



A Study of Class Competition and Interpersonal Patterns in the Urbanization Process

——Taking takeout industry as an example

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Abstract. In the process of urbanization, a large number of agricultural migrants have entered the emerging urban business, promoting a rapid transformation of the urban and rural class structure in China. With the arrival of economic downward pressure, class interactions have taken on new characteristics, causing corresponding adjustments in interpersonal relationship patterns. Based on the reference group theory, the study analyzes the reality of class competition and the corresponding interpersonal interaction strategies in the takeaway industry as an example. The study finds that there are two kinds of interaction strategies: differential positioning and homogeneous competition within the middle class, mainly the shopkeepers; the social underclass, mainly the rural migrant population, is in a state of "controlled atomization" and there is invisible competition; between the middle class and the social underclass, there is both class collaboration based on the division of labor in the industrial chain and class collaboration based on the temporal order. In the middle class and the bottom of the society, there is both class collaboration based on industrial chain division of labor and class competition based on time order. Therefore, good industrial policies should be designed to mitigate the competitive conflicts between different strata.

Keywords: Class Competition; Interpersonal Relations; Urbanization; Takeaway Industry

1 Presentation of the Issue

In the process of urbanization, China's social class structure has undergone unprecedented internal changes. According to Qiu Liping and Gu Hui, the sources of the "new middle class" in Chinese society at this stage can be distinguished into three entry channels, namely, administrative entry through power-granting relations, market entry through market exchange relations, and social network entry through social capital[1]. However, in Li Qiang's view, the strength of the middle class in China is still relatively weak, as it accounts for a relatively low absolute proportion of the nation's employed, laborers, workers or peasants on the one hand; on the other hand, the newly emerged middle class is highly unstable and strongly dependent on economic development performance. As Hu Haixiao points out, globalization and rapid social transformation have made China's "middle class" more uncertain and compounded[2]. The development of China's middle class has encountered deep social imbalances that bring about fractures and conflicts, and the prominence of its numbers cannot conceal the unrest and turmoil of the large base class, the underclass.

In 2012, "new type of urbanization" became the guideline of China's urbanization policy, the core of which is people-oriented and people-centered urbanization. As of the end of 2015, the total number of migrant workers who have not obtained urban hukou was 277 million, accounting for as much as 20% of the total population at the end of the year [3]. The total number of migrant workers who have not obtained urban hukou was 277 million by the end of 2015, accounting for 20% of the population at the end of the year. In terms of urban pull, the development of the Internet has facilitated the growth of new economic sectors such as take-away, express delivery and net-contracted vehicles, which have absorbed a large number of migrant agricultural workers and provided a channel and opportunity for peasants to move to the cities.

Therefore, with the advent of the economic downswing and the slowdown of social wealth increment, the relationship between different social classes has increasingly shown contradictory and competitive patterns, especially the reproduction of the middle class presents inherent structural tensions. In this context, this study attempts to deconstruct the relationship between class competition and interpersonal

relationship patterns in the context of transition, taking the take-out industry as an example, and analyze the state of interaction between different social classes in a social state of increased competition. Specifically, two research questions are included: (1) What are the development demands and action goals of these social classes in the takeaway industry involving takeaways, merchants and e-commerce platforms? (2) What kind of competitive relationships exist within the same class and between different classes? What are the characteristics of their respective interaction strategies?

2 Theoretical Foundations

Reference groups are also known as significant others, and the attitudes and standards of reference groups often serve as criteria for individual self-judgment and social action. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Cooley proposed the theory of "The Looking Glass Self", in which others' evaluations and attitudes towards oneself were used as a "mirror" to form self-concept. "The Mirror"[4] . In his famous work *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois uses Cooley's "Looking Glass Self" perspective to depict the nearly fractured sense of self in the black spiritual world in the half-century after the Civil War. African Americans were torn between Negro identity and American citizenship due to white sociopathy[5]. *The Souls of Negroes* further highlights the influence of the community of others on an individual's self-perception. In 1942, Hyman (1942) first introduced the concept of "reference group" [6] .

