

# How Social Inequality is Being Written in “New” Taiwanese Sociology Textbooks: When Western Theories meet Local Reality

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## I. Introduction: A Brief Re-cast of Taiwanese Sociology

1. The first 30 years of Rootless and Dependless: 1950-1970s
2. The second 30 years of Indigenization and self-liberalization: 1980-2011
3. Three Turns
  - (1) The Moderate Turn: close to Taiwan reality
  - (2) The Critical Turn: on top of Taiwan's critical issues
  - (3) The Radical Turn: inside of Taiwanese political democratization
4. “A paradigm shift” has been taking place in Taiwanese sociology in the past 3 decades. Since then, “Taiwan in context” has been in the minds of many local Taiwanese sociologists when they wrote about sociology and Taiwan society. And only taking such context of paradigmatic shift in Taiwanese sociology in mind, the following reading of Taiwanese textbooks on social inequality could make more sense and with more appreciation.

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## II. The Textbooks and Related Chapters to be Looked at

1. *Taiwan Society* (台灣社會), edited by J. H. Wang, Taipei: Chiu-Liu Books, 2002, 540 pp. (a total of 15 chapters)

Chapter 6: Social Stratification, by R. M. Tsai

Chapter 7: Sex and Gender, by C. F. Chang

Chapter 8: Ethnic Relation, by F. C. Wang

2. *Sociology and Taiwan* (社會學與台灣) (3rd edition), edited by J. H. Wang and H. Y. Chiu, Taipei: Chiu-Liu Books, 2009, 550 pp. (a total of 21 chapters)

Part II: Social Differentiation and Inequality

Chapter 5: Social Class and Social Stratification, by K. H. Su

Chapter 6: Gender, by M. H. Chen

Chapter 7: Ethnic Relations, by C. C. Chih

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3. *Social Problems of Taiwan* (台灣社會問題) (2nd edition), edited by H. Y. Chiu and L. Y. Chang, 2010, 608 pp. (a total of 16 chapters)

Chapter 6: Poverty, by Y. C. Wang

Chapter 7: Unemployment, by W. C. Chou

Chapter 9: Indigenous Peoples under Colonial Structure,  
by C. C. Chi

Chapter 11: Immigrants/ Workers under Globalization,  
by H. C. Hsia

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### III. The Matrix of Social Inequality in Taiwan

1. Four Major Manifestations of Social Inequality (treated as social problems) are identified in the textbooks:

- \* Poverty
- \* Unemployment
- \* Domestic Ethnic Minority
- \* International Marriage and Labor Immigrants

2. Three Primary Structural Sources (Factors) of Social Inequality (considered as social structures) are also underlined in the textbooks:

- \* Class
- \* Gender
- \* Ethnicity

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### 3. The Mapping of Social Inequality Analysis

A Matrix of Social Inequality

Manifestations of SI / Structures of SI	Poverty	Unemployment	Ethnic Minority	International Immigrants
Class				
Gender				
Ethnicity				

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#### IV. An Initial Reading of Social Inequality in the Textbooks

1. Poverty and unemployment have long been considered as the established and conventional social inequality problems in Taiwan, while the inequality issue of ethnic minority defined with a critical perspective was induced by the recent ethnic movements and inspired by the emerging discourse of minority rights. The discrimination and human rights issues faced by the new international marriage and labor immigrants were also recently discovered and analyzed with critical sociological eyes.
2. Very significantly, the three structural factors as the causes of the above four prevailing social inequality issues in Taiwan, are class, gender, and ethnicity. The three structural factors have always been identified as the sources of social inequality in the western sociology. But such “structural perspective” was a rather recent development in Taiwanese sociology and it was only possible after its liberalization and indigenization phases since 1980s and 1990s.

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3. From a content analysis of the selected 160 edited books published by sociologists between 1980 and 2011 reveals that the most popular phrases (concepts) used in the titles are “change” (變遷) and “development” (發展), followed by “issues” (課題) and “problems” (問題). Obviously, various aspects of Taiwan’s social change and development and the related emerging issues and problems have indeed occupied the attentions of indigenously minded sociologists when they intended to portray Taiwan as a changing society in their edited books.

