Current Situation, Existing Problems and Prospect of the Study of Social Stratification in Contemporary China

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Introduction. Under the backdrop of market economy and social transformation in China, the class structure of society has undergone profound changes, and the traditional class division is no longer relevant. However, there are still some unresolved problems in the study of social strata in China. The lack of diversity and comparability of research methods limits the depth and scope of research. Relatively few studies have been conducted on some emerging classes. Research on the relationship between social class and other social issues is insufficient, such as the relationship between class and education, class and income distribution, etc., are still limited.

Methodology and sources. At present, a social classification model has been proposed to study social stratification in China, taking into account the characteristics of China's national conditions. A large number of empirical studies have revealed the evolution and characteristics of China's social class structure. The mechanism of social class formation and the factors influencing them have been studied, which has provided theoretical support for social development. Modern stratification models of Chinese authors have been used for the analysis in comparison with traditional models.

Results and discussion. The study of social stratification in China inherited the theoretical framework and empirical research methods of Western social scientists, and there are also attempts to develop its own model of social stratification in combination with the actual situation in China. The structure of social stratification in China is characterized by the need to take into account the state redistribution system and the market economy model. However, there is a consensus that government officials are at the top of the social hierarchy, and the class of peasants and unemployed are at the bottom of society; mental workers (white collars) are higher than manual workers (blue collars). The results of studies on the impact of human capital on social stratification show that gender and educational level have universal significance in society; household registration system and housing type are special independent variables that affect social stratification in China more than in other countries, etc. However, there is a lack of relevant empirical studies that could provide specific quantitative data showing how independent variables affect social stratification in China. Many new social and professional groups have emerged in Chinese society. In recent years, some Chinese scholars have studied such specific social and professional groups, the most widespread and in demand in the labor market in China, taking into account the digitalization processes.

Conclusion. It is necessary to further explore the methods and models of social stratification suitable for China's national conditions so as to cover the characteristics of social class diversity. It is necessary to strengthen the research on the relationship between social class and other social issues so as to provide more effective policy recommendations for social development. It is also necessary to strengthen the research on emerging classes, pay attention to their social status, mobility and responsibilities, and provide more effective support and guidance for their development.

Keywords: social stratification, market economy, education, social welfare

Оригинальная статья

Текущая ситуация, существующие проблемы и перспективы изучения социальной стратификации в современном Китае

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Введение. На фоне рыночной экономики и социальных преобразований в Китае классовая структура общества претерпела глубокие изменения, и традиционное классовое деление больше не актуально. Однако в изучении социальных слоев в Китае все еще остаются нерешенными некоторые проблемы. Отсутствие разнообразия и сопоставимости методов исследования ограничивает его глубину и объем. Относительно мало исследований было проведено по некоторым формирующимся классам. Поиск взаимосвязей между социальным классом и другими социальными проблемами недостаточен, а между классом и образованием, классом и распределением доходов и прочими по-прежнему ограничен.

Методология и источники. В настоящее время для изучения социальной стратификации в Китае предложена модель социальной классификации, учитывающая особенности национальных условий этой страны. С помощью большого количества эмпирических исследований была выявлена эволюция и характеристики социально-классовой структуры Китая. Был изучен механизм формирования социальных классов и влияющие на них факторы, что обеспечило теоретическую поддержку социального развития. Для анализа были использованы современные модели стратификации китайских авторов в сравнении с традиционными моделями.

Результаты и обсуждение. Изучение социальных слоев в Китае унаследовало теоретические схемы и эмпирические методы исследования западных ученых-социологов. Есть также попытки разработать собственную модель социальной стратификации в сочетании с реальной ситуацией в Китае. Структура социальной стратификации в этой стране отличается необходимостью учитывать систему государственного перераспределения и рыночную модель экономики. Однако присутствует консенсус в отношении того, что государственные чиновники находятся на вершине социальной иерархии,

а класс крестьян и безработных – в низшем слое общества; работники умственного труда (белые воротнички) стоят выше, чем работники физического труда (синие воротнички). Результаты исследований, посвященных влиянию человеческого капитала на социальную стратификацию, показывают, что гендер и уровень образования имеют универсальное значение в обществе; система регистрации домохозяйств и тип жилья являются особыми независимыми переменными, которые влияют на социальную стратификацию в Китае сильнее, чем в других странах, и т. д. Однако соответствующих эмпирических исследований, которые могли бы предоставить конкретные количественные данные, показывающих как независимые переменные влияют на социальную стратификацию в Китае, не хватает. В китайском обществе появилось много новых социальных и профессиональных групп. В последние годы некоторые китайские ученые изучали такие конкретные социально-профессиональные группы, наиболее массовые и востребованные на рынке труда в Китае, учитывая процессы цифровизации.