For Merton, a famous American sociologist, reference groups include three types of people: those who have actual interactions with themselves and have stable social ties; those who are roughly in the same status or in the same social category; and those who are in a different status or social category. Therefore, this paper will use reference groups at three levels: firstly, examining the class relations and their interpersonal interaction strategies within the middle class with reference to the middle class; secondly, examining the class relations and their interpersonal interaction strategies of the social underclass groups with reference to the social underclass groups; and finally, examining the status of class interactions and their relationship patterns between the middle class and the social underclass from a comparison between different classes.

3 Case Presentation

3.1 Case Overview

The H City East Center Complex is located in the center of the city's east area and is an experiential urban complex that integrates high-end shopping, themed commercial streets and high-end residences. Within the complex, nearly 1,500 shops are occupied, providing more than 10,000 jobs and generating about 600 million yuan in taxes annually. Among them, the fourth and fifth floors are mainly for the catering industry, which basically occupies Meituan, Hungry Food and other take-out platforms. In this paper, 12 of these food and beverage businesses engaged in takeaway delivery were selected as respondents, and structured interviews were conducted with food and beverage operators and takeaway riders respectively, with a view to understanding the actions, identifications and strategies of different class groups in the takeaway industry.

3.2 Class Relations in the Takeaway Industry

In the takeaway industry, three class relationships are included: middle class to middle class, within the social underclass, and between the middle class and the social underclass. Next, we will specifically examine the daily life situation of the above classes and their relationship patterns.

Firstly, it is the daily life of the middle class, mainly the shopkeepers, which can be summarized as the "outsourcing and capital operation" model. In this model, stores are managed by a "manager + employee" system, in which the entrepreneur with ownership is responsible for funding and coordination, while the specific affairs of the store are mainly managed and operated by professional managers. Nine of the 12 stores have recruited store managers through social recruitment channels, and some stores even have more than one store manager, whose job description includes daily incoming and outgoing goods, staff management, business strategy development and customer relations. When the store is profitable, the entrepreneur is usually not involved in the specific activities of the store, and is mainly responsible for core matters such as the development of the store's overall business strategy, adjustments and account clearing. In this model, the store will adopt more specialized business strategies, such as painting ratings, running campaigns, dealing with bad reviews, search recommendations, platform bidding rankings, etc.

There is also another model of "autonomous, family-run business". The shops are managed in a family/workshop style of "relatives + employees", where the owner is both the legal representative and the actual proprietor, and is responsible for all matters large and small within the shop. Of the 12 shops, three are run mainly by the owner himself, with key family members and even relatives helping out in the shop, and a small number of employees are also recruited. Unlike outsourcing, self-employment requires the owner to spend more time on specific matters, or even to specialize in one of them, which leads to a significant lack of specialization in this category. Under this model, shops will focus more on their strengths in terms of taste, price and human relations, and adopt a differentiated competitive strategy to avoid vicious competition with other capitalized shops.

Secondly, there is the daily life of the social underclass, mainly take-away riders. Within this group, their lives show the following characteristics: (1) the state of social mobility of moving from rural to urban areas. From the interview results, 64% of the riders are above 40 years old and belong to the older generation of migrant workers who have moved out from the rural society, most of them have the life experience of going out for many times. 36% of the riders are below 40 years old and belong to the new generation of migrant workers, most of this group grows up in urban communities, far away from the rural life, and have a greater sense of identification with citizenship. Among them, 45% of the riders have already bought a house in the city but do not have a stable formal job, while others have not yet bought a house in the city and are still in a state of "rootlessness". (2) Split status of crowdsourcing and full-time work. From the interview results, more than 90% of the riders are part-time riders of crowdsourcing, whose advantages are: flexible working hours, no restrictions, and the possibility of taking care of children; less assessment and management requirements, lower regulations on the riders' operation process, and lower barriers to entry; higher delivery amount per order, but the delivery difficulty is also increased. In addition, e-commerce platforms recruit a small number of full-time regular employees, pay five insurance and one gold, and provide the latter with unified training, assessment and management, generally responsible for the delivery business in a specific area, with lower delivery difficulty and relatively fixed salary income. (3) Separate state of career and life. For full-time riders, the e-commerce platform is responsible for providing food and housing, and strictly enforces rigid time regulations for morning, mid-shift and evening shifts, with free time in the unit's dormitory during off-duty hours; for crowdsourced riders, time control only occurs

during the delivery period, and flexible time arrangements allow riders to take care of both personal and work affairs, especially taking care of the elderly and children at home. As a result, takeaway riders are able to maintain clear boundaries between their work careers and their daily lives.

