
Introduction: class and stratification in the People's Republic of China

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The subject of the handbook is the shifting class map and status order of the People's Republic of China (PRC), as well as the changing patterns and dynamics of social stratification, which are telling indicators of its socio-political reality. The subject will be analysed from multiple perspectives in the broad context of China's economic, political, social and cultural change, so that the analysis of fundamental changes in China's class reality and stratification will not only produce a panorama of class formation, class sorting and class experiences as well as status attainment and maintenance in the PRC, but also aid understanding of the evolution of its polity, economy and society in general. Whilst the handbook will encompass the whole PRC period, its focus will be placed upon the transition from the pre-reform era (1949–1978) to the post-reform era and recent developments since 1978.

CLASS CONCEPTS, CLASS ANALYSIS AND CLASS THEORIES

Social stratification, or the unequal distribution of societal resources, is a common feature of all complex societies, whilst 'class' is a major organizing concept in the exploration of stratification systems (Crompton 1993: 4). The multiple meanings of class have been the subject of recurrent and protracted debates in class studies, raising vexing conceptual, methodological and theoretical issues that remain unresolved. The conceptual differences are significant because they could refer to different social realities, and the differences are compounded by methodologies of class analysis and lead to different class maps or relations among the identified classes. What is more, explanations of class are commonly informed by, or embedded in, class theories and broader ideologies or tied to various vantage points or perspectives. Thus, social classes and socio-political reality, like every other type of social phenomena, cannot be conceived or perceived independently of the volition and representation of socio-political analysts and social agents (Zimmerman and Wieder

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1971; Giddens 1977; Collin 1997). Indeed, they are products of the very cognition or an accomplishment of the accounting practices through and by which they are represented, described and explained (Berger and Luckmann 1971: 13; Zimmerman and Wieder 1971). In other words, knowledge about inequality and class, like knowledge about society in general, is 'a realization in the double sense of the word, in the sense of apprehending the objectivated social reality, and in the sense of on-goingly producing this reality' (Berger and Luckmann 1971: 210–11). Hence, defining classes is fraught with risks.

For the purposes of this handbook, there is no need for the contributors to offer their own definitions, as the task of the handbook is not to name classes or devise class schemes but to find out and present what class means to those in the PRC who employ the concept, what class schemes they have devised, why that is the case, and how the identified classes fare under changing circumstances. What matters most therefore is the meaning of 'class' that is given to the term by analysts and other social agents in the PRC as well as the lived experiences of commonly identified classes rather than the contributors' definitions or classifications.

That said, there are times when it is imperative for the contributors to interrogate and disagree with the classifications of the Party-state or PRC analysts. For example, high-ranking Party-state leaders, let alone ordinary cadres, are rarely referred to as the ruling class or upper class in official communications or the Chinese-language scholarship, not least because they are said to be 'servants of the people' (*renmin gongpu*) and because it is politically harmful to acknowledge the division of Chinese citizens into ruling and ruled classes. But that does not mean that the contributors should not call a spade a spade or critically engage with common ways of naming, describing and explaining classes. Critical judgement and interpretation are essential in their analyses of common notions and representations of class, particularly those of the Party-state, social analysts, and individuals and groups who are sorted into classes and status groups.

In common usage, the single term 'class' is a shorthand to describe groups ranked in a hierarchical order, structures of material inequality or an individual's social attributes, or to indicate social standing or prestige. Social classes are also perceived to be actual or potential social actors. There is no need to disparage these uses of 'class', as any social grouping can be called a class as long as that signifier is widely understood and accepted in society. Problems arise, however, when a given class concept is taken out of its historical or discursive chain of signification or detached from the analytical methodologies and theories in which it is

embedded, attached to competing methodologies and theories, or applied haphazardly in the analysis and explanations of stratification. Yet the 'dis-embedding' and 'grafting' of class concepts are not uncommon in class studies, as is most amply demonstrated in vacuous arguments about China's middle class (Guo 2008, 2012).

