

HANDBOOK ON SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN THE BRIC COUNTRIES

Change and Perspective

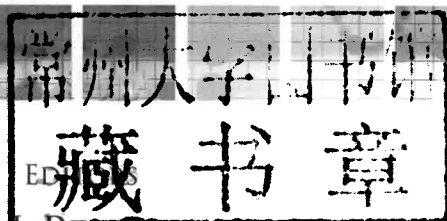
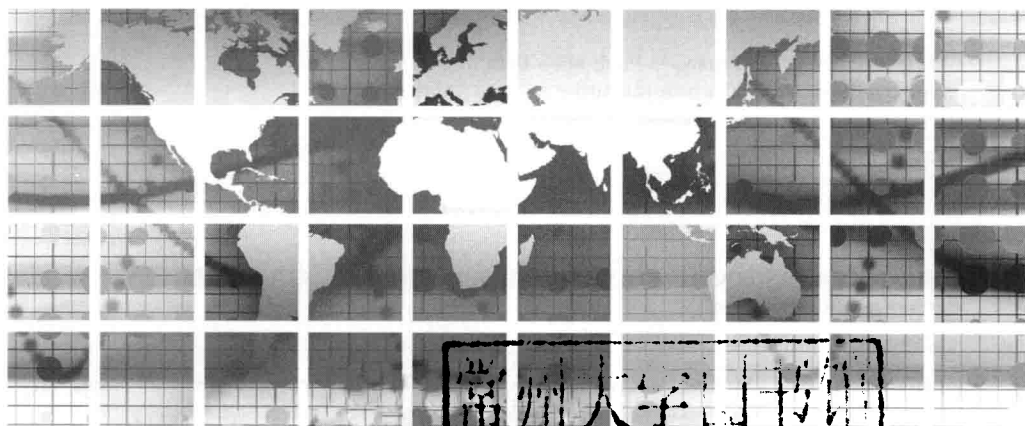


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Acknowledgments

In 2009, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and Russian Foundation for Humanities (RFH) signed a collaboration agreement. One important point of the agreement was that the Institute of Sociology at CASS and the Institute of Sociology at Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) would work together on a comparative study of social stratification between China and Russia starting from 2010. This comparative study was scheduled to be based on field investigations, but for the purpose of early-stage preparation, the two parties decided to hold two seminars before the investigations. In order to make the seminars more productive, we agreed to write the seminar papers under a common framework, so that a book could be published after the seminars.

The year 2010 marked the 30th anniversary of the Institute of Sociology at CASS, and a grand celebration was held in April 2010. As the resident of the Chinese Sociological Association and Director-General of the Institute of Sociology at CASS, I invited Tom Dwyer (former President of Brazilian Sociological Society, who had just finished his presidency at that time), Valery Mansurov (President of the Russian Society of Sociologists), and Uttam B. Bhoit (President of the Indian Sociological Society) to join the celebration and deliver speeches. As one of the celebration events, a conference entitled “Globalization and Social Development” was held, with participants from the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China). Professor Ishwar Modi, the Secretary-General of the Indian Sociological Society, and Tavares dos Santos, the former President of the Brazilian Sociological Society, also attended the conference.

Tom and I could be called “old friends” — I knew him several years ago when he was still the President of Brazilian Sociological Society through Professor Shen Mingming of Beijing University. Before that, our institute had almost no connection to Latin America’s world of academic sociology.

After an initial contact, Tom invited me to attend the annual conference of the Brazilian Sociological Society, and arranged my meeting with Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a renowned Brazilian sociologist and former President of Brazil. Tom is an enthusiast who actively advocates communication and cooperation among sociologists of BRIC countries.

