Literacy, Identity and Schooling: A Case Study of Literacy Practices of

'Peasant Workers' in Northern China

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Abstract

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Peasant workers refer to those who were originally doing farm work in rural areas and who have rushed into cities to find more economically rewarding jobs in China. They are marginalized economically, socially and culturally. This thesis provides a qualitative study on the literacy practices of the peasant workers in Northern China. Peasant workers' subjective interpretations of their lives and literacy practices are the main source of data and a phenomenological perspective functions as the theoretical underpinning for data analysis.

The author mainly examines the meaning of literacy for peasant workers in the Chinese culture, the relationship of literacy and identity, and the role of schooling in literacy in peasant worker's lives. The thesis concludes that literacy education for peasant workers in China is, by its nature, oppressive, authoritarian and antidemocratic. The author also provides some suggestions to make literacy education more emanicipatory and more empowering.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father Zhiyu Sun.

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Chapter I
Introduction

On September 4th, 2003, UNESCO released the newest statistics concerning literacy around the world. According to this report, China has made the biggest gains among 40 countries that had been investigated (Cited in SOHU, 2003, NP). It is said that the number of illiterate adults (over 15 years of age) has dropped from 18.2 million to 8.5 million and the illiteracy rate has dropped from 22.23% to 8.72% from year 1990 to 2000. But what can these figures mean to literacy researchers and practitioners? What is the story behind these numbers, particularly of those 'illiterates'? This thesis aims to study the literacy practices of one of the marginal groups in China that is supposed to enjoy most the benefits of literacy education – 'peasant workers' [1]. Having lived in cities where the population includes many peasant workers, I have the hunch that literacy might not have brought them what was expected – independence, empowerment and emancipation. Feeling for their situation, I have the eagerness to delve into this problem and try my best to find out how they participate in literacy practices in the current social dynamic; what challenges and difficulties they have in fulfilling their tasks and how we, as educationists, can help them in achieving the empowerment and emancipation that literacy purports to offer. Therefore, I decided to choose the literacy practices of peasant workers as the theme for my Master thesis.

[1] 'Peasant worker' is a literal translation of the Chinese counterpart 'Min Gong'. 'Min' refers to peasants and 'Gong' means workers. Although this term suggests derogatory meanings, I will use this translation in this thesis since it becomes the fixed term and reflects the actuality in China.

In this introductory chapter, I am going to provide some background information about peasant workers: who they are and what is their socioeconomic and sociocultural situation. After that, I will go on to discuss the education that peasant workers have received, illustrating as well the theoretical underpinnings of that education. In the end, I will present the objectives and questions of this research.

Peasant Worker

Definition of peasant workers

"We walk from one city to another,
from 1980s to the next century.
This city changes with each passing day.
It is illuminated by a myriad of twinkling lights.
But my dear brother, none of them belongs to me.
My dear brother, none of them belongs to us."

This is a popular song among a unique class of people that has emerged in China since 1980s. From big cities to small townships we can see millions of them busy building skyscrapers, manufacturing goods on production lines, working as waiters or waitresses and vending all kinds of merchandize. They have various names: 'floating population', 'workers from outside', 'temporary residents', 'blind flows' etc. The most common name for them in Chinese translates most closely to peasant workers. Peasant workers refer

to those who were originally doing farm work in rural areas and who have rushed into cities to find more economically rewarding jobs (Peilin Li, 2002). According to the research done by Liu (1995), the average population that flew from rural areas to cities was 80 million every year in 1990s and more and more rural people are moving into the cities in the 21st century. Peasant workers have grown up into a huge class that cannot be ignored in the Chinese society.

Just as many industry workers were generated in the process of the modernization of the western societies, the emergence of the flow of peasants from countryside to cities is seen as an inevitable consequence of the industrialization and urbanization of the Chinese society (Shenming Li, 2002, p1). However, distinguished from industrial workers in Western countries, the Chinese peasant workers face a particular problem: the refusal to be fully accepted in the cities due to their birth in rural areas.

In 1951, the Chinese government introduced a dual system of 'registered permanent residence' . Those who were born in rural areas got rural residence cards and those who were born in urban areas got urban residence cards. A person who does not possess an urban residence card cannot work in cities; some bureaucratic steps need to be done before hand. This rural identity is hereditary. The child of a couple of 'peasants' can only acquire a rural residence card although s/he might be born in a city. Only a person who has

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obtained a university degree and has found a formal job recognized by the government can switch her/his identity from rural to urban. Based on this system, citizens are actually divided into two main groups, rural and urban.

Many policies are framed based on this distinction and in most cases, favor urban citizens. For example, the entire social insurance budget in 1999 was 110 billion RMB, of which 97.7 billion was spent for urban residents which only account for 23% of the whole population, while 12.6 billion was spent for the rural residents which account for 77% of the population (Sun, 2002, p.152). The "registered permanent residence" system actually functions as a 'social enclosure' scheme in which some members of the society are prohibited from sharing urban resources. In contrast to other social enclosure schemes (e.g., diplomas, property rights), this scheme is entirely rooted in birth (Qiang, Li, 2002, p.46). The brand 'rural residents' (usually referred to as peasants) has acquired a negative meaning and is seen as the lower class, rejected from enjoying many political, economical and social benefits,.

Under this situation, the term of peasant worker indicates not only a person's occupation but also his/her identity. It is a combination of a person's métier and social status (Sun, 2002, p.152), similar to a caste. 'Peasant' refers to their social status or identity and 'worker' shows that they are working in industries or service sectors instead of doing farm

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work. They live and work in cities, however, they cannot enjoy the same welfare and rights that are offered to urban residents. In this sense, they can only be described as marginal in the society.

The status quo of peasant workers

People usually believe that the process of urbanization of these 'peasants' is festive, full of joy and dreams fulfilled (Peilin Li, 2002, p. 56). It is true that these peasant workers can earn much more than they would in rural areas. For example, Qiang Li (2002) finds that a person can earn 3.5 times more in a city than in a rural village. At the same time, these workers will be re-socialized into and enjoy urban civilization (Bai & He, 2002, p. 57). However, many researches (Chunguang Wang, 2002; Cui, 2002; Guan & Jiang, 2002; Liu & Liu, 2002) contend that peasant workers are actually marginalized politically, economically, socially and culturally in this process. Basically, these researches describe peasant workers' subordination in the following two ways.

From a socioeconomic perspective, peasant workers are restricted by their rural identity. First, when they move from the countryside to cities, they have to go through many procedures and pay a considerable amount of money to get a work permit. For example, if a rural person wants to work in Beijing, s/he has to pay 450 RMB (approximately 75 Canadian Dollars) per

year to get seven different permits in order to be a legal worker (Sun, 2002, p. 153). These expenses are a big burden for them since their annual income would only be in the average of 4800 RMB (approximately 800 Canadian Dollars) (ibid). Even though they have obtained these certificates, there are still risks that they may be arrested and sent to asylums or sent back to their birth places.

Second, they can only work in certain industries. For instance, the municipality of Nanjing has released a catalog listing all the occupations that a peasant worker can have. These jobs usually involve heavy physical labor, for example, construction, loading, mining, foundry, carpentry, etc. Higher paying and more prestigious jobs are not available for peasant workers (Sun, 2002, p. 153).

Third, their basic rights are not protected in the work place. They must accept unfair employment contracts since they are very anxious to find work. More and more reports (Guan & Jiang, 2002; Cui, 2002; Xiaoyi Wang, 2002; Cai & Du, 2002) show the unfair treatment done to peasant workers: they are often paid at low rates, they work overtime, they are mentally or physically abused by employers and they do not have any pension or insurance. Since these workers do not have urban residence cards, they are excluded from the governmental pension and health insurance benefits that are offered only to urban citizens (Tian, 1994). In summary, peasant workers are officially

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second-class citizens that are exploited both individually and collectively.

From a sociocultural perspective, peasant workers are viewed as low in status. First of all, these workers are experiencing a process of re-socialization when they begin to live and work in cities (Bai & He, 2002, p.2). The new way of life and social regulations are a major adjustment, resulting in culture shock. They have to learn new social rules and cultural codes in order to cope with the unfamiliar circumstances. They are forced to make some sacrifices to adapt themselves to the new world.

Second, they are stigmatized as inferior to those around them – the majority of city people (Yang, 1999) like some immigrant groups in Europe and North America. They are perceived as a threat to public security, to the neatness and orderliness of cities. Words like 'rudeness', 'dirtiness', 'inferior' are often used to disdain them. People laugh at rural people's accent so that they are even shy to speak before other persons. What's more, the self-perception of peasant workers is so much influenced by this stigmatization that they see themselves as 'inferior' as well. They are haunted by deep self-humiliation (Hanlin Li, 2002). In sum, the process of urbanization of these peasant workers is far from being joyful or brilliant. Instead of enjoying urban civilization, they are assimilated as second-class residents and are losing their voices. The

course of it is full of pain and shame although it does bring some economic return to them.

From the above discussion, we conclude that the emergence of peasant workers is an inescapable result of the modernization and industrialization of the Chinese society. However, they are a powerless class and are exploited and pressed both politically and economically. In order to investigate the role of literacy and education in this process, we need to know what literacy education they have received. In the following section, I am going to introduce and analyze the education programs that have been planned for and offered to peasant workers.

The Literacy Education of Peasant Workers

The education that peasant workers receive can be separated into two parts, literacy education in rural areas and on-site training after they move into the cities. The Chinese government carries on a policy that requires nine years of compulsory education both for urban citizens and rural citizens. Most peasant workers have usually gone through some formal education although many of them dropped out before the completing the nine years. At the same time, China treats literacy as central to the education of adults in rural areas. Therefore, when these workers come to the cities, most of them can read and write.

After they find jobs in cities, only a few employers offer on-site training to these workers. According to the statistics, only 9.1% of peasant workers have ever received some skills training (SINA, 2003, NP). In 2003, the government launched a new policy aimed at providing large scale training to peasant workers within the coming seven years. In this training, literacy education might be involved. It greatly influences the literacy practice that a peasant worker is engaged in. In this section, in order to present a comprehensive discussion of the education that peasant workers receive I am going to talk about both the literacy education in rural areas and the on-site training that is going to be offered in the near future.

Literacy education in rural areas

The People's Republic of China was declared on October 1st, 1949. The illiteracy rate was then 85% (Dutta, 1987, p.31). In post-revolutionary China, literacy has been viewed as critical to the effort of reconstruction. Therefore, the attack on illiteracy began almost immediately after the establishment of the new regime. Many plans have been initiated and many programs carried out. Various methods are used including establishing evening schools, part-time literacy groups, a personal responsibility system(relating people's salaries with their efforts to improve their literacy performance), and so on (Dutta, 1987, pp.34-35). Although the adult

education policy is set by the government, actual programs are carried out by a range of educational institutions, mass organizations, commune municipalities and enterprises.

For the Chinese government, a worker or a cadre in a city is considered to be literate if s/he recognizes 2000 Chinese characters and a peasant, 1500 Chinese characters. At the same time, s/he must be able to carry on simple numerate calculations and be able to read simple articles (SOHU, 2003, NP). According to this standard, the illiteracy rate was 8.72% for adults from 15 to 50 (SOHU, 2003, NP) in a census done in 2000, a huge drop in 50 years. The Chinese government believes that the emergence of new illiterates will be prevented with the widespread nine-year compulsory education. China ambitiously announces that within 10 to 20 years, all citizens between 15 and 50 will be literate and therefore make China a fully literate nation (Cheng & Mao, 2002, p.361).

The literacy programs for rural residents did provide basic reading and writing skills and is reported to have helped in the improvement of agricultural productivity (Dutta, 1987, p.43), however when these rural residents move to the cities, their skills do not fit with the situation and are no longer adequate. In order to cope with the new working environment, they have to obtain new competencies.

On-site training in cities

The Chinese government has realized the need to equip peasant workers with new expertise to meet the requirements for the modernization and industrialization of the Chinese economy. In October, 2003, six relevant ministries released an outline of training programs to be offered to peasant workers between 2003 and 2010 (SINA, 2003, NP). In this outline, guiding principles, tasks and plans, policies and measurements are all well stipulated.

I.   Guiding Principles

It is clearly stated that training of peasant workers should be oriented towards the industrialization, modernization and urbanization of Chinese society. The ultimate goal is to accelerate the economic development of China, to boost the prosperity of Chinese society and to promote the stability of the social order.

It is also stated that the training program should be carried out by various relevant educational organizations and will be supported by both the central and local governments. Pertinent laws and regulations will be established as well.

II.   Tasks and Plans

From 2003-2005, the government plans to give introductory training to 10 million potential peasant workers (who are living in rural areas but are

willing to find jobs in the cities in the future) and plans to give on-site training to the current 50 million peasant workers (who already moved into and are working in cities). From 2006-2010, the government plans to give introductory training to 50 million potential peasant workers and plans to give in-service training to the 200 million peasant workers who will be working in cities then.

Introductory training refers to training that prepares rural people to live in cities, including informing them of all kinds of laws and regulations, supplying them general knowledge about cities and introducing new concepts and values to them. The textbooks for this type of training will be compiled by the central government of the country and be uniform across the country.

In-service training refers to all kinds of expertise training and all kinds of certificate training. The emphasis will be put on skills related to construction, manufacturing, housekeeping and other service industries. The textbooks for this type of training will be compiled by local educational committees.

III. Policies

According to government policy, the successful training of peasant workers should be one of the criteria to assess an official's effectiveness on the job. Provincial and civic governments are to be allocated an amount of funding to carry on training. The cost of training by enterprises will

be exempted from taxes. All levels of teachers and educational institutions are to cooperate with this training plan.

These policy statements are the agenda for the next seven years and express the intention that the implementation of this project will provide enough qualified workers to meet the needs of industrialization and modernization of Chinese society.

In the above writings, I have explained two types of education that a peasant worker might go through: literacy education in rural areas and on-site training after they move into cities. How do these programs help peasant workers? Are they bringing what we expect to these workers? What is the essential character of these programs? In order to have a deeper understanding of these programs, we need to have a look at their theoretical underpinnings and their objectives.