In the conceptions of theorists and researchers, 'class' variously signifies concrete social groups such as occupational aggregates, collectivities, communities, theoretical or abstract categories, and so on. The most basic question that has been the focus of recurrent debates is whether or not classes are social actors or social forces with the capacity to transform society or make history. This question underlies much of the polemics surrounding dichotomies such as class structures and class action (with consciousness being the intermediary between the two), objective and subjective class, and structure and culture, to name the most notable. These dichotomies centre on whether consciousness is integral to the identification of a class and what are the most significant sources of social differentiation and stratification. Answers to the question dictate or shape conceptions of class, analytical methodologies and explanations of social relations and trajectories of change. They also entail explanations as to what galvanizes classes into action, whether it is class consciousness, collective identity, solidarity, common interests, predispositions, antagonism or something else, and, if so, how these things come about.

Marxists posit that classes are social forces capable of making history, and that the struggle between the 'warring classes' of capitalist society is the motive force of history propelling human societies from capitalism to socialism and communism. However, Marx never gave a precise definition but used 'class' both as a theoretical or abstract concept in the development of his theory and as a descriptive, historical concept. His abstract class refers to a social category derived from relations with the material means of production. Thus, the bourgeoisie are the owners of the material means of production, while the proletariat own only their labour power. This conception of class underpins Marx's class theory. The concrete or practical classes that Marx (1962) identified include the landed aristocracy, financiers, the industrial bourgeoisie, the middle class, the petty bourgeoisie, the industrial proletariat, the lumpenproletariat and the peasantry.

Unlike Marx, Weber did not see classes as communities or social forces; rather, 'they merely represent possible, and frequent, bases for communal action' (Gerth and Mills [1948] 1967: 184–5). His proposition proceeds from the assumption that infinitely variable market-determined class situations reflect differing life chances in the market and that the

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situations are characterized by exchange rather than exploitation and domination within production relations, as Marx posits. It holds in the light of the plurality of what Weber describes as causal components affecting 'life chances', which, unlike class relationships grounded in exploitation, can lead to the identification of a large number of classes which are mostly not directly related, let alone opposed, to each other. As class action and conflict are not deemed inevitable in this approach, class consciousness is not a major theoretical concern, in contrast to the Marxian approach, where class consciousness is of vital importance as a link between structure and action. Indeed, the essence of Marx's class theory is the unity of structure, consciousness and action, or the S-C-A chain.

A widely adopted alternative to the S-C-A model is the 'structure model', which pursues empirical investigation of class structure more than anything else. Another alternative is the culturalist approach which has gathered momentum in the wake of the 'cultural turn' in class studies since the 1990s. In the 'structure model' the term 'class' is used to describe structures of material inequality or groups ranked in a hierarchical order: classes mean groupings unequally rewarded in material and symbolic terms. The classes thus labelled signify positions within the technical division of labour instead of social relations at work or positions within the social division of labour, as is the case in the S-C-A model (Abercrombie and Urry 1983: 109). They are objective entities which can be empirically investigated, and class analysis essentially means the sorting of unequal individuals or aggregates of populations into unequal positions. This model has prevailed in class analysis in post-Mao China, although many analysts take account of class subjectivities, which essentially mean self-identification by subjects (Guo 2008).

The structure model has little to say about consciousness or action. That is not a problem if the analyst is not concerned with class subjectivities. The model's principal value lies in the fact that the identified classes are among the most useful indicators of material advantage and disadvantage in modern societies and are widely used in research on social policy, marketing and advertising, and so on (Crompton 1993: 10). It may also give one some idea about the shape, composition and trajectory of society. Yet not all analysts using this method of class analysis are content with objective structures alone; quite often, 'class-producing' factors are identified and then linked with consciousness, attitudes, predispositions, lifestyles, political preferences, child-rearing practices, opportunities for physical and mental health, access to educational opportunity, patterns of marriage, occupational inheritance, income and so on.

