Structuration or Individualization: Changes in the Social Stratificationin in Urban China From 1988 to 2009

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Abstract

This paper uses the urban household survey data for 1988-2009 in the city of S to make primary research whether the person's objective class position affects consumption patterns in the process of social inequality of urban. The results show that the urban class structuration is a substantially inverted U curve, not a linear process. In 1988-1993 during the early period of the marketization, the "destratification" and "popular" characteristics had been mainly presented and there was no significant difference in most projects in consumption patterns between classes. In 1994-2001 in the dual marketization stage, the class structuration had basiclly formed, that is, there was a significant difference in expenditure and the class taste and culture had gradually formed. Since the marketization expansion stage in 2002, the consumption patterns of class has been presented the "semi-structured" state and the explanatory power of class shows an apparent decline. With the improvement in economy, the society has entered the stage of mass consumption and person's consumption patterns tended to be diversified and individualized.

Key words: Structuration; Individualization; Social stratification; Consumption patterns

INTRODUCTION

One of the central debates in the field of social stratification emerged at the end of the 20th century and concerns the concept and importance of class in the developed industrial society (Clark & Lipset, 1991; Erickson, 1996; Pakulski & Waters, 1997; Sorensen, 2000; Dieter, 2001).Many people in this debate argue that the meaning of class seems not any more useful for understanding the contemporary society. This perception is closely connected to the individualization of the life style in postindustrial society (Beck, 1992; Beck, 2002; Bauman, 2013). While Some argue for the importance of class in determining and interpreting social phenomena. Empirical results also show for instance that classes still tend to shape their members from within their social class, that is, economic security and prospects are stratified by class (Goldthorpe & Marshall, 1992; Hout & Brooks et al., 1993; Morris & Western, 1999; Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). Further developments of the debate focus on the relevance between explanatory power of class and the degree of class structuration (Grusky & Ku et al., 1994).

The discussion about the impact of social classes on social behaviours and life styles has been lively. Traditionally,many sociologists have stressed the strong connection between social class and behaviour.Based on Marx and Weber, class structuration theory is provided by Giddens. According to Giddens (Giddens, 1981), whether classes become social classes is dependent on various forms of structuration. Structuration of classes is contingent and the connection between social classes and social behaviour is a matter of empirical inquiry rather than a theoretical construct. Giddens particularly emphasizes on which he calls "distributive groupings". In the view, he refers to the relationship between social groups and commonality lifestyles. Giddens considers that the consumption patterns can be seen as strengthening social stratification in societies where the different class

can be observed as living in visibly distinct areas. Thus, class is structurated if there were significant differences in consumption patterns between classes. In general, consumption patterns have become the important evaluating standard for degree of class structuration.

In contemporary sociology Bourdieu may be the most famous scholar with the view that consumption matters the class structure (Bihagen, 1999). Bourdieu describes the class difference in term of the concept of "Distinction". On Bourdieu's own account (Bourdieu, 1984), distinction starts out from 'an endeavour to rethink Max Weber's opposition between class and stand'. According to Bourdieu, if children from different classes are brought up in systematically different milieus, their success in school or in a job interview can be affected, which in turn uphold the class structure (Bourdieu, 1984). This view of consumption as a tool for class reproduction is in sharp contrast to some perspectives on 'post-modern consumer society' (Featherstone, 1990). He views society as "a system of relatively autonomous but structurally homologous fields of production, circulation and consumption of various forms of cultural and material sources" (Brubaker, 1985). His empirical research found that different classes are clearly different in consumption structure such as food, culture and the appearance. People in the same income may also have different consumption patterns, because he different classes have different tastes, which form the class culture, and that strengthen the class boundary. In addition, Gans also agrees that people in higher social strata are those who prefer and consume 'high' or 'elite' culture, while individuals in lower social strata are those who prefer and consume "popular" or "mass" culture (Gans, 2008). The individualization may be regarded as an attempt to restrict the validity of structuration. Many Postmodernists argue that class analysis hasn't done apply to consumption study in highly developed industrial society because it cannot show the fragmentation, volatile and reflexivity of postmodern consumption. Differences in consumption and lifestyle are indeed losing their grounding in social stratification. Other structural bases such as age, gender or ethnicity are now at least as important as class in conditioning lifestyles. Beck argues that with the development of social economy, people's income, education, social mobility on the rise, society has entered the stage of mass consumption, and people's consumption patterns tend to be more diversified and personalized, thus weakening the associated class and the way of life. In the wealthy and industrialized countries, reflective modernity and globalization breaks the class consciousness and culture in the industrial society (Beck, 2002). Thus, the birth of mass consumption and the development of the economy, providing more people with resources for consumption, make the question of class and consumption intriguing.