Theoretical underpinnings of the education of peasant workers

There are two main assumptions underlying the literacy programs for rural residents. First, literacy is seen as purely a technique of reading and writing. For example, the criterion set by the government regarding what is a literate person is totally based on the number of Chinese characters s/he can read and write. The slogans used to promote literacy can also illustrate this mentality. For example, the government usually depicts the

literacy education as a campaign to 'eradicate illiteracy' or 'eliminate illiteracy' (ACCU, 2000, NP). Precise time schedules are set when these goals will be achieved (Dutta, 1987). These slogans and plans imply the separation of literacy from its subject and the alienation of literacy from dynamic social contexts. Literacy education in China, therefore, is being understood as instruction in decoding techniques of Chinese characters.

In this perspective, literacy is an independent variable that can be isolated both from people and from social contexts (Street, 2001). It is but a piece of data, something immobilized, concluded, terminated, something to be imparted by one who attained it to one who still does not possess it. However, this view of literacy is problematic since literacy practices vary from culture and culture and cannot be removed from their social and cultural contexts, nor from the context in which the skill is or will be used.

The second assumption is the single and direct relation between literacy and development. This concept is closely related to the above mentioned technical view of literacy. When people are taught the technique of decoding letters or characters, they can do what they like with this newly acquired literacy after that. This is why the Chinese government views adult education as critical to the modernization process. The directives of literacy education clearly stated that these programs are to intensify adult education so as to increase the rate of labor productivity (Dutta, 1987).

The government assumes that once a 'peasant' is literate then s/he will be transformed into a new socialist citizen. Together with this transformation, new culture will be accepted and social prosperity for the state becomes possible.

Another manifestation of this second assumption is shown by seeing illiteracy as a deficit (Rogers, 2001). To give an example, the 'Directives on the elimination of illiteracy' issued on 1978 by the State Council government' best demonstrates this attitude. It stated that efforts must be made "first to blockade, second to wipe out, third to raise" (Dutta, 1987, p. 33). To blockade meant to realize universal primary education. To wipe out meant to get ride of illiteracy among the young and adults. To raise meant to reinforce and raise the level of those who have already become literate. Illiteracy is viewed as a great barrier to the economic and social development of China which must be purged.

This relation made between literacy and development is also problematic. Development is not a neutral and universal term that means the same for everyone and everywhere. There are many paradigms of development concerning the objectives or goals of development. Development of one social group might not mean development for another. In addition, even though development is defined as economic prosperity, there is no evidence that literacy will necessarily lead to it.

Apart from these philosophical assumptions of literacy, we can not neglect another keystone that underlies literacy education for rural people. The Chinese government usually employs literacy education as one of the most powerful means to strengthen its control over the masses. Literacy programs always stress the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (Dutta, 1987) and always underscore the accordance with socialism ideology. Stites (2001, p. 171) concludes that the dominant rational for the Chinese central government's promotion of 'mass literacy' is to diffuse central ideology and control into peripheral communities and in so doing to reduce the marginality of these communities. The central government has strong control over the text books and instruction materials. The legitimization of political hegemony becomes the priority in literacy education.

The content of the training programs for peasant workers also reflects the same assumptions with rural literacy education: that education or training can be purely technical and can bring development both to peasant workers and to the country. On the one hand, program designers put emphasis on the training of skills so that they can be employable in the cities. On the other hand, they employ many measures to facilitate the assimilation of these peasant workers into the current societal structure, yet as we have found out, only as second class citizens. The Chinese government wants these workers to be politically good citizens who are useful for economic

development. The educational process is totally initiated, designed and implemented from the top – down perspective and the participation role of peasant workers is minimized.

Research Questions

On the basis of the preceding discussion as well as from a review of the literature, the objectives of this study may be stated with particular reference to the case of China:

1. Understand the nature of the concept of literacy; understand the particular social meaning of literacy in the Chinese culture;

2. Explore the relationship between literacy and identity, literacy and schooling, literacy and empowerment;

3. Analyze (based on their perception of their worlds) whether peasant workers have been empowered by the literacy training they have received;

4. Propose a general principle for the planning and implementation of literacy programs for these peasant workers.

In accordance with these objectives, my research questions can be conceptualized as follows:

1. What is literacy? What does literacy mean in the Chinese culture?

2. What is the relationship between literacy and identity? What is the

relationship between literacy and schooling?

3. How does the literacy education influence these peasant workers? What are their interpretations of life, literacy, education, knowledge etc. ? How do they understand themselves and their new lives in cities? Are they equipped after becoming literate to deal effectively with city life?

4. If not, what implications can be drawn? What kind of literacy programs would be more effective for them? How can we improve the current education to empower peasant workers so that they can participate fully in both the rural and the urban spheres of Chinese society?

In the following sections, I will first provide a literature review on literacy and related concepts. Basically, I am going to discuss the literature on the following three topics: the nature of literacy; literacy and identity; literacy and schooling. This section will also serve as a template to analyze my data and discuss my findings (Given, 2003, NP). A chapter on methodology will follow. In this part, I will explain why I use a qualitative method and case study approach as my research framework. Then, I will discuss the philosophical underpinning of the framework, describe the research contexts and blend them with an account of some interesting events that happened in the field. I believe that this account will shed

light on our understanding of the research as well. In the fourth chapter, I will concentrate on the findings of the research and my analysis in light of the theories expressed in the previous chapters. Through their perspectives and my interpretation, I will concentrate on revealing how the concept of literacy is socially constructed, how their identity is shaped by dominant ideologies and how schooling plays a role in peasant workers' lives. The last chapter of this thesis will provide a conclusion and explain how the results of this research can be applied in the planning, implementation and evaluation of literacy programs in China.

Chapter II
Literature Review

The literature in the field of literacy is massive and substantial. I hope

that my literature review not only summarizes, interprets and describes what

has come before but also analyzes, criticizes and derives key issues from

the literature (Spiers, 2003, NP). At the same time, the literature review

should allow me to examine new data in light of existing findings. I will

try to have this literature review serve as a template to analyze my data

and discuss my findings (Given, 2003, NP). Since this thesis endeavors to

analyze the literacy practices of peasant workers in China from social and

ideological perspectives, my work will particularly concentrate on the

literature that deals with how literacy is socially constructed and practiced

and the role of literacy in people's lives.

The review is divided into three parts. The first part is concerned with

two distinguished philosophies of looking at literacy: the 'autonomous'

model and the 'ideological' model. From the comparison of these two models,

we can have a better understanding of the nature of literacy. In my later

analysis, I will use the conclusion of this part to discuss the nature of

literacy in Chinese culture. The second part analyzes the relationship

between literacy and identity and the relationship between literacy and

socialization. The emphasis is to demonstrate how a person's identity is

shaped by his/her literacy discourses. In my later analysis of the research

data, this part will help me to investigate the self-consciousness of peasant

workers and to illustrate how their identity is being influenced and reconstructed when they move from villages to cities. The third part deals with the relationship between literacy and schooling in the operations of social power. The function of school in spreading dominant literacy will be discussed. In the analysis, this part will help us to understand the role of formal education in peasant workers' lives.

The Nature of Literacy

There is no settled definition of literacy, which is a constant topic in the current literature. Apparently there is no definite conclusion. Basically, our understanding of literacy has developed in two stages. At the first stage, theorists are mainly concerned with the rigid dichotomies between orality and literacy. Here it is believed that as a people move from an oral to literate tradition that literacy brings fundamental cognitive development and socioeconomic betterment. The second stage, which has won more and more supporters, takes a more situated approach to the understanding of literacy. Theorists in this camp treat literacy as a social construction which is rooted in social and ideological contexts. In this section, I will compare the literature of both camps of theorists in order to illustrate the nature of literacy.

The first stage: the 'autonomous' model of literacy

Greenfield's study (1972) is the most cited work by the camp of theorists who believe that literacy can improve cognitive skills. She studied the differences in logic development between schooled and unschooled children amongst the Wolof of Senegal and argued that these differences are fundamentally the consequence of the differences between oral and written languages. She maintains that "speakers of an oral language rely more on context for the communication of their verbal messages" (1972, p. 169). The context-dependent speech, she further argues, is tied up with context-dependent thought, which is the opposite of abstract thought (ibid). Greenfield asserts that the superior cognitive operations of schooled children amongst the Wolof were "learnt through the training embodied in written language" (ibid). She concludes that literacy is the basis for mental development. Hildyard and Olson (1978 as cited in Street, 1984, p. 20) quote Greenfield to justify educational systems which develop "intellectual competence that would otherwise go largely undeveloped". Literate persons, they believe, can extract themselves from the embeddedness of everyday social life and are more logical (ibid). Havelock (1963; 1982) also suggests literacy actually makes for a "great divide" between human cultures and their ways of thinking (as cited in Gee, 1986, p. 723). In summary, these theorists believe that literacy itself can bring cognitive development.

The declaration that literacy can lead to higher order cognitive skills is culminated in Goody's (1963, 1968, 1977) articles and books. Goody views writing as a changed mode of communication from orality. Goody (1977) terms literacy as the 'technology of the intellect' and represents what Street (1984) calls the 'technology determinism' (p. 44).

Goody believes that the distinction between literate and non-literate is similar to the traditional one between logical and pre-logical. The writing, he contends, makes the relationship between a word and its referent more general and abstract. It is less closely connected to the peculiarities of time and space than is the language of oral communication. As a result of this enforcement of logic development, writing is also closely connected to the distinction of myth from history, the elaboration of bureaucracy and the emergence of 'scientific' thought and institutions (As cited in Street, 1984).

Except for the cognitive consequence, Goody holds that literacy also facilitates institutional and social development. In his point of view, writing brings the growth of individualism and of more depersonalized and more abstract systems of government, hence the growth of democratic political process (Street, 1984; Gee, 1986).

To summarize the above theorists, literacy leads to logical and analytical thought, distinction between myth and historical fact, individual

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attitudes, complex and modern society and economic development. The popular

conception that literacy has such favorable effects constitutes what Graff

(1986; 1987) calls the 'literacy myth'.

Street (1984; 1987; 2001) categorizes the above model as the

'autonomous' model of literacy. He defines this model as follows:

> "The model assumes a single direction in which literacy
> development can be traced, and associates it with 'progress',
> 'civilization', individual liberty and social mobility. ⋯ It
> isolates literacy as an independent variable and then claims to
> be able to study its consequences. These consequences are
> classically represented in terms of economic 'take off' or in
> terms of cognitive skills"
>
> (Street, 1984, p. 2)

Labov (1973) provides an argument against the 'autonomous' model of

literacy by carrying out a research on the black youths in the New York ghetto.

These ghetto youths were supposed to be underdeveloped in speech and hence,

logic. However, Labov finds out that their speech has all the qualities

generally associated with logical thought. He discovered that these black

students were seen as cognitively 'deprived' because people were trying

to understand their language and action from an ethnocentric perspective.

Such writers as Greenfield and Olson were, in fact, testing mainly the

explicitness of language although they assume this to be 'cognitive

flexibility' and logic (Street, 1984, p. 27). That is, these studies

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essentially test for social conventions, instead of universal logic. These theorists are evaluating different literacy practices by comparing them with the Western essay-text type of literacy (Gee, 1986, p. 731). In addition, by labeling the non-literate cultures as pre-logical, they try to maintain that their own conventions are superior.

The revolutionary work on the Vai in Liberia by Scribner and Cole (1981) has redefined the whole scenario of the cognitive effects of literacy. Liberia is a multilingual society. Residents speak Vai language in daily lives, use Arabic in religious contexts and use English in government and educational institutions. Different people have different language capacities, which allowed the researchers to study the cognitive effects of each language. Scribner and Cole finally conclude that "school fosters abilities in expository talk in contrived situations" (1981, pp. 242-243). What's more, Scribner and Cole further find that these abilities tend to disappear in a few years after students leave the school contexts. Therefore, extravagant claims for massive and universal cognitive skills resulting from literacy have not, in fact, been revealed.

Besides the cognitive consequence, those who see literacy as an autonomous force always claim that literacy is connected with social mobility and success in society. Graff (1979) overrides this belief by his study of the role of literacy in the 19th century. He maintains that although literacy

is supposed to beneficial to poor workers, it is actually not advantageous to them at all. These groups are deprived not because of their 'illiteracy' but because of their poverty. This again proves that literacy must be considered with a wide range of other social factors in order to be fairly assessed.

Street provides a strong critique of this 'autonomous' model of literacy. Basically, he questions this conception from two perspectives. First, the tests that aimed at investigating logic and reasoning abilities often test such factors as explicitness, the nature of which is more clearly dependent on the social conventions and cultural context (Street, 1984, p. 4) as argued in Labov and Scribner's work. Many sociological and anthropological researches (Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Lévi-Strauss, 1966 as cited in Street, 1984) demonstrate that logic exists within unfamiliar conventions as firmly as in Western cultures. In fact, it is virtually impossible to set up a measure by which different performances of logic across different social groups can be reliably assessed (ibid).

That being said, the theorists who believe that certain form of literacy can lead to logical development are reviving the 'great divide' theory that has been so discredited by social anthropologists and sociologists (Street, 1984, p. 24). The findings that embody the 'autonomous' model of literacy are presented as the 'neutral', 'objective' findings of scientists and

thus disguising their ideological basis. "The supposedly technical and neutral nature of the 'autonomous' model of literacy appears to absolve them from the charge that they are making ideological claims about cultural differences" (Street, 1984, p. 29). If literacy is termed as a type of technology, then this technology is ideologically charged (ibid). Actually, any technology, including writing, is a cultural form, a social product whose shape and influence depend upon prior political and ideological factors (Gee, 1986, p. 733). Literacy, if decontextualized and viewed as cognitive, is considered innocent and removed from any discussion of hegemony or domination (Wagner, 1991, p. 12). From the above discussion, we conclude that abstracting literacy from its social setting to evaluate its consequences can lead nowhere.

