation: Beyond an awareness of the possibility of changing their current social position, people are also expected to act to transform the reality of oppression (Freire, 1970b). Instead of being passive, ignorant objects of dominance, workers become knowing subjects who can and must intervene critically in the situation surrounding and oppressing them. Workers who believe in transformation will show a capacity for critically observing and even changing the surrounding world, especially their relationship with the capitalist class.
- Sense of social responsibility: The oppressed should be aware that their responsibility is to struggle for

their humanization and liberation (Freire & Macedo, 1993). Taking actions to transform the social reality should be the responsibility of each working-class member, not of other workers or the capitalist class. Thus, instead of being onlookers, every working-class person, including blue- and white-collar workers, should participate in labour movements appealing to common class interests as a united group.

- Belief in collective power: The oppressed are expected to realize the power of the collective (Freire, 1970a). Instead of relying on individual efforts to change the oppressed class position, a successful social struggle needs the collective action of all class members (Freire, 1973). Transformation of the capitalist social structure demands both collective actions and reflections upon the actions to intervene in the social reality. As a result, workers will collaborate for collective strikes, protests, and negotiations and request the right to organize labour unions.

Four dimensions of social consciousness

Based on the false/critical-consciousness theory attested above, four dimensions emerge from Freire's (1972a, 1973, 1985, 1998) works to distinguish critical consciousness from false consciousness (see details in Table 1.1). The first dimension, *awareness*, refers to people's understanding of their current situations and whether they can realize the existing social problems. The second, *attribution*, refers to how people perceive the social, economic, and political causes that perpetuate the inequalities and injustice they face in society. The third dimension, *self-efficacy*, involves whether people believe in their personal ability to bring changes to social and political conditions. In contrast, the fourth dimension, *intended action*, concerns people's beliefs about how to

act to make changes.

<Table 1.1 here>

Table 1.1 presents the relationship between the four dimensions and the main characteristics of false and critical consciousness, categorized from Freire's works. Social consciousness construction is a continuum of development from childhood to adulthood. Freire expected it could have an extreme ending point with a critical state of consciousness in all four dimensions. However, during the construction process, one's social consciousness will most likely have characteristics of false consciousness in some dimensions and critical consciousness in others. In this book, these four dimensions set up important parameters for understanding the state of migrant children's class consciousness.

Constructing social consciousness in childhood: The significance of the schooling process

People's ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes about social reality – in sum, their social consciousness – affect their actions and reactions towards social reality and are, in turn, affected by the social context in which they are submerged. However, these social beliefs and values are not born to people but constructed throughout their life experiences. Moreover, as researchers have discovered, multiple agents – society, family, school, peers, media, etc. – play parts in this construction process of social consciousness (Jennings, 2007; Merelman, 1972; Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977).

More importantly, Althusser (1984) emphasized that, among these multiple agents, the family and school contexts are the two most significant contemporary societal apparatuses affecting people's perceptions of social

reality, and in most conditions realizing the dominant class's ideological control. Working-class parents, as the oppressed people themselves, are consistently submerged in the social oppression and fail to develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1970a, 1970b, 1972a). Since parents are limited by their false consciousness in fostering a critical one in their children, the school context stands out for its potential to break the constraints on disadvantaged children (Freire, 1970a, 1970b, 1972a).

School is the only major institution between family and the labour market. Functionalists believe the educational system accomplishes the socialization process between students' family life as children and their social life as adults (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004). Therefore, it should provide students with a knowledge base and specific skills to meet modern society's division of labour requirements. Moreover, it should also prepare these young people for their adult roles by equipping them with the standards, values, and norms necessary to govern their behaviours in mainstream society (Althusser, 1984; Apple, 1976; Apple & King, 1983; Dreeben, 2002).

