

THE SOCIAL ALCHEMY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN CHINESE SOCIETY: HOW ITS SCHOOL HEADS EXERCISE DUALITY IN AN INSTITUTIONALIZED CONTEXT

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Abstract

While duality highlights the interaction between structural constraints and agency, ability is defined as the core component in practicing creative actions, so that the influence of power on agency is largely ignored. Furthermore, the influence of social cultures is not taken into account by duality. This essay argues that social cultures constitute an institutionalized milieu, regulating the relationship between conduct and social rewards and, in turn, such an institutionalized rule comes to steer social members' knowledgeability and ability. As a result, the practice of agency normally occurs within a scope predetermined by the institutionalized context. In order to secure personal gain, actors tend to comply with its rules, as evident in the utility of social capital, the acquisition of which can be conceptualized as an art of social alchemy in Chinese society.

Key words

Duality, social capital, Chinese culture, school head, institutionalized context, social alchemy.

0. Introduction

In order to resolve the dualism between structuralism and agency, A. Giddens argues that mutual knowledge allows the actor to discover the rules and properties of social structure, and this knowledgeability enables him or her to transform structural constraints into resources for developing creative actions, so that the implementation of agency further drives social change. Whilst such duality profiles the interactive axiom between social structure and agency, Giddens mistakes ability for power. The interplay between ability, subjective intention and power tends to espouse the influence of selfishness and, in turn, the fusion between ability and power becomes the means of securing personal gain. This principle indicates that in order to shield personal interests, the performance of agency normally occurs within structural rules, whereby the institutionalized reward system

comes to gear creative actions. As this institutionalized system develops within a specific social context, Chinese culture needs to be viewed as the core factor shaping this institutionalized system in the Chinese context. Evidently, the combination of family-orientation and face-orientation in this culture generates an institutionalized context that stipulates certain rules of social reward. This is evident in the rule of social resource distribution in China, which is mainly determined not by the equity principle but the emotional/blood linkage that can be acquired through social networks. Furthermore, this institutionalized context also favors important posts because they signify both their occupants' excellent ability and their family reputation. Such a setting tends to impel Chinese school heads to construct proper social circles in order to develop strong friendships with persons who have the authority to influence their promotion. However, this selfishness-led approach is cloaked in a public mission because school heads are expected to obtain more resources for their teachers and students. As they are situated in structural holes that function to connect different social groups and filter important information, their privileged position endorses their knowledgeable ability, so that their construction of social capital can be defined as the practice of duality. However, the institutionalized context comes to influence the space and path of agency, so that the performance of social capital within this institutionalized milieu can be interpreted as an art of social alchemy, which signifies the deeply interwoven interaction between duality and the institutionalized reward system.

1. Duality and its assumption

The dichotomy between structuralism and agency has long dominated the development of social theories (Sibeon, 2004). The notions of cultural reproduction and critical pedagogy, for example, represent perspectives grounded in structuralism and agency respectively. However, Giddens (1979, 1984) rejects this dualism by pointing out that structuralism undervalues the influence of creative actions, while the perspectives of agency mistake desires for results. He argues that there are interactions between social structure and agency because mutual knowledge and subjective interpretations are able to create this interactive principle. By behaving as social constructors, daily participation in the construction of social customs, cultures and institutions, which are the cornerstone of social operation, allows social members to develop shared experiences with social structure, which function as the core element in forming mutual knowledge between human actions and social structure. Furthermore, rational minds permit social members to become engaged in multiple forms of interpretation of social structure (Giddens, 1987), so that social structure no longer functions as a rigid cage but instead becomes a resource for the making of meanings (Giddens, 1993). According to Giddens (2015), when an actor discovers the rules and properties of social structure, he or she knows the pattern of social operation, and this knowledgeable ability enacts as a catalyst converting structural constraints into resources for developing creative actions. In order to exert such agency, the actor

needs to possess ability (Giddens, 1979, 1984). Such duality spotlights the interaction and compatibility possible between structure and agency by arguing for a combination of knowledgeability and ability, which empowers the actor to surpass structural constraints through creative actions. By acting in a collective form, the practice of agency is able to drive social changes (Giddens, 1987).