The culturalist approach is probably inspired by the work of E.P. Thompson and Pierre Bourdieu more than anybody else. In culturalist theory, 'class cultures can be usefully viewed as modes of differentiation rather than as types of collectivity', where 'class' processes operate through individualized distinction rather than in social groupings (Savage 2000: 102). Culturalist theorists stress 'how in various settings of social life, processes of inequality are produced and reproduced routinely and how this involves both economic and cultural practices' (Devine and Savage 2000: 193, 196). In so doing, they place culture, lifestyle and taste at the heart of the production and reproduction of social hierarchy and inequality, extend the investigation of culture from consumption to production, and reconceptualize cultural practices as part of both the cause and the effect of class formation instead of simply as an effect.

Whilst concurring with Marx that class is embedded in relations of production and that class experience is determined by such relations, Thompson (1968: 10) shifts his focus away from economic structures in his analysis and to class consciousness, or 'the way in which class experiences are handled in cultural terms, including "embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms"'. Bourdieu goes even further towards the integration of structure and agency, objectivity and subjectivity, and economy and culture. From his viewpoint, various 'forms of capital' – economic, cultural, social and symbolic – together empower (or otherwise) agents in their struggle for position within 'social space'. As a consequence of these different endowments, individual classes come to develop and occupy a similar habitus, understood as 'a system of dispositions' shared by all individuals who are products of the same conditionings (Bourdieu 1987).

In either case, habitus or cultural practices are construed not merely as manifestations of class but as an integral dimension of class or even classes themselves. The value of Thompson's culturalist approach is best appreciated in light of Stuart Hall's (1981) insight that every struggle between classes is always also a struggle between cultural modalities, that winning the struggle of ideas is as important to the class struggle as are economic and political struggles. It is worth stressing, however, that Thompson's work is not so much class analysis as class struggle analysis (Kaye 1984: 201). It is difficult to pin down culture in the process of class formation, as 'class' is not a thing, a structure or even a category, but an abstract force, a 'historical phenomenon' unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, a relationship, and 'something which in fact happens' (Thompson 1968: 9). A major challenge for Bourdieu's approach is where to locate class structure and how to

proceed in thinking about the links between class and culture on the one hand and between various kinds of capital on the other.

The chapters of this handbook draw from the aforesaid conceptions of class without being constrained by a uniformly prescribed definition, analytical approach or theoretical assumption. When applying those conceptions to social analysis in China, however, the authors of each chapter are acutely aware that these theorists' ideas were developed with capitalist conditions and little state intervention in mind and applied to social stratification and class formation taking place under such conditions. As noted in Chapter 4, the conceptions and theories must be reconciled with the fact that the PRC is not predominantly a capitalist system but has a mixed economy and an authoritarian polity which have different effects on social stratification and class formation. Furthermore, there is more reason for cautioning against drawing a clear-cut line between the political on the one hand and the economic, social and cultural on the other in the PRC than in consolidated capitalist systems with limited government.

CLASS AND STRATIFICATION IN THE PRC

The centrality of class in the Chinese Party-state's ideology, if not its practices, is unquestionable, as it is embedded in the constitutions of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and PRC and in the state emblems. Yet the PRC's class map has changed drastically over time; so have the significance of class and the status order in the country as a result of ideological revision, line struggles within the CCP, and shifts in political imperatives and priorities. Whilst class remained a dominant organizing principle in the Mao era, the concept has posed a daunting dilemma to the CCP in that it has become an obstacle to 'reform and opening'. There can be no doubt that the linchpin of the reform programme since 1978 has been the abandonment of Marxian notions of class struggle and Maoist practices of 'continuous revolution'. The transformation of the Chinese economy has altered the class map and status order as well as the dynamics of social stratification, and de-legitimated the assumptions that in the past provided an ideological underpinning for the distribution of material and symbolic rewards within the Party-state hierarchy and in society.