Заключение. Необходимо продолжить изучение методов и моделей социальной стратификации, подходящих для национальных условий Китая, с тем чтобы охватить характеристики социально-классового разнообразия. Следует активизировать исследования взаимосвязи между социальным классом и другими социальными проблемами, чтобы дать более эффективные рекомендации по политике социального развития. Также необходимо активизировать исследования, касающиеся формирующихся классов, уделять внимание их социальному статусу, мобильности и обязанностям, а также обеспечивать более эффективную поддержку и руководство для их развития.

Due to ideological restrictions, social stratification research has been a taboo area in mainland China. In the 1980s, Western scholars first raised the issue of social stratification in China (Ni Zhiwei), but it did not receive widespread attention in the country. Domestic scholars began to pay attention to and study this issue in the early 21st century, when China's economy was stable and growing, people's income was stable, rapid industrialization, rapid urbanization, and the expansion of higher education occurred, these social changes provided the social background for the emergence of stratification research. At the beginning of the new millennium, Chinese scholars began to study the issue of social strata, which was also influenced by other factors. The theoretical study of new Marxism. The main issue discussed in the new Marxism is the classic "binary theory" of Marx's class theory, which adds the middle class. This theoretical discussion reached China and aroused the interest of Chinese scholars. The issue that Chinese scholars are concerned about is that the emergence of the new middle class may change China's social structure and ultimately affect China's political situation, especially the expansion of the "private entrepreneurs" group, whether they can achieve economic status like the Western middle class and change their original political situation. Some Chinese social scholars appeared as policy researchers and policy advisers, and in their studies, they downplayed the traditional relationship between class analysis and politics and emphasized the emergence of new social groups, especially the emergence of the middle class, as "changes in social status". The emergence of the middle class is conducive to social stability, and they studied their

income, consumption, lifestyle, etc., avoiding sensitive words. They proposed "middle group in the society" and "social middle group" instead of "middle class" to gradually allay the government officials' doubts and reduce the research resistance. The authorities have gradually accepted the research of sociologists. However, they have not completely eliminated doubts about this issue, and they have proposed the concept of "middle-income group" to replace the concept of the middle class. Scholars generally believe that the "middle-income group" is the "middle class". Commercial advertising and mass media propaganda. The sales of goods such as cars, houses, and luxury goods are often advertised as targeting the "middle class" in advertisements. This has led people to realize that social classes do exist, but the middle class that the media refers to is actually a high-income group, while the middle class referred to by the government is a middle-income group, which is very different from the middle class studied by sociologists. The middle class in developed countries is more mature and homogeneous. The middle class in China is a new social group with greater internal heterogeneity and greater diversity of occupations. A large number of private enterprise owners should belong to the middle class.