I spoke to him about the joint research project between China and Russia on social stratification to Brazilian and Indian sociologists at the Beijing “Globalization and Social Development” conference, and invited them to participate as well, so we could expand the joint research between China and Russia into a collaboration project among the four BRIC countries. In July 2010, I was invited by Professor Michel Wieviorka, President of the International Sociological Association (ISA), to give a keynote speech at the presidential plenary of XVII/17th ISA World Congress of Sociology held in Gothenburg, Sweden. I also attended the BRIC Sociologists special session organized by Tom. Also at the Congress, I met Professor Celi Scalón (President of Brazilian Sociological Society) again. Tom told me that she is one of the best sociologists doing social stratification research in Brazil. After the Congress, Celi formed a group of Brazilian sociologists who were writing papers on the Brazilian social structure. In India, I established a connection with Professor K. L. Sharma of Jaipur National University through the introduction of Professor Ishwar Modi, the Secretary-General of the Indian Sociological Society. Although Professor Sharma is quite senior in age, he is very courageous and hardworking — he wrote all the nine chapters on Indian social stratification.

In the fall of 2010, I led the research team of CASS Institute of Sociology to participate in a seminar on Sino-Russian social structure comparison in Moscow, which was jointly sponsored by the RAS Institute of Sociology and the CASS Institute of Sociology. The two parties reviewed each other's paper drafts and proposed revision suggestions to each other. I know the Director-General of the RAS Institute of Sociology Professor M. K. Gorshkov and the deputy Director-General of the Institute Professor Z. T. Golenkova quite well — both of them even visited my institute in Beijing. I know Professor Z. T. Golenkova particularly well — she visited my institute several times, and she is also an expert on social stratification research in Russia. The President of Russian Society of Sociologists, Valery Mansurov, is also the Deputy Director-General of the RAS Institute of Sociology. Another Deputy Director-General is Polina M. Kozyreva. Here I would like to extend my special thanks to Polina, who was in charge of almost all the coordination and communications between Russian scholars and our side.

The collaboration among sociologists of BRIC countries turned out to be much more complicated than I expected, because our final goal was to write an English book collectively on the social structures of BRIC countries, but many of the authors from Brazil, Russia, and China could not write in English, and it is almost impossible to find a person who can translate Russian and Portuguese papers into English in China. In the end, I would like to acknowledge the Director-General of the RAS Institute of Sociology Professor M. K. Gorshkov and the President of Brazilian Sociological Society Professor Celi Scalon for their support in translating the papers written in Russian and Portuguese into English, before they were sent to China. In this book, papers written by Brazilian and Indian authors were translated into Chinese from English, while papers written by Russian authors were translated into Chinese directly from Russian. In October 2010, a conference on the social structures of BRIC countries was held in Beijing, and [the Chinese version of this book] was scheduled to be published before the conference.

I firmly believe that this book will have significant influence after its publication. That's why I have devoted my enormous time and energy in organizing this book. The influence not only results from the contents of the papers, but more from the impact of the rise of BRIC countries on the future global economic and political regime.

I would like to extend my special thanks to Wang Lei, the Deputy Director-General of the Bureau of International Cooperation (BIC) at CASS, and Jin Zhe, the Deputy Director of the European-Asian Division of BIC, who paid close attention to this collaboration research and provided us with tremendous support throughout the project. I also want to thank my research team, whose productive and excellent work made this collaboration project move smoothly. Professor Chen Guangjin, the Deputy Director-General of my institute, and Mr. Zhao Kebin, the Director of the Division of Research Administration of my institute, assisted me throughout the process and did lots of work related to this research. Professor Li Chunling was in charge of the communications with authors from the BRIC countries, while assistant research fellow Dr. Lu Peng did lots of editorial work for the unification and formalization of this book. Mr. Xie Shouguang, the Director of Social Sciences Academic Press under CASS, and Tong Genxing, the editor of this book, gave huge support to the publication of this book, for which I would like to thank them sincerely.



Li Peilin

June 30, 2011, Beijing

Introduction

Li Peilin

It is by chance as well as a historical inevitability that the term BRICs (or BRIC countries) has become so popular. Jim O'Neill, the chief economist of the internationally renowned investment bank Goldman Sachs originally coined the term ten years ago, in 2001. An economist with a Manchester working class family background, O'Neill is now world famous because of this brilliant coinage, even though at the time of its birth he had visited only the "C" of the BRICs — China.