Since the reform and opening in 1978, contemporary China has experienced a transition from a planned economy to a market economy. In the process, economy has developed rapidly, but social inequality has continued to rise in China (Nickum, 2003; Cai & Chen et al., 2010). At the same time, China has been transformed from a relatively homogeneous society to one with great variation in the struction of socail stratification. However, there are debates over change of socail stratification in china. In my reseach, firstly, I will attempt to identify whether there are distinctions for consumption practices between the different social classes over the past two decades. Secondly, I will explore the impact of social classes on consumption patterns and lifestyles, by analyzing how differently social classes spend their income. Finally, I will attempt to determine how urban society in contemporary China is stratified in terms of consumption patterns. In doing so, by using the urban household survey data for 1988-2009 in the city of S, I will test empirically two theoretical approaches, "class structuration theory" and "individualization theory". The primary research question is how the changes of social stratification in China's urban society.

1. DATA AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

1.1 The Data-Set
This study uses the 22 phases of the urban household survey data collected by the National Bureau of Statistics of China over the period 1988-2009 in the city of S. Households who are selected by sampling with probability proportionate to size (PPS) in the surveys are required to keep records of their income and expenditure. Hence, this data-set contains detailed information about the categories of expenditure and the head of household's individual characteristics for urban households. The total sample size within the period of 22 years was 6203 households.

1.2 Variables

1.2.1 Dependent Variables: Consumption Patterns Indicated By Expenditures and Ownership
In this paper Consumption patterns is indicated by expenditures and ownership. The urban household survey data is so useful as it contains all expenses of a household although it does not cover all aspects of consumption, since expenditures might only be regarded as one aspect of consumption (Bihagen, 1999). Another important aspect of consumption is ownership of durables. Thus, expenditures and ownership will be analyzed in this study.

1.2.2 Independent Variables
The most familiar measure of class in modern societies is occupation of the head of households. Education is measured here with an ordinal scale:(1) managers, (2) professionals, (3) routine nonmanual employees, (4) manual workers, (5) self-employed workers, and (6) others.

Other variables in this paper indicate the position of household in the social stratification. Work-unit sector

is very important for household in Urban China (Bian & Logan, 1996). Thus, I distinguish the market sector from the state sector (code 0 for the market sector and 1 for the state sector). A variable of Work-unit industry is also used. To control for the size of households a variable of Per capita disposable income will be used. Moreover, these variables of sex and age will be used because they probably affect consumption. Education is also used because it is a variable strongly correlated with class. All these variables are of great importance in the analyses of class differences since all of them are correlated with class in different degrees (Bihagen, 1999).

1.3 Models

1.3.1 OLS Regression Model

In the first part of the analysis, four consumption categories are selected. Those selected consumption categories are: eating out, food, looks and culture. The Ordinary Least Square(OLS) regression model is suitable for the items everyone consumes where: in $(Y) = \alpha + \beta_1(class) + \beta_2(gender) + \beta_3(age) + \beta_4(income) + \beta_5(education) + \beta_6(sector) + \beta_7(industry) + \beta_8(Hukou) + \beta_9(household size) + \varepsilon$, where Y is a continuous dependent variable measuring the amount spent on the consumption items.

1.3.2 Logistic Regression Model

In the end of the analysis, logistic regressions, which are suitable with dependent dichotomous variables, are used to predict having vs. not having, or consuming vs. not consuming. The equation will be: $\log P/(1-P) = \alpha + \beta_1(class) + \beta_2(gender) + \beta_3(age) + \beta_4(income) + \beta_5(education) + \beta_6(sector) + \beta_7(industry) + \beta_8(Hukou) \beta_9(household size) + \varepsilon$, where P is the probability of consuming a element, the "Bs" are vectors of coefficients for class, gender, age, income, edecation, sector, industry, Hukou, and housuhold size.