By definition, the CCP is a class organization and the vanguard of the Chinese proletariat. The first constitution of the PRC, which was endorsed at the First National People's Congress (NPC) on 20 September 1954, defined the PRC as a socialist state under the people's democratic

dictatorship, led by the proletariat and based on the alliance of the workers and peasants. Its definition of the 'people' included the proletariat, the peasantry, the petit bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. These classes were the PRC's legitimate political subjects and have been represented ever since by four stars in the national flag and state emblems. After the completion of 'the socialist transformation of the ownership of the means of production' between 1953 and 1956, the Party declared that the exploiting classes as classes in themselves had disappeared in China and the PRC had basically become a socialist system, although it was at the elementary stage of socialism. Nevertheless, the CCP added that the PRC remained a class society, that the remnants of the old exploiting classes including their ideologies would linger on, and that class struggle would last for a long time. The Party continued to label the family backgrounds of some members of society as bourgeoisie, landlords, rich peasants, and other categories which derived from pre-ownership and pre-land reform relationships, even though those placed in the categories had been deprived of their productive property. These labels were passed on to the children and grandchildren of those who had been put in the categories in the past. This practice lasted well into the 1980s, affecting millions of Chinese to varying degrees, although discrimination gradually eased in the reform era.

The CCP's class schemes in the Mao era were not directly related to the actualities of China's class structures; nor were they the result of sociological investigation. What was important to the CCP was a general judgement on the extent to which social groups were supportive or opposed to the CCP. This was a continuation of the Party's long-standing tradition of treating classes as either friends or enemies, while the point of class analysis was, first and foremost, to identify friends and enemies. In the reform era, class has taken on drastically different meaning and significance as class struggle and continuous revolution have given way to 'reform and opening'. The keynotes of the social blueprint of Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, be it 'xiaokang society' ('a prosperous society'), 'harmonious society' or 'Chinese Dream', are economic development, prosperity, high living standards, social harmony and people's happiness.

Still, class cannot be ignored, owing to its centrality in the CCP's ideology. The Party's allegiance to Marxism, albeit spurious, prevents it from openly renouncing Marx's class concept and class theory, and it remains important for the CCP to show that it has not betrayed its class base, which is central to its identity and *raison d'être*. It is also important for the CCP to maintain a class scheme that conforms to the Party and state constitutions. Hence, class is a political reality in the PRC that

cannot be ignored or denied. Its class structures, class composition, class relations and status order have changed dramatically over the last three decades, and these changes must be understood, explained and squared with the Party line.

A major consequence of 'reform and opening' is the transformation of the PRC's class map. Despite the dramatic transformation, the Party-state continues to adhere to its traditional two-class scheme, although it has eliminated the stratum of intellectuals by promoting it into the industrial proletariat as part of its relaxation of ideological and political control over society and mobilization strategy. Though the CCP acknowledges the emergence of new social groups in the reform era, it does not treat these groups as classes separate from the working class but as part of the latter (Jiang 2001: 169). Even those who work with large volumes of capital and rank among the richest in the country and in the world are placed in the working class instead of being classified as upper, capitalist or exploiting classes. In this milieu, the CCP has thrown open its doors to private entrepreneurs and businesspeople and, indeed, prioritized their interests in its economic development policies.

The two-class scheme is not in the least convincing and is rejected by overseas analysts and numbers of the Left in China. Dickson (2003) and So (2003), for example, have pointed to a class of 'red capitalists' and 'a cadre-capitalist class' which has emerged to monopolise economic capital, political capital, and social/net capital in Chinese society. Deng Liqun (1991: 5) argued in the early 1990s that the bourgeoisie had already taken shape as a class and that there was acute class struggle in Chinese society. Numerous other commentators on the Left continue to make the same point. The Party can only deny the emergence of a bourgeoisie, for 'we will not allow a new bourgeoisie to take shape'; 'if a bourgeoisie has emerged, we must have gone astray' (Deng, X. 1993: 110–11). But these statements are meaningless in the absence of proper class analysis. If the elimination of the old exploiting classes of landlords and capitalists in the 1950s meant the deprivation of their means of production, it is plausible to argue that the possession of productive property in the reform era has given rise to new exploiting classes. Indeed, social classes, as defined by Marxists and Weberians, can be readily identified in China today. It is certainly possible to find a bourgeoisie with a considerable amount of productive property, a proletariat deprived of the means of production, and class exploitation and class antagonism. Such a class map is not something the CCP wants to highlight or acknowledge, for it cannot be squared with the Party's claims about its adherence to Marxism or the socialist nature of the PRC. Without the will or the recourse to resolve

this fundamental contradiction, the CCP can only paper over the gaping holes in its class discourse.