However, the functional theory fails to explain how these knowledge, skills, standards, values, and norms are selected and promoted in the school context and why these taught ones are more important than others. Schooling cannot be neutral (Anyon, 2011; Tyler, 1949). Conflict theorists, therefore, highlight that the socialization process of school education itself reflects social and economic relations in society. Thus, the schooling process would legitimize the unequal class relationship and socialize students to accept better political and economic arrangements determined by the dominant class through delivering values and beliefs that benefit the latter's interests (Althusser, 1984; Anyon, 1981, 2011; Apple, 1979, 1982; Apple & King, 1983; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). As a result, children, especially those from a disadvantaged social position, are more likely to

show conformity in social reproduction than critically problematize social realities (Apple & King, 1983; Freire, 1985). Thus, through the schooling process, working-class children learn to not only do working-class jobs but also legitimize their dominated social position and self-blame for their eventual class reproduction (Anyon, 1978, 1984, 2011; Apple, 1996; Apple & King, 1983; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1977).

Many previous studies have documented the various mechanisms of the schooling process in reproducing the social class structure. For instance, Bowles and Gintis (1976) revealed a correspondence between the school's organizational structure and the workplace's social relations. The ordering-obeying relationship among school administrators, teachers, and students roughly mirrors the oppressing-oppressed relationship between employers and employees in the workplace. In addition, teachers' authority power in the classroom is established by giving orders and setting up classroom regulations and principles for students. Meanwhile, students learn to wait constantly and patiently for permission from the teacher, tolerate discomfort, and obediently restrain any desires contrary to the teacher's will (Apple & King, 1983; Jackson, 1990). Aronowitz (1991) also agreed that a hierarchical structure between teachers and students in school administration would legitimize the authority power vested in other institutions.

More importantly, children's schooling experiences are not equal either. McDermott (1977) identified two types of classroom instruction: authoritarian instruction, in which students' every movement is controlled and directed by teachers' instructions; and guidance-based interaction, which encourages students to explore and discover new knowledge. As previously found, teachers tend to utilize different types of instructions to teach children from different social class backgrounds (Anyon, 1980, 1981, 2011). In working-class schools, teachers

tend to be the class owner and attempt to control the classroom (time and space) and student behaviours. Students are required to follow the steps laid out by teachers without questioning them; meanwhile, their perceptions are likely to be ignored when they conflict with teachers' perceptions in the classroom context. In contrast, creative activity, individual expression, and analytic intelligence are appreciated and encouraged in both affluent professional schools and executive elite schools (Anyon, 1980, 1981).

These findings indicate that teachers in working-class schools tend to utilize an authoritarian teaching style to maintain their authority over students, while teachers in upper-middle- and capitalist-class schools are more likely to use a guidance-based teaching style to develop students' critical analysis and problem-solving abilities. As a result, working-class students learn to be submissive to authority's orders and requests, weakening their creative capability. A culture of silence then might be promoted among working-class children, even before they enter society.

Moreover, formal curriculum content also differs depending on one's social class. Researchers have argued that, through a selective process of emphases and exclusions, the objective knowledge taught in formal curricula is, in fact, a theoretically distorted view of the society (Apple, 1996; Giroux & Penna, 1983; Popkewitz, 1977), allowing the social reality of oppression to be masked in school curricula. Thus, for example, the portrayal of capitalist society is naive, unrealistic, and overly positive in most American textbooks, and concepts such as 'social issues' and 'social conflicts' are either defined in negative terms or avoided altogether (Anyon, 1978; Fox & Hess, 1972).

Anyon (1978, 1980) further discovered that social issues and social problems such as ‘why do workers strike’ are problematized in classroom discussions in executive, elite schools but wholly excluded from curricula in working- and middle-class schools. Additionally, Litt (1963) found that positive impressions of political systems and economic arrangements were more likely found in textbooks used in the poor, minority, and working-class school districts, where political authority needed to be legitimized, than in white, middle-class schools. Thus, curriculum content could obscure the oppressive class relationship in the capitalist society and reinforce the development of working-class students’ belief in adaptation to capitalist society (Freire, 1985).

