

## Academic Significance and Contemporary Value on the Gap between the Rich and the Poor of Song Dynasty

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**Supported by** Chongqing Graduate Research Innovation Project “Study Inequality Issues Under the Song of Social Transformation - in the Northern Song Dynasty City Center” (CYB2015062).

Received 9 February 2015; accepted 11 July 2015  
Published online 26 August 2015

### Abstract

As we all know, from Tang dynasty to Song dynasty, there’s an obvious change of traditional Chinese society. In academia, it is called the Tang-Song transformation. In the social and economic level, there has been a widening gap between the rich and the poor and frequency of social conflicts. Facing the growing gap between the rich and the poor problem, the Song government governed the society by taking a series of positive measures, in order to reduce the wealth gap. For this issue, in academia, there have been some researches and investigations, but these achievements are still not enough. This thesis tries to conduct a preliminary explanation of the academic significance and contemporary value of academic history review and rational discussion, in order to strike a chord in academia.

**Key words:** Song dynasty; Gap between the rich and the poor; Academic significance; Contemporary value

Sun, J.; Wei, M. Q. (2015). Academic Significance and Contemporary Value on the Gap between the Rich and the Poor of Song Dynasty. *Canadian Social Science*, 11(8), 7-10. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/7476>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7476>

### INTRODUCTION

The gap between the rich and the poor is the crucial issue in all social transformation periods. The intervention, domination and understanding to the wealth gap are the important issues for social government of all dynasties and one of the hot spots cared by many researchers. As we all know, from the Tang dynasty to Song dynasty, there’s an obvious change of traditional Chinese society. In the social and economic level, the most outstanding change is dramatic concentration of rural land which is aroused by the reform of the land management system. Then, lots of landless farmers rushed into the city. Therefore, this phenomenon speed up the urbanization process of Song dynasty and the development of the commodity economy. As a consequence, the change of land management system, the development of the commodity economy, the wideness of the wealth gap and the social class division formed a closed causal chains. That is, because of “no clear field management system, no suppression for merger” of Song dynasty, land annexation become more and more serious. For the land lost farmers, they either stay in the countryside, become tenancy, or leave the countryside and rush into cities to promote the prosperity of the urban economy. In view of this understanding, putting the perspective of social transformation on urban and rural areas of Song dynasty and making systemic analysis on the interactive relationship among social transformation, income disparity and social stratum polarization has significant meaning for further understanding of the Tang-Song transformation.

### 1. ACADEMIC VALUES

#### 1.1 Theoretical Meaning

Since the middle-Tang dynasty, the structure of society and economy changed deeply along with the change of land mechanism. Traditional Chinese society started the

change from status society to contact society, from equal society to differential society, from agricultural society to agricultural-commercial society. During this process, the non-status gap between the rich and the poor became the pronominal problem in Song dynasty. Out of the need for social stabilization, Song dynasty processed a positive management of the gap between the rich and the poor, and wanted to erase the great gap through re-distribute of the wealth. As for the whole characteristics, the transition of the society in Tang and Song dynasty seems similar with now days China, though there is a time-distance of thousands of years. The contents of the transition as well as the change process both show similarity.

First of all, as for social differentiation, the characteristic of the change of Tang and Song dynasty is the change from status society to commercial society, which is similar to the change in the society in China now days. Before middle Tang dynasty, the social distribution mechanism clearly according to social class. The most silent characteristic is the mechanism of “ennobling according to the military success” in Qin and Han dynasty. From the nobility to normal people, they all take the land according to their social status. After the middle Tang dynasty, along with the emergence of non-status rich class and the carry out of the tenancy system, the dependency on status became loose and the resources tended to be distributed equally. The political status is not the only factor that affects the distribution. As for the Chinese society in recent 50 years, it also went through a transitional process from status society to commercial society. Before 1978, political status was the important factor for people to get resources and the distribution of all kinds of living material was different according to different social classes. After the opening and revolution of China, the status factor became weaker gradually, and transition to the distribution according to the amount of labor. Especially with the building of market economy system, the social productivity was freed and the free change of all kinds of productive factors was favored. The market involves can activate in the distribution according to several kinds of factors such as their labor force, knowledge, land and resources and so on.