Though most social scientists and commentators in the PRC refrain from pointing out the emergence of a bourgeoisie, they do not endorse the CCP's two-class scheme. According to Lu Xueyi and some 20 colleagues of his at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) (Lu 2002, 2004, 2010), Chinese society has stratified into ten strata or classes, namely state and social administrators, managerial personnel, private entrepreneurs, professional and technical personnel, clerical personnel, individual-operated business proprietors, commercial and service personnel, industrial workers, agricultural labourers, and the unemployed and partially unemployed.

No less dramatic than the redrawing of the PRC's class map is the transformation of its status order. In the Mao era, the industrial proletariat, for example, were portrayed by the CCP as the motor of history, the embodiment of the most advanced forces of production, and the principal agency of revolution. Together with the peasants, they were the 'masters of the country' and constituted 'the regime's only, or surely, most legitimate, political actors' (Solinger 2004: 54–5). In the post-Mao era, large sections of the working class have joined the new poor and the underclass since losing their 'iron rice bowl' and becoming detached from the CCP's historical mission. The new poor have good reason to hold the CCP responsible for maintaining the social contract and to demand that it live up to its own claims as articulated throughout the PRC. After all, it was the Party which set in motion and presided over a reform that has taken away the job security and guaranteed social welfare of the working class and paved the way for the rise of propertied classes. The best prospect for the new poor is to move out of poverty and get rich – a route available, at best, to a small minority of workers. Unless they do so, their status in society will remain low, in contrast to the new rich, including the Party-state cadres, capitalists and middle classes, who are now the new historical subject in the 'socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics' and the new masters of the People's Republic. Their growing prominence in society contrasts with the decline of the proletariat and peasantry and is indicative of a new status order that finds no parallel in Maoist China, especially after 1956.

In the eyes of the 'losers' in 'reform and opening', socialism and the leadership of the proletariat have become meaningless, except as a reminder of the CCP's ideological apostasy or as grounds for challenging the Party. From the Party's perspective, it matters little whether the proletariat loses its status as the most progressive force in history. It is all the better that it no longer constitutes the mainstream – and future – of

society, for the Party's new mission of wealth creation and the marketization of the economy requires efficient creators of wealth and consumers with ample purchasing power rather than a revolutionary working class. The mission therefore entails a fundamental shift from a primary concern with the working class and other revolutionary classes to the principal creators of wealth, namely those who own, finance or even monopolize the enterprises that produce and market goods and services, whatever their class, including capitalist classes and well-off middle classes.

In this regard, China's Party-state has been plagued by deep contradictions in its dissynchronized value structure and the value-environment nexus. The former is exemplified by ideological inconsistencies and the latter by the ideology's failure to legitimize the Party's pragmatic measures while 'crossing the river groping for stones' in 'reform and opening' (Guo 2010). The dissynchronized nexus has been further highlighted under Xi Jinping, who has, unlike every other CCP leader since 1978, instructed Party-state officials and ordinary CCP members to be re-educated in historical materialism and dialectic materialism. The irony would not be lost on the Party theoreticians that Xi and his Party could speak of historical materialism without referring to its conceptual and theoretical bedrock, class struggle. If one agrees with Chalmers Johnson (1966: 35) that values and the requirement of environmental adaptation determine a social structure and produce conflicts within it, the contradictions can be seen as sources of tension and structural determinants of Chinese society, or constraints under which social structure and social relations can be conceived, described and explained.

THE STRUCTURE AND THEMES OF THE HANDBOOK

With the politics of class analysis and the constructed nature of class in mind, the handbook provides an overview and case studies of class and stratification in the PRC, focusing on the post-Mao era. Change is a central thread running through the handbook. Specifically, it addresses the growing interest in fluctuations in the significance of class from the Mao era to the post-Mao era and the transformation of the PRC's class map, status order, structures of inequality, causal components contributing to life chances, and class experiences. The changes in this regard are part and parcel of China's transition since 1978 from a command to market economy and from a totalitarian to a post-totalitarian political system, as well as the metamorphosis of the CCP from a doctrinal to a pragmatic political party. This will enable the handbook not only to

provide a panorama of class and stratification as well as detailed analysis of the dynamics and trajectories of social stratification and class formation but also to aid understanding of the evolution of the PRC's economy, polity and society.