O'Neill first proposed the concept of BRICs on 20 November 2001 in a Goldman Sachs economic research report entitled "The World Needs Better Economic BRICs". In 2003, O'Neill and his team at Goldman released a research report "Dreaming with BRICs: The Path to 2050", which boldly predicted that the world economic regime would be reshuffled: Brazil would overtake Italy in 2025 and France in 2031, while Russia would overtake Britain in 2027 and Germany in 2028; India would overtake Japan in 2032, and in 2041, if all things go smoothly, China would overtake the United States as the world's largest economy. The total gross domestic product (GDP) of the BRICs would exceed that of the major six Western industrialized countries (G7 without Canada), and therefore, the world's major economic powers would become China, United States, India, Japan, Brazil, and Russia. However sensational it sounded then, this Goldman Sachs report has drawn close attention from investors, financiers as well as policy-makers. Obviously, people were not taking this prediction as a sheer utopian idea, but rather regarded it as an actual development trend. While China is called

“the world’s factory”, Brazil is considered “the world’s raw material base”, Russia “the world’s gas station”, and India “the world’s office”.

It was indeed a bold and rather ingenious idea to bring the four countries together and craft the concept of “BRICs”. In many respects, the four countries are sharply different from each other, but they are all emerging economic powers. Whether looking from a geographical, historical, or a cultural perspective or taking their religions, languages, and values into consideration, the four countries are quite different. More importantly, the term “BRICs” by itself sounds far more powerful and promising than phrases like “emerging economies”. In Chinese, “BRICs” is translated into *jin zhuan* (meaning golden bricks), which is even more vivid and expressive.

To Western scholarly ears, the BRIC concept sounded a bit like a non-Western alliance bent on challenging the dominance of developed Western countries, and it therefore produced a certain amount of anxiety. Moreover, the concept was much more than a rhetorical flourish. On 6 June 2009, the first BRIC summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia, after which a second was held in Brazil’s capital city Brasilia during 15–16 April 2010, when a Joint Declaration was issued and the cooperative mechanism of the BRICs was inaugurated. One year later, on 14 April, a third BRIC summit was held in Sanya, China, when the Sanya Declaration was released as a blueprint for future cooperation. The BRIC countries’ leaders also unanimously agreed to admit South Africa into this “BRIC countries club” and scheduled the fourth meeting in India for 2012. We can see that the concept of “BRICs” has rapidly developed from an abstract economic and financial concept to international political and economic reality.

There are two frequently mentioned theoretical frameworks of comparison when analyzing China. One is the “East Asian Development Model”, which proposes a flock of geese pattern of development in the East Asian Confucian cultural context, with Japan as the leading goose, followed by South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or “the four Asian tigers”, and then the massive economy in the back — China. All these countries and regions, when they were in their high-speed development stage, were characterized by high levels of savings, investment, and exports. In the global economy after World War II, for instance, Japan and the Asian tigers were among the very few countries and regions who successfully transcended the boundaries of “core–semi-peripheral–peripheral”. The other popular framework of comparison is that of “Transition Countries”, which argues that China, just like Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, is transitioning from a planned economy to a market economy, a vital role in the

development of transition countries. New institutionalism is the leading theory in this comparison framework.

Now we have a brand new theoretical comparison framework within China studies — the “BRICs” framework. It is different from the East Asian Development Model, which is based on cultural and geographical similarities; it is also different from the Transition Countries framework, because it is not established on the basis of shared patterns of market transition. Probably the only justification for comparison among the BRIC countries lies in the fact that they are all emerging economic powers and share common interests in restructuring the global economic and social regime.

As for the overall economic power of the BRICs, China accounts for more than half. The total GDP of the BRICs in 2009 was \$8,948.849 billion, of which China accounted for 54.9%, while Brazil accounted for 17.6%, India 13.8%, and Russia 13.7%. However, viewed in terms of GDP per capita, Russia and Brazil were both considered as developed countries in 2008, with the former exceeding \$10,000 to \$11,796.92, and the latter \$8,235.49; China and India, however, were still developing countries, with a GDP per capita of \$3,312 for the former and \$1,022.34 for India, and it is the first time for India to exceed \$1,000.