From the above chart (Fig. 1), we can see that class stratification research in mainland China began in the 1990s. The first two peaks were in 2002 and 2008. These two years are special, one is after China joined the World Trade Organization, and the other is the year of the Olympic Games. These two events with worldwide influence are both symbols of China's integration into the world. Therefore, during this period, the review of scientific research was relatively relaxed. Subsequently, the research interest in this topic began to decline.
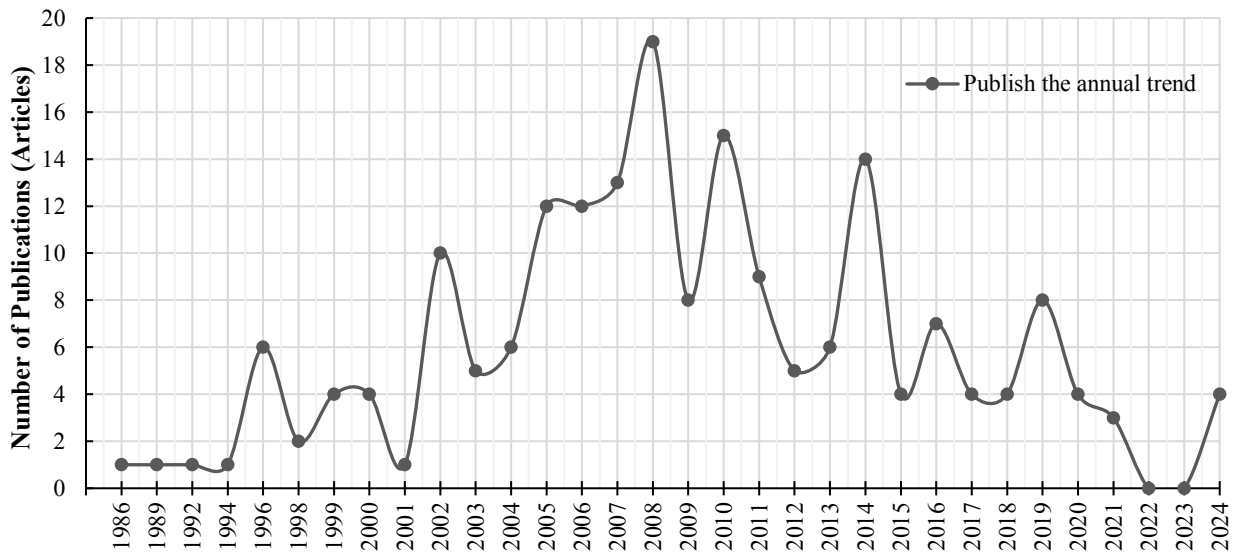

Fig. 1. Analysis of the overall status of Chinese social stratification research

From the above chart (Fig. 2), we can see that the disciplinary distribution of research on social stratification in China is as follows: There are only 34 articles in the discipline of sociology and statistics, accounting for 16.6 % of the total, ranking second. The first place is China's politics and international politics, with 107 articles, accounting for 52.2% of the total. The third place is administrative science, also known as national administration. From the fourth place onwards, there are more research results related to education. Foreign language, Marxism, and economics

have fewer research results and account for a very small percentage. It can be seen that most Chinese scholars regard social stratification research as a political topic, while only a small number of scholars regard it as a topic in sociology.
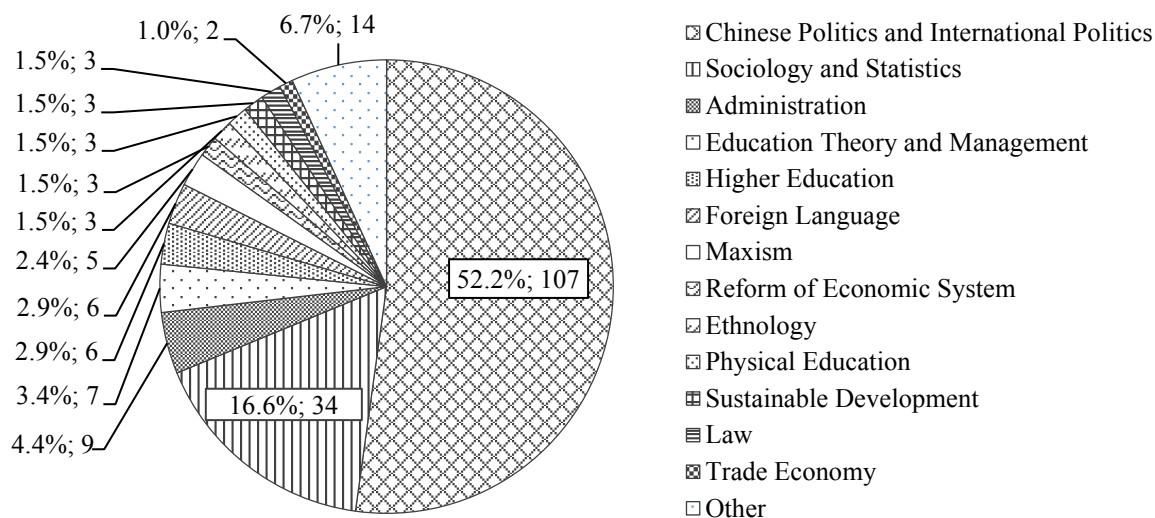