Ham, Paine and Cha (2011) documented the notion of duality by examining the issue of the gender equality agenda. They argue that this agenda has become a prevailing world discourse that has acquired a transnational structure/legitimacy, imposing on the education policy of its member countries. This intensifies the gap between global and local systems, or at least drives these countries to comply with a worldwide grammar that stipulates predetermined rules, prescribing discursive practices to the extent that local meaning extensively conveys global vocabularies. This is exemplified by increasingly uniform patterns of education policies and school curricula. However, their findings showed that the 160 states sampled were able to convert this global epistemic mode to their own social contexts by adopting a strategy of loose coupling, which allowed them to incorporate externally predefined structural components into their educational actions, and preserve contextualized local meanings through innovative actions. This proactive modification took on the dialectic between the global organizational structure and the prioritization of educational actions and, in turn, this duality authorized these agents to retain their autonomy in the sphere of educational policy. By exploring the lens of the structure/agency dialectic, Wenner and Settlage (2015) found that school principals actively employed the tactic of buffering, which accommodated the structured requirements of education policy and school independence. They interpreted the external structure and internal school culture, and this interpretation opened up a gateway for altering or at least mitigating structural constraints by undertaking rational measurements and innovative initiatives. They rationally measured opportunity costs and predicted the best outcomes of their action plans. These pivotal/innovative schemes successfully shielded teachers' autonomy from externally structured constraints and benefited students' performance in science education. This association signified the fact that their agentic actions transformed the structure into a new form.

Although duality overcomes the gap between structuralism and agency, it has limits, which are partly derived from the premise of rational and flexible actions, as advocated by Goffman (1959), who defines humans as social creatures equipped with rational minds that grant them the ability to adopt flexible actions in the enactment of social interactions. This is evident in their presentations in daily life, through which individual social members attempt to present their best manners/conducts and hide their dark worlds in order to construct positive images of themselves through their social encounters. By manipulating the presentation of 'front' and 'back' stage attributes, they certify the rationality of their minds. As this micro approach becomes the core creed of agency, duality is unable to

connect with social operation on the macro level. When Giddens (1979, 1984) excludes power from ability, this gap further becomes prominent because duality doesn't take subjective intentions into account. Whilst rationality acts as a core element in initiating social actions, the fusion between power and subjective intentions can foster selfishness, so that the performance of duality may come to mask desire for personal gain. As a result, agency may not be exercised in a collective way, but rather through individualized routes.

2. Power, personal intentions and agency in structured contexts

For T. Hobbes, human beings are selfish social creatures, as witnessed by the fact that they constantly attempt to plunder advantages from others. This selfishness-led motivation easily triggers chaos that can jeopardize the personal interests of all social members. Fortunately, social contracts diminish such possible conflicts and, in turn, participation in social actions ensures personal returns (Campbell, 1981). Johnson (1972) argues that as professionals are framed as social icons who certify professional service quality, professional licenses become an effective tool for monopolizing the market, legitimating the authority of professionals and allowing them to command high levels of remuneration. This relation indicates that professional titles enfold the intention of personal interests, as evidenced by the case of the French medical practitioners who forced the French government to recognize their exclusive privileges in the medical market by organizing and employing collective actions. The professional license of the medical practitioner originated in such a political and self-interested context (Jamous and Peloille, 1970). This selfishness-led approach was also testified by Goodson and Dowbiggin (1990), who deconstructed the means through which French psychotherapists obtained legitimate authority. They were originally committed to humanistic ideals, but later shifted to the realm of self-interest, engaging in collective actions to seize administrative control over the reconstruction of the mental asylum, which had been initiated by the departmental Prefects of France under the 1838 Act. In order to protect the exclusive privileges of the professional license, they further appropriated degeneracy theory, which offered them a perfect shield from accusations of incompetence.