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4. Furthermore, a look into the detailed topics of the included 1133 chapters in the above 160 books even reveals another significant fact: “ethnicity” related articles take the lead (137 chapters), followed by “social class” and “social mobility” (131 chapters), “social structured change” (83 chapters), and “gender” related issues (78 chapters), and then “social movements” oriented topics (73 chapters).

Once again, these focused themes have reflected the “indigenous attention” and “liberal intention” in the minds of the Taiwanese sociologists in their writing about Taiwan’s change and development, especially on the recently emerging social inequality issues.

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## V. The Substantive Writings of Social Inequality in the Textbooks

1. To refer to the above matrix, each possible “analytical cell” can be filled by:
  - (a) Introduction of related theoretical frameworks developed in the West
  - (b) Illustration of empirical evidence in Taiwan
  - (c) Offering social criticism and policy recommendations so as to eliminate the injustice incurred in the specified aspects of social inequality

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2. On every and each aspect of the four social inequality manifestations and the three social inequality fundamental structures, respective authors/ sociologists have introduced relevant sociological theories or analytical perspective in interpreting the specific social facts of social inequality as conceived in the western sociologies. It ranged from the classical sociological theorists such as Marx vs. Weber and neo-Marxist vs. neo-Weberian theories on class; to contemporary theorizing such as assimilation theory, pluralism and social constructionism on ethnic relations; to liberal feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism on gender; to Orientalism and the theorizing of “the others” on foreign spouses and workers, among others.

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3. However, reading through the related seven chapters, it is found that there are more “instructive concepts” to describe the phenomena of social inequality than “guiding theories” to explain the causes, magnitudes and consequences of social inequality in the texts. In other words, the respective authors have not really intended to apply any particular western sociological theory to write about the whole story of specific social inequality of Taiwan, rather it is their purpose to introduce the students (readers) with different aspects of the real world of social inequality that could empirically observed and witnessed through verifiable empirical data and statistical evidence.

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4. To offer as complete empirical illustrations of social inequality as possible seems to be the main objectives for each related chapter, the author also introduces succinct conception or phrasing to catch the essence of certain complexity of inequality phenomenon such as “stratification of gender”, “stratification of ethnicity”, “social problemization of indigenous peoples and immigrants”, “racialized class discrimination”, “shift from provincial backgrounds to ethnic origins”, “class matters”, “gender matters”, “ethnicity matters”, and “state matters”

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5. All in all, the related seven chapters are successful in portraying, depicting and sketching various dimensions of both “manifestation” of and “fundamental structures” of social inequality problems in Taiwan by verified empirical evidence generated by Taiwanese sociological research and government statistics. They also use highlighted useful concepts to explain the issues of social inequality in a sociological manner.

6. Finally, it is the “local reality” rather than “western theories” that has occupied Taiwanese sociologists minds when they write about the aspects of social inequality in Taiwan.

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## VI. Possibility for a Common Textbook on Social Inequality in East Asia?

1. Yes, if such textbook is an empirically based one that is intended to teach East Asian sociology students of the commonality and difference of social inequality issues among the five East Asian societies. So far, it is more or less ready to take on this challenge as empirical studies of social inequality with enlighten perspectives are generally in fine shape.
2. No, if such textbook is designated to be a theoretically-driven one that is intended to inform East Asian sociology students of the comprehensive and even locally-generated theoretical construction of social inequality among the five East Asian societies. Though the theoretical-analytical interpretation of the manifestations and causes of social inequality in each society has begun for some years, it is still far from the stage where an East Asian theory of social inequality can be produced.

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3. Nevertheless, judged from the Taiwan case and its relevance to the rest of four East Asian societies, it is instructive to envision a “state-generated social inequality” theorizing in analyzing and explaining how the state actions have shaped the origins, ramifications and consequences of different aspects of social inequality--poverty, unemployment, ethnic minority and international migrants, as well as a “state-associated social inequality” theorizing in understanding how the state has also actively molded the extent to which class, gender and ethnicity have directly or indirectly created social inequality.

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