Fig. 2. The disciplinary distribution of research on social stratification in Chinese Mainland

Chinese Politics and International Politics
Sociology and Statistics
Administration
Education Theory and Management
Higher Education
Foreign Language
Maxism
Reform of Economic System
Ethnology
Physical Education
Sustainable Development
Law
Trade Economy
Other

Some models of social stratification in China.

The theoretical sources of Chinese scholars' research on social stratification are mainly Karl Marx's class theory and Max Weber's class theory. The research results of subsequent Western scholars also have reference, more are Wright Mills, Blau and Duncan, White, Goldthorpe and so on. According to the chronological order, Chinese scholars' studies on social stratification are as follows.

The model of Lu Xueyi – Ten Social Strata.

Among Chinese native scholars, the first to analyze social strata and the most influential are Lu Xueyi's ten social strata. On the basis of occupational classification, Lu Xueyi divides social classes according to the status of the possession of organizational resources, economic resources and cultural resources [1]. Organizational resources include administrative organization resources and political organization resources, which refers to the ability to dominate social resources according to the state power organization and the party organization system. Economic resources mainly refer to the ownership, use right and management right of means of production. Cultural (technical) resources refer to the possession of knowledge and skills recognized by society (through certificates or qualifications) [2]. So, ten social strata:

1) state and social administrator – 2.1 %;

2) manager – 1.5 %;

3) private entrepreneur – 0.6 %;

4) professional technical personnel – 5.1 %;

5) clerical staff – 4.8 %;

6) individual industrial and commercial household – 4.2 %;

7) business and service employee – 12 %;

8) industrial worker – 22.6 %;

9) peasant – 44 %;

10) unemployed person – 3.1 %.

The model of Li Qiang-from inverted "丁(Ding)"to "土Tu)".

Lu Xueyi's analysis of the ten social strata has aroused a heated discussion in the academic group and led the trend of social stratification research. Lu Xueyi's article has many defects. firstly, the population base is not clear; secondly, the data source is not clear;and thirdly, it focuses on subjective qualitative analysis and lacks objective data support. Although many people believe that his social stratification model has a strong explanatory power to the reality of Chinese society. Since then, Professor Li Qiang has proposed the "Inverted Ding-shape" (2005) and the "Tu- shape" (2011) of Chinese social structure [3, 4]. Using the model of International Socioeconomic Status Index (ISEI), the author analyzed the data of China's fifth (2000) and sixth (2010) population censuses, and pointed out that: 63.2 % of China's lower-class population is farmers; Workers (including migrant workers converted from farmers and workers in township enterprises whose actual social status and living standards are closer to those of farmers), accounting for 9.1 %; The main transport service personnel, commercial service and catering service personnel, mechanical and electrical products, electronic products equipment personnel and assembly personnel, processing industry semi-technical personnel, etc. The number of grass-roots personnel is large and the proportion is high, so the social structure is similar to the "Inverted Ding" of Chinese characters [4, 5]. Ten years later, Professor Li Qiang used the same research method to point out that the social structure of China has changed a lot in 10 years. First, the proportion of farmers in the total population decreased by 16.71 %. Second, the proportion of blue-collar workers increased by 3.78 %; Third, white-collar groups, including managers, professional and technical groups, operating and sales personnel and ordinary office workers, accounted for 10.44 % of the total employment population. That is, the population at the bottom decreased, the population at the middle and lower levels increased, and the class structure changed from the "Inverted Ding" shape to the "Tu" shape [4].

Liu Xin's Chinese urban social strata.

Liu argues that neither White's nor Goldthorpe's hierarchic model applies to China, which has a large number of state-owned enterprises and a large number of officials. Based on the data of the "Comprehensive Survey of China 2003", he takes public power and market capacity as the main criteria for dividing Chinese urban society [6]. The social strata of Chinese cities are divided into five strata. Liu Xin's method of stratification takes China as a case study and ignores international comparison. At the same time, his research sample did not take into account the social groups such as the unemployed, freelancers, and emerging occupational groups, which exist widely in urban society [6]. Therefore, it has great research limitations.