All the above findings have demonstrated the close relation between power and selfishness. Whilst rational ability may aid the actor to employ agency, his or her subjective intentions come to mediate such rationality. Because selfishness is generally garnered in subjective intentions, it is very difficult to maintain neutrality in the notion of ability. Power is the key means of determining the distribution of social resources and rewards, and this tends to motivate people to seek power as a strategy for obtaining personal advantage. This principle indicates that ability changes its original nature and becomes a synthesizer, fusing selfishness and power into an integrated means of proliferating personal advantage. This fusion functions as a kind of social alchemy because it enables its possessors to create

wealth and obtain social prestige. Furthermore, while knowledgeable facilitates the exercise of agency, subjective intentions may obstruct the fusion of individualized agency into a collective form, so that the gap between duality and social changes remains.

As subjective intentions may remain in a fragmented state, the performance of duality should belong to the personal domain and, in turn, the influence of social structure becomes predominant. This prominent influence echoes in the study of Campbell and O'Meara (2014), whose analysis of faculty careers showed that although there were interactions between social structure and agency, context played a more important role. Supportive departments were able to fuse individual and institutional goals into an integrated entity that stimulated best practices while, in contrast, constrained contexts produced the opposite results. In a similar vein, Oolbekkink-Marchand, Hadar, Smith, Helleve and Ulvik (2017) revealed that whilst experienced teachers were able to employ innovative strategies to protect their autonomy from structural constraints, such an agentic trajectory was bound to the contextual conditions. By actively interpreting and evaluating the school context, they had to acknowledge the extent to which they might have space for action, and this comprehension assisted them to implement their pedagogical beliefs. Support and trust from school administrators were crucial factors affecting the practice of agency. This relation indicates that social members need to comply with structural rules in order to secure personal gain, so that whereas the combination of knowledgeable and ability energizes the actor to implement agency, creative actions normally operate within the institutionalized path of social structure.

3. The Institutionalized Reward System

As this phenomenon highlights the deeply interwoven relations among ability, power and selfishness, the exertion of agency is mediated by the social context, in which social norms and values act as the yardstick determining the distribution of social status and levels of remuneration. As such, the practice of agency can be conceptualized as an art of social alchemy. Durkheim (1933) argues that social members were bound together originally by primary institutions such as families and localities. While the development of scientific knowledge released them from this mechanical solidarity, the influence of traditional norms declined dramatically, so that it was very difficult to integrate a massive number of individuals into an organized body. This loss of social cohesion and deteriorating social consensus was likely to trigger social chaos. Fortunately, the division of labour provides an effective platform, increasing the density of social interactions that engender a system of shared sentiments and, in turn, facilitating the development of new types of social norms that re-integrate individualized and scattered people into an organic entity. This organic solidarity develops a consensus of collective responsibility, curbing the bio-impulses and desires of individuals, so that the equilibrium of social operation can be sustained. Parsons (1937) argues that social norms need to be transmitted into a value system that functions

in a psychical way, if a society is to achieve stability. When people internalize the value system through the process of socialization, it can be enacted through personality (Parsons and Shils, 2008), so that they are committed to presenting their behavior in a value-oriented form. As the value-orientation becomes the foundation of their judgments, the shared values help society reach substantive agreement and, in turn, its harmonious operation becomes possible (Parsons, 1937).

The value system is not only able to yield harmonious relations among people but also acts as a core ingredient in establishing social institutions. Meyer (1977) argues that the value system benefits the development of social institutions, as evident in the case of the education system, whose value stems from the collective recognition by people of its positive functions, opening up a gateway of upward mobility for working class children. Although this value-led approach indicates that society tends to operate within an institutionalized apparatus, social changes drive it into a dynamic state. According to Lerch, Bromley, Ramirez and Meyer (2017), social operation shifts from a collective structure into an individualized form. As education activates the function of enlightenment, the content of textbooks in modern society tends to address the value of democratic freedom, so that individualism acquires a legitimate status. As a result, they are unleashed from the collective constraint that used to be the main character of the previous stage of society, and the performance of the institutionalized reward system is no longer reliant upon collective structure but individualized agency. Cha and Ham (2014) demonstrated how individuals became the central focus of education in the epoch of globalization because its world-wide norms and values shaped a transnational institutionalized context, in which education no longer acted mainly as an instrumental means of meeting domestic needs but as an institutional embodiment to fulfill its global responsibility. This institutionalized setting thus extended educational functions from bounded national territories to global civil society.