The differences between the development levels of Russia and Brazil and China and India are evident not only in their per capita outputs, but also in the structure of their industries. Considering the breakdown among the agricultural, industrial, and service sectors within GDP in 2009, Brazil (6.1%, 25.4%, 68.5%) and Russia (4.7%, 32.9%, 62.4%) had basically completed their industrialization and urbanization, while China (10.6%, 46.8%, 42.6%) and India (17.2%, 28.4%, 54.4%) still had a substantial proportion of farmers.

Housing prices in the capitals of Brazil, Russia, India and China also reflect, to some extent, the living standards of the four BRIC countries. By 2009, the average housing price in Brasilia was R\$12,000/m², equivalent to \$6,666/m², and 156,400 rubles/m² in Moscow, equivalent to \$5,320/m², while the average housing price in Beijing was 15,808 yuan/m², equivalent to \$2,325/m², and 65,000 rupees/m² in New Delhi, equivalent to \$1,411/m².

These statistical comparisons, however, are far from enough for us to have a deep understanding about the BRICs. Actually, the four great powers have pioneered new paths of development, which are quite different from the traditional theory of modernization. In other words, the patterns of modernization in the four countries are dramatically different from those

of the Western countries and their practices would probably require that scholars rewrite modernization theory.

“Football” springs to mind whenever Brazil is mentioned. As the largest country in Latin America, and the fifth largest in the world, Brazil also ranks fifth in the world in terms of its population, at more than 190 million. Brazil was historically a colony of Portugal, with Portuguese as the national language and a majority of Catholic population. It is also a multi-racial country, in which the white people account for 49.4% of the population, mixed-blood 42.3%, Afro-Latin American 7.4%, with the remainder made up by a small number of Asian Latin Americans, natives and Indians.

In 1960, Brazilians living in rural areas still accounted for 55% of the total population, but by 2010 this proportion had fallen to 16%. There are also significant regional disparities in Brazil. The Southeastern regions of Brazil are far more developed than the Northeastern regions, which are more rural and stuck at levels of industrialization and urbanization far below the national average. As in China, the term “farmer” in Brazil, to some degree, is still synonymous with “poor person”. Although the arable land per capita for Brazilian farmers is much larger than that of their Chinese counterparts, comparatively speaking, regions with more agricultural workers are still economically backward regions.

During the 30 years between 1950 and 1980, Brazil enjoyed a remarkable average economic growth rate of 7%, largely thanks to the shift of laborers from rural to urban areas. With its rapid economic growth, the income gap between the rich and the poor increased dramatically. At certain points, the income gap was so high that the Gini coefficient was over 0.6. Some scholars argue that it is one of the major reasons why Brazil became ensnared by the “middle-income countries trap”. However, Brazil’s Gini coefficient started to decline in 1997, and had fallen from 0.6 to 0.53 by the end of 2007. Its impoverished population has also decreased significantly during the same decade, and by 2011 the number of Brazilians living below the poverty line with a monthly income of less than R\$70 had fallen to 16.2 million.

Surprisingly, the rigidification of Brazil’s social stratification structure is very significant looking from a long term — during the eight years from 2001 to 2009, there have hardly been any notable changes to social stratification. Brazil is still not a majority middle class society. In 2009, white-collar workers accounted for 30% of the urban population, while manual labor made up 47.6% of the labor force.

Russia is a country that has tremendous influence on modern China. Most people who formed the current backbone of China had grown up

reading Russian literature. As the world's largest country by both land and water areas, Russia spans from Eastern Europe to Northern Asia, with a total population of about 140 million, of which the European portion accounts for four-fifths. The population in the Eastern part is comparatively small given the vast land area, with a population density lower than one person per square kilometer. Russia has completed its industrialization and urbanization, with the urban population accounting for 73% of the total population. Orthodoxy Christianity is the dominant religion in Russia, followed by Islam, the second largest. 55% of Russian people have religious beliefs, among which approximately 90% are Orthodox, 5% Muslim, with smaller percentages of Catholics, Jews, Buddhists and so on. Russia is also a multi-ethnic country and the great majority are the Russian people, which have a population of roughly 115 million. Russia is a federal state, and the Russian Federation consists of 89 federal subjects (21 republics, six territories, 49 regions, two federal cities, one autonomous region, and 10 autonomous areas), which are subsequently incorporated into seven federal districts by geographical locations.