Finally, yet importantly, Bowles and Gintis (1976) pointed out that school evaluative systems tend to convince students from all socioeconomic backgrounds to believe in the ideology of meritocracy. However, meritocratic beliefs emphasizing the significance of individual efforts and credits in achieving upward social mobility (Young, 1958) would lead working-class students to self-blame for their low academic performance and being alienated from college-track. Besides, researchers discovered that students are much more likely to receive rewards for their subordination, obedience (Apple & King, 1983; Bowles & Gintis, 1976), and self-discipline (Choy et al., 1993; Henke et al., 1996), which could further foster their submission to and obedience of authority in the future labour market. Also, the school evaluation system in contemporary society has been criticized for its ignorance of working-class people’s life experiences (Greene, 1983). Freire (1993) believed this lack of knowledge would mislead children from working-class families to depreciate their life patterns.

Eventually, the social and cultural reproduction theorists argued that the unequal schooling process further reinforces social class distinctions that originate outside the school context (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1979; Bowles

& Gintis, 1976; Lareau, 1987, 2011). However, the deterministic structuralism of reproduction theories attested above has also been challenged for oversimplifying the dynamics between student agency and the wider society (Giroux, 1981; Levinson & Holland, 1996). Resistance theories perceive students as active agents who construct their meanings of social life, rather than passive recipients of the knowledge and ideologies selected by and legitimated in their schooling (Alpert, 1991; Giroux, 1983a; MacLeod, 1987; Munns & McFadden, 2000; Willis, 1977). Willis (1977) found, in his study of English working-class students, that certain students ('lads') resisted mainstream schooling by interrupting the class, showing negative attitudes towards learning and teachers, and eventually withdrawing from school to take up working-class jobs. This counter-school culture, intersecting with their internalized masculinity of working-class culture, was the 'lads'' means of rejecting a school system that *de facto* reproduced the existing social structure (Willis, 1977). Facing the coexistence of 'lads' and 'ear'oles' in the school context, teachers tended to encourage the latter's compliance and punish or neglect the former's resistant behaviours, thereby reinforcing working-class students' resistance and eventually denying them the possibility of mastering standard patterns of knowledge.

Additionally, while social and cultural reproduction theorists emphasize the schooling's reproduction function and its role in educating students with conformity and domestication, critical pedagogy theorists believe in the role of education as empowerment. From their perspective, schooling can encourage children to deal with a problematic social reality critically and creatively. Therefore, as Freire (1993) believed, school education should take the lead in fostering working-class students' critical analysis of their oppressed situation. Via such a schooling process for critical consciousness, oppressed children should not feel inferior for their

origins but master so-called standard patterns to fight for the reinvention of knowledge. In this vein, the school could enable disadvantaged and oppressed children to understand the constraints of their current situation and realize the significance of taking transformative actions to eventually stimulate social change (Freire, 1970b).

To facilitate the possibility of developing children's, especially those from oppressed situations, ability to problematize social reality and action to effect change, education for critical consciousness should cover the following four significant characteristics, according to Freire's works:

- Co-intentional education: Both teachers and students are subjects of the educational process, with an equal relationship. Teachers need to realize that they do not own the class and that knowledge is not their property but the object of reflection for both students and themselves (Freire, 1970b).
- Educating through dialogues: Students need to be involved in a dialogue with teachers about curriculum content, teaching styles, and evaluation criteria (Freire, 1970a, 1972b). Students' voices and their family culture should be heard and respected in the education system. Through interactions with peers, they learn from each other and understand the common needs of their group members. The goal of educating through dialogues is to develop a sense of cooperation and a belief in collective power rather than in competition and exclusive individualism.
- Problem-posing education: Social reality should be presented as a problematic object for students' reflections (Freire, 1970b). Teachers need to encourage students to interrogate what they have taken for granted and confront the social reality with critical interpretations (Freire, 1973, 1985).
- Empowering through experiences: It is believed that, to learn social and political responsibility,

students need to experience that responsibility (Freire, 1973). Thus, students need the right to challenge and question teachers' words and the opportunity to negotiate with teachers in constructing social meanings.