This dynamic development shows that there is a tight correspondence between collective expectations and contextual needs, which legitimizes the institutionalized reward system. This association indicates the existence of an interactive principle. On one hand, social members subscribe to the social value system, and the recognition rule operates in an institutionalized system. As this ensemble is derived from the public's collective expectations, it obtains legitimate authority to command the distribution of social resources and rewards. Consequently, the conduct and manners of social members are extensively accommodated by the reward system, which functions in an institutionalized form imbedded within the system of social norms or values (Mayhew, 1985; Parsons, 1937). On the other hand, the institutionalized reward system is inscribed in people's minds, so that it can govern their attitudes and behavior. According to Foucault (1991), through the mechanism of schooling, which is able to instill certain types of social values, social members can be transformed into docile bodies, who internalize the prevailing values and behave as self-governing agents. In this way, schooling enables the dominant

groups to reformulate the souls of social members, so that they become strong supporters (Popkewitz, 2000). Ross (1999) argues that while the development of the democratic system of government has reduced the political power of the state, the notion of freedom has become a new apparatus for carrying out social control over individuals by shaping their subjectivities in school, so that morality can be instilled into children through the process of internalization. As a result, social members are successfully re-assembled from being the subjects of legal and constitutional rights/obligations into a synthesis whose power and duties are articulated in the language of social needs. Furthermore, social control, shifting from political society to civil society, highlights the fact that reshaping the soul has become the new focus of governing technology because it increases the subjective commitment to values and ways of life.

Accordingly, when the institutionalized reward system is instilled into people's minds, they become self-governing agents, who subscribe to the legitimacy of its authority, so that the distribution of social resources, remuneration, status, honor and prestige is viewed as a natural outcome. The fusion of inscribed minds and the subscribed entity comprises the system of social norms and values that institutionalizes the reward system. This institutionalized figure effectively encourages people to acquire social honor. Polanyi (1944) argues that wealthy people devote themselves to engaging in non-profit activities in order to win social respect, so that human behaviors are largely administered by social accounts, such as social status, honor and dignity. This phenomenon indicates that an institutionalized system tends to institute the rules and space of social rewards, so that the structure of society converts itself into a routinized organism, providing a stable and predictable path for social actions. As argued by Berger and Luckmann (1991), the typification of habitualized actions constitutes shared experiences between actors, so that a bank of common knowledge enables the actor to predict predefined patterns of conduct embedded within the institute. The background of habitualized activity thus opens up a foreground for deliberation and innovation that creates a fertile space for him or her to exercise agency. Therefore, interpreting and envisaging an institutionalized program enables actors to release themselves from the position of structural appendage and to act as creative initiators. As collective expectations found social rules, the mechanisms of reward and sanction attain a legitimate status, so that the value system becomes the irreplaceable composition of structural rules. As a result, social operation is reliant upon the institutionalized reward system because it is able to reduce the gap between individualized needs and a common good. Conforming to this institutionalized rule allows the actor to occupy a privileged position, so that practicing agency within this institutionalized form can be conceptualized as social alchemy. This relation reveals that in order to perform social alchemy, agential exertion needs to be within the rules of social structure because complying with its order is likely to help the actor acquire benefits.