1) upper class – 0.6 %;

2) upper middle – 7.6 %;

3) lower middle – 22.8 %;

4) skilled workers and clerks – 25.7 %;

5) unskilled workers and individual industrial and commercial households – 43.4 %.

Li Lulu and Qin Guangqiang's authoritative class system.

According to the data of CGSS-2006 China General Social Survey, the sample size was 5280. According to the possession of the means of production, the position in the organization (with or without the right to management), whether the manual labor, they established an authority class system [7]. The details are as follows (see the Table):

Li & Qin's authoritative class model

Authoritative Class System			Fre.	Percent
Employer		1 large employer	27	0.5
		2 small employers	160	3.0
Self-employed person		3 self-employed persons	381	7.2
Employee	Non-labor	4 non-labor employees with high authority (e.g., senior management)	188	3.6
		5 non-labor employees with middle & low authority (e.g., middle & low management)	262	5.0
		6 high autonomous non-labor employees (e.g., senior professionals)	793	15.0
		7 middle & low autonomous non-labor employees (e.g., middle & low professionals)	1046	19.8
	Labor	8 supervisors with authority	561	10.6
		9 high autonomous labor employees (e.g., skilled workers)	681	12.9
		10 middle & low autonomous labor employees (e.g., non-skilled workers)	1180	22.4
		Total	**5820**	**100.0**

Li & Qin's authoritative class model attempts to integrate the key concepts and models of Marx and Weber, using Chinese social survey data for analysis. But their problems are: first, they assume that people with means of production have a higher social status than people without means of production, and even self-employed people have a higher social status than senior managers in enterprises. As everyone knows, the social status of managers of state-owned enterprises in China is much higher than that of ordinary private business owners, and the social status of managers of state-owned enterprises or private enterprises is also much higher than that of individual business owners. Second, it is believed that the social status of non-manual workers is higher than that of manual workers, which is quite consistent with the actual situation in China, but some self-employed people are both mental and manual workers, and they are not distinguished. Third, those who do not have a fixed unit and do not have a fixed income are excluded from the social class system, without research and explanation.

The above are several efforts and attempts on the structure of Chinese social class in Chinese literature. In addition, there are many articles that make detailed and specific analysis of social class as dependent and independent variables.

Taking social class as the dependent variable, which factors affect or determine the social stratification in contemporary China?

By comprehensive analysis of the above four major social stratification models, we can summarize the independent variables that Chinese scholars attach importance to that determine or affect social stratification. Lu emphasizes power factors (the formal power of official state officials), economic factors (ownership and control of the means of production), and cultural factors (diplomas and skills), which is a more mixed multi-factor model. He did not point out that the attainment of government positions, diplomas and skills requires education, which is a major flaw. After all, education is a self-induced social factor obtained by the individual's own efforts. The ownership and control of the means of production can be divided into state-owned units and private units, in which the state-owned units belong to the power factor, and the various types of private units can also rely on education, skills, good management and other acquired factors. Therefore, Lu's social stratification model attaches more importance to the factor of self-induced, and neglects the influence

of the predication social factor. The same problem exists in Professor Li Qiang's article. Li Lulu and Qin Guangqiang's articles pay more attention to the factors of job autonomy, which is determined by education, skills, position and other factors. They also emphasized the importance of ownership of the means of production. In addition, in the Chinese literature, the household registration system and gender are involved in the influence of presupposition factors.