The second stage: the 'ideological' model of literacy

Street (1982; 1984; 1987; 2001) proposes, in opposition to the 'autonomous' model of literacy, an 'ideological' model. This model stresses the significance of the socialization process in the construction of the meaning of literacy for participants, and is therefore concerned with the general social institutions through which this process takes place. We cannot isolate literacy from the wider social contexts as a disinterested parameter in order to study its consequences. Many researchers (Finnegan, 1981, 1982 as cited

in Street, 1984; Parry, 1982) subscribe to this model and argue in its favor.

Heath (1982; 1983) contributes to this conception by analyzing how pre-school children from both mainstream families (white middle-class) and the working class learn reading skills differently. She describes how these social groups "take" knowledge from the environment, instead of treating reading as a universal technical skill. The results she got show that children acquire different cultural assumptions and premises based on how bed time stories are narrated. Diverse ways of narrating stories are embedded in various social practices and customs for different groups. Language learning and socialization are "two sides of the same coin" (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984, as cited in Gee, 1986). In literacy events, not only are reading skills diffused to children, but also the norms and values of the communities. Furthermore, mainstream children learn an infrastructure of pedagogical practices and cultural assumptions which match those they will encounter in schools. In other words, the literacy practices representing different ideologies socialize children into different world views which will either be rewarded or discouraged in later school experiences.

We conclude that literacy cannot be decontextualized from the above comparison between the "autonomous" model and the "ideological" model of literacy. Instead, literacy practices, including pedagogies and curricula, are by definition the textual representations and products of particular

cultural contexts, institutional conditions and political interests (Freebody & Welch, 1993, p. 3). The nature of literacy is social and ideological. To understand what literacy means in a special culture, we must first investigate the social and ideological dynamics within which the concept of literacy is construed.

Literacy and Identity

Scollon and Scollon (1981) studied the concept of literacy from a personality psychological perspective. They argued that discourse patterns (oral or written) in different cultures are not just ways of communication and nor are they value free. On the contrary, they reflect a particular reality set or world view and are among the strongest expressions of personal and cultural identity (Gee, 1986). Their contention is based on a study of Athabaskans living among North American Anglophone society. Literacy practices of these two cultures are so different that they represent conflicting values. Acquiring a different sort of literacy, therefore, is parallel to a re-socialization process in which new values, new world views and new social practices are learned. It is much more than learning a new technology. The study inferred that teaching literacy to previously non-literate people involves an implicit process of re-socializing to new ways of thinking and doing that may violate the existing social order.

Sociolinguistic research also shows that language variation is pervasive in modern societies and, further, that this variation marks social background and social activities (Gumperz, 1982; Labov, 1972, as cited in Collins & Blot, 2003, p. 104). Gee (1996) raises an example of how language variation figures in processes of identity construction. English-speaking people use - ing (talking, sleeping, etc.) as a standard form in formal situations and use - in (talkin, sleepin, etc.) as a colloquial form in informal circumstances. To Gee, -ing marks hierarchy and - in has more sociability. '-ing' and '-in' comprise a pair of alternates in language selection. Therefore, we can conclude that selections from a multiplicity of language variants enable people to inhabit a multiplicity of overlapping identities (for example, a mother, a factory worker, a Christian, etc.).

Gee (1989a, 1989b) illustrates his understanding of literacy in its relation with Discourse (with capital "D"). By Discouse, Gee (1989b) means:

> a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of
> thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as
> a member of a socially meaningful group or "socially network"
>
> (p. 18)

He succinctly puts Discourse as a sort of "identity kit". Whenever we use language we must say or write the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs, and

attitudes (Gee, 1989a, p. 6). Discourses are combinations of these forms of life which integrate words, actions, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes (ibid). In summary, Discourses are ways of being in this world.

Discourses are inherently ideological and are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in the society (Gee, 1989b, p. 19). Any discourse concerns itself with certain objects and puts forward certain concepts, viewpoints, and values by marginalizing viewpoints and values central to other discourses (ibid).

Gee further distinguishes 'primary discourse' and 'secondary discourse'. Primary discourses are our socio-culturally determined ways of using our native language in face-to-face communication with intimates (1989b, p. 22). They are often oral and are acquired through primary socialization. In a modern technological and urban society like ours, it is inevitable for us to contact social institutions beyond the family. These secondary institutions include schools, stores, government offices, business sectors and churches. Discourses beyond the primary discourse are developed when people access and interact with these secondary institutions (ibid). Secondary discourses often involve written languages that go beyond our primary discourses.

Therefore, Gee (1989a, 1989b) defines literacy as control of the uses

of language in secondary discourses. Since there are many types of discourses, there are various types of literacy. Dominant literacy refers to control of a secondary use of language used in a dominant discourse (Gee, 1989b, p. 23). The dominant discourse or dominant literacy is more or less compatible with primary discourses of different social groups. Children from mainstream families will find the dominant literacy easy for them to practice since their primary discourse is highly compatible with the dominant one. Children from non-mainstream homes often do not get the opportunity to acquire dominant secondary discourses due to their parents' lack of access to these discourses (Gee, 1989b, p. 24).

Languages from different Discourses transfer into, interfere with, and influence each other to form the linguistic texture of entire societies and to interrelate various groups in society (Gee, 1989a, p. 14). "Filtering" is a process whereby aspects of language, attitudes, values and other elements of certain types of secondary Discourses are *filtered* into primary Discourses (ibid, p. 15).

In summary, language variants enable people to inhabit a multiplicity of identities and a person's identity is embedded in his/her discourses which are socially and ideologically constructed. Both of these two points illuminate that identities are constructed, rather than given by the primordial criteria of race, language, place of origin, etc. (Friedman, 1994

as cited in Collins & Blot, 2003, p.105). Literacy represents secondary

Discourse which actually functions as a scheme to benefit mainstream children

and disadvantage non-mainstream children.

Literacy and Schooling

In this section I will discuss the role of one of the main secondary

institutions - school in literacy development. It is an unquestioned part

of present day social knowledge that literacy is both the purpose and the

product of schooling (Cicourel and Mehan, 1984 as cited in Cook-Gumperz,

1986).Research on literacy and schooling mainly concerns how universal

public schooling helps to form a cultural-ideological identity from among

the diverse populations administered and regulated by a given state (Collins

& Blot, 2003, p.96) through promoting 'schooled literacy'. Literacy

learning confirms and sustains dominant Literacies and dominant discourses

through daily interaction in classrooms, thus creating an educational

hegemony. The complete analysis of schooled literacy provides not only a

familiar account of expanding educational participation and rising literacy

rates but also explores the less-often-noted exclusions, resistances, and

forms of gender, race, and class domination that accompanied the spread of

modern schooling (Collins & Blot, 2003, p.65).

Becoming literate in conventional terms means learning all writing and

reading skills in a culturally organized and culturally appropriate fashion (Ferdman, 1991, p. 99). The technology of reading, while supposedly neutral, entails a practice or use of that technology that requires rules and regulations about proper or correct use (Luke, 1998. p. 17). Then, who decides and enforces these rules and regulations concerning language?

Cook-Gumperz (1986) develops a social perspective on literacy and on its acquisition within a contemporary school context. She examines how the relationship between literacy and schooling evolved in the last few centuries. With the industrialization and modernization of Western countries, the role of literacy has reversed from being a dangerous radicalism inherent in acquiring literacy to the opposite view that the social and political danger is in having illiteracy in the population (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p. 28). This transition was triggered by two events whose purposes and goals were generally opposed. First, the popular literate culture of ordinary people defined literacy and the achievement of schooling as part of their individual and personal development. The expansion of schools grew directly out of this popular literacy development. Secondly, there was a need for a work force prepared for increasingly industrialized employment with a set of proper disciplines and behavioral codes (ibid, p. 29).

The second mission of schools finally brings the popular cultural force of literacy under control. The concept of literacy has transited from an oral

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and pluralistic tradition to a single and stratified body of knowledge. Through schooling, literacy became linked to a teaching-learning process that stressed behavioral and moral characteristics, with the ability to decode and encode written symbols as an important but secondary goal (ibid, p. 28). In other words, it is schools which are deciding what is an appropriate way to speak and write.

The major goal of mass schooling was thus to control literacy, not to promote it: to control both the form of expression and the behavior which accompany the move into literacy (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p. 28). Schools become the arbiters of literacy standards (ibid, p. 34). The position of modern educational systems as the institutions of selection and placement for the complex division of labor has made schooling the pre-eminence force (ibid, p. 36). Those who fail in the test paradigm set up by schools are seen as having a lack of abilities not as having a lack of learning or different social skills (ibid, p. 37).

Gee (1989a, 1989b) continues to explain the function of schooling using his discourse theory. Mainstream children practice aspects of dominant secondary discourse (e.g., dominant ones represented in the world of school, government offices and business institutions) in the very act of acquiring a primary Discourse. Therefore, when they come to participate in these secondary institutions, they appear to demonstrate quick and effortless

mastery of dominant secondary discourse. On the other hand, non-mainstream children tend to be slow in learning the secondary discourse due to their lack of training in it via their primary discourse. Gee (1989a) points out that this is a key device in the creation of a group of elites (p. 15).

In summary, the emergence of mass schooling has changed the nature of literacy from multiple traditions to a singular conception. Schooled literacy basically functions as a means to assimilate various social groups into a well-ordered technological society. It also functions as a selecting scheme to sustain the dominant ideology.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed some classic literature in the field of literacy. Literacy should be understood and studied within social contexts. It is charged with ideologies, social conventions and cultural codes. It does not automatically lead to cognitive advancements and social developments.

Literacy also plays an important role in the formation of a person's identity. A change in literacy practices usually involves a change of attitudes, values and beliefs, hence the identity. A dominated group usually has to master the dominant literacy in order to share social goods and advantages.

Schooling, by transiting multiple literacy traditions into a unified

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literacy, maintains and perpetuates dominant control. It disadvantages

dominated groups by neglecting and denying their literacy in the curriculum.

Chapter III
Methodology

This chapter deals with the methodology of this research. I will talk about why I use qualitative research and case study, how phenomenological philosophy helps me to address my research problems, my research design, research contexts and ethical issues. Since qualitative researchers assume that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock comprehensive understanding of what is being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 5), I blend some interesting events that happened during the field work into the text. I believe that we can have a much enriched understanding of this research through the account of these events.

Qualitative Research and Case Study

Qualitative research

This study of literacy practices of peasant workers in Northern China sets out to explore how peasant workers understand themselves and how literacy influences them in the broader context of other factors in their lives. In particular, I seek their perception of literacy, of their situation and of schooling.

Since my aim is to explore their perceptions and gain understanding from their perspectives, I chose a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning (Shank, 2002).

"Meaning" is a basic concern to the qualitative approach. Researchers are

interested in how people make sense of their lives. Therefore, the qualitative research paradigm can serve my purpose in my inquiry.

A fundamental assumption of the qualitative research paradigm is that a profound understanding of the world can be gained through conversation and observation in natural settings rather than through experimental manipulation under artificial conditions (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). Some basic characteristics of qualitative research are given below.

First of all, qualitative research has actual settings as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument. Qualitative researchers are particularly concerned with context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 4). They assume that human behavior is shaped by the setting in which it occurs. Second, qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 6). Daily activities, procedures and interactions are useful for researchers because they are keys to understanding ideological values, social conventions and cultural codes. Last, qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. Theories are developed from the bottom up (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 6). There is no hypothesis to test. Rather, a study may end with hypothesis for further enquiry and possible testing.

My research reflects these characteristics of the qualitative approach. I chose to analyze the literacy practices for peasant workers in their natural

work context. Before I entered the field, no hypothesis had been set up. And the inductive interviews were the main strategy for gathering data. I prepared some guiding questions which help me to organize my ideas during the interviews. However, it was the peasant workers who decided the route and the timing of the interviews. Interview questions emerged as these workers accounted their life stories.

Case study

A case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 54; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1989; Stake, 1994). Eisner (1991) argues that case study methodology is a particularly appropriate research design when the research seeks to explore new areas of investigation or when the boundaries of the phenomenon are limited and when the research is exploratory in nature. My research does not cover peasant workers across China. China is distinguished by its geographical and cultural diversity across the country. The social structures are not the same in every area. My research mainly deals with literacy practices for male construction workers in Northern China. It is better addressed in a case model. What is more, the nature of this research is exploratory. Therefore, case study methodology provides a coherent research design.

Phenomenological Perspective

Most qualitative researchers reflect some sort of phenomenological perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 22). My research design and my data analysis are based on this perspective as well. I think that it is necessary to give a succinct discussion of some of the relevant essential concepts of phenomenology. It will tell us why phenomenologists attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects (Geertz, 1973). It will explain why I think that the understanding of peasant workers' individual perspectives can illuminate whether they are empowered or not. And it will explicate why I believe that peasant workers' factual situation and life constraints can be elucidated by their subjective interpretation of their lives and worlds.

Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz are the main developers of the phenomenological theory. Basically speaking, phenomenology is concerned with the cognitive reality which is embodied in the processes of subjective human experiences (Helmut R. Wagner, 1970, p. 13). According to Husserl, all direct experiences of humans are experiences in and of their "life world" (ibid). Life world is the whole sphere of our everyday experiences, orientations and actions.

Then, how do phenomenologists conceptualize "life world"? Schutz (1970)

further elaborates this "life world" from three angles. First, a man has to encounter and recognize the hard facts which include the objects around him and the wills and intentions of others with whom he deals. This stance is pragmatic, utilitarian and meant to be realistic (p. 15).

Second, each man stands as a person having gone through the long chain of his prior life experiences. Each situation in which he finds himself is an episode in his own ongoing life. Each has entered the present situation with his own purposes and objectives rooted in his past: his unique life history (Schutz, 1970, p. 16). Thus, subjectively, no two persons could possibly experience the same situation in the same way.

Third, each person has a unique "stock of knowledge" on hand. He cannot interpret his life or make plans without consulting this stock of knowledge. This stock of knowledge is constituted in and by previously experienced activities of our consciousness (Schutz, 1970, p. 74). Husserl calls it the "sedimentation" of meaning. Similarly, Gergen (1982) understands individual knowledge as a set of shared, subjective, often taken for granted meanings and assumptions that are socially and historically constructed.