4. Chinese Culture and Social Capital

Unlike Western cultures, which emphasize individualism, the key character of Chinese culture is collective. This collectivism, partly generated by Confucianism, is characterized by behavioral principles of collectivity, conformity and reciprocity, the purposes of which are to construct harmonious relationships with others. This is evidenced by the fact that when dealing with conflicts, for example, most Chinese intend to employ non-confrontational strategies, such as avoidance and accommodation (Lin, 2010). This collectivism is also associated with the family value system, which functions as the core element in safeguarding the operation of Chinese society. It has been argued that this value was born in the specific context of ancient Chinese society, in which agriculture was the main industry. The key components of this industry were land and the system of irrigation, which could only be constructed and preserved by organized manpower. This historical context furnished a huge space for the expansion of the big family, which functioned as an institutionalized site, protecting its numerous members and accumulating wealth for them (Yang, 2002, Yang and Ye, 2005). As the family social space became a vital core of life, daily social interactions between family members became intensive and, in turn, this situation fostered the development of a family-oriented value that espoused the members' commitment to protecting their family's reputation. This relation indicates that the family-oriented culture was able to fuse the members' individualized motivations into a collective genus, so that outstanding performances not only certified an actor's excellent ability but also helped win prestige for the entire family from society (Yang, 2002, Yang and Ye, 2005).

Hwang (1987, 2005) argues that this family culture further incubates a face-oriented culture because of the emotional commitment originally associated with the blood chain of large families. The main obligation of the master of a big family was to solve conflicts among its members. However, impersonal rules would jeopardize the emotional linkage that was the core ingredient in sustaining the family-oriented value and preventing families from falling apart. This dilemma eventually made the family master inclined to sustain the harmonious relationship among the family members. As this mediatory role required a considerable degree of authority, this situation further reinforced this solidaritic preference. This could be evidenced by the methods of resource allocation, in which priorities were determined not through principles of neutrality but based firstly on blood relationships, next on friendship, and finally on the equality principle. This culture tended to scaffold emotional concordance by avoiding insults to people, so that emotional coherence sped the development of a face-oriented culture. As big families and blood-led villages were the main units of ancient Chinese society, face-orientation became a key feature of Chinese culture. This aspect of the culture has survived the impact of industrialization, and in its modern manifestation transformed itself into conventions of courtesy for social interactions, such as the custom of giving gifts to construct and consolidate social networks.

As social networks circulate important information that helps actors achieve their goals effectively, the function of social capital motivates people to construct proper social ties. In competitive situations this motivation is further amplified because social capital assists the actor to occupy a privileged position (Lin, 2002; Szreter, 2000). Although social circles generates collectivity-owned capital, obligations, constituted by the feelings of gratitude, respect and friendship, are able to prevent their members from abusing such a privilege (Bourdieu, 1986). Coleman (1990, 2003a, 2003b) argues that a form of social network closure promotes the density of interactions between its members, which benefits the establishment of common cognition, interests and beliefs, and this context stimulates a strong emotional linkage that certifies collective expectations. This closure context thus ensures the fusion between psychical commitment and group intentions, which engenders a mechanism of norm and trust, functioning to govern the behaviors and manners of group members through collective rewards and sanctions, so that selfishness can be diminished and sharing information between them becomes possible. For Lin (2002), trust functions to strengthen expectations and duties among its members because it supports the development of loyalty in this closure context, which commands them to fulfil their collective responsibilities. Therefore, trust comes to increase their commitment to organizational goals and this scenario improves organizational efficiency (Lins, Servaes and Tamayo, 2017). Bachmann and Kroeger (2017) argue that trust can bring benefits to individual actors as well because it simplify social complexity by supporting the partner's expectations and ignoring other possibilities. It also embraces mutual expectations that make further behaviors of both sides predictable. While this situation improves the efficiency of their interactions, the function of trust is regulated by institutional forms. In this regard, Fuller (2014) proposed that trust was able to benefit the actor's action strategies and results, as attested by the case of students, who have trust in the legitimacy of education, and in particular its ability to affect their future in the labor market. This, in turn, leads them to develop a high level of aspiration, which assists them to accumulate social capital without parental help. This principle also occurs within families, in which parents display supportive values of and attitudes towards education, leading their children to adopt a self-directed strategy for personal improvement that increases the volume of their social capital.