For studying whether there are distinctions for consumption practices between the different social classes Over the past two decades, the period will be divided into three stages on the basis of degree of inequality. In the early period of the marketization (prior to 1994), social kept a relative equality and a higher homogeneity. In the dual marketization stage (1994-2001), social inequality began to rise. In the marketization expansion stage (2002-2009), social inequality further expanded to stabilize. Finally, I have chosen suitable models to estimate the differences of consumption between the classes.

2. RESULTS

2.1 Ordinary Least Square Regression Results of Four Selected Consumption Categories

In this section, I estimate the relative effect of each socio-economic demographic factor on four selected consumption elements to see how consumption patterns vary across different classes. This is accomplished through OLS estimation. In the following pages, I report the findings in tables through 1.

The results show that there were not significant differences on expenditure of eating out, looks and culture between different social classes from 1988 to 1993 after controlling other variables. However, managers than routine nonmanual employees and manual workers are lower on the food expenditure. In the dual marketization stage (1994-2001), different classes have different consumption cultures. Consistent with Bourdieu' research, the expenditure of food, culture, and Looks differed significantly among the different classes. Specifically, for managers and other classes, there were great differences in expenditure of eating out, culture, and Looks. But there was no significant difference between classes in food consumption. Managers spent significantly more money on looks and culture. In the marketization expansion stage (2002-2009), professionals spent the most amount of money on eating out and culture, and were statistically significant at the 0.1 or 0.05 level of probability. Except professionals, the rest of the classes were not significant difference in eating out. Professionals and routine nonmanual employees significantly lower than managers in food. Except self-employed groups, the rest of the classes spent more money on looks. As the coefficient indicates, Professionals spent the most amount of money on culture.

In sum, the distinctions for consumption patterns between the different social classes over the past two decades are substantially inverted U curve. Specifically, with the deepening of the marketization and social inequality, the differences of consumption between social classes were on the rise. Since 2002，however，the differences of consumption between social classes have a downward trend, which only embodied in part of the classes. Food expenditure showed the changes of class culture. In the period of the low level of life, routine nonmanual employees and manual workers spent the most amount of money on food. With the improvement of standard of living, there are not significant differences on food between different social classes.

2.2 Logistic Regression Results of Ownership of Durables

Turning our interest to the ownership of durables I see that the class differences are generally more obvious than when analysing expenditures on non-durables.

Logistic models are used here to examine relative effect of each socio-economic demographic factor on four selected durables. In the following pages, I report the findings in tables through 2.