Serfdom was still legal in Russia in the 17th century, when many European countries were enjoying rapid industrial development. In order to follow the examples of countries in the West, Peter the Great (Peter I) sent a mission to Western Europe in 1697 and traveled himself under a pseudonym. After returning to Russia he implemented a series of reforms, known as the Reforms of Peter the Great, which greatly improved the overall national strength of Russia. In 1721, Peter the Great declared Russia an empire. After that, during the reign of Catherine II, Russia enjoyed an unprecedented expansion of territory, a period generally known as the "golden age of the Russian Empire". In 1917, Russia established the world's first socialist state, and later at the end of 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, commonly known as the Soviet, was established.

During the Soviet era, Russia took the whole world by surprise with some of its achievements. In 1954, the Soviet Union built the world's first nuclear power plant; in 1957, it launched the first artificial satellite; and four years later, in 1961, the first manned spacecraft. By 1977, the national economic strength of the Soviet Union had reached 70% of the United States figure, its GDP 58% and per capita income 40% of the United States. From the end of World War II to the early 1980s, the Soviet Union was regarded as the world's second economic power, before it started to suffer economic stagnation and an eventual decline in national strength. The year 1991 saw the dissolution of both the Soviet Union and the Soviet Communist Party,

which put an end to the half-century Cold War between the Eastern and Western camps led by the Soviet Union and the United States, respectively.

Russia's economy underwent a severe recession after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since the beginning of the new century, thanks to the soaring oil prices, Russia has witnessed rapid economic growth and become an important member of the emerging economies. In 2000, Russia's GDP was \$205 billion, and by 2008 it reached a record-breaking \$1.67 trillion, a several-fold increase within eight years. In 2009, due to the tremendous impact of the international financial crisis, Russia's GDP decreased to \$1.23 trillion. According to the World Bank data, before the international financial crisis, Russian economic output had entered the top 10 worldwide, and its national GDP at purchasing power parity (PPP) had ranked seventh or eighth.

With rapid economic recovery and growth, the living standards of the Russian people have greatly improved. In 2000, the national average monthly wage in Russia was 2,223 rubles (about \$82); by 2010 it had reached 20,815 rubles (about \$682).

Although Russia has basically completed its industrialization and urbanization, its rural population still accounts for 27% of the total population. Nevertheless, with its market transition underway, Russia's social structure has changed dramatically, which is reflected in many aspects such as property relations, income distribution, labor organizations, and social mobility. A new social stratification structure has gradually emerged, with some new classes and social groups coming to the fore, such as big landlords, small-to mid-sized entrepreneurs, managers, the "new poor", marginal groups, the unemployed, and immigrants. Some studies by Russian scholars have suggested that in 2009 relatively wealthy families accounted for 41%, less wealthy families accounted for 27%, while relatively poor and poor families both accounted for 16% of the population. Russia has also faced problems relating to increasing income disparity and the polarization between the rich and the poor during the market transition. In February 2008, the Russian *Kommersant* reported official statistics that the gross income of the richest 10% of Russia was 16.8 times that of the bottom 10% in 2007. Russian scholars estimated that the Gini coefficient reached 0.4 in 2009. Nevertheless, it is already much lower than the peak 0.56 in 1996.

India, with a population of 1.21 billion in 2011, is the world's second most populous country, second only to China. The 2001 Census revealed that 72.22% of Indian people reside in over 550,000 villages, with the rest in more than 2,000 towns and cities. India is a multi-ethnic country with a long history, and its two main ethnic groups, the Indo-Aryans and the Dravidian,

account for 72% and 25% of the population, respectively. Religion is almost universal in India. The most popular religion in India is Hinduism, with believers making up 72% of the Indian population, followed by Islam (12%), Christianity (2.3%), Sikhism (1.9%), Buddhism (0.8%), Jainism (0.4%), and some others. This is in stark contrast to China, where the majority of people are non-religious. Although the proportion of Buddhists is not high, India was the birthplace of Buddhism, which is one of the three major religions of the world. Most of the Hindu scriptures were written in Sanskrit language.