While the contributors to the handbook have identified a range of causal factors or forms of capital affecting life chances, they share the concern to investigate the pivotal role of state power in shaping social stratification, the production and reproduction of class, and the attainment and maintenance of status in the PRC. The state's role in these processes stands out in sharp relief against general patterns of stratification and class formation which have been identified in much of the European and American scholarship. An overlapping consensus emerging from the chapters is that inequality and class in the PRC cannot be understood and explained simply with reference to Marx's, Weber's and other economy-centric theories. Nevertheless, there is no 'party line' that the contributors to the handbook are required to follow. They are left to raise and discuss issues in their areas of expertise as they see fit, and there are noticeable similarities and differences in the ways in which the issues are treated.

The handbook comprises six parts. Part I provides a historical overview of class in the Mao and post-Mao eras. Part II delves into the dynamics of social stratification and class formation. Part III focuses on major welfare indexes including education, housing and health care. Parts IV to VI turn to class and stratification in the post-Mao era and are respectively devoted to the ruling class, the middle classes and the working classes. With the exception of the ruling class, the other class labels and classification are widely accepted in China. Even though the former is not in wide circulation, the name and classification are justified in that the class thus named wields dominant economic power and operates the governmental and administrative authority in the PRC (Goodman 2014).

It is shown throughout the handbook that the PRC's class map has changed significantly over time; so have the significance of class and the status order in the country as a result of ideological revision, line struggles within the CCP, and shifts in political imperatives and priorities. Whilst class remained a normative organizing principle in the Mao era, the concept has posed a daunting dilemma to the CCP, as it has become an obstacle to 'reform and opening', the construction of a 'harmonious society' and the realization of the 'Chinese Dream'.

With the transformation of the PRC's economy, class map, dynamics of social stratification and class formation, the customary assumptions which provided a normative underpinning for the distribution of material

and symbolic rewards in the past are de-legitimated and gradually replaced in the post-Mao era by discourses legitimating new practices in the reformed economy and polity. These macro-level changes have brought about micro-level changes in employment, income and wealth, housing, health care, social welfare, consumption, lifestyles and so on. Part II of the handbook explores the dynamics and trajectory of stratification during China's transition in the last three decades. The chapters in this part of the handbook engage with theoretical concerns about class formation and questions of class structure, consciousness and action. They concentrate on economic causal components contributing to life chances but go beyond the traditional concern with the economic structure of inequality and economic stratification systems to call attention to the role of state power, culture, gender and ethnicity in stratification class formation.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the new class order established by the Chinese Communist Party between 1949 and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. The basic level of the new social structure consisted of urban work units and rural production brigades, and inequality among these collectivities was a fundamental source of social differentiation, reinforced by strong restrictions on mobility. After reviewing these basic structures, the chapter examines the educational and political credentials that determined an individual's position within these collectivities, as well as access to the higher rungs of the social order. The chapter then discusses the old and new elites that occupied the top echelons of Chinese society during this tumultuous period and their gradual convergence, before considering the changing collective identities brought about by the radical restructuring of the class order and the propagation of the CCP's revolutionary narrative. Finally, the chapter briefly recounts the CCP's repeated campaigns to tear down existing class hierarchies, which disrupted the social order throughout this period and foreshadowed the even greater turbulence of the Cultural Revolution.

Chapter 2 demonstrates how the representation of class and class interests played out at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and during subsequent years. There are several interrelated themes developed in this chapter in relation to the concept of class. Regional differences reflected not only the aims, forms and methods employed from the bottom up in Chinese society but also social status. What happened at the schools and the universities in Beijing were also related to the activists' class background and social status. Furthermore, different stages of the Cultural Revolution witnessed varying class representations, patterns of class formation and social stratification as well as changing class relations and status order.

