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## Letting Go of the Western Upper-Middle-Class Centric Cultural Capital Framework: Exploring the Cultural Wealth of the Taiwanese Working Class

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### Abstract

Existing mainstream theories of social class, such as Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, tend to favour the upper class in Western contexts. These theories often use Western upper-middleclass culture and tastes as the standard for defining what constitutes 'favourable capital.' Within this Western-centric and upper-middle-class-oriented framework, the working class, particularly in non-Western societies, is often viewed as 'disadvantaged' or 'culturally deficient.' However, the working class is not necessarily 'unfavourable' and 'needs to be changed.' They may possess unique advantages and forms of capital that are simply unrecognised by mainstream standards. This raises important questions: Who determines whose capital is important and whose is not? Do working-class individuals represent themselves, or are they interpreted and silenced by the Western upper-middle class? This study challenges the existing Western upper-middle-class bias and shifts the perception of the working class from being culturally deficient to recognising their unique cultural wealth. Taiwan, as a non-Western society with a blend of Eastern and Western influences, is suitable for exploring the unique cultural wealth possessed by the working class that differ from existing Western centric theories. Through interviews with 10 Taiwanese workingclass individuals who have successfully achieved upward social mobility, this study identifies their cultural wealth. The findings reveal that Taiwan's social and cultural context, which places significant importance on academic qualifications, along with the working-class individuals' unwavering determination, resilience, and social affinity shaped by their backgrounds, are intertwined to form their cultural wealth. This challenges Western upper-middle-class conceptualisations of 'favourable capital' and reflects Taiwan's unique societal context.

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