



Understanding Social Stratification in China's Sociological Textbooks

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Background

- Recovery of sociology in China in 1979 when the economic reform began
- The first Department of Sociology established and started sociological training in Peking University in late 1980s. Since then, sociological education has gradually developed in colleges and universities.
- However, no discussion of social stratification in the first sociological textbooks during 1980s and early 1990s.
- The term of “social stratification” appeared in sociological textbooks in late 1990s.
- Since the begin of this century most of sociological textbooks have a specific chapter to discuss the issue of social stratification.



Four major features of social stratification research in China

- Effort to break social stratification research away from the authority's ideology
- Close relation between social stratification research and policy-making
- Focuses and topics closely follow the process of the economic reform
- Conflict, interaction and integration between Chinese specific experience and western sociological knowledge



Social stratification and ideology

- Tradition of Marxist class theory
- Class theory and the authority's ideology
- Change of ideology and theoretic debate
- Class analysis and functionalist theory of social stratification
- Sensitive topic



Social stratification and social change

- The economic reform has brought about huge and dramatic social, economic and political changes
- key focuses and topics of social stratification researches closely follow the process of the economic reform.
- Different social problems appearing in different stages of the economic reform caused continuous transferring in focuses, topics and concerns of social stratification.



Focus and Topic

- Change of stratification mechanism
- Emergence of New classes
- Rising of income inequality
- Socioeconomic gap between urban and rural areas and migration
- Education inequality and college entrance examination



Social stratification and social policy

- Main target of the research is to find measures to solve social problems and provide suggestions for governmental policy-makers.
- Social stratification research is relative to public concern
- Courses on social stratification become more and more popular in universities. Students have great interests to attend these classes.



Chinese and western Knowledge

- Interaction and conflict between localized awareness and sociological knowledge from western sociology
- Generational difference in explanation of social stratification
- Integrate localized knowledge and western sociology



Four stages

- Stage 1 : 1979-1989
Reflecting traditional Marxist class theory and making academic research independent from socialist ideology
- Stage 2: 1990-1995
Avoiding theoretical controversy and focusing to investigating and describing what changes happened
- Stage 3: 1996-2000
Different approaches: cleavage between Chinese-style popularized research and western-style academic research
- Stage 4: since 2001
Comprehensive research and focusing not only on empirical problems but also on theoretical concerns



Stage 1 : 1979-1989

- Social stratification research likes controversies of ideology
- Most discussion are about theoretical arguments but not empirical research
- Theoretic debates break social stratification research away from ideology and beyond traditional Marxist class theory
- Western theories of social stratification, such as theories of Marx Weber and functionalism, had been introduced into China



Stage 2: 1990-1995

- 1989 interrupt the progress of social stratification research to be academic research
- A backlash of political ideology after 1989
- Social stratification research became a politically sensitive topic
- Western sociological theories had been criticized by Party theorists
- Debates on theories of social stratification had been prohibited
- Few of discussion on social stratification in sociological textbooks
- However, there are some comprehensive descriptions on social changes based on large-scale surveys and providing suggestions for the government leaders



Stage 3: 1996-2000

- Chinese sociologists gradually accepted Western sociology and began to learn methodology of western sociology
- Social stratification research became the first field to accept western sociology
- There were two types of social stratification research: Chinese-style popularized research and western-style academic research
- Academic research developed quickly in the study of social stratification. Many Chinese versions of English sociological textbooks published and became mainstream textbooks in sociological training of universities
- However, influence of these researches had been limited in academic circles and been farther and farther away from practical problems the public and policy-makers were interested in.



Stage 4: since 2001

- Effective integration between Chinese-style popularized research and Western-style academic research
- Ideological constraints were broken through to some extent
- A large number of research results have been introduced into sociological textbooks
- These researches provide comprehensive and thorough analysis on the transformation of China's social stratification during recent 30 years
- Some of these research results have great social influence or feedback
- Policy-makers pay great attention to these research results
- A few of textbooks for courses of social stratification has been published which displayed a pluralistic theoretical approaches and multiple subjects



Summary: evolution, mature and innovation

- Chinese understanding of social stratification during recent decades has been experienced evolution, mature and innovation. It has been developed in a process of conflict, interaction and integration between Chinese localized experiences and western sociological theories.