Table 1
OLS Regression of Expenditures on Non-durables

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Model 1 1988-1993	Model 2 1994-2001	Model 3 2002-2009
Eating out	Female	-0.190	-0.045	0.313***
	Age	-0.070	0.087***	0.015
	Age square/100	0.056	-0.110***	-0.011
	Size	0.430***	0.160***	0.355***
	Log income	1.407***	0.922***	1.233***
	Education	0.068*	0.035***	0.096***
	State sector	-0.238	0.095	-0.028
	Monopoly industry	0.071	-0.066	0.221***
	Professionals[a]	0.017	0.401***	0.361*
	Routine nonmanual employees	0.073	0.485***	0.254
	Manual workers	0.143	0.403***	0.271
	Self-employed workers	.	0.247	0.043
	Others	0.183	1.017***	0.119
	Hukou			0.370***
	Constant	-5.802**	-4.450***	-7.852***
	Ajust R^2	0.258	0.192	0.253
Food	Female	0.301	0.126	-0.026
	Age	-0.022	-0.010	0.003
	Age square/100	0.033	0.012	0.004
	Size	0.165***	0.150***	0.233***
	Log income	0.146*	0.130***	0.189***
	Education	0.015	-0.010*	-0.003
	State sector	-0.114	0.053*	0.035
	Monopoly industry	0.097	0.068***	-0.002
	Professionals[a]	0.079	-0.022	-0.133**
	Routine nonmanual employees	0.186*	-0.048	-0.115**
	Manual workers	0.217*	0.054	-0.075
	Self-employed workers	.	0.132	0.001
	Others	0.411	0.187***	-0.028
	Hukou			0.108***
	Constant	6.324***	6.862***	5.872***
	Ajust R^2	0.187	0.168	0.300
Looks	Female	0.090	0.017	0.134***
	Age	0.087**	-0.006	0.035***
	Age square/100	-0.117***	-0.005	-0.054***
	Size	0.154***	0.234***	0.266***
	Log income	1.037***	0.994***	0.928***
	Education	0.050***	0.030***	0.032***
	State sector	0.490***	-0.035	-0.061*
	Monopoly industry	0.038	0.019	0.030
	Professionals[a]	-0.052	-0.212***	0.022
	Routine nonmanual employees	0.071	-0.160**	0.056
	Manual workers	0.062	-0.317***	-0.035
	Self-employed workers	.	-0.276	-0.132*
	Others	0.262	-0.247**	-0.016
	Hukou			0.142***
	Constant	-5.040***	-2.107***	-2.721***
	Ajust R^2	0.420	0.339	0.360

To be continued

Continued

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
		1988-1993	1994-2001	2002-2009
Culture	Female	-0.050	-0.005	0.023
	Age	0.059	0.178***	0.112***
	Age square/100	-0.092	-0.197***	-0.139***
	Size	0.342***	0.139*	0.316***
	Log income	1.902***	1.033***	0.775***
	Education	0.127***	0.174***	0.145***
	State sector	-0.528*	0.428***	-0.257***
	Monopoly industry	-0.068	-0.498***	0.022
	Professionals[a]	-0.027	-0.136	0.408**
	Routine nonmanual employees	-0.307	-0.469**	0.213
	Manual workers	0.266	-0.551**	0.200
	Self-employed workers	.	-1.837***	-0.005
	Others	-1.414**	-0.195	0.557**
	Hukou			0.356***
	Constant	-15.123***	-12.373***	-8.954***
	Ajust R^2	0.152	0.148	0.115

Note: Omitted category is managers. In all models the year is controled as a dummy variable. * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01（two-tailed tests)

The results show that there were not significant differences on the possession of air conditioners between managers and all others from 1988 to 1993 after other variables are controlled. Compared to the manual workers, those routine nonmanual employees and professionals have air conditioners more at the 0.05 level of probability. In the dual marketization stage (1994-2001), manual workers were more likely to have air conditioners. In the marketization expansion stage (2002-2009), the probability of ownership of air conditioners for manual workers was significantly lower than the professionals and self-employed groups.In the early period of the marketization (prior to 1994), there were significant differences with an audio system between different classes. The odds of having an audio system for those professionals, routine nonmanual employees, and manual workers were respectively 44%（1-e^{-0.587}）, 60% (1-e^{-0.916}) and 61% (1-e^{-0.932}) lower than managers. In the dual marketization stage (1994-2001), there was no significant difference with an audio system, compared to managers. Besides, there was also no significant difference between manual workers and all other classes. In the marketization expansion stage, manual workers were significantly less likely to have an audio system, compared to managers. There was no significant difference with a computer between different classes in 1988-2001. In the marketization expansion stage, the probability of ownership of computer for managers was significantly higher than that of all other classes. Manual workers were significantly less likely to have a compute, compared to professionals and routine nonmanual employees. Besides, the results of having a musical instrument and computer are very similar.

From the results of ownership of durables I can conclude that the possession of air conditioners and musical instruments presents inverted U curve between different classes. There were significant differences in 1994-2001. Except compute, the differences between different classes gradually weakened from 2002.

