
Preface

Social and political analysts in the English-speaking world began to toll the death of class both as social phenomenon and as analytical concept as early as the 1950s. The ‘death of class’ is attributed to new developments in modern industrial societies including national democracy, the welfare state, economic and social pluralism, the rise of institution-based divisions, an ever-widening educational front, ethical individualism, occupational differentiation, rising affluence, market fragmentation, and so on and so forth. Coupled with these are various flaws that critics find in the class concept, methodologies of class analysis and class theory. Perhaps the most devastating blow to the class concept is its loss of ideological significance and political centrality following the decline of Marxism, the collapse of Soviet communism, and the resultant waning appeal of socialist ideologies and class radicalism.

A similar decline of interest in class took place in China in the late 1970s, as the concept gradually lost discursive legitimacy after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) embarked on the systemically transformative programme of ‘reform and opening’. The programme can be characterized as a conscious abandonment of the Party’s decades-long revolution and class struggle in favour of economic development through comprehensive marketization and partial privatization. It was motivated by the antipathy to class struggle and references to class which prevailed in China in the wake of the Cultural Revolution among the rank and file of Party-state cadres and in society at large. Against this backdrop, Chinese analysts and commentators rejected class analysis *en masse* and went further to disarticulate class and subvert Marxian class theory. Indeed, the slogan of ‘farewell to revolution’ rang loud in the greater part of the 1980s. What was meant by ‘revolution’ was, more than anything else, the CCP’s communist revolution, which Mao Zedong described as the violent act of one class overthrowing another. It was this revolution, as was widely believed in China in the early days of ‘reform and opening’, that had caused the loss of millions of lives in the country and suffering to even more Chinese citizens. Hence, a consensus emerged among all walks of life about the need and desirability of rejecting class *in toto*; it was not in the least an issue whether class was a useful concept or an actual social reality that should be analysed and understood.

However, the claims about the 'death of class' have been proven wrong. In the People's Republic of China (PRC), in particular, class has made a remarkable comeback in the last two decades, while social stratification, the transformation of the PRC's class map and class relations have attracted enormous attention in Chinese academia and mass media. The surging interest in the subject obviously has much to do with the dramatic socio-political change in the reform era. A result of 'reform and opening' is the emergence of greater inequality than has ever been experienced in the PRC and even in advanced capitalist systems. By the Party-state's official accounts, China's Gini coefficient in 2014 stood at 0.469, although the index had been dropping for six years in a row since it rose to 0.491 in 2008 from 0.412 in 2000, when the National Statistics Bureau first began to publish the index. As a consequence of massive social stratification and rapid class differentiation since 1978, what social and political commentators in the PRC used to describe as the de-stratified Chinese society under Mao, comprising two classes (workers and peasants) and one stratum (intellectuals), has evolved into an unprecedentedly complex structure and intricate web of social relations. The PRC's status order has been transformed as well.

Research on China's social stratification and class formation began to gather momentum within the country in the 1990s and outside the country about a decade later. The contributors to the handbook have been at the forefront of the research, some having been actively engaged for years or decades. I would like to thank them all for agreeing to join the project and bringing their rich expertise to the handbook. In Australia, David Goodman has played a leading role in the inquiry into China's new rich and questions of class not only through his publications but also by bringing interested colleagues together and organizing reading groups, seminars and workshops. Five of the contributors here participated in the Seminar on Class which David organized at the University of Sydney between 2009 and 2011, and about half of the contributors presented at his invitation at the 2011 workshop on Class and Class Consciousness in China. I have benefited greatly from David's inspiring work and exceptional leadership. The conception of this handbook is largely a result of the seminar, the workshop, other related projects, and numerous conversations and debates with him.

Most of the chapters of the handbook were presented at a workshop held at the University of Technology, Sydney in December 2013, which was generously funded by the university's China Research Centre. Stephen Frenkel, Jonathan Hassid and Jonathan Marshall acted as discussants and made detailed and insightful comments on the chapters they discussed. Mark Selden, Sally Sargeson, Terry Woronov and Joel

Andreas suggested very useful ways of structuring the handbook and dealing with various themes. Anita Chan, Jon Unger, Chen Guangjin and You Ji chaired sessions at the workshop and provided invaluable feedback on the papers. Clare Moore took good care of the visitors' flights and accommodation, catering and every other aspect of the workshop. Frances Guo and Selene Martinez Pacheco painstakingly combed through the manuscripts for errors, stylistic inconsistencies and missing or incomplete references. I am deeply grateful for everybody's contribution at every stage of the project. Without their participation and support, the handbook would not have been possible.

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