In terms of social stratification, India is marked by its Hindu caste system, a very unique social hierarchy that permeates its history. After the invasion by Aryans in the seventh century B.C., the Brahmins advocated the caste system, in which Hindu society was categorized by four varnas: Brahmana (mostly priests), Kshatriya (kings and nobles), Vaishya (civilians), and Sudras (slaves). There were strict boundaries between varnas — people were forbidden to marry outside their varnas; they could pursue only those professions that were allowed by their varna, for example, a trader belonging to Vaishya varna could only engage in trading activities and so on, and strict adherence to hierarchy of the varna was advocated where the Brahmana at the top and Sudra was at the bottom. Excluded and shunned by the society were the “untouchables” — the Chandra (now called “Dalits”), which consisted of war prisoners and people resisting the caste system. Though many new religions in India, such as Buddhism, were introduced as a way to resist the caste system, after the Brahmanism was integrated with Hinduism it has maintained its influence on society. Even today, long after the right to equality had been enshrined in the Indian constitution, traces of caste discrimination can be found.

Indian culture has had a tremendous impact on Western society. After a thorough study of the Indian village system, Karl Marx came to the conclusion that the self-sufficient peasant economy is the key to understanding Asian social structures. He wrote: “This simply arranged organization of production provides us a key to understanding the mystery that although Asian countries have experienced a series of disintegration and reconstruction, with ever-shifting dynasties, there oddly have not been any noticeable changes in Asian societies. The social structure and fundamental economic elements have always remained the same in spite of the sweeping shifts of political powers.” (Marx, 1963).

It was during recent decades that India witnessed unprecedented and profound changes to its social structure stemming from rapid economic growth. The social structural changes also had a significant impact on

sociological studies of Indian social stratification. According to one of the authors of this book, Professor Sharma, studies of Indian stratification by sociologists mostly focused on the caste system, class relations, land ownership and issues related to social elites in the 1960s. However, in the 1970s, scholars began to shift their focus to theories and methods of social stratification. There has been a proliferation of discussions and studies on various topics from different perspectives, such as the theoretical and historical analysis of social stratification, power politics, caste and classes, land problems, urban industrialization, and issues related to women and other vulnerable groups. By the 1980s, although the caste system as a form of social stratification had become quite weak, research on caste was still an important part of Indian social stratification studies, and caste as a political interest group identity is still important in India. By now, the paradigm of India's social stratification research has changed greatly. More and more scholars are using the latest statistical methods and survey data, conducting new social stratification studies on various aspects of Indian society, such as income, occupation, education, land ownership, property, class-consciousness, lifestyle, etc. Moreover, since India has a fairly developed service sector, in stark contrast to China, studies about the Indian middle class have also gained in significance.

China is the world's most populous country, with a long history and profound culture. According to the results of its sixth census in 2010, China's total population had reached 1,339.7 million, an increase over 73.90 million over 10 years. People aged 0–14 accounted for 16.60% of the population, 15–59 accounted for 70.14%, and 13.26% of the population was 60 and over. Although China is a multi-ethnic country, 92% of the population is Han Chinese. The majority of Chinese people are still farmers, despite the fact that China has come to the middle stage of industrialization and urbanization. In 2010, 49.68% of the population lived in urban areas versus 50.32% in rural areas.