While recognizing problematic surroundings and marginalized children's cultures as content critical to the learning process via initiating open dialogues, recent studies have proven that the school system could lead children to analyze and understand social realities critically and to take transformative actions (Chavarria, 2017; Santoro & Forghani-Arani, 2015). However, few studies have explored the possibility of developing rural migrant children's critical consciousness of the social inequalities in the schooling process.

The current study

Driven by the inquiry into migrant workers' consciousness construction in childhood, I intend to answer two main research questions in this book: how rural migrant children perceive their surrounding social realities and how their social perceptions could be constructed and reshaped throughout their urban schooling process. Grounded in the four-dimensional framework of class consciousness and theories on the function of schooling in reproducing or transforming the social structure, I focus on investigating the following four specific sub-questions: (1) Are rural migrant children aware of the social inequalities facing the rural migrant population; (2) To what causes do they attribute perceived social inequalities; (3) Who do they perceive as change-makers and what do they see as feasible ways of changing their fate as a rural migrant working class; and (4) How are rural migrant children's consciousness of social inequalities affected in the urban schooling process and how could

the public school differ from the private migrant school?

To answer these questions, I conducted qualitative investigations in two primary schools – one private migrant school (coded as Heart School, HS) and one public school (coded as Card School, CS) – in the Sun District (pseudonym) of Beijing between June 2014 and April 2015[5]. As China's capital and a megacity, Beijing has encountered severe problems with its rural migrant population. Issues related to rural migrant children's education are some of the most serious. The city's population of rural migrant workers has grown steadily in recent years, climbing from 1.5 million in 1999 to 2.9 million in 2004, 3.7 million in 2009, and 4 million in 2010 (Z. Lai, 2011; X. Lü & Wang, 2010; C. Wu, 2006; Y. Zhou & Wang, 2016). Per the 2014 population census, Beijing is home to 21.5 million migrant people, representing 38.1% of its total population (Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics [BMBS], 2016a).

Beijing's population of compulsory-education-age rural migrant children has also grown, from an estimated 400,000 (83% of whom were of primary school age, and 17.1% were of secondary school age) in 2007 (Yang & Wang, 2013) to over 480,000 in 2014 (Zhao & Wei, 2017), representing 41.7% of the city's student population at the compulsory education level in that year (BMBS, 2016b). Despite their numbers, rural migrant children in Beijing may be more aware of the unjust rural-urban differentiation and social oppression via the educational inequalities they face. Official statistics show that only 63% of rural migrant children in Beijing attended public schools in 2007, leaving approximately 146,000 rural migrant children to attend *minban* (private 民办) migrant schools (Yang & Wang, 2013). According to the New Citizen Program [NCP] (2014), there were still nearly 95,000 rural migrant children studying in around 130 private migrant schools in Beijing in

2010, indicating many rural migrant children had been excluded from its public education system.

The investigated migrant school case, Heart School, was in a predominantly migrant community far from Beijing's city centre and offered affordable primary education for 484 migrant children who had been shut out of public schools in Beijing. This private migrant school, though unlicensed, was selected for its non-governmental organization (NGO) background. The school kept student tuition fees low, as both the school HS and its establisher NGO were committed to serving migrant workers in the neighbourhood and promoting migrant working-class culture. Thus, this private migrant school was expected to illustrate social realities and societal beliefs more critically than mainstream public schools.

The public school case, Card School, in this study was located in the same district as HS, on Beijing's outskirts. In the 2013–2014 school year, 90.1% of its 960 students were rural migrant children whose families had somehow succeeded in presenting the five documents required for school enrolment. Like all other public schools in Beijing, this public school received full administrative, financial, and academic supports and supervision from the local education authority. Therefore, I selected this school as representative of the common core characteristics of public schooling in Beijing.