Based on the above understanding of life world, Schutz (1970) further argues that each individual constructs his own "world" with the help of building blocks and methods offered to him by others: the life world is prestructured for the individual (p. 16). The world, then, is given to him.

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Given to him, with it, is a whole world view. This view includes not only interpretations of nature, the cosmos and the supernatural but also the many customs and norms regulating human conduct, plus the many recipes of practical behavior in social as well as technical matters (ibid, pp16-17).

This world view or cultural pattern is handed down to people by ancestors, teachers, and authorities as an unquestioned and unquestionable guide in all situations (Schutz, 1970, p. 81). Mezirow (1995) also stipulates that our meaning perspectives and meaning schemes are learned as generalized implications that we have assimilated from our interaction with our culture and our parents (p. 44). In this way, the objective social conventions and cultural patterns are linked with people's subjective worlds. On the one hand, an individual's subjective interpretation of the world is deeply embedded or rooted in objective social and ideological contexts. On the other hand, social practices and social rules are embodied in people's subjective views of their experiences. Reality, consequently, is "socially constructed" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

To apply phenomenology in my research, I believe that peasant workers interpret their lives by drawing on their 'stock of knowledge' which is acquired through their socialization. The blocks and methods of this stock of knowledge are not preset in their minds. On the contrary, they are passed on by the ancestors, teachers, peers and are assimilated and accumulated

through peasant workers' previous life experiences. Their stocks of knowledge reflect the social conventions, constraints and cultural patterns within which peasant workers live. Through understanding how and what meaning peasant workers construct around events in their daily lives, reality can be unfolded.

Research Design and Data Analysis

Research design

We are clear now that the emphasis of this research is to grasp peasant workers' subjective interpretations of their lives. Therefore, the emphasis is put on the open-ended interviews with these "peasant workers". Basically, my research is divided into three parts.

I. I sent out 26 questionnaires (Sample of Questionnaire See Appendix I) to qualified participants. The object of the questionnaire was to get data on the basic information about their profiles, literacy levels and literacy practices. At the same time, the information helped me to select persons suitable for open-ended interviews.

II. Based on these data, I purposefully selected ten participants from different ages, jobs, levels of literacy and origins of births for interviews (Sample of Guiding Interview Questions See Appendix II). The goal of the interviews was to get an understanding of the participants' perceptions of

the meaning of literacy, the influence of literacy or illiteracy in their lives, etc. The interviews were open-ended thus allowing for the emergence of unexpected data. As the skillful use of the unstructured interview requires a great deal of training and experience (Borg & Gall, 1989) and as I am a novice in this area, I chose a semi-structured interview.

III. I also planed to visit local educational institutions to get relevant laws, regulations and program plans for implementing the "eradicating illiterates" policy in that region.

Data analysis

My data, therefore, stems from questionnaires, interview transcripts and appropriate governmental documents. The analysis of data can be divided into two categories: etic perspectives and emic perspectives.

The goal of the etic perspective is try to understand how participants view their world, what it looks like through their eyes. The emic perspective acknowledges the conceptual and theoretical understanding of the participants' social reality (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). In the chapter on the findings and analysis, I will report interpretations through participants' eyes and then will place that understanding within my theoretical and conceptual framework of the phenomena and reconsider the participants' presentation with the goal to define, unravel, reveal or

explain their world. I believe that this method is proper and fits into the philosophies that I draw on.

Basically, my data analysis consists of four parts. First, I have determined three themes to become categories of focus based on the literature review. They are the nature of literacy in the Chinese culture, the relationship between literacy and identity and the relationship of literacy and schooling. Second, I framed my data collection (questionnaires, interviews) on these three topics. Third, I categorize the data by these focus issues, topics and themes. Last, I analyze the data and write up the final analysis.

I am also aware that my interpretation of my data is drawn from my "stock of knowledge" that is embedded in my social experiences. It is far from impartial and unbiased. I have tried to stay cautious of my assumptions and to embrace a critical attitude to them.

Contexts and procedures

Site selection

I carried out my research in Jinzhou city, a middle-sized city in Liaoning Province located in the northeast of China. The city faces the Bo Sea on the southeast and is surrounded by maintains on the other three sides. Rural villages around it mainly grow agricultural crops and fruit trees. Jinzhou

city is an industrial city with a population of three million. As with many other cities in China, Jinzhou's economy is experiencing the transformation from the planned system to the market-oriented system. The transformation has brought vitality to the city. Many office buildings and resident apartments are popping up like mushrooms.

The main source of construction workers is from the circumjacent villages and counties. The increase in agricultural productivity has produced a lot of surplus labor. These workers come to Jinzhou to find jobs that are more profitable than those in the rural areas. There are eight construction companies which are very similar in their operation and management structures. I finally decided to contact Hua Tian Company, the biggest one in this city which is working on building a new residence block. Hua Tian Company has employed about 500 peasant workers, all of whom are from surrounding villages. These workers are divided into 10-15 groups according to their job classifications.

Access to the company was trouble-free. I explained my purpose and my plan to the general manager of this company and he agreed at once, although he showed his doubt that these workers had the ability to answer my questionnaires or to take part in interviews. He asked me to contact group managers by myself because he was too busy. The management of these groups was very loose. Both the size and the membership of the groups were not fixed

according to different tasks. These workers moved constantly from one working site to another wherever there were jobs. This presented a big difficulty for my research since I hoped to trace my participants for at least two weeks. Finally, I found out from the general manager that one group of about 40 workers was going to stay at one working site for at least 20 days. I called the group manager and explained to him what I wanted to do. He told me that these workers would finish supper after seven o' clock in the evenings and after that they had nothing to do and nowhere to go. He thought that this was a good time to carry out my research. I started my research the next evening (July 15th, 2003).

Participants

At seven o' clock, I arrived at the place where they live. This was a huge block with around 30 new apartment buildings. Approximately 30 workers did painting jobs, and the other 10 workers dig tunnels for the drainer system in this block. All of them are males. These workers lived in one big room in one of the unfinished buildings. Their living place was about 90 square meters. Forty people squeezed into this room. There were no beds, only mattresses. The room became very hot on summer nights and workers usually sat along the street to enjoy the coolness after they finished their suppers.

The group manager was not there but one worker told me that they had been

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told that someone was coming tonight. I explained to these workers about my

purpose and my plan. None of them said anything but many of them smiled with

curiosity. After verifying that none of them held urban residence card, I

sent out my consent forms (Sample of Consent Form See Appendix III) together

with pencils. Some of them began to read these forms and some of them began

to chat. I said that they needed to sign their names if they agreed to

participate and if there was anyone who could not read or write I could carry

on the oral consent procedure (Sample of Oral Consent Form See Appendix IV).

At the beginning, they were very cautious but as long as one or two began

to sign, all of them signed. There was a possible risk here. Did they sign

the consent because they agree or simply because other people signed and they

wanted to follow. I asked one worker who signed after communicating with his

colleagues whether he really understood what was in the consent form. He told

me that he understood, however, he would not like to sign first. He felt

reassured when other people signed as well. I think that this reflects a lack

of autonomy and self-determination in these workers.

After getting the consent forms, I sent out questionnaires. Many of them

were not familiar with this procedure. Although instructions were stated on

the top of the questionnaire, these workers kept on asking me questions about

how to answer it. I used alphabet letters (A, B, C etc.) to mark each choice

in some questions. One of them asked me what that meant and told me that he

knew nothing about these "foreign words". I was surprised but at the same time, I realized how their literacy tradition was different than that of mine. I unconsciously drew on my literacy tradition as a tool to study them.

Four of them could not finish the questionnaires. I read the questionnaires aloud and filled them out for these four workers. At last, I got 26 valid questionnaires. The Table for Basic Information shows the basic information of these 26 workers. I chose participants of various ages and various educational levels for later interviews.

Interviews

Finally, I have chosen Jun, Hui, Chun, Dong, Liang, Fang, Xu, Hong, Tao, Hua from this group as my interviewees. I was hoping that I could find a room to carry on conversations with them separately but found out that their living room was the only one available in this place. I decided to carry out interviews with them on the sidewalk. Fortunately, there was not much traffic since this was a new residence block.

The process of conducting the interviews was interesting. When I was ready to begin my job with an interviewee, I usually found myself among a crowd of workers. They were so curious about my job that they would like to listen what we were going to talk about. It would have been impolite if I told them to leave us alone. Therefore, I began to chat freely with these workers. They

Table I Basic Information

Encoded Name	Age (years)	Education Completed (years)	How do you evaluate your literacy level	Do you often read in your daily life?	Do you write anything in your daily life
He	41	0	Very low	No	no
Chun	31	9	Low	no	no
Ming	23	6	Low	no	no
Ling	20	7	Low	no	no
Dong*	19	7	Very good	Sometimes read books	Sometimes
Da	18	8	Low	A bit of newspaper	no
Tao*	28	9	Very low	Sometimes	no
Suo	23	12	Middle	Sometimes read books	no
Bao	53	9	Low	Sometimes	Sometimes write IOU
Zhuang	27	7	Low	no	no
Jian	18	9	Very low	Sometimes	no

Biao	18	6	Very low	no	no
Qiang	25	7	Very low	Sometimes	no
Liang*	19	7	Low	Sometimes	Often write dairies
Jun*	40	11	Good	Often	Work dairies
Xu*	25	9	Low	no	no
Hou	40	0	Very low	No	no
Hong*	42	0	Very low	No	no
Chun*	18	5	Very low	No	no
Guang	35	9	Middle	no	no
Bo	24	9	Middle	Sometimes	Very little
Hua*	30	7	Low	no	no
Jun	35	3	Good	Sometimes	no
Fang*	40	8	Low	Sometimes	no
Hui	36	9	Very good	Often read	Some letters

* These workers are chosen as interviewees.

posed a lot of questions about my life: how I study in Canada; what I eat there or whether people there live the same way as our Chinese, etc. They wanted to know the life of the construction workers in Canada: how much they earn and whether they are respected. Not every one of them talked; most of them chose to be silent but listened attentively. With time passing by, people began to leave and at last there only left two people: the interviewee and me. At that time, the interview began.

During the interviews, most of the workers were shy in the beginning and then became very talkative and very serious. Apparently, they liked to talk about their lives, their experiences and their concerns. I got the feeling that they had not had much chance to articulate their thoughts before others and not many people in their lives had listened to them attentively. When the interview finished, many of them expressed their appreciation for talking with me about their lives. Those who had not been chosen were a little bit disappointed. I did not tell them my selecting rules. They thought that maybe it was because their questionnaires were not well answered. Some of them even came up to me and asked me to interview them. At those moments, I usually agreed and talked with them without note-taking.

Although I had clarified that I was a student doing research, they still confused me with a journalist at times. They told me some unfair things that had been done to them and hoped that I could make it public and help them.

There was another worker who came up to me and asked me for some advice on which major was the best for his daughter who was going to enter a university.

Leaving the field was a little bit sad. The research and the subjects became friends. They were shy to say goodbye to me. I hope that I will see them again and have the chance to communicate with them about the results of this research.

Local Educational Bureau

A few days after my field work, I visited the local Educational Bureau which is the governmental organization responsible for all kinds of education in that area. It was a new eight-floor building in the central district of Jinzhou city where I did my research. I was told by the receptionist that the division of rural education had been dismissed and its responsibility was transferred to the division of adult education. I went to the office of adult education and asked whether I could get some statistics or relevant documents on literacy education for rural people or peasant workers. One of the staff told me that they have recently moved into this new building and all those documents were discarded. She also told me that the literacy education for rural adults had finished a long time ago and the emphasis of their job now was to train current urban workers. I then asked her about those new illiterates due to their dropout from schools. She gave me a smile and

did not answer. From the attitudes and words that I encountered in my visit, I think that the philosophy of these officials towards literacy is in line with that of the central government: that literacy is purely a decoding technique that is isolatable from social and cultural contexts. They believe that the literacy education in this area is finished in the sense that all those "illiterate" adults were taught how to read and write the way these literates do. Thus, they believe that the mission is ended and no further action required.

The above were all the activities that had been done in Jinzhou. I took all the data collected with me back to Canada and started to write my report in October, 2003. Since I could not obtain relevant documents from Jin Zhou Educational Bureau, my data includes valid questionnaire responses and interview transcripts.

Ethical Issues

As part of my thesis, I was required, under the Concordia Ethics Policy to submit a proposal (See Appendix V) outlining how I would attempt to address ethical considerations through the duration of the study. This proposal was submitted to my thesis supervisor and three members of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee for review. I prepared my ethics reports according to the Summary Protocol Forms. This form requires researchers to provide

details on basic information (e.g., title of research, literature review, description), research participants (e.g., sample of persons to be sampled, method of recruitment), and ethical consideration (e.g., informed consent, freedom to discontinue, risks to participants and confidentiality). On July 8th, my advisor told me by email that my ethic report had been approved which meant I could start my research.

Chapter IV
Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, I will present the findings and the analysis of this research. This chapter is organized into three parts: the meaning of literacy to peasant workers in the Chinese culture, the relationship between literacy and identity; and the role of schooling in literacy and bringing about literacy in peasant workers' lives.

The Meaning of Literacy in the Chinese Culture

As concluded from the literature review, understanding of the concept of literacy must be situated in the social and ideological dynamics within which it is constructed. The particular meaning of literacy in the Chinese culture must be understood as a concept that has been built up in the daily interactions by different groups of people in the particular context of the history of China. In this section, I am going to analyze how peasant workers interpret the concept of literacy and illiteracy and investigate their interpretations in light of Chinese culture.

In the introduction, I argue that one of the basic assumptions of the literacy policy of the Chinese government is that literacy can both contribute to individual cognitive advancement and social development. The literal translation for 'literate' is 'cultured person' (Wen Hua Ren) and the literal translation for an 'illiterate person' is 'culturally blind' (Wen Mang). These appellations reflect that, within the dominant

Chinese culture, literacy is considered to be closely related to culture and knowledge. An illiterate person is seen as an uncultivated person without knowledge. In my interviews, I asked these workers about their opinions concerning an illiterate person.

Jun: An illiterate? I won't disdain him. I have read books.
        I am cultured person.
              ......