Chapter 3 summarizes the dramatic changes in China's social stratification and mobility since the beginning of 'reform and opening' in 1978 and the rising income inequality which has further widened the gap in the social and economic status of different social groups and given rise to a new, solidified class structure. Following the analysis of these changes and a general survey of the academic literature on the changes, the chapter concludes that there is still much uncertainty in China's social stratification and controversy among scholars over whether rising inequality and social differentiation are leading to social and political unrest.

Chapter 4 questions the economic-centrism in conventional conceptions of inequality and class as well as in the scholarship of China. Whilst acknowledging the value of the economic foci in studies of stratification and class formation, it calls attention to state power as a critical determinant of life chances and a major organizing principle in the country's class map and status order. It proceeds to illustrate the part that state power plays at the macro and micro levels in the production and reproduction of inequality and class. Chapter 5 spotlights the relationship between culture and class, arguing that class formation should be treated as a necessarily unstable process where media and culture are not external to this unstable process but are constitutive of it. The chapter starts with a comparison between the cultural politics of class in revolutionary China and its contemporary counterpart by tracing the metamorphosis of official definitions of what it means to be a worker and peasant which assume a dominant place in the mainstream culture. This is followed by an analytical account of how and why a number of media and cultural forms come to represent the class experience of China's workers and peasants in the era of a state-led market economy.

Chapter 6 explores social stratification and class formation in the PRC in relation to gender. Its central argument is that China's long patriarchal tradition, its one-party polity and the unequal distribution of natural and social resources have combined to influence women's marriage mobility. Furthermore, despite fundamental changes in Chinese society, men's dominance in its upper classes and status order as well as class formation and status attainment essentially remains unchanged, and for most women marriage continues to be a major avenue for upward mobility and for crossing class boundaries.

Chapter 7 turns to social stratification as related to ethnicity. It examines specifically the labour market and ethnic minorities' experiences of job search, hiring and workplace advancement with a view to discerning if ethnic minorities are at a disadvantage in comparison to their Han counterparts. The new labour utilization system in the reform

era has created a situation where ethnic minority job seekers with high human capital but poor social network capital are placed at a disadvantage. As a consequence, ethnic minority workers are populating low-income occupational sectors and have higher unemployment rates than Hans.

Chapter 8 concentrates on some of the most prominent issues in relation to education, social stratification and class formation in contemporary China. It points out that one of the definitive characteristics of China's current educational system is its highly stratified nature. There is also increased and deepened inequality in education since the late 1970s that is closely associated with social stratification and class status. In addition, social and educational stratification in contemporary China is complicatedly linked to the intersection of gender and ethnicity.

Chapter 9 follows with a detailed case study of the role that education plays in social stratification and class formation. Focusing on the high school entrance exam (HSEE), the chapter finds that China's high-stakes exams systems create lifelong inequalities for the nation's youth in the form of class sorting, a process by which success or failure in an exam determines a young person's future class position. The HSEE serves as a pernicious form of class sorting, for the youth who fail this exam are locked out of the academic educational stream, and out of white-collar and middle-class jobs in the future.

Chapter 10 deals with the impact of transformation of housing entitlements on social stratification and policies to engineer a consumer society. The chapter traces the ways in which housing reform illuminates some of the characters of China's social stratification. Issues around housing reveal that stratification in China happens still by and large 'by design'. Stratification is not driven by an inequality in distribution of wealth but rather by an uneven distribution of power that is a result of individual and family positions within the grid of power that connects private interests to the state.

Chapter 11 directs attention to health outcomes and equity during the last three decades of economic reform and identifies socio-economic positions and class status as good indicators of people's health and likelihood of health insurance protection. The chapter analyses the processes by which the dismantling of the old welfare system and the gradual introduction of social insurances within a marketized environment interacted with social and class inequalities to the detriment of the health outcomes and protection of specific social groups. It suggests that while the government increasingly recognized the economic dimensions of health inequalities it did not acknowledge their class dimensions, shying away from a discourse of class conflict and failing to challenge class hierarchies and the underlying political economy.