Secondly, as for the gap between the rich and the poor, the meaning of the Tang and Song dynasty social transition is at the change from the equal society to the differential society. The Han and Tang society before Song is status society, the distribution of wealth is strictly according to the status classes. The noble social status is the base on “the wealth”, and normal people are contracted by ming-tian system and jun-tian system. Those who owned a lot of land were the ones those who owned the higher social status. Therefore, Han and Tang dynasty society was a society of the noble people; the political status decided the economic resources. After the building of Song dynasty, the government didn’t impede

the land merge, and therefore the land concentration degree expanded greatly. Besides, the process of law system in Song dynasty guaranteed that most of the social members got the resident qualification and slaves disappeared gradually. From then, the non-status rich class began to emerge, the diversion standard of the status of social members change from high-low level of social status to poor or rich. And because of that, Song dynasty was usually referred to normal people in society or rich people society. Since 1978, looking from the point of view of the gap between the rich and the poor, the change of the former thirty years of China and latter thirty years of China was similar to the change of Song and Tang Dynasty, which all changed from equal society to differential society. Before 1978, because of the existence of planned economy system, the income level of normal social members was similar. Those who had higher living standard were those within the system and their income level was divided according to their political status too. After opening and revolution, market economy system took over of planned economy system, and the government gradually controlled less of social resources, poor, low-level social status, rich and high-level social status have been divided in to four aspects, the necessary link between social status and economy status was broken, and a large amount of normal but industrious and wealthy people emerged.

Thirdly, as for re-distribution, the meaning of the transition of Tang and Song dynasty was that the government gave up the intervention of the first-time distribution, and aimed at the second and third distribution to adjust the gap between the rich and the poor. The so-called giving up the intervention for the first time distribution referred to the policy that Song government didn’t distribute the land with force, but carried out “no land system”. At the same time, in order to close the gap between the rich and the poor and to guarantee social stability, Song government aimed at the second and the third distribution, and processed government guarantee positively at one side, and encouraged folk charity at the other side. As for this, the educational circle has reached a common view about the success, the coverage and the meaning of Song dynasty’s social guarantee system. For instance, professor Wang Liping of Suzhou University thinks that the social guarantee system of Song dynasty cannot be reached even at Ming and Qing dynasty. Professor Zhang Wen of Xinan University believes that the social guarantee system of Song dynasty is unique in Chinese history. Besides the just evaluation of Song government’s guarantee system, we should see that the gap between the rich and the poor has been enlarged greatly. Corresponding to this, before 1978, the state hoped to maintain the intervention of the first-time distribution through planned economy system. Because most of the social resources have been distributed equally,

the social guarantee system which prevents social risk and under way social relieve seems not that important. But after 1978, with the political power gradually doesn't intervene the first-time distribution, the market economy becomes the main stream, and in order to guarantee that social members can still live after the failure in market competition, and to adjust the distance between the rich and the poor, the social guarantee system began to be resumed and developed.

## 1.2 Academic Meaning

In academia, the research for gap between the rich and the poor in the period of Tang-Song transformation and the social governness, redistribution of income and so on are not enough. For the content of research, the past research most focus on distribution thought, concentrative degree of rural land and the traditional social relief system, such as the research for distribution thought by Yang Huangxing and the research for the rural land issue of Song dynasty by Qi Xia, Zhao Gang, Gu Gengyou and Kui Jianrong and the exploration in the area of social relief system by Zhang Wen. There is still a big development space for the research of gap between the rich and the poor in Song dynasty and social governance measures. Besides, for the research means, there are researches focus more on the description and no quantitative analysis. Therefore, the academic values are as follows:

Firstly, making the issue of gap between the rich and the poor and social governance measures as the focus of research can help us get a better understanding on the wealth gap issue and the civilization process of Song dynasty. Because of the merge of rural lands arouse the large amount of farmers rush into the cities, they supply labor force to cities and make the solid base for economic prosperity of the cities, at the same time, this phenomenon also lead in the sharply wideness of wealth gap. Facing this challenge, on one hand, the government of Song dynasty inherits the traditional policy, and on the other hand, they make some innovation, such as the residential facilities in cities and reduce the influence of urban refugees to the social stability.