First, in terms of gender, Li Chunling had such a set of data in her field research in Shenzhen and Hefei in 2002 to demonstrate the differences between men and women in terms of political status, income and education. In terms of income: in Shenzhen, the average monthly income of men is 5,098 yuan, and the average monthly income of women is 2,947 yuan: men are 1.7 times higher than women. In Hefei, the average monthly income of men is 847 yuan and the average monthly income of women is 616 yuan, 1.4 times higher than that of women. In terms of education: the average number of years of schooling for men and women is very similar. The average years of schooling for men in Shenzhen are only 0.4 years longer than for women. In Hefei, men have an average of 0.6 more years of education than women. In terms of political resources, there are significant differences between men and women. In Shenzhen, the percentage of party members among men is 18 percentage points higher than among women. Among men in Hefei, the proportion of party members is 25 percentage points higher than that of women. Secondly, in the recruitment, employment and secondary employment, there are certain restrictions and discrimination against women. Among the gender factors, age, household registration, education and other factors are added. These factors add to the disadvantage of women's employment.

The household registration system is a unique institutional arrangement in China. The household registration system is to restrict people's mobility in urban and rural areas and regions through the institutional arrangement of the place where the household registration belongs. Because of the difference in resources between urban and rural areas and between regions, it also causes the difference in the amount of resources obtained by different household registration. It is both an antecedent factor and a self-induced factor that can be changed by one's own efforts. First, people inherit their parents' household registration type at birth. After adulthood, through their own efforts, through some channels (education, promotion, army, etc.) can change their household registration type. There are abundant research results on the effect of household registration system on social status in China. The general conclusion is that the household registration system is an important factor influencing social stratification. In the labor market, there is a difference in household registration between urban workers and migrant workers in terms of wages, insurance and union participation, among which the role of household registration is about 30 % [8]. Wu Xiaogang and D.J. Treiman found in their empirical analysis of the factors affecting the acquisition of urban household registration in the same period that although education and political conditions (party membership) increase the chances of "rural household registration to non-rural household registration", rural household registration significantly reduces the chances of obtaining education and political status [9]. In terms of economic status or access to market opportunities, there are significant household registration hierarchies or social spatial hierarchies. The contribution rate of individual household registration level to the growth of monthly income level is 13.7 %, which means that the monthly income level of individual household registration from rural household registration to municipal household registration level may increase by 13.7 % [10].

The effect of work unit on social stratification. According to an American political sociologist A. Wilder, there are distributional differences between a redistributive economy and a market economy. In a market economy, some firms are willing to pay higher wages to their workers. In a redistributive economy, some firms distribute more income to their workers than others. The higher the administrative level of the organization the more budgetary power, the larger the base of tax resources the more profitable it is [11, 12]. This shows that in China's social stratification mechanism, there is stratification among work organizations, and the stratification mechanism among organizations depends on the power level of the work unit rather than the market profit level of the organization.

Education is closely related to social stratification. Education has always been a conduit to a certain class. The issue of educational equity in China has been concerned by scholars. The main issue is whether education strengthens class reproduction or promotes social mobility? The empirical studies of different scholars tend to answer this question. Through the analysis of 3,975 sample surveys in Beijing, Wuxi and Zhuhai in 1998, Li Lulu pessimistically believes that the inheritance within each class is still the main feature of Chinese society, even though the transformation of the redistribution economy to the market economy has not changed the characteristics of self-reproduction of the upper class [13]. Wu Xiaogang, Xie Yu; Scholars such as Li Peilin, Li Qiang and Sun Liping also support this view. Li Chunling et al. believe that after the reform and opening up, the income distribution mechanism of the market economy (competencism) has gradually replaced the distribution mechanism of the traditional planned economy (equalitarianism). But the effect of different stages of education on raising personal income is different. Across the country, junior high school education has the strongest effect on increasing income, while the effect of high school (including secondary school), junior college (and above) and primary school education is weaker in turn. In cities, high school and technical secondary education are the most conducive to income growth; In rural areas, a junior high school degree offers the best economic benefits. Within the redistributive system, college degree or above has higher economic benefits; The higher economic returns outside the redistributive system are junior high schools, senior high schools and technical secondary schools [14].

Taking social class as independent variable, what are the external characteristics of different social classes?