4 Class Relations and Their Interaction Patterns in the Takeaway Industry

4.1 Within the Middle Class: Differential Positioning and Homogeneous Competition

First of all, the reference group has a comparative evaluation role, and individuals can obtain an evaluation of themselves by comparing with the benchmark level of the group they belong to. In the process of operation, restaurant shops will determine their own development position, especially according to their own resource advantages to determine specific business strategies. For outsourcing operators, they prefer to initiate homogeneous competition, occupy a regional leading position, and obtain scale and brand effects, with common strategies including promotional activities, standardized management, and brand building, with particular emphasis on the concept of service first. Second, individuals who lack identification with the reference group may tend to pick an external group as a reference. For independent operators, they will generally "benchmark" with small stores outside the complex, and adopt different positioning strategies and chain brands to differentiate themselves, specifically in terms of lower prices and emphasis on taste, thus forming their own brand characteristics to sustain their survival.

4.2 Inside the Social Underclass: Controlled, Atomized Individuals

In addition, reference groups have a normative role that compels individuals to follow certain standards of behavior determined by the group. For takeaway riders, their delivery behavior is influenced by three factors: clear goals, rule constraints, and feedback systems. First, almost all takeaway platform companies use a piece-rate wage system, i.e., riders receive a corresponding commission for each order they deliver. Therefore the amount of orders run determines the rider's income. Secondly, riders must follow the standard process of arrival-pickup-delivery. If they do not complete the corresponding task and confirm it in advance, the platform system will

automatically consider the rider to be "fraudulent" and impose a fine of varying amounts. Thirdly, the rider's performance will be reported in a timely manner through ranking and "performance" rankings. The higher the rider's rank, the more likely the platform system will randomly send orders, and for each completed order, the rider will receive an additional \$0.1 bonus on top of the commission. The rider's rank depends on the rider's order volume, number of positive reviews and attendance rate.

4.3 Across Classes: Division of Labor and Competition for Time

As they are in two links of the industry chain, shops and delivery riders belong to different reference groups, and there is no homogeneous competition between them. On the one hand, food distribution and delivery constitute two important links of business activities, and there is a social division of labor between the two class groups that collaborate with each other; on the other hand, the rigid constraint of delivery time internalizes the time cost, which indirectly leads to relational competition between riders and shops. In principle, when a rider gets an order, he/she should immediately go to the restaurant to pick up the food. If there is an order from the same restaurant or in the same direction before the rider "confirms the pickup", the platform system will assign the new order to the same rider, but the problem is that it comes at the cost of delaying the "confirmation of pickup", which will cause a delay in the delivery time of the order.

5 Conclusion

In the process of urbanization, Chinese society has experienced unprecedented distance changes, providing a large number of opportunities and resources for class mobility for the new urban middle class as well as for the mobile population moving out of agriculture. With the onset of economic downward pressure, social class competition has intensified and class interactions have taken on diverse relational forms. In the takeaway industry, interpersonal relationship patterns have differentiated interaction strategies among different classes. Among them, the middle class, mainly the shopkeepers, shows a differentiated positioning and homogeneous competition, while the social underclass is strictly controlled and atomized, and there is a "power gap" between the middle class and the social underclass - there is both There is a "power divide" between the middle class and the bottom of society - there is both

collaboration and division of labor in the industrial chain, and competition and conflict in the temporal order. Therefore, there is a need to properly manage the interpersonal class conflict according to the structural position of different classes.

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