Secondly, no matter in economic circles or in sociology circles, most of the researches on gap between the rich and the poor from the perspective of reality, even make the long period and diachronic study. Particularly for the research of the rich and the poor issue at present at home, they usually take the 30 years after reform and opening as a research period. Because the wealth gap change and the outcome of problem always need a long time to emerge and governance measures and redistribution of income also need long time to show its effect. Therefore, the longtime research for the issue of gap between the rich and the poor can help us have better understanding of change law of wealth gap and the real effect of income redistribution policy. Through the systemize and explore for the city wealth gap of Song dynasty, it can help the

researchers have a deep understanding on the gap between the rich and the poor and income redistribution, and also can make some case study supports for other areas in humanities and social sciences.

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## 2. CONTEMPORARY VALUE

At present, gap between the rich and the poor and governance measures for this issue have become the predominant topic of socially sustainable development. French economist Thomas Katie thought since the 1980s, the wealth gap in the world becomes more and more deeply. If we don't make some changes, this issue will become the more serious social crisis. Throughout the history of China, the gap between the rich and the poor is the crucial issue in Chinese history especially in social transformation periods, and it aroused a serious of social problems in history. By analyzing the gap between the rich and the poor of Song dynasty and revivification of governance measures of Song government, particularly measures in income redistribution. This is not only the study of historical problems, but also the echo of present social problems. Therefore, we can have a better understanding of the wealth gap problem and supply academic and thoughts resources to contemporary Chinese social transformation.

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## 3. REACH MEANS

According the reality of social transformation in Tang and Song dynasty and the subject and object of gap between the rich and the poor, the research route of this topic could be summarized as **follows**:

Firstly, we could directly study the gap between the rich and the poor of urban-rural in Song dynasty based on the center of gap between the rich and the poor. Thus different and specific research route should be adapted according to their different situation in the urban area and rural area. For rural area, because land is the most important means of production, through the analysis of rural land concentration and combining the quantitative analysis of rural households of hierarchy it is a research route. And at the same time, because the city officials, soldiers and businessmen are regarded as the main group, simple analysis of the land concentration is difficult to restore the gap between the rich and the poor of the city. I'm afraid we need to centralize salary to carry on the quantitative statistics. Especially for Song dynasty's capital city Kaifeng and Linan, due to the millions imperial guards and thousands of officials, the salary level must be obviously affected the whole society gap between the rich and the poor.

Secondly, we could study the gap between the rich and the poor Song dynasty from one aspect centered on social security. As a way for social control, the social

security aim is to prevent social risks and maintain social stability. From the point of income distribution, social security is also a kind of income redistribution. Through the way of fiscal transfer payment, social security could regulate social income gap. Facing the expansion of the gap between the rich and the poor, Song dynasty has carried on the bold practice of social security whose concrete measures have been acknowledged in academic circles. But social security's concrete effect to adjust the gap between the rich and the poor still worthies further studying.

Thirdly, we could comprehensively study the Song government's countermeasures on the social governance. Social security is only a part of the social control. In order to make up the wealth gap, the Song government took positive social control measures such as strengthening the control of rural security, increasing income of petty officials, temporarily reducing the tax burden and so on. Through specific social governance measures according to the gap between the rich and the poor, we could learn the attitude and understanding of the gap between the rich and the poor from the view of government.

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## CONCLUSION

Through the investigation and reduction of the gap between the rich and the poor in Song dynasty, it will not only help us to deepen the understanding on traditional Chinese society, but also observe and study the changing process of the gap between the rich and the poor in traditional Chinese society as well as the concept and attitude of traditional society to the wealth and poverty problems in a broad way.

In addition, the investigation to the problem of the gap between the rich and the poor will also help us to deepen our understanding of the social transition period which

perhaps has the most important academic value on this issue. As Li Hung-Chang puts it, China was in the changing situation since three thousand years ago. From the reform of the Lord Shang to Two-Tax Law of Tang dynasty, to the Hundred Days of Reform and the reform and opening up, China's traditional society has experienced four large-scale social changes. Through analysis the history of Tang and Song dynasty, it will help us to understand the development deeply and grasp the venation of Chinese civilization. It will also help us to understand the rise and fall of history while we regard history as a mirror for the guidance of the future.

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