The relationship between class and consumption. In his empirical study, Zhang Yi divided China's social strata from low to high into five strata, namely, the peasant class, the working class, the old middle class, the new middle class and the owner class (the class that owns the industry and employs others, similar to the capitalist class), as independent variables. The consumption type is divided into two types: survival consumption and development consumption. (The per capita household expenditure on food, clothing, water, electricity, housing, medical care, maintenance and wedding events is defined as the consumption of family members to meet their basic needs, that is, survival consumption; Per capita household expenditure on education, tourism, entertainment, home appliances, communications, transportation, etc. is defined as consumption to meet the future development needs of oneself and family members, that is, developmental consumption. In the current Chinese society, the main consumption needs of the peasant class and the working class are still concentrated on the satisfaction of subsistence needs. The old middle

class not only has strong survival consumption elasticity, but also has strong development consumption impulse. The new middle class has shifted its main consumption power to developmental consumption. Due to the small sample size of the owner class, the owner class does not show statistical significance in these two aspects of consumption [15].

The relationship between social class and social welfare. Taking Haikou City as a case study, Li Fen divided the social class in Haikou into five levels: upper level (state and social managers, managers and private business owners), middle and upper level (professional and technical personnel and clerks), middle and middle level (working class), middle and lower level (self-employed industrial and commercial service employees), and lower level (unemployed or semi-unemployed). The type of social welfare is taken as the dependent variable, and the type of social welfare includes six types (medical care, pension, etc.). Through the empirical study, it is found that there is a positive correlation between social class and social welfare, that is, the higher the social class, the more types of social welfare they enjoy; At the same time, there are differences in the number of total welfares between the middle and upper classes, the upper classes and the middle and lower classes, and the difference in the number of welfares between the middle and lower classes is not significant [16].

Conclusion. Through the research and summary of Chinese literature, including some foreign literature, this paper draws the following conclusions about the empirical research on Chinese social classes:

1. The study of social strata in China has theoretically inherited the theoretical schemata and empirical research methods of western sociological scholars, among which the most influential are Marx's class theory and Weber's social stratification theory, Wright Mills, White, Goldthorpe, Blau and Duncan, etc. Some apply their theories and research methods completely, and then look for empirical data in China. Some scholars have also reflected on the theories and methods of Western sociology, and believe that they cannot simply apply their theories, but should develop their own social stratification model in combination with the actual situation of China. But in general, the theory is less innovative and lacks horizontal comparison with other countries.

2. In terms of the actual situation in China, great changes have indeed taken place in the social strata of China after the reform and opening up. Therefore, some scholars have tried to establish the social stratification model in China. The pattern of social stratification in China is more complex than in other countries. On the one hand, there is the problem of how to link the redistribution model with the market model. The redistribution model has a stratified model, and the market model also has a stratified model. How to arrange the social stratification under the influence of these two models has always been a problem puzzling Chinese scholars, and so far, they have not been able to find a stratified model recognized by everyone.

But there is also a certain consensus that the state administrators (officials) should be at the top of the social hierarchy, and the peasant class and the social unemployed class should be at the bottom of the society. Mental workers (white-collar workers) are higher than manual workers (blue-collar workers).

3. Exploration of independent variables affecting hierarchy. Chinese scholars have explored the effects of gender, educational attainment, type of work unit, and household registration on social stratification. Gender and education level are rich in research results, which are related to

the impact of human capital on social stratification, and this aspect is universal in human society. Household registration system and unit type are special independent variables that affect social stratification in China, but not in other countries. Unit type is also a unique phenomenon in China, reflecting the same job content but different salaries and benefits. However, there is no relevant research to provide specific quantitative data. In general, the independent variables affecting social stratification in China are more and more complex than those in other countries, but the relevant empirical studies are less and simpler.

4. The influence of social class on other social problems. Taking social class as an independent variable, social class clearly affects education, consumption and social welfare, all of which have empirical research results. But the results were limited to just a few areas. Studies on other aspects, such as the relationship between class and political attitude, class and social policy, and class and other social variables, are lacking.

5. Many new social groups or occupational groups have emerged in Chinese society, and there is a lack of research on them. In recent years, some Chinese scholars have studied social groups such as truck drivers and delivery workers. However, for other social groups, such as "software programmers", "financial practitioners", "Internet sellers", "live streamers" as well as freelancers and other emerging social or professional groups, there is a lack of research.

To sum up, these problems are problems that need to be solved in the social class research or group research in the future. These problems not only put forward new questions to the scholars' research, but also put forward new challenges.

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