Data were drawn from document review, questionnaires, interviews, and school observations conducted in the two case schools (see more details in the Appendix). Research participants of this study include school principals, teachers, rural migrant children, and rural migrant parents of current and graduated students. Children participants were recruited from the two schools' fifth and sixth grades, the highest two primary school

grades in China, who would transit to middle schools in one or two years. Students in these two grades usually are around ten and 11 years old, respectively. Rural migrant children are sometimes one or two years older than their urban local counterparts due to school transfers and late school admission, enabling them to, according to social psychologists, construct a moderately elaborate conception of class structure (Connell, 1970; Davis, 1979; Hazelbaker et al., 2018).

In total, I interviewed 44 HS students (14 focus-group interviews and three individual interviews) and 43 CS students (11 focus-group interviews and four individual interviews). In addition, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with one principal and 11 teachers in HS; two principals, two deans, and 13 teachers in CS (see Table 1.2 and Table 1.3); 17 rural migrant parents of current fifth- and sixth-grade students (six from HS and 11 from CS), and ten rural migrant parents of HS graduates.

<Table 1.2 and Table 1.3 here>

The structure of this book

This book contains eight chapters. The first chapter reviews the extant literature on rural migrant workers' class consciousness formation in urban China and social theories on class consciousness construction in multiple contexts (with an emphasis on the schooling influence). This introduction chapter also explains why and how this book applies the class perspective and Freirean framework to explore the class consciousness construction in childhood and the influence of the schooling process in shaping rural migrant children's consciousness development. Research questions investigated in this book and the theoretical perspectives adopted for analysis

are presented. In Chapter Two, the historical development of education policies for rural migrant children is reviewed to present the growing marginality of rural migrant children in the urban education system in China. Additionally, two types of school education offered for rural migrant children in China – the public school and the private migrant school – are compared based on two Beijing school cases investigated as the research site of the current study. Detailed evidence of various educational inequalities faced by rural migrant children in Beijing is included.

Chapters Three to Six are the primary findings chapters. Chapters Three and Four analyze rural migrant children's class consciousness based on the four-dimensional framework of consciousness construction. Chapter Three primarily discusses how witnessing their migrant parents' disadvantaged manual working status has made fifth- and sixth-grade migrant children aware of migrant workers' daily experience of inequalities and how they primarily attributed those inequalities to a lack of education, personal traits, and structural rural-urban/migrant-local differentiation. In these rural migrant children's eyes, society is constructed with a hierarchical division between manual-labour and mental-labour occupations, with manual labourers seen as inferior due to their personal inability to perform mental-labour tasks. Chapter Four further explores rural migrant children's perceptions of available and feasible options in seeking a way out of their doomed fate of reproducing their parents' rural migrant working in the future. Rural migrant children's future expectations and how they perceive their expected future could be achieved via educational pursuits or in the labour market are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapters Five and Six focus on the function of the schooling process in fostering and (re)shaping rural

migrant children's social consciousness of the inequalities. Chapter Five examines three characteristics of the meritocratic schooling shared in two case schools in Beijing: emphasis on the pursuit of academic success via the individual hardworking, negative narration of rural migrant parents, and cultural support for migrant children's education abandonment. Findings further reveal that meritocratic schooling reinforces rural migrant children's belief in individualism and meritocracy rather than collective resistance when dealing with social inequalities. Chapter Six further compares two case schools' approaches to performing their socialization function in citizenship construction with a student population dominated by rural migrant children and strategies of dealing with rural migrant children's unignorable perceptions of social inequalities in the classroom context. Through comparisons, this chapter reveals the possibilities for and challenges to cultivating a critical state of consciousness among rural migrant children in the schooling process. Finally, this chapter further elaborates the underlying rationales for the differences between the two case schools.

On the basis of the findings of this book, Chapter Seven revisits the extant studies of rural migrant children and challenges the explanatory power of the prevailing rural-urban/ migrant-local differentiation discourse in the existing literature. This chapter discusses that the class-based differentiation, which has been substantially ignored in previous studies, is currently replacing the *hukou* system as the main driving force in marginalizing rural migrant children in urban society and further tracking them into the social reproduction loop. Thus, it is significant to go beyond the dominant *hukou* analytic framework and bring a class perspective to mainland China migration studies, especially rural migrant children studies.

