

How social inequality and stratification is researched and taught in Korea

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Short history of interest in “social class”

- Dearth of stratification research before the 1980s
- Class stratification as booming industry during the 1980s
- Cooling down of heat in the 1990s, and rekindling of interest in the 2000s

Research & teaching on inequality before 1980s

- Mostly theoretical discussion on classical sociologists' ideas – Marx, Weber, Dahrendorf, Giddens
- Focus on functionalist explanation of stratification and its critiques
- Translated textbooks of western sociology

Upsurge of interest in class and stratification during 1980s

- Rediscovery of Marxist class theory with the rise of social movement
- Growth of empirical studies on class inequality
- Heated debates on class structure and class formation

Debates on class in 1980s

- Economic fates of “working class”:
proletarianization vs marginalization
- Political orientation of “middle class”:
conservative vs progressive
cf: 中産層 & 中民

Retreat from class during 1990s

- Weakening of ideological interest in class after the end of cold war
- Rise of interest in pluralism and post-industrialism
- Hong & Koo(1993)'s textbook on social class & stratification in Korea

Rekindling of interest in inequality in the 21st century

- Increasing economic inequality since 1990s
- Research projects and data collection on inequality and stratification
- Courses offered on diverse aspects of inequality

Emerging issues & topics

- New forms of inequality: contingent workers, generation gap....
- Ascriptive inequality: gender inequality, race inequality (immigrants)
- Consequences of stratification: health, culture & life-style, political preference...

Reflections on theory & model

- Mostly imported and applied to Korean context, and rarely constructed “bottom-up” style from the field
- Some concepts are “performative”: they do not passively mirror reality, but actively shape our perception & thinking

Reflection on data & method

- Most data come from standardized procedure of survey and analyzed using general statistical models
- Less data gathered from field studies of interview or participant observation to highlight particular aspects of inequality in Korea

Reflection on teaching

- Juxtaposition of theoretical ideas, concepts, and models with statistics from Korean empirical data
- Korean realities of inequality seen through the lens of western sociology

Questions

- Can we research and teach stratification and inequality in other ways than we currently do? If so, is it better?
- What are the Korean characteristics of inequality that evade western concepts and models?

Questions

- What are the factors that generated or contributed to the Korean characteristics of inequality?