Chun: An illiterate is a person who knows nothing. Me too. I
        know nothing but work.
              ......

Hui: I know how to read. If not, I am an uncouth fellow. No
        culture no knowledge.
              ......

Fang: An illiterate's life must be very difficult. An
        uncultured man can only work as a physical laborer.

Throughout the interviews, I found that the above assumption permeate the workers' understandings about literacy and illiteracy. Almost all of them believe that it is very important to be a literate person since an illiterate is definitely a person who possesses no culture and no knowledge.

The self-estimations of their literacy levels represent a paradox compared to the responses in the questionnaires. Among 26 workers who filled out questionnaires, only four of them (Chun, Hong, He and Hou) could not read and write. The other 22 workers could read and complete in writing the

questionnaires, which meant they possessed basic reading and writing skills. However, 17 out of the 26 workers reported that they had low or very low literacy skills. Many of them even equated themselves to illiterates. Why did they have such low estimations of their own literacy levels?

In the interviews, this paradox surfaced as well. It seems that this problem is closely related with their perceptions of knowledge, culture and literacy. Below are some of the interview conversations that most represent this topic ("R" refers to the researcher):

Liang: I am very regretful that I quit school. I have no culture, no knowledge. I have a lot of difficulties when I want to do something, even to read a newspaper.

R: But you have received seven years of education. You can still read and write even though there is some difficulty.

Liang: Yes. But I have no knowledge.

R: Why? I mean you can paint. I can't. Don't you think that this is some kind of knowledge?

Liang: No. Everybody can do this kind of job.

R: Then what, do you think, is knowledge.

Liang: For example, computers, internet, etc. And speaking well. For example, speak or write with idioms.

R: How do you look at a person who cannot read or write?

Liang: I will treat him as a normal person. I won't disdain him because I am the same.
            ……

R: How do you look at a person who cannot read or write?

Dong: I am on an equal footing with him. I can read but almost cannot (Dong chose 'Very Good' as the answer to "what do you think about your literacy level"). I am a peasant worker here. Reading is really not important for me.

......

R: Why do you think that your literacy level is very low? You can read and write.

Tao: I think that my literacy level is low. I cannot write articles. Sometimes, I meet characters that I don't know. But this is ok. I am doing manual jobs. A knowledgeable person doesn't do manual jobs.

Tao: For those who are illiterates, I feel for them because I am the same.

......

R: Why do you think that your literacy level is low?

Hua: Yes. I mean I am not good at writing.

R: Then how do you look at those who cannot read and write at all.

Hua: I feel that I am not even as good as them. I don't have much knowledge. Everyone can do my job. Nothing to do with knowledge.

R: Then tell me who do you think is a knowledgeable person?

Hua: Like you. You go to a university. You must have read a lot of books. And you write.

It seems that literacy is more than reading and writing in these workers' minds. What is the reason for that? What does literacy mean in the Chinese culture? I think that literacy is not seen simply as a mastery of reading and writing skills in China. It implies mastery of a 'higher culture' which is the exclusive property of certain classes. In order to explain this, we need to first have a look at the Chinese language and the cultural tradition in Chinese history.

Chinese is an ancient language that has survived relatively unchanged

in its written form since the standardization of writing in the third century B.C., making it the oldest continuous literary tradition in the world (Alitto, 1969, p.43). Distinguished from the alphabetical language in the West, Chinese is written in non-phonetic ideographs of which there are approximately 40,000. Each character conveys an idea of its own and further meanings develop when combined with other characters. Chinese originally derives from pictographic representations which became stylized and simplified. The ideographs are related to phonetic patterns of pronunciation. Consequently, the mastery of literacy usually requires years of rigorous study. Before the modern era, only a small percentage of the population had the ability, time and resources for such extended study. Therefore, the masses were actually precluded from being literate in spite of the traditional Chinese emphasis on education in ancient times (Alitto, 969, p.44).

Confucianism, the most influential thought in the history of Chinese education, believes that the reins of government and social control should be left in the hands of morally superior persons and moral superiority can only be achieved through education (Hu, 1962, p.7). This particular belief provides the rationale for a unique phenomenon in traditional Chinese education: a formalized system of examination designed less for education than for the selection of qualified government officials. The system, called

Ke Ju in Chinese, began in the Tang dynasty (618-906) and was abolished in

1905, a few years before the Qing Empire collapsed. It had a ponderous

influence on Chinese culture, education and social upbringing. Generally

speaking, the series of examinations were held periodically at prefectural,

provincial and metropolitan levels. People who passed these examinations

would be designated as officials in various posts. Apart from being the major

avenue to political advancement, success in these examinations could bring

other state-prescribed legal privileges (for example, exemption from corvée)

and extralegal privileges (special mode of transportation and clothing, etc)

(Hu, 1962, p. 14). These people formed a unique class of scholar-official or

gentry (Michael, 1955, p. xiii).

The system of Ke Ju has had a tremendous effect on the meaning of literacy

in Chinese culture. First, these examinations actually confined and limited

the meaning of knowledge. Since the emphasis of these examinations was put

on the understanding and interpretation of Confucian doctrines, only

knowledge concerning Confucian ethics was recognized, thus devaluating other

practical knowledge (for example, agricultural knowledge, manual techniques,

commercial knowledge, etc,). Classical Confucian books and relevant

interpretations readings became the sole teaching materials to be used. A

'knowledgeable person', if translated into Chinese literally, will be 'a

person who reads books'. Here, 'books' refers to Confucian books. A person

was not treated as a 'knowledgeable person' if s/he could not memorize, interpret or write Confucian ethics, even though s/he might be very knowledgeable in other fields.

Second, both the form and substance of the imperial examinations tended to become more rigid and formalized from the 14th century onwards, and by the nineteenth century examination essay writing had developed into a fine art (Hu, 1962, p. 15). This particularly stylish writing was totally separated from oral language by its special form, style and vocabulary. It made classical Chinese literacy the exclusive property of the scholar-officials (Alitto, 1969, p. 44).

As a result of these two points, intellectuals were distinguished as elite members and the masses (especially rural people), on the contrary, were cut off from the mainstream of Chinese life by their vulgar language and inability to read or write in Ke Ju style.

With the abolition of the Ke Ju system, and with the overthrow of Confucianism as the dominant ideology, the sovereign status of those Confucian classic books no longer exists. However, the worship of orthodoxy and the contempt for popular culture still persist. Knowledge, to some extent, still tends to be related to books, educational degrees etc. The meaning of literacy remains narrowly interpreted. A literate person not only knows how to read and write, but also has to read many classical books and write in

a stylish style. Furthermore, this person has to work *with the brain*. A physical laborer is implicitly seen as 'illiterate' even though s/he knows reading and writing. Non-dominant literacy remains unacknowledged and is relegated to non-literacy. Literacy, thus, is the property of a particular class in Chinese society. This perception helps to perpetuate the dominant discourse or dominant literacy.

Those workers who thought they had no knowledge were much influenced by this mentality. Although they could read and write, they compared themselves to illiterates because they were doing physical jobs or simply because they were peasant workers. They denigrated what they did as humble or rough work. Knowledge, for them, was something profound, beyond comprehension and beyond reach. Since they did not read books as often as 'knowledgeable persons', they deemed themselves as people without knowledge. Therefore, the restricted meaning of knowledge and literacy formed through Chinese history has, in fact, functioned as an oppressing concept, labeling the masses as 'unknowledgeable' and 'uncultivated'. Peasant workers appear to have internalized and accepted this concept.

Literacy and Identity

Hanlin Li (2002) sees the process of peasant workers coming to cities to work as a process also of their integration into urban culture (p. 98). Peasant

workers use urban people as their reference points to help them continuously

adjust and adapt their social behaviors (Shi, 1999; Chi, 1998; Sun, 1996).

However, it is not possible for them to get rid of their original values,

attitudes and beliefs, produced in their primary socialization in rural areas

right away. These values, attitudes and beliefs still function as their

"stock of knowledge" (See chapter III) through which they interpret their

new lives in the cities. Schutz (1970) analyzes the problems of orientation

and adaptation which befall a person who, having been raised in one cultural

community, is transferred to another one, as this:

> He comes with a fixed (outside) picture of the host community and finds that
> it does not prevent his becoming disoriented, while his old notions of the
> conduct of everyday affairs prove to be largely useless. Thus, he is forced
> first to become an observer of the ways of life of the host community, and
> second to reconstruct, piece by piece, at least whose sets of rules for
> practical conduct without which everyday life would be impossible for him.
> His reception by members of the host community, in turn, reflects his attempts
> at adaptation from the outside. On the one hand, his position is considered
> one of the uninvolvement. On the other hand, his acceptance of routine behavior
> is felt to be void of the underlying "spirit" of the native community.
> Therefore, he remains the man who cannot be trusted; his loyalty to the in-group
> remains in doubt.

(p. 18)

Peasant workers' familiarity with rural social rules and behavioral

regulations does not lead to their automatic adaptation to the urban cultural

and social codes. They have to experience an upsetting resocialization

process. In my interviews, their resocialization process is also

highlighted.

R: Do you have any difficulty when you work here?

Jun: I think the life is ok for me. I work everyday.

R: For example, if you meet an unexpected accident, what will you do? Who will you go to?

Jun: I will call my family. I have a lot of home fellows here. We take care of each other as well. Or, if they can't help me, I can go to the manager.

R: Why don't you go to government? Or any other social institutions?

Jun: I don't know how and I don't think it will work. I doubt there will be anyone who will help us in those government offices.

R: What about when you go shopping or have some entertainment?

Jun: To tell the truth, I never go to entertainment places. Shopping? There is a small store near here. I eat, live and work in this building block. Don't have much need to go out.

                            ......

R: How do you feel about your life here?

Xu: I am not satisfied.

R: Why?

Xu: I am bored. Not many friends. I had some friends, but they moved to another city.

R: You don't make new friends?

Xu: I don't know. Maybe I will move to that city as well.

R: What do you do when you don't have to work?

Xu: Nothing. You see our living room. You can do nothing but sleep. Sometimes, I go to cinema. But I don't like it. People in the city are not friendly. Once you speak, you show your accent. They don't like to talk to you.

R: Does this happen very often?

Xu: (sign) yes.

R: You never read books when you have time?

Xu: Each time I finish my work, I am too tired to read.

                            ......

R:	What do you think about your accent?
Fang:	Yes, I have an accent. But all my friends are like this. We don't care.
R:	Good. And what do you and your friends usually do then you have time.
Fang:	Nothing. We drink a little wine. That's all.
R:	Do you have many friends who live in this city?
	Fang: Not really. I don't like them. Too snobbish.

......

R:	You have been working in this city for about five years. What do you feel about that?
Hua:	I like it. I have gained some money here. I think that I am going to work for another 10 years. Then I will go home.
R:	Except for economic reasons, is there any other attraction in this city?
Hua:	No. Actually I don't think the people here like me or us. We are peasant workers. People usually think that we have no knowledge, stupid and boorish.
R:	What do you think about yourself.
Hua:	I think I am a good person. I can work and I never harm other persons. But I think I am a little bit stupid because my cultural level is low. I have to do this kind of job. I have to sweat a lot.

... ...

R:	Are you happy with your life?
Tao:	No. I don't like my job. It is very basic and it is so arduous. But I can do nothing. I have to work.
R:	Except for your work? Any other dissatisfaction?
Tao:	Yes. My social knowledge is not enough. And I have difficulty when I do things with other fellows. I think that this is because I am not used to working with so many people and my education is not good. My knowledge is so limited.
R:	You have difficulty with your colleagues? What about other social relations? For example, the manager, the government or other institutions?
Tao:	Well. Peasant workers are looked down upon by these urban people. I don't like to go out. As soon as you

open your mouth, they know that you are a peasant. I
don't like to go out. And to tell the truth, I have
no idea what those social institutions are about.

From the above transcripts, we can see that the resocialization process for

these workers is not easy. It is full of frustration, confrontation and

disappointment. The following analysis will focus on two aspects. First, I

found that these workers' social activity is very much restricted; they did

not have many connections with social organizations (local government

offices, cultural centers, etc.). It seems that they lacked the motivation

to establish contact with these institutions. Why it is like this? Second,

I found the social identity of peasant workers is very negative. They are

usually seen as unwelcome persons in cities. How does this influence these

workers?

Hometown complex

When peasant workers are relocated from their hometowns and move into

unfamiliar urban areas, their rural social networks have to be abandoned and

original social relations are cut off. Hanlin Li (2002) contends that the

integration process for peasant workers is a process of reconstructing social

networks within new urban communities (pp. 96-97). He further argues that the

degree of integration for peasant workers into urban communities is

positively related to the quantity of the social contacts that have been set

up by him/her   in the new social contexts(ibid, p. 97). A large social network

means more mobility and security for these workers.

From my research, all the interviewees built their social network with

"home fellows" and other intimate friends. They usually went to these home

fellows and intimate friends for help when they had any problem. Social

institutions that are supposed to provide help for these workers were

considered a last choice. This showed that peasant workers' network was

mainly comprised of "rudimentary social links based on kin and places of

birth" (Hanlin Li, 2002, p. 107), which is a characteristic of rural

societies. Fei (1980) points out that "people seek trust from intimacy in

rural communities" (p. 39). When these workers moved to cities, they still

adhered to this principle and tended to set up their social network with home

fellows since they already trust them.

I think that this 'hometown complex' has both good and bad influences

on the integration process of these workers. Peasant workers can quickly set

up their new social network in cities through establishing relationships with

their home fellows. This network functions as a social support system for

them, especially when there are many policies that do not favor them. However,

this also reduces a worker's motivation to build connections with urban

people or with social institutions and, therefore, this limits their capacity

to socially integrate.

Why these workers do not show interest in participating social activities can also be explained as a lack of familiarity of and a lack of trust in the various social organizations in cities. For example, one of the workers told me that he bought glasses from a shop but found out that the quality was very bad. I asked him to go to a complaints center where such cases could be investigated. He told me he did not want to go because he knew nobody in that center. He said that he would feel at a loss and helpless in a place where he knew nobody. I think that this fear of strangers has prevented many workers from participating in urban social life.

