

**Department of Sociology
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Public Lecture

Chinese Inequalities: From Revolution to Reform

by

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Abstract

Social inequality has been a core problem at the heart of sociological analysis since the birth of the social sciences. China's recent development has primarily attracted attention from the perspective of high speed growth and emergence as the workshop of the world. But that development, which has also been characterized by transition — from one of world's most egalitarian societies on the eve of reform in the 1970s to becoming, by 1995, one of the most unequal in Asia, and then, by the early 2000s, in the world — and the rash of social protest that has accompanied these changes — has naturally spawned a burgeoning literature documenting and assessing patterns of inequality. Increased accessibility both to official survey data and research in local communities has allowed researchers to amass large and increasingly sophisticated data sets documenting income distribution, social mobility and structures of inequality. Working within the “stratification paradigm”, these empirical studies in both China and internationally have overcome a major obstacle confronted by a previous generation of China scholars studying social inequality: the dearth of scientific data. This paper assesses the stratification, class and spatial paradigms for charting structures of inequality in two epochs of revolution and reform, and explores the relationship between institutional structures and inequality in the PRC.

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