Table 2
Logistic Regression of Ownership of Durables

Dependent Variables	Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
		1988-1993	1994-2001	2002-2009
Air conditioner	Female	0.241	0.419***	-0.022
	Age	-0.001	-0.005	0.023***
	Log income	1.691***	1.578***	0.756***
	Education	-0.052	0.043	0.135***
	State sector	-0.300	0.025	-0.049
	Monopoly industry	0.181	0.276*	0.171
	Professionals[a]	0.441	0.194	-0.032
	Routine nonmanual employees	0.145	0.189	-0.234
	Manual workers	-0.586	0.533*	-0.401
	Self-employed workers	.	0.531	0.056
	Others	-0.373	0.171	-0.073
	Hukou			1.122***
	Constant	-15.049***	-14.190***	-8.711***
	pseudo R^2	0.163	0.151	0.155
Audio system	Female	0.301	0.126	-0.026
	Age	0.018	0.013*	0.013***
	Log income	1.149***	0.779***	0.429***
	Education	0.020	-0.000	0.027*
	State sector	0.521	0.068	-0.131
	Monopoly industry	-0.028	0.093	0.157**
	Professionals[a]	-0.587**	-0.312	-0.059
	Routine nonmanual employees	-0.916***	-0.197	-0.089
	Manual workers	-0.932***	-0.093	-0.410**
	Self-employed workers	.	0.175	-0.278
	Others	1.455*	-0.514	-0.216
	Hukou			0.402***
	Constant	-27.528	-7.803***	-5.592***
	pseudo R^2	0.191	0.048	0.047
Compute	Female	-0.246	0.206*	-0.118
	Age	-0.076***	0.040***	0.020***
	Log income	0.387	0.700***	0.557***
	Education	0.016	0.090***	0.157***
	State sector	0.332	0.378**	-0.340***
	Monopoly industry	-0.457	-0.092	0.145
	Professionals[a]	0.429	-0.044	-0.492*
	Routine nonmanual employees	0.338	0.164	-0.584**
	Manual workers	-0.818	0.162	-0.914***
	Self-employed workers	.	0.202	-0.723**
	Others	1.206	-0.646*	-1.062***
	Hukou			0.777***
	Constant	-18.490	-9.403***	-6.340***
	pseudo R^2	0.268	0.093	0.143

To be continued

Continued

Dependent Variables	Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
		1988-1993	1994-2001	2002-2009
Musical instrument	Female	0.347	0.583***	0.226*
	Age	-0.016	0.022**	0.015**
	Log income	0.850**	0.597***	0.369***
	Education	0.233***	0.109***	0.171***
	State sector	2.158**	-0.050	-0.097
	Monopoly industry	-0.033	0.202	0.095
	Professionals[a]	0.373	-0.531**	-0.210
	Routine nonmanual employees	0.864**	-1.154***	-0.216
	Manual workers	0.803*	-0.985***	-0.496**
	Self-employed workers	.	-1.930*	-0.176
	Others	1.929	-1.508***	-0.751**
	Hukou			0.337**
	Constant	-13.372***	-9.418***	-9.176***
	pseudo R^2	0.092	0.089	0.075

Note: Omitted category is managers. In All models the year is controled as a dummy variable. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed tests).

CONCLUSION

Contemporary China has experienced a transition from a planned economy to a market economy. In the process, economy has been developing rapidly; however social inequality has continued to rise in China. At the same time, the changes of social stratification in China's urban society are very complicated.

An important result of this study is that the urban class structuration is not a linear process, a substantially inverted U curve. In the early period of the marketization in 1988-1993, the "destratification" and "popular" characteristics had mainly presented and there was no significant difference in most projects in consumption patterns between classes. In the dual marketization stage in 1994-2001, the class structuration had basically formed, that is, there was a significant difference in expenditure on eating out, looks, culture and possession on air conditioners, musical instruments between classes, whose taste and culture had gradually formed. Since the marketization expansion stage in 2002, the consumption patterns of class has been presented the "semi-structured"state and the explanatory power of class shows an apparent decline. The difference between the majorities of consumer items is only reflected in individual class, and presents an obvious individual trend.

Although social inequality has been rise since 2002, the consumption patterns of classes have not showed strengthened structure with the economic development, suggesting that the society has entered the stage of mass consumption and person's consumption patterns tended to be diversified and individualized with the improvement in the economy, which has weakened the relevance of class and lifestyle. Social inequality is more individualized rather than class-oriented.

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