What is the reason behind the fear of the unknown? Besides 'hometown complex', I believe that there are two other reasons. First, the dualistic 'permanent residence system' makes peasant workers second class citizens and they do not enjoy equal political and economic rights with urban citizens. It makes them less positive towards social activities. Second, the negative identity attributed to peasant workers nourishes an "inferiority complex" (Hanlin Li, 2002) which reduces their enthusiasm and motivation to be an active social person. In the following section, I will discuss the identity of peasant workers and consider to what extent it is influenced by the resocialization process.

The identity of peasant worker

The name 'peasant worker' implies a negative connotation in many people's minds. In my research, seven out of ten workers said that they had experienced humiliation because of their identity in the city. Usually, they were seen as dirty, stupid and unruly. They felt very angry at this but did not want to argue. One of the aftermaths of these experiences was that they tried to keep away from participating in public life as much as possible so that they could avoid such embarrassment.

Like some immigrant groups in Europe and North America, peasant workers are stigmatized as inferior by those around them – the majority of city people (Yang, 1999). Illiteracy is usually another characteristic attributed to these workers since they are doing physical jobs. From my interview data, we see that these perceptions have permeated the sub conscience of these workers. They tended to believe that they were illiterate and boorish people. When humiliated by other people, they tended to hide instead of defending themselves. These workers gradually lose their voices in the city.

Their dialects and accents are immediate indicators of their rural identity. The Chinese language is characterized by its multiple dialects. Some of these dialects are even regarded as different languages (Allito, 1969). Some other dialects are distinguishable from the standard language only by their accents. In my research, the interviewees spoke the same dialect as people from Jinzhou city since all of them were from adjacent villages. However, there were still

differences in accent, and especially, in the vocabulary. Six out of ten admit that they hesitated to speak before a stranger since this would reveal their rural identity. Two of them said they were not influenced by their accent but basically they only communicated with their home fellows, who had the same accent.

To these workers, living in the city required them to learn another discourse (both way of speaking and accent), which would be seen as "proper" in this city. If we see the primary socialization of these workers in their families as the first discourse, and their socialization into rural societies as the second discourse, then their resocialization into urban culture requires them to learn a third discourse. This third discourse is an integration of saying, doing, and valuing, all of which are political (Gee, 1989a, p. 13). The mastery of the second discourse (rural and non-dominant discourse) brings solidarity with a particular social network, but not wider status in and social goods from the society at large. The mastery of the third discourse (the urban and the dominant discourse) brings with it the acquisition of social "goods" (money, prestige, status, etc.). Peasant workers need to master the third discourse (vocabulary, actions, attitudes and beliefs) in order to achieve political and economic benefits.

To conclude the above analysis, peasant workers' integration into urban culture is full of difficulties. On the one hand, they are constrained by

their rural values, beliefs and attitudes. On the other, they are denigrated by urban people. Both of these two points have a negative influence on the workers when it comes to learning the dominant discourse. Their identity, permeated by dominant ideologies, functions to marginalize them economically, politically, socially and culturally.

Literacy and Schooling

This section is devoted to analyzing the role of formal education in peasant workers' lives. My questions in the interviews mainly concentrated on three areas: the reason why they left school; what they learned at school and whether that education helped them; and what were their expectations for their children's education. The following are excerpts from the transcripts:

R: Why did you leave school?

Jun: I didn't finish high school because my family needed me to work. I was good at school but I couldn't continue.

R: Do you think what you learnt at school are useful for you now?

Jun: I think that it is helpful to know how to read and write. Sometimes I read swordsman novels.

R: What about your children? What level of education do you expect of them?

Jun: My elder daughter has already left the school. The school is too far from my home. She is working as a

waitress in this city. If she wants to go on with her study, I will support her. My little son is in grade one. But he is too naughty and likes to play. I don't think that he will give a good performance in the future.

··· ···

R: Why did you leave school?

Liang: Because my performance was bad. I am very regretful now. I have no knowledge and no culture.

R: If you had a child, what kind of education would you expect for him/her?

Liang: I would help him/her have better education. S/he would have to study hard and have a better life.

··· ···

R: Why did you leave school?

Dong: I quit because I didn't like it. My school performance was terrible. I don't regret that but I want to learn more from my parents.

R: What do you want to learn?

Dong: Well. How to live in this world. How to make friends.

R: What do you want your children to have as education.

Dong: I hope that my children will work hard and get higher degrees. Don't follow me.

··· ···

R: Tell me your school experiences.

Chun: I went to a Mongolian school. I studied five years there and then quit. The reason was that I was too stupid. I didn't like reading at all. Now I want to learn more. But not knowledge from books. I want to learn skills. Sometimes, I read Chinese dictionary.

R: Do you think what you learned at the school is helpful for you?

Chun: Yes, I think so. If I could read, life would be easier. It was too hard to make money in my hometown. So I came here but I had difficulty in reading Chinese.

··· ···

R: Are you satisfied with your life?

Hui: No. But I think that I have to be responsible for that. I didn't study hard when I was young. It was not the responsibility of the school. My family is another reason. We were too poor. If I was born into a richer family, I could have gone to a university and become a businessman.

R: So I think that you will want your children to have better education.

Hui: Yes. No matter how hard it will be, I will support my children to go to universities. They will have better jobs and better lives.

                    ... ...

R: Why did you leave school before finishing your nine-year education?

Fang: I didn't want to continue. I was so stupid. But in rural areas, everybody is like that. Education is not well developed. And what's more I had a heavy family burden. I needed to earn some money.

R: Do you think what you learnt will help you in your life?

Fang: I don't think that being literate helps me because I am doing a physical job. But it does help me to count.

                    ......

Xu: I began to work when I finished my nine-year education. I want to receive a better education very much. I think that my cultural level is pretty low because of my poor education. When I tried to find a job, I found out that people with good certificates can find better jobs. I am doing physical job which has restricted me. If I had a better education, I could have a much better job.

R: Then why did you quit school then?

Xu: My family didn't care about my education. My father was in prison then. The huge family burden made me quit. I am very regretful. But I had no choice then.

R: Do you think that the education you had has helped you a lot?

Xu: Actually, it doesn't help me very much. It is rare that I use what I learned in school.

R: In the future, what do you expect for your children?

Xu: I hope that they can be better than me. More culture,

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more education and a better life. I have had enough of being a peasant worker. I want to learn more.

......

R: Why did you stop your education?

Tao: I failed the examination to get into high school. I didn't work hard and I am stupid.

R: Do you think that what you learned in school is helpful?

Tao: I think so. I think it's helpful. I can read, otherwise I would have been an illiterate.

R: What do you expect of your children's education?

Tao: Of course the higher the better. Only knowledge from the books is real knowledge. My social knowledge is not enough. I think that this is related to my poor education. If I have a chance to study, I will study computers.

......

Hong: I was only in school for two years. My family is poor and I had a bad memory. Except for reading, I can do everything.

R: Now you cannot read and write. Does this influence your life?

Hong: Yes. It makes my life more difficult. It is even a little bit difficult for me to take a bus or to buy something. I had a mouth under my nose. I can ask. (smile)

R: Why were you not good at studying?

Hong: I just couldn't do it! Maybe I wasn't working hard. I am very regretful now. I hope that my children will have a higher education. It is useful to be a knowledgeable person.

... ...

R: Why did you leave school?

Hua: Because I felt it was boring. I couldn't remember things in the books. Therefore, I quit. But I am regretful now. I don't recognize many characters.

R: Does this influence your work and your life?

Hua: Not really. Reading is not important for my work. But some other things, for example, counting, is useful for

me. I think that my cultural level is not bad. Only that
my literacy level is not high.

R: And your children? Do you want them to have a better
          education?

Hua: Yes. I hope that they can have a good education. The
          more characters they recognize, the better they can
          speak. I can' t speak any idioms.

Three main themes emerge from the above transcripts and will frame my analysis

in this section. First, education is constantly related to betterment of life.

Second, these workers tend to believe that it was their stupidity that

resulted in their failure in the schools. Third, what they have learned in

schools did not help very much for their work and lives.

Education: a ladder to social betterment?

All of these workers thought that education or the lack of it is responsible

for their current situation to some extent. They also declared that they were

going to provide good education for their children so that they can have a

better life.

As in many western countries (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Collins, 1989) ,

education systems in China function as the institutions of selection and

placement for the complex division of labor. I think that it is even more

the case that education can bring economic rewards and social advancement

in China.

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An ancient tale illustrates this attitude towards education says that there is a high and brilliant "golden gate" where the Yangtzi River meets the sea. Every year, many fish in the river will swim to this gate and try to leap over it into the sea. If a fish succeeds in this jump it will turn into a dragon. And if it fails, it will remain a fish all its life.

Various elimination examinations at different levels are equated with "golden gates" that can decide the fate of students. The preeminent position of education in a Chinese person's life has both an historical explanation and a current interpretation.

First, education as a social ladder is a historically constructed conception. Confucius argued that education provides the only avenue to moral superiority, which is regarded as the sole qualification for participation in government and social leadership (Hu, 1962, p.8). This was the basic rational for the Ke Ju system, which selected candidates for government officers. Therefore, success in Ke Ju examinations became the avenue to social and political advancement. This deeply-rooted notion that excellent scholarship leads to social betterment has persisted until today and still influences people's judgment and choices.

Second, China has to adopt a highly competitive eliminating scheme in its education due to the deficiency in educational resources (Cheng & Mao, 2002). Examination preparation becomes the object of daily activities in classrooms and the benchmark for teachers' performance. After compulsory

education, only those who succeed in the final entrance examinations go to high schools or universities. In 2002, the entrance rate for universities was 9%, preventing most of the students from participating in higher education (Cheng & Mao, 2002, p. 169). On the other hand, a university degree is very important in the job replacement market and is thus regarded as being closely related to good jobs and good lives (ibid).

This is particularly true for peasant workers. The rural identity status is hereditary. The children of rural residents can only receive rural residency cards even though they were born in the cities. The only way to shed this status is to get into a university by hard work and to try to find a formal job recognized by the government. Therefore, almost all rural people hope their children will study very hard to successfully get rid of rural identity and become "first-class citizens". Such a child is called the "phoenix out of a bird's nest".

Examinations, by their very nature, link a certain exercise of power (surveillance and judgment) to a certain kind of knowledge (Collins, 1989, p. 10). In schools, examinations define the aptitudes of individuals, situate their level of competence and abilities, and indicate the possible use that might be made of them (ibid, p. 11). Under such circumstances, schools in China can be viewed as sites of control, realized through surveillance and discipline. Literacy, as the central concern for schools (Cook-Gumperz,

1986), is thus stratified by examinations, with divisions between the literate, subliterate, nonliterate, and so forth (ibid). By defining what is and what is not literacy, schools became political sites that perpetuate dominant ideologies.

Literacy education: an equalizer or a divider?

In the previous section, we saw that people in China believe that education can bring social betterment. One of the assumptions underlying this belief is that education is an equalizer for people from different classes and genders. People can succeed through their "own" efforts, as represented by the match of education and job. However, in my research and analysis, much more needs to be considered before we claim that this is true.

In my interviews, some workers stated that their families were too poor to support their studies. It is true that China promotes nine-year of compulsory education for all citizens. However, only one third of the population can finish the nine-year education program (Chen & Mao, 2002, p. 35). Although students are exempted from tuition fees, they still have to pay for their books and other miscellaneous fees which prove to be unaffordable for many poor families (ibid).

Other workers referred to themselves as 'stupid' and thought that this was the reason for their failure in school. The dominant discourse defined

their understanding of their 'quitting school'. However, many theorists (Bourdieu, 1986; Percell, 1977) have shown that a student's academic performance is not only influenced by personal intelligence and capability but also influenced by the transmission of culture from the family. Schools unfairly treat those students of lower classes by adopting the culture and ideology of the dominant class in their curricula. The standardization of language is one way of exerting hegemonic control.

Although the Chinese language is characterized by various dialects and accents, schools in China only teach in one standard language. In 1955, the Bureau for the Promotion of Common Speech called for the immediate adoption of common speech (Putong Hua) in all primary and secondary schools with the exception of those in minority areas (Allito, 1969). Most rural people in China speak dialects or speak Mandarin with accents. When they go to school, the language of their primary socialization represents a disadvantage for them compared to those who already speak Mandarin with their parents at home. Since the standard language is also adopted by other secondary institutions (government offices, business sectors, social centers, etc.), there is an overt link between the standard language, literacy, personal competence and social mobility. What, then, is the nature of 'standard language'?

Collins (1989) defines standard language as an institutionally imposed way of speaking, associated with classes and groups which exercise dominant

power in particular political structures, typically nation states (p. 13).

By promoting standard language (schooled literacy), schools transform subaltern literacies into a general literacy, purportedly universal yet controlled by elites, held out as the universal ideal yet stratified and unequally available (Collins, 1989, p. 13). In this sense, rural people or peasant workers are not mobilized by literacy education; instead they are confined and restricted by it. There may be some rural children who successfully master the standard language and the dominant discourse to achieve social advancement. Yet as a class, rural people do not advance. Schooling does not function as a social equalizer for them. Quite on the contrary, it works as a divider that makes them more marginalized and more oppressed.

Literacy education and national integration

The purpose of literacy education in China has experienced a change from its initial aims to today. Before China's economic reform in 1979, it was clearly stated that literacy and education "are the instruments of the proletarian political dictatorship for educating the people in Communist ideology" (People's Daily, as sited in Allito, 1969, p. 55)). Recently, literacy education has been more focused on the formation of employable laborers needed for the economic development of China.

In order to ensure the political correctness of literacy education, the text books and other teaching materials are consistent throughout the country (Cheng & Mao, 2002). The standardized language, values and ideologies, which together form literacy education aims to produce a socialist man that is politically loyal and economically useful.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed three topics based on data collected from interviews and questionnaires. Basically, the workers interviewed answered questions on their understanding of literacy, of their identities and of schooling. In the light of the foregoing literature review and in the light of my understandings of the Chinese culture, the analysis reveals that class position still determines a person's chances of acquiring enough literacy skills to ensure social and economic improvement.