Since reform and opening-up policies of the late 1970s, China's socialist market economy has developed deeply and rapidly. At the same time, Chinese society has also undergone tremendous changes, which are so rapid, dynamic, widely spread and far-reaching that they are practically unparalleled in the world's history of modernization. Changes have taken places mainly along the following dimensions of Chinese society:

First, there have been great changes in class structure. The original simple class structure consisting of workers, peasants, cadres and intellectuals has

been transformed into a complex class structure composed of diverse interest groups and new classes, such as the self-employed, private entrepreneurs, executives in foreign-owned enterprises, scientific and technical personnels in non-state enterprises, employees in various social intermediary organizations, freelancers, and so on. Quite a lot of people of the new social classes are from the old classes of workers, peasants, cadres, and intellectuals. Even within the same social class, the social status and economic interests of people differ greatly. As in the case of the worker class, there are workers in monopoly industries, workers in foreign-owned enterprises, city workers in competitive industries, as well as migrant workers. Therefore, how to integrate and coordinate the different interests between and within classes, and establish a dynamically competitive and harmonious social order under this new situation, has become one of the most important tasks of social development.

Second, the urban-rural structure has changed greatly. Since reform and opening up of the economy, more than 200 million farmers have left the ancestral farming lands that they had occupied for generations. Many left their villages and became workers engaged in the secondary and tertiary industries in cities and towns. As a result, China has experienced the world's largest industrialization and urbanization process to date. The rapid social mobility of such a large population has posed new issues for societal management. How to help migrant workers from rural areas integrate into the new social system of urban life and establish a new balanced system of urban-rural integration has become a major challenge for current societal management.

Third, the income distribution has changed in significant ways. Over 30 years, China's income distribution, which used to have a fairly high degree of equality, has changed to one defined by large income disparities compared to other countries in the world. Income inequality, unfair distribution, and the related corruption have triggered resentments between cadres and the masses, and are the fundamental reasons behind various social problems. How to adjust the income distribution structure and establish a fair and equitable income distribution system has become a pressing issue to be addressed for maintaining social harmony and stability.

Fourth, the population structure and family structure have also experienced great changes. Along with profound changes to China's population structure, family miniaturization and the aging of the population have also accelerated greatly. Many of the problems that could have been solved with the help of members of a bigger family, such as elderly-care, the

single-parent problem, mental disorders, disability and intergenerational conflict, have gradually turned into social problems. The traditional pension model, which had been universally practiced for thousands of years by the Chinese people, has become unsustainable due to changes in family structure, intergenerational relations, and social mobility. These are all new challenges Chinese society is facing now.

Fifth, there have also been changes to the patterns of social organization. With profound changes affecting the economic system, Chinese social life has shifted from “work unit-oriented” to “society-oriented”. On the one hand, with reforms implemented in work units to achieve goals such as “self-owned housing, market-based employment, socialized social security, market-based logistic services”, “work unit” as both the fundamental of the traditional management system and the grassroots organization of the society have weakened their own role in solving social problems, while some of them have completely disintegrated. On the other hand, the diversification of employment has accelerated social mobility. The new working entities established after reform and opening up have all adopted the “non-unit” management system. There are no longer “all-around units”; they are only working places now. More and more members of society have changed from a “work unit person” into a “social person”. The proportion of “work unit people” in the total urban employed population used to be more than 90%, but now it has dropped to about 25%.

Last but not least, important changes have occurred in people’s social norms and values. While the market transformation has enhanced economic development and significantly improved people’s livelihood, it has also triggered changes in social norms and values. While the pursuit of personal interests has been legitimized, the code of conduct restraining and supervising the pursuit of personal interests has not been effectively enforced; while the complexity of social life and production activities has greatly increased, a sophisticated and suitable social management and monitoring system has not been established; and while the values of people have changed profoundly since the introduction of market economics, the construction of a social morality and credit system suitable to these changes is still lagging behind.

In a word, analyzing social structural changes, especially changes in the social stratification structures of the BRIC countries, is a special sociological perspective in the study and analysis of social issues. This unique sociological perspective is necessary to help us achieve a better understanding of the economic growth and social development of the emerging economic

powers. This very special perspective will also help us unveil the mystery of how these emerging powers, with such dramatic differences in history, geography, culture, language, religion, etc., could in some instances share a common will and take joint action. In any event, it is the profound social structural changes in these countries that determine their own future and, to a large extent, will shape the socio-economic landscape of the future world.