The above findings indicate that when trust is supported by the social system, it will operate in an institutionalized form that effectively ensures the circulation of important information between group members through the mechanism of mutual understanding. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) found that as the roots of intellectual capital were deeply embedded within social networks, an institutional setting was able to increase social capital that assisted its members to share intellectual capital and, in turn, this scenario facilitated the development of new intellectual capital. For Granovetter (2003a), the fact that social capital is embedded within social relationships enables it to create a dual mechanism,

comprising of self-government and collective integration. Socialization makes group members internalize its norms into their value system, which mediates their behaviors automatically. As this value system corresponds with their collective expectations, they can be reintegrated into an organized group, so that their actions are no longer dominated by selfishness, but by social accounts such as honor and prestige that are extensively conditioned by norms. The interplay between trust, expectation and obligation constitutes a norm that functions to integrate the group members into an entity empowered with a self-steering cognition and collective authority, the combination of which proliferates to the utility of social capital in the closure form of social networks.

In contrast, some researchers advocate the open form of social networks. Granovetter (2003b) found that while a strong tie increased members' commitment to trust, their interactions generally occurred within a limited sphere, so that weak ties tended to open up more opportunities for them to interact with outsiders. Lin, Cook and Burt (2001) argue that the interaction of social ties grants its occupiers access to useful information that is scattered unevenly across different groups. For Wellman and Frank (2001), this crucial conjunction engenders multiple forms of interactions with a variety of persons who channel important information. Accordingly, Burt (2007) rejects the closure form of social ties by pointing out its weakness – 'homophily,' which makes contacts between members become redundant, or even a waste of time. This closure structure also makes information acquisition occur simultaneously, which restricts its members ability to seize a privileged position in a competitive situation in advance. In order to overcome these structural constraints, the actor needs to construct multi-forms of weak ties. While important information is embedded within the structural holes that connect different groups and filter information, the actor needs to possess the insight to discover such embeddedness.

Although disputes about the relative value of closure and open forms of social ties remain, Putnam (2001) seems to conceptualize these two types as distinct means of bonding and bridging social capital, as they are applied to a single homogenous group and between heterogeneous social clubs respectively. It is argued that bridging social capital tends to bring more benefits to the actor, such as earning, than bonding social capital (Growiec and Growiec, 2010; Zhang, Anderson and Zhan, (2011). This argument was verified by Kwon, Heflin and Ruef (2013). They found that social capital in connected organizations on the community level was likely to assist its members to be self-employed. In contrast, it was difficult to have such advantage in isolated organizations. Other studies further indicate that the supportive situation is the core factor of generating social capital. Allan and Catts (2014) argue that the distribution of social capital is uneven due to its personal locale and territories, inhabiting a specific social context in which a supportive situation tends to encourage its insiders to develop social capital. For Fuller (2014), the supportive spaces of institutions encourage easy and informal linkages between their members. Therefore, such contexts are much more likely to enable students to obtain

social capital that rewards their academic achievements. Tang (2015) further argues that social capital is highly moderated by social contexts, within which actors' ability to construct social networks and attitudes towards them develop. This was exemplified by the involvement of immigrant parents in schools, which indicated that home-based rather than school-based activities were the focus of their actions, and inert minds resulted from their limitations with respect to English language and school knowledge.

Overall, the utility of social capital can be interpreted as the practice of duality because embeddedness comprises structural rules, the discovery of which requires knowledgeability, and using social capital by occupying the structural holes or constructing a closure form of social networks is to exercise agency. Furthermore, social capital is moderated by social contexts, cultures and other conditions, which come to mould the actor's knowledgeability and ability. As the social culture affects the exertion of social capital, Chinese school heads may adopt different strategies from their western counterparts.