The first part of the analysis is concerned with the nature of literacy in the Chinese culture. After a long evolution, the concept of literacy in China operates the majority of people. Literacy is not simply regarded as a person's reading and writing ability but is closely connected with the person's occupation. The concept of literacy functions as an oppressing power over the majority by relegating their plural literacies to a state of "non literacy".

The second part of the analysis deals with literacy and identity in light of Gee's discourse theory. I analyze the peasant workers' integration into the urban culture. On the one hand, these workers are constrained by their rural values, beliefs and attitudes that are shaped by rural discourse. On the other, they have to master a new urban discourse in order to share social goods. This process proves to be complex and frustrating. In addition, the negative identity attributed to peasant workers makes this process even more difficult.

Finally, the analysis investigates the relationship between literacy and schooling. Examinations, which are extremely important in the Chinese educational system, arbitrate what is literacy and what is not, and hence contain hegemonic capacity. Equality of education is also problematic as the standard language in the school is a dialect of a specific dominant class. It disadvantages those who are less exposed to that tradition. As a result, literacy education is never a 'fair gamble' to rural people, peasant workers and other non-dominant groups but a social divider that marginalizes them. Literacy education also supports a strong form of nationalism in China. The main purposes of governmental promotion of literacy are to foster national integration and boost economic development.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications for Literacy Education

Conclusions

This thesis provides qualitative account on literacy practices of peasant workers in Northern China. Peasant workers are a unique class of people engendered by the industrialization and modernization of Chinese economy. However, they are oppressed economically, politically, socially and culturally. The Chinese government and educators have carried out or plan to carry out various literacy programs to make them literate on the presumption that literacy can bring betterment both for them and for the entire society. This thesis sets out to investigate the influence of literacy on the lives of peasant workers

I adopted a qualitative approach because this research is to explore, not to verify, the influence of literacy acquisition on these workers. A phenomenological perspective functions as the philosophical underpinning for the study. The field research took place in Jinzhou, a middle-sized city in the northeast of China from July 18th to August 2nd. 26 peasant workers participated. They filled out questionnaires and ten of them were interviewed. The analysis and the writing of the thesis were carried out in Canada.

In order to have a full understanding of the role of literacy in peasant workers' lives I mainly explore three issues in this study: the meaning of literacy in peasant workers' world, their identity formation

in the process of urbanization, and the role of schooling in their lives. My analysis is based on the data collected in the field in light of the current literature on literacy.

The Chinese government puts great emphasis on literacy education because it regards literacy education as central to political unification and economical development. Literacy education for peasant workers is made up of two parts: the compulsory formal education when they were children and on-site training which might include literacy education when they work in cities. Different social groups hold different objectives and expectations for literacy education designed for peasant workers. To the dominant groups, literacy education can help to assimilate peasant workers to mainstream society, yet marginalize and exploit them at the same time. Peasant workers, on the other hand, treat literacy and education as tools to move up in the social ladder. They hope that education can help them and their children to get rid of the rural identity and to achieve life betterment. Then, what is the role of literacy in peasant workers' lives? What has been brought to these workers when they achieve literacy? My findings can be concluded as follows:

Nature of literacy in the Chinese culture

First of all, I analyze the meaning of literacy in the Chinese culture. I find that the interpretations of literacy (illiteracy) by the peasant workers interviewed indicate what Freire (1987) called "the academic approach" to literacy, in which a literate person should be thoroughly grounded in the classics, articulate in spoken and written expression and actively engaged in intellectual pursuits (p. 146). From the analysis of the interview data, we find that this notion of literacy is deeply rooted in the Chinese literary history and still shapes people's understanding of literacy. This approach to literacy actually ignores the life experience, the history and the language practice of the popular masses. Peasant workers' own property of lived experiences, languages and history is left unappreciated and unused when they learn how to read and write in school.

Freire (1987) points out that literacy and education in general are cultural expressions (p. 51) and class distinction has a strong impact on these expressions. The dominant class, which has the power to define, profile, and describe the world, pronounces that the speech habits of the subordinate groups are a corruption, a bastardization of dominant discourse(ibid, p. 53). Generally speaking, dominant classes make their interests, tastes and styles of living as national and superior. The subordinated groups lack the political and economic power to

legitimize their own interests and tastes and, inevitably, are assimilated into the dominant ideologies. In China, rural culture is usually viewed as 'barbaric'. The experiences of rural people are seen as inferior to the elite culture. Peasant workers, as a marginalized group, not only are permeated by this dominant ideology by seeing themselves as culture deprecated, but also lack the ability to criticize and transform this reality.

The underlying belief of the training programs carried out by the Chinese government reflects another approach to literacy which Freire (1987) categorizes as the "utilitarian approach" (p. 147). Utilitarian literacy has been championed as a vehicle for economic betterment, access to jobs, and increasing productivity levels. The main object of training peasant workers is to prepare as much qualified labor as possible for the development of the Chinese economy. The programs based on this philosophy emphasize the mechanical learning of reading skills and other technological skills while sacrificing the critical analysis of the social and political order.

Both the academic and the utilitarian approaches are inherently alienating in nature (Freire, 1987, p. 146) because both of them fail to address questions of cultural capital or various structural inequalities (ibid, p. 149). Literacy, within these two approaches, is stripped of its

sociopolitical dimensions. It works to reproduce dominant values and meanings. Peasant workers are marginalized, restricted and oppressed by the conception of literacy in Chinese society.

Literacy and identity

The analysis of literacy and identity of peasant workers also leads to the conclusion that peasant workers are being oppressed during literacy acquisition. Their primary discourse, fashioned in rural areas, is looked down upon both by other social groups and themselves. Again, literacy education fails to recognize and utilize peasant workers' primary discourse but operates to inculcate them with myths and beliefs that deny and belittle their lived experiences, their history, their culture and their languages (Freire, 1987, p.143). These workers' conception of literacy and themselves are permeated by the dominant ideology. They internalize the dominant ideology without critical thinking and resistance. They do not possess the ability to transcend their own reality.

When these workers move into cities to work, they are experiencing effort and pain to master a new form of discourse, which is suitable in cities and which is the dominant discourse in the Chinese society. On the one hand, they cannot shed their rural identity and still stick to

the rural philosophies (for example, their "hometown complex" and their lack of motivation to participate in urban life). On the other hand, they try their best to master the dominant discourse in order to share more social benefits. Foucault (1980, p.93 as cited in Giroux, 1990, 83) argues that discourse is connected to broader institutional and social practices and the power relations which inform them. In other words, discourse can only be explained in class, gender and race conflicts. Peasant workers have to master the dominant urban discourse in order to advance in this society. This means that peasant workers are disadvantaged and oppressed by dominant groups.

Literacy and schooling

My analysis of the relationship between literacy and schooling focuses on three areas: the preeminent position of examinations, the promotion of the standard language in classroom instruction and the function of schooling in the nationalism of the country. The current educational structure serves to inculcate rural people with myths and beliefs that perpetuate subordination.

The examination system is the most important method to select individuals for job placement and is regarded as equal for all children in China. However, upon deeper investigation, we find that rural

children are disadvantaged by their economic, social and cultural capital. The examination system also guarantees a "textual authority" (Grioux, 1990, p.84), where both the value of a particular text and the range of interpretations are legitimized by educators. The preparation for various examinations makes teacher to adopt a banking method. Students are defined primarily as passive consumers and teachers are reduced to dispensers of information (Giroux, 1990, p.85). Emphasis is put on memorization, mastery and certainty, thus excluding the voices, histories and experiences of subordinated groups.

The promotion of the standard language in classroom instruction makes the notion of literacy a matter of learning the standard language. Peasant workers usually speak dialects, which is a sign of lack of culture in many people's minds. This contrast between the superior standard language (Putong Hua) and the inferior dialects is, in fact, a social phenomenon. Freire (1987) contends that, under such a circumstance, the students' voice is silenced by a distorted legitimation of the standard language.

The promotion of the standard language in classroom instruction also proves that the government intends to strip the popular masses of their own cultures and to acculturate the mass into the dominant and the national rational. This is done by sacrificing marginal groups'

cultural property and disabling their ability to challenge the current

social order.

From the above discussion, we can conclude that literacy education

for peasant workers in China is, by its nature, oppressive,

authoritarian and antidemocratic. It does not make peasant workers

emancipated and empowered. Literacy has polar implications; it could be

wielded for the perpetuation of relations of repression and domination,

or for the purpose of self and social empowerment (Giroux, 1987, p. 2).

Literacy can either serve to reproduce existing social formations or

serve as a set of cultural practices that promotes democratic and

emancipatory change. In the next section, I am going to talk about what

is emancipatory literacy and how it can benefit the educational programs

for peasant workers in China.

Implications of This Study for Literacy Education

for Peasant Workers

Before I give out suggestions for making literacy education for peasant

workers more emanicpatory, I am going to describe the definition of

emancipatory literacy and the characteristics of it. Grioux & McLaren

(1986) argue that an emancipatory literacy should enable students to

"interrogate and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than merely serving the wider social order" (p. 15). An emancipatory literacy must embrace a critical attitude towards dominant cultures and play an important role in demystifying the artificial parameters imposed on people. Freire and Mecedo (1987) state that the notion of emancipatory literacy suggests two dimensions of literacy. On the one hand, students have to become literate about their histories, experiences, and cultures of their immediate environments. On the other hand, they must also appropriate those codes and cultures of the dominant spheres so they can transcend their own environments (p. 47). Therefore, critical literacy is more a pedagogy of question than a pedagogy of answer (Freire & Mecedo, 1987, p. 54). I would argue that literacy education for peasant workers needs to be critical in order to be emancipatory. A critical literacy needs us to make changes in our concept of literacy, teaching materials and methods, and our understanding of the role of teachers.

First, we need to abandon both the academic and the utilitarian understandings of literacy and need to pluralize the concept of literacy in China. The superiority/inferiority of various languages and dialects is a social notion that must be demystified by educators and students.

Current literacy program give peasant workers access only to predetermined and pre-established discourses while silencing their own voices and suffocating their own discourse. Freire (1987) declares that the students' language is the only means by which they can develop their own voices, a prerequisite to the development of a positive sense of self-worth (p.151). My thesis contends that the literacy traditions of peasant workers must be recognized and must be treated as an important component of an emancipatory pedagogy. The literacy campaign for peasant workers should embrace a critical appropriation of their own culture and history. The literacy program that is needed is one that will affirm and allow oppressed peasant workers to re-create their histories, cultures and languages. The legitimation of these discourses would authenticate the plurality of voices in the reconstruction of a truly democratic society (Freire & Mecedo, 1987, pp.55-56).

In order to pluralize the concept of literacy for peasant workers, we need to reform our way of designing curriculum and of compiling teaching materials. The curriculum and teaching material should be closely related to the lived experiences of peasant workers and should address their cultures and interests. To respect different discourses and to put into practice the understanding of plurality require a political and social transformation (Freire & Mecedo, 1987, p54). Not

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only should peasant worker learn to respect their own languages and cultures, but also the entire society should be challenged and learn to appreciate different discourses.

Second, peasant workers should be equipped with the necessary tools to reappropriate their history, culture and language practice. They should be aware of how their consciousness is socially constructed and their identity is perpetuated by dominant ideology. In order to make this happen, educators should constantly challenge workers when they learn to read or write. Peasant workers will find that it is impossible to deny the constitutive power of their consciousness in the social practices in which they participate. They will understand that the profound dimension of their freedom lies exactly in the recognition of constraints that can be overcome. On the other hand, they will perceive that they should transcend the constituting reality and question it, instead of accepting and defending it. In this way, peasant workers will become more and more critical. They will assume a critical posture to the extent that they comprehend how and what constitutes the consciousness of the world. Thus, the prime role of critical pedagogy is to lead students to recognize various conflicts and enable them to deal effectively with them. Reading the word is preceded by learning how to write the world (Freire, 1987, p. 49).

Chinese education is characterized by the banking method and indoctrination. Students adopt a very passive role towards teachers and tend to memorize what teachers and textbooks say. I would argue that we should adopt a critical pedagogy towards literacy and education in general in order to stimulate students to reflect upon texts and contexts. Learners will begin to comprehend the relationship among many different discourses and hence, will begin to take action to liberate themselves.

Third, we should rethink and redefine the role of school in our society. Schools can not only function as a site of cultural reproduction but only as a site of cultural production. Schools could not only serve as a place to perpetuate domination, but also could serve as a place to challenge dominant ideologies and legitimize subordinated discourses.

Schools in China always impose absolute certainties on students and do not encourage students to express their own opinions. In order to make schools liberating, major changes on teaching methods, teaching material and teaching philosophy should take place in China. Students, not merely a minority of specialists, could decide on what to produce based on real necessities, not invented ones that ultimately benefit only the dominant groups. Peasant workers should not be treated as

"objects" who are waiting to be filled with literacy skills but "subjects" who is going to participate and invent their own literacy tradition. These workers can participate in the design, conduct, analysis and evaluation of literacy programs together with educators. As they learn reading and writing skills, they should critically reflect various issues in their lives.

Fourth, the role of the literacy teacher is very important in critical literacy. First of all, educators should learn to appreciate various discourses and cultures and avoid looking upon students from an ethnocentric point of view. Teachers who teach peasant workers literacy skills should respect particular languages, experiences and cultures of peasant workers and consciously integrate them into the curriculum. Teachers who teach peasant workers literacy skills should also invite these workers to co-work with them in designing, implementing and evaluating programs. In other words, these workers should be subjects in literacy actions. At the same time, educators should lead peasant workers to realize the permeating force of dominant ideology and to challenge it.

Fifth, education should not only be restricted to schools. A radical and critical education has to focus on what is taking place today inside various social movements and labor unions (Freire, 1987,

p. 61). Giroux (1983) contends that public movements are very important in the promotion of democratic principles because these movements centers seeing themselves as agencies of discussion (p. 62).