Chapter Eight is the conclusion chapter. This chapter concludes that rural migrant children have not yet

developed a critical state of class consciousness that challenges the current unequal society with the commitment to transforming the whole oppressed working class, although their awareness of inequalities provides a significant foundation for doing so. Also, the difficulty and possibility of transforming migrant children's awareness into critical reflections and actions need to be further situated into children's dynamic, ongoing interactions with the multiple embedding contexts (school, family, and the broader society) which are highly dominated by the ideology of meritocracy and lacking a critical class discourse.

Notes

1. China's household registration (*hukou* 户口) system was implemented in 1955 and divided China's population into two identities: peasants and urban dwellers (K. Chan, 2009). For decades, the *hukou* system generated a clear rural-urban segregation in public goods provision in China. Urban and rural residents developed different relations to the means of production according to the ownership system and the *hukou* system. In urban areas, the *danwei* (work unit 单位) took total responsibility for its workers' daily expenses, social welfare, housing, medical expenses, children's education, and other expenses (C. Lin, 2006).
2. Rural people were assigned and closely connected to their communes before the 1980s (Cheng & Selden, 1994). The production process in the agriculture sector was greatly collective at that time – rural people farmed and reaped together. The costs of production and reproduction, such as living expenses, education, and medicine, were shared in rural communes.

3. According to the definition given by NBSC (2017), rural migrant workers are people with rural *hukou* status who are currently working in non-agricultural industries within the jurisdiction of their *hukou* location or migrating outside it for over six months. The former are referred to as local rural migrants, and the latter as going-out rural migrants, representing 112.4 million and 169.3 million people, respectively, in 2016. Due to the *hukou* system, these rural migrants are categorized as non-local or rural residents in urban areas, and are thus largely excluded from the urban social welfare system, including medical insurance, housing, social security, pensions, and child education provision (M. Li, 2015; Solinger, 1999; Woronov, 2004).

4. In Marx's dichotomous class classification model, there are two antagonistic classes in a capitalist society: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Marx & Engels, 2008). The bourgeoisie are the owners of productive material and machines, while the proletariat, who lack private possession of the means of production, only own their labour (Marx & Engels, 1962). Due to private ownership, the proletariat depend on the bourgeoisie's hiring; thus, the proletariat are powerless to protect and plead for their social and economic interests. Marx and Engels (1962) believed that, unless private ownership was broken up and the capitalist class structure was overturned, the proletariat would be consistently situated in an oppressed position and deprived by the bourgeoisie. Only if the proletariat were to acquire political supremacy and become a ruling class through revolution could they remove the pre-existing condition of production – private ownership of the means of production – and transform the prevailing exploitative class relation (Marx & Engels, 1981, 2008). To practice and particularly win this

political class struggle, a transformation of the proletariat from the state of 'class-in-itself' to the state of 'class-for-itself' is necessary (Marx & Bender, 1972). The state of 'class-in-itself' suggests that people who possess the same relation to the means of production in the production process are automatically members of the same class (Marx & Bender, 1972). However, they may not consider each other members of a united proletariat class, holding the same class interests. Given a state of critical consciousness, the working class would become a 'class-for-itself,' learning to identify social, political, and economic contradictions, taking collective actions against social oppression, and achieving social change to the class structure (Marx & Bender, 1972). To Marxism, this state of critical consciousness can only be achieved through labour movements, in which working-class people can articulate ideas of which class they belong to and who is exploiting and dominating them, and organize collective actions to change their class position (Gallin, 1990).

5. The main round of data collection was conducted between June 2014 and January 2015 in two case schools in Beijing. I also conducted a follow-up qualitative investigation in the private migrant school case during March and April 2015.