Chapters 12 and 13 concentrate on the ruling class. Goodman notes that China's current ruling class is no doubt different from the ruling class of 1978, as it has resulted from a combination of residual state socialist era institutions of power and the new structures of wealth. At the same time, despite apparently capitalist tendencies it is unlikely that three decades of reform in the PRC have brought the development of a capitalist ruling class. He argues that the continued maintenance of Communist Party rule means that the capitalist class, limited in size, must act with and within the institutional constraints of the Party-state. He goes on to suggest that the model for this kind of ruling class development and its future is more likely to be the market socialism of Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia during the 1970s and 1980s than Western European or North American capitalism. Lu identifies two major challenges which the ruling class has encountered in the reform era. One is how to bring experts into politics and policy making, and the other is how to balance political rationale and economic impulse. He further delves into the ways that technocrats, informal politics and promotion models each reflect the internal legitimacy crisis of the Party-state.

The next three chapters deal with the middle classes. Chapter 14 places ordinary cadres and the cadre system in the context of historical change. It pays particular attention to the nomenklatura system as part of the institutional sets of the Party-state and offers valuable insights into the social profile of ordinary cadres and controversial issues such as status attainment and individual benefits.

Chapter 15 describes the growth of professional workers in the context of the expanding higher education system and the improving economic structure in the reform era. The chapter illustrates the demographic profiles, socio-economic positions, and political orientations and participation of Chinese professionals, and compares them with managers, as the two groups form a major part of the emerging new middle classes in China. Chapter 16 deals with one of the most significant state–society relations in contemporary China, the relationship between the Party-state and private entrepreneurs. Treating the new rich entrepreneurs as an occupational group rather than a unitary class, the chapter examines how these entrepreneurs are incorporated in China's Party-state system and represented in local politics. Their incorporation and representation reveal and highlight the mutual dependency between the state and business.

The last three chapters of the handbook discuss the working classes. In Chapter 17, Blecher divides working class formation into three distinct phases. From its birth in the very late nineteenth century to the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the nascent working class was able to

act on a national or at least trans-regional canvas only occasionally, when Communist Party leadership provided the necessary coordination. During the three Maoist decades, when the Chinese working class enjoyed much improved levels of material life, security and prestige, it also began to develop a radical outlook that produced a good deal of spontaneous, class-based political mobilization which had very significant effects on national politics. Under the structural reforms beginning in late 1978 and especially since the transition to capitalism began in earnest in the early 1990s, when the Chinese working class was knocked squarely off its Maoist perch both economically and socially, it began to decompose into fragmented individuals and small groups without much common experience or outlook. Over the long arc of its development, Chinese working class formation has developed the most, and produced the most radical politics, when workers have experienced better material and social treatment, that is, under state socialism rather than capitalism.

In Chapter 18, Chan and Selden discuss the Chinese rural migrant workers (*nongmingong*), particularly their precariousness and individual and collective struggles, within a framework that highlights the changing face and intensification of contradictions among labour, capital and the state. It analyses the role of local governments in drawing in businesses and investments, and the specific conditions of Chinese rural migrant workers' production and reproduction in the contemporary political economy. It also documents the ways in which aggrieved workers have organized to take legal and extra-legal actions to defend their rights and interests, without the leadership or mobilization of trade unions. The chapter concludes by outlining the impact of demographic changes and geographic shifts of production on the growth of workers' bargaining power in the workplace and the marketplace.

In Chapter 19, Sargeson draws on definitions of class as social formations that arise from relations of property ownership and labour and which are manifest and elaborated in economic, political, social and cultural practices in her analysis of the class situation of the peasantry. She traces changes in China's peasantry in the recent past, present and imagined future as small-holding agriculturists who rely upon family labour and the patronage of a dominant class and participate little in markets. She argues that, while the Chinese peasantry constituted a significant class in the Maoist period and early post-Mao periods, by the beginning of the 21st century, as a consequence of expanding markets, cultural and demographic changes, and political marginalization, it was declining as a class.

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