5. Chinese School Heads and Social Alchemy

Veblen (1994) argues that wealth has become the prime yardstick of ability, so that wealthy people win social status and honor. Outstanding achievement also serves to certify someone's ability, so that it embodies a similar function to the icon of wealth. The face-oriented and family-oriented features of Chinese society further reinforce this social icon because these cultural features emphasize the value of professional posts. In this way, achievements embrace dual functions, certifying actors' outstanding ability and enhancing their family's reputation, which naturally become a core force in motivating people to pursue promotion. This psychical inclination tends to incubate corruptions in Chinese society, which have been extensively reported as a social phenomenon (Guo, 2013, Guo and Li, 2015, He, 2000, Shieh, 2005, Sun and Gao, 2015, Wang, 2013, Wedeman, 2005). This scandalous game reveals that the briberies function as a social catalyst, fusing some officials and bribers into an interest group. As personal intentions are able to gear the operation of power, legitimate authority is unable to retain a neutral form, so that personal advantage should be defined as the core ingredient in directing the actor's intentions and behaviors. Whereas social networks are able to assist actors to obtain important information, social cultures affect the volume of social capital. Collectivism is the main feature of Chinese culture, as manifested through family-orientation and face-orientation, and this collective culture increases people's emotional commitment. The desire for enhancement of personal and family status, thus, establishes school head as a position within the realm of personal privilege rather than that of public interest.

As school heads occupy structural holes connecting the school and other social groups simultaneously, representing closure and open forms of social networks respectively, they have more opportunities to access important information. However, as the desire for

promotion comes to dominate their efforts, they may apply their legitimate authority to increase social capital for personal purposes, rather than the collective goals of schools. In other words, legitimate authority, bestowed by the post, becomes the tool for constructing social circles that meet a school head's personal needs. This promotion-led desire is further reinforced by the rule of social resource distribution, which is not based on the equity principle but a blood/emotional-led concern (Hwang, 1987, 2005), which can be acquired through social ties. While this situation engenders a collective expectation impelling school heads to strive for more resources for their teachers and students through social capital, personal concerns are able to transform this public endorsement into the personal domain. As social networks assist actors to create a strong emotional connection with the persons who have power to affect their promotion, school heads will devote themselves to participating in social group activities. However, this selfishness is coated by an outer veneer of collective missions, so that their sin is remitted.

6. Conclusions

Although legitimate authority empowers school heads to implement a common will, personal concerns come to steer their power. Their intentions are protected by a structured context, in which they simultaneously situate themselves in the structural holes of closure and open forms of social networks, and this privileged position proliferates to their personal advantage by increasing their access to important information. This structured arrangement perfectly fits in the institutionalized context of Chinese society, in which the combination of family-oriented and face-oriented culture honors important posts, so that promotions become a social icon certifying the seeker's outstanding ability and his or her family's reputation. As a result, promotion tends to be the main goal of Chinese school heads. This relationship is espoused by the rule of social resource distribution in Chinese society, not based on the equity principle but the blood/emotional formulation that can be acquired through social ties. Such a situation is highly likely to impel them to form networks and social circles. This phenomenon reveals that the fusion between Chinese culture and social capital constitutes an institutionalized context that stipulates the rule of social rewards. The institutionalized rule tends to encourage Chinese school heads to be social creatures, devoting themselves to participating in social groups in order to develop friendships with those people who have power to affect their promotions. While this game encompasses the character of selfishness, collective expectations, which require them to win more resources for teachers and students through social capital, blurs such personal attempts.

This relation indicates that the institutionalized reward system is able to accommodate the practice of duality because discovering the rule of Chinese culture is equivalent to the notion of knowledgeability, and the ability to construct social networks can be interpreted as professional ability. Constructing social capital becomes an art tending towards social alchemy in Chinese society, in which traditional culture constitutes an institutionalized

context that institutes the space and path of creative actions. In this way, the exercise of agency within its institutionalized rules is able to shield personal intentions. As there are social rewards embedded within this institutionalized context, which is engendered by Chinese culture, school heads need to discover this embeddedness in order to secure personal gain. Exercising agency within the institutionalized context serves to objectify their subjective intentions. Their privileged position, situated in structural holes, further increases this possibility, whereby the practice of duality is much like an art of social alchemy. While performing this alchemy can be viewed as the practice of duality, the institutionalized reward system prescribes the scope and path of agency.

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