

Department of Sociology
University of Macau
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

Seminar

**Position and Mobility in the Contemporary World-System:
A Structuralist Perspective**

by

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Abstract

The list of leading economies of the world today is nearly identical to the list of leading economies of 100 years ago. This suggests that world-system structure, not national economic policy, is the important consideration in understanding development. World-systems theory implies that early developers externalized the social costs of economy-wide development to their colonies, casting subject populations in the role of the Marxian "reserve labor army" to subsidize the full employment of their home populations. These gains were protected after World War II through welfare state mechanisms; where these mechanisms are weak, rural and inner-city urban peripheralization is clearly in evidence. This structuralist perspective holds broad implications for development theory and practice today. Economies like China and India are sufficiently well-governed to permit their leading sectors to participate fully in the modern world-economy. However, with no subject populations on which to impose the social costs of their development, these economies retain substantial internal peripheries and thereby mass rural and informal urban poverty. If such structural factors persist, China and India are not likely to converge with the core economies of the world-system, but rather toward the Brazilian/Mexican/Russian economic and social models.

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