Table 1.1. Four dimensions of social consciousness construction.

Dimensions	**False Consciousness**	**Critical Consciousness**
Awareness	The consciousness of inevitability (fatalistic attitude; taken for granted)	Awareness of the problematic situation
Attribution	Meritocracy (not questioning structural constraints; self-blaming) Mystification of reality (everyone is free to make choices)	The consciousness of resistance (challenging the social order)
Self-efficacy	Fear of freedom/change (lack of self-confidence; reliance upon others and not oneself to make change)	Belief in transformation (being confident in making changes) The consciousness of autonomy (being confident in initiating changes)
Intended action	Belief in adaptation (compliance) Meritocracy (individual efforts) Duality in the oppressed mindset Culture of silence (endurance and no resistance)	Sense of social responsibility (taking actions) Belief in collective power (initiating/participating in collective actions)

Table 1.2. Demographic information of teacher interviewees (Heart School).

No.	Name	Type of Teacher	Gender	*Hukou* Status	Class Teacher	Teaching Subjects	Years of Teaching
HS1	Xiao	School principal	F	Migrant	No	Flexible of minor subjects	8 years
HS2	Yung	Formal teacher	F	Migrant	Yes (6th grade)	Chinese; Math	7.5 years
HS3	Na	Formal teacher	F	Migrant	Yes (5th grade)	Chinese; Math	5.5 years
HS4	Rang	Volunteer teacher (full-time)	M	Migrant	Yes (5th grade)	Chinese; Math	1 year
HS5	Peng	Volunteer teacher (full-time)	M	Migrant	Yes (4th grade)	Math	1 year
HS6	Tong	Volunteer teacher (full-time)	F	Migrant	Yes (4th grade)	Chinese	1 year
HS7	Jie	Formal teacher	F	Migrant	Yes (3rd grade)	Chinese; Math	2.9 years
HS8	Qing	Formal teacher	F	Migrant	No	English	5.5 years

HS9	Juan	Volunteer teacher (full-time)	F	Migrant	No	English	1 year
HS10	Pang	Volunteer teacher (full-time)	M	Migrant	No	Social Studies	0.5 year
HS11	Yan	Volunteer teacher (full-time)	F	Migrant	No	Music; Painting	1 year
HS12	Xing	Volunteer teacher (part-time)	F	Beijing local	No	Chinese composition	Over 10 years

Notes: M=Male; F=Female.

Table 1.3. Demographic information of teacher interviewees (Card School).

No.	**Teacher Name**	**Type of Teacher**	**Gender**	***Hukou* Status**	**Class Teacher**	**Teaching Subjects**	**Years of Teaching**
CS1	Qiao	School principal	F	Beijing local	No	No	24 years
CS2	Song	Vice school principal	F	Beijing local	No	Chinese; Math	23 years
CS3	Ran	Dean of English subject	F	Beijing local	No	English; all other minor subjects	24 years
CS4	Shuang	Dean of Morality	F	Beijing local	No	Ideology and Morality	24 years
CS5	Cheng	Young Pioneer counsellor	F	Beijing local	No	Young Pioneer activities	16 years
CS6	Lin	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	Yes (6^{th} grade)	Math	14 years
CS7	Xia	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	Yes (6^{th} grade)	Chinese	17years
CS8	Li	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	Yes (5^{th}	Chinese; Math	20 years

					grade)		
CS9	Hong	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	No	Ideology and Morality	27 years
CS10	Yu	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	Yes (6th grade)	Math	5 years
CS11	Chun	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	Yes (5th grade)	Chinese	9 years
CS12	Ling	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	No	Ideology and Morality	6 years
CS13	Ting	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	Yes (6th grade)	Chinese	1.5 years
CS14	Meng	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	No	Integrated-practice Activity	1.5 years
CS15	Nan	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	No	English	5 years
CS16	Wang	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	No	English	1 year
CS17	Ni	Formal teacher	F	Beijing local	No	English	1 year

Notes: F=Female.