Since schools in China are almost closed to critical pedagogy, it is very meaningful to recognize that public environments are extremely important for pedagogical production of political and social resistance. Peasant workers move from rural areas to urban areas and experience a re-socialization process. This has provided a good opportunity for them to reflect on this process and to criticize both their primary and the dominant discourses. Educators should encourage them to participate in various social movements and lead them to demystify realities. For example, these workers are shy to talk to urban people because they have rural accents. In these cases educators should discuss with them the sociological nature of language and let them comprehend that this is a social phenomenon instead of a technological one. Educators should also encourage them to respect and use their own language to participate social activities.

It is imperative, therefore, for educators to comprehend what is taking place today in these social movements and spheres of public action. Teachers should become what Giroux calls "engaged public intellectuals" (1990, p. 86) in order to be a critical teacher.

In the above discussion, I have given several suggestions on how to make literacy education more empowering and more emancipatory for peasant works in China. I am fully aware that the implementation of these changes requires fundamental changes not only in educational sectors, but in political, economical and ideological changes as well. Peasant workers cannot be emancipated without thorough reforms in their political and economical position. In the implementation of critical literacy, we will, inevitably, meet with various obstacles. However, I believe that critical literacy do present us a good way to make our society more democratic. I would like to end this thesis with a citation from Gee: "Literacy education is not for the timid" (1986, p. 208).

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Appendices

Appendix I. Questionnaire*

Can you read or write? (If yes, then go on; if no, I will read Part I to them and fill that out for them and questionnaire stops there.)

Part I: Personal Information

Name: Sex: Age: Origins of Birth:
Marital Status: Child(ren):
Job Type:

Part II: Literacy Level

● How many years of public education have you finished:

● Other educational program (Please identify):

● What do you think is your literacy level? :
   A. Excellent   B. High   C. Middle   D. Low   E. Very Low

● How often do you meet characters that you do not recognize?
   A. Never.   B. Rarely   C. Sometimes D. Often.   E. Very Often

● Do you think that you need to go on with your education?

   If yes, what do you want to learn?

   If no, why?

Part III: Literacy Practices

● In the following category, what material do you read?

A. Signs in streets

B. Forms required by the government (including ID card, residence certificate, residence permit etc.)

C. Contracts

D. Work Instruction

E. Newspaper

F. Books and Journals

G. Others (Please identify):

- Do you write anything in your everyday life?
  A. Very Often B Sometimes   C Rarely   D Almost Never

- What do you write?

*Note: This questionnaire was translated into Chinese when it was used for the research.

Appendix II

Interview Questions*

1. *Interpretation of Literacy*

- What does literacy help you in your life? (Do you feel difficult in your life because of your illiteracy or low literacy skills?)

- What's your attitude towards a person who is not literate?

- Do you think that it is important to be able to be literate? Why?

- What do you think is knowledge? Who is a literate person?

2. *Literacy and Identity*

- Are you given something in writing when you began this job? Are you fully informed of the conditions of your job?

- If you feel that your life is difficult, what do you think is the reason for that?

- When people call you 'peasant worker', what do you feel?

- What kind of social activity do you participate in?

3. *Literacy and Schooling*

- Why you quit school?

- What you have learned from school?

- What level of literacy do your want for you children? Why?

Note: Interviews were conducted in Chinese.

Appendix III

Consent Form*

(To be given to managers and given to interviewees who can read with appropriate changes to wording (e. g. 'them' becomes 'you')

1. This research is focused on the literacy practices of 'peasant workers' in Jinzhou City, China. It is designed to do a M. A. Thesis and for academic purpose only.

2. Participants will be required to fill out a questionnaire. Some of them will be required to have interviews with the researcher.

3. All the data collected will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone except for the researcher. Real names are required in questionnaires and only codified names are used in interviews. However the research results will be available for the public with confidentiality protected.

4. The participation is voluntary and the participants can withdraw from this research any time they want by speaking to the researcher or to the manager. The interviewees and the manager will be given information as to how to contact the researcher at the place she will be staying.

5. The potential risk will be that some questions may evoke some unpleasant life experiences.

6. This research aims to find out a way to improve literacy programs for 'peasant workers, in China and therefore will be beneficial for them.

7. The researcher will communicate the result of this research with all participants when it is available.

Bo Sun, Researcher	Participant
Tel:0416-2817396	
Add: 150-2 Longjiang Beili, Jinzhou	

Date	Date

*Note: 1. Final consent form will be in Chinese.

Appendix IV

Oral Statement of Consent Form*

This research is focused on the literacy practices of peasant workers in Jinzhou City, China. It is for academic purpose only. Participants will be asked to fill out a questionnaire. Some of them will be invited to be interviewed by the researcher. All the data collected will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone except the researcher. Real names are required in questionnaires but only coded names are to be used in interviews. However the research results will be available for the public with confidentiality protected (including name of the city, company etcetera). The participation is voluntary and the participants can withdraw this research any time they want. They can talk to the researcher or the managers to quit this research.

Bo Sun, Researcher
Tel:0416-2817396
Add: 150-2 Longjiang Beili, Jinzhou

Bo Sun for _____

Date

Date

*Note: I will read this oral statement of the consent form to those who cannot read and write and sign for them if they agree.

Appendix V

Ethics Form for M. A. Thesis

Education Department, Concordia University
June 2003

Part One: Basic Information

1. Researcher
   Name: Bo Sun Tel: 514-598 1413 Add: 4574, Fabre Montreal, QC H2J 3V6
   Graduate Student of Educational Department of Concordia University
2. Title of Research
   Literacy, Empowerment and Emancipation: A Case Study of Literacy
   Practices of 'Peasant Workers' in Northern China
3. Granting Agency, Contractor
   Not Applicable
4. Description of Project
   Research Question:

I. Does the current literacy program (basic education) bring personal
empowerment and social development to 'peasant workers'? If not, why?
II. What kind of literacy program can help 'peasant workers' to achieve
personal empowerment and social development?
Participants:

'Peasant workers'(Mingong) represent a newly emerged social group ever
since China has initiated its economic reforms in the last two decades.
Many farmers no longer do farm work any more, choosing to move into cities
to find jobs that are more economically rewarding. Generally speaking,
they work in the mining, construction or other industries that require
heavy physical labor. In my study, participants will be selected from
the peasant workers in some construction companies of Jinzhou City,
China.

Instruments, Design and Procedure:

The study is essentially an exploratory in-depth look at a complex issue,
requiring several different qualitative techniques (questionnaire,

interview-discussions). That is, this is not an experiment with randomly selected subjects.

A. I will send out 30-50 questionnaires to get data on their literacy levels and literacy practices in their lives.

B. Based on these data, I will select 10 participants for structured interviews. The interviews will be open-ended. The purpose is to understand their subjective constructions of the world around them.

C. I will also go to relevant governmental organizations to get some statistical data about peasant workers in China.

Educational Purpose/Benefit:

'Peasant workers' are, to some extent, neglected by Chinese society. I hope that this study will contribute in drawing attention to this marginalized group, and more and more research on them will be done in the future.

At the same time, I realized that education in China normally focuses on the transmission of ideology, the memorization of knowledge or the training of specific skills. I hope that through this study, we can focus more on the humanistic side of education and put personal empowerment and development at the heart of education.

Scholarly Review: Not Applicable

Part Two: Research Participants

1. Samples of Person to be studied

The city of Jin Zhou is located in Liaoning Province in the north of China. There are several construction companies. Most of the construction workers in these companies were originally farmers from the countryside around Jinzhou city. They work long hours every day. Employers provide living places and food for them and pay them low salaries. They are labeled as 'peasant workers' (translated literally from Chinese) in China and belong to one of the lowest social classes in Chinese society. My participants for the research will be selected from these construction workers.

2. Method of Recruitment of Participants

Through personal contact, I will seek permission from the managers of these construction companies. I will explain my purpose and my methods to these managers and at the same time I will make sure that this research will not affect either the managers' or the workers' jobs. For example, I will conduct my research during their off hours. I will first determine eligibility based on my criteria and then randomly select workers from this group of eligible workers for my research. The participation should be voluntary and participants can quit this research any time they want. I will explain my research results to both the managers and the participants when I complete them.

3. Treatment of Participants

Outline of procedure in detail:

1) Select a construction company where I have access through my personal contact. I will try to choose a big company which has about 200 workers.

2) Meet the managers. It is very important that they establish trust in me. I will communicate with them about my purpose and my method for the research and listen to their suggestions so that this research will not bring troubles to the their jobs. On the other hand, I will ask these managers to assure that this research won't affect the participants' jobs as well. I will tell the managers that I won't disclose my data to them but I am happy to come back to them with my research result. Details of the research will also be discussed with them including the procedure to choose participants, time schedule, places for research, etc.

3) The requirement for being a participant is that he must was originally a farm worker and has come to work in the city. Among qualified 'peasant workers', I will introduce my research to them and randomly select 30-50 participants. However, I will try to select them from different ages, origins of birth, literacy levels, etc.

4) After choosing qualified participants, I will sign a consent form (translated into Chinese) with them. For those who able to read the written form (See Appendix III), they will sign for themselves. For those who are not able to read this form, I will read the oral statement of the consent form (See Appendix IV) one by one and sign for them if they agree. This is supposed to be an appropriate way to do so in China.

5) Find a big space and carry out the questionnaires. (Sample of Questionnaire See Appendix I).

6) Analyze the questionnaires. Select proper participants for interviews according to their ages, jobs, levels of literacy and origins or birth. Codify their names.

7) I will find a private space near their living places and carry out interviews. I will not tell them who will be interviewed beforehand. The number of interviewees will be around ten. (Sample of Interview Questions See Appendix II)

8) Finish fieldwork. I will tell these participants that I will bring the result to them when I have it. I would be very pleased to discuss it with them at that time.

9) I will store the data in a safe place and put them into my laptop. Later on, I will carry both the papers and my laptop to Canada.

How will research be introduced:
I will explain to the participants that I am going to do a research on their literacy practices for my M.A. thesis and I have already got the permission from their managers so that there will not be any influence on their jobs. The research is made up of questionnaires and interviews. All they need to do is to carry out the questionnaires. All the answers will be kept confidential and will only be used research purpose. I will be pleased to come back and communicate with them about my research results. Also, the workers have the right to choose to participate or not.

Do participants understand time and effort required:
I will have my time schedule approved by the managers first and then explain it to the participants.

How will private and confidential information be protected:
All the questionnaires and interviews will be kept confidential. For the questionnaires, I will ask participants to write down their names which are necessary for me to identify them in order to go on to the next step: interviews. Then, I will codify their names and use these codes for interviews. In this way, the content of interviews will be kept confidential even though someone else sees them by accident. Data will

not be disclosed to anyone except for the researcher.

Where is the information going to be stored:
The information collected will be noted on paper and stored in my house. I plan to put all the data into my laptop. Later on I will bring both the paper and the laptop to Canada with me.

Part Three: Ethical Concern
1. Informed Consent

   Written Consent (See Appendix IV)
   I will translate this into Chinese and have the participants who can read and write to sign them.
   Oral Statement of Consent Form (See Appendix V)

2. I will read this to those who cannot read and write one by one. If they agree, I will sign for them. The researcher thinks that this is the most appropriate way to do so in the specific cultural context of China.

3. Deception

   Deception 1: Interviews are usually seen as related to political issues. And due to the strict political situation in China, people are cautious not to get involved in any political discussions. Therefore, there is a potential that participants may hide their real feelings and say things that are in accordance with what the government publicized as "correct". In order to avoid this deception, I will make it clear I have no relations with the government and my analysis and publication will be conducted in Canada. I will emphasize that the data will be valid only when participants are offering the truth, that being truthful will help to bring about improvement. What's more, I will keep those data confidential so that they cannot be identified and will not get into any political trouble.

   Deception 2: The word "illiterate" has some negative implication, therefore those who are illiterate may be hesitant to admit that they cannot read or write. Since I will ask them to fill out the questionnaires by themselves, I will know who is illiterate.

4. Freedom to Discontinue

I will include the freedom to discontinue anytime during the research in the consent form. They can tell me or their managers verbally that they don't want to participate in this research any more. The managers will know how to reach me.

5. Assessment of Risks

Risk for the Participants:
Level of Risk: Low
The potential risk exists in structured interviews. I would ask them to describe if non-literacy has brought any bad influence on their lives and what they are. I think that this might evoke some unhappy life experiences and therefore arouse pain or shame. However, I don't think that this will bring about psychological damage. At the same time, I will reach an agreement with the mangers before the research starts to assure that this research will not affect these workers' job. I will assure the workers of this understanding.

Risk for the Researcher:
Level of Risk: Low
First of all, my research is legal. Second, Chinese government is more and more democratic today. They welcome criticisms and suggestions as long as these won't bring any damage to the government.

The researcher is aware of how important it is to keep good rapport with both the managers and the workers. I will let the managers know that my research is only for academic purpose. I will assure them that I will not report what I collect to any governmental organization. In my final report, I will not disclose the name of the company.

6. Protecting and/or addressing participant "at risk" situations.

For the risks to the participants:
I will try to calm down if some of them are nervous at answering questions and avoid any further inquires on this topic.
I will code interviewees' names so that the content of the interviews will be safe from anyone except for the researcher. Interviewees will be made aware of this fact.

For the risks to the researcher:
I will use delicate words to assure the managers that my research will not bring any problem to the them. In doing so I protect myself from any possible difficulty from them. In addition, local personal contacts will help to insure that the researcher retains her welcome in the setting.

7. Post-research Explanation or Debriefing

    How will you explain research to participants: See question two in the part of Treatment of Participants
    How will you explain results to participants: I will go back to them and tell them about my results.   I will have to do it orally because my final result will be in English, instead of Chinese.
    Have you indicated where participants can reach you? Yes, in the consent form.
    How will participants be protected in the event you publish findings? Participants' names and companies' names will not be disclosed in the findings.
    Will information or quotes be made available in any public forum?   Yes. And confidentiality will be protected as indicated in the consent document.

8. Confidentiality of Results
    The research is confidential, but the researcher will know the identity of participants since the identity is required so that the researcher can select some of them for interviews later. The identity information will not be disclosed to anyone. The researcher will keep all the data with her all times.