

Editor's Comments

Chinese Journal of Sociology
2015, Vol. 1(1) 3–5
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DOI: 10.1177/2057150X14568770
chs.sagepub.com



We are living through an extraordinarily interesting period, historically. The world has largely been peaceful since the end of the Second World War. The Cold War ended in the unambiguous victory of the West. Economic development and industrialization have been happening in many parts of the world, beyond Europe and Northern America. The world has become increasingly globalized, connected by internet technology, inexpensive air travelling networks, and English as the de facto international language.

This is a fortunate time to be a sociologist. While technological advances and economic prosperity are sure to continue predictably, social issues studied by sociologists are becoming more prominent, requiring serious research, both for policy making and for public discourse. Let me mention a few: social inequality, education, health, culture, family formation and dissolution, fertility and mortality, social cohesion and collective efficacy, public trust, social organizations and institutions, neighborhoods, social networks, racial and ethnic conflicts, gender relationships, domestic and international migration, feelings of happiness and alienation, crimes and deviant behaviors, and intergenerational relationships. I mention these topics not only because they figure prominently in past sociological research, but also because they are unlikely to have solutions that are solely, or even mainly, technological or economic in nature. Take divorce as an example. We know that divorce rates have risen in many countries since the end of the Second World War, coinciding with a period of rapid economic development and technological advances, as well as the large improvement of women's social status relative to men, especially in education. In short, divorce is a social phenomenon, and understanding of its causes and consequences requires sociological research. The same can be said of other social phenomena.

This is a particularly exciting time to conduct sociological research on China. After a "century of humiliation" between the Opium War that began in 1840 and the end of the Second World War in 1945, the China unified by the Communist Party in 1949 stayed poor, undeveloped, and isolated from the rest of the world until 1978, when a new era of the economic reform began. Since 1978, China has been undergoing a social transformation whose scope, rapidity, and significance in impact are unprecedented in human history. I hold the view that China's ongoing social transformation since its economic reform is a watershed event in long-term world history, comparable in significance to the Renaissance that began in 14th-century Italy, the Protestant Reformation in 16th-century Germany, and the Industrial Revolution in 18th-century Britain.

Although social changes occur almost everywhere in the world, they are happening in China on very large scales and at rapid speeds. Let me mention a few. Per capita GDP in China rapidly increased from 463 RMB yuan in 1980 to about 30,000 RMB yuan in 2010, a 55-fold increase in just 30 years. Education expansion has been such that Chinese have been transformed from a largely uneducated population only four decades ago into a highly educated population, with the percentage of youth completing college education at roughly the same rate as in the US, at about 25%. Fertility dropped from about six children per woman in the 1960s to below two since the 1990s. Many other social trends, such as those in economic inequality, urbanization, divorce, cohabitation, and incorporation of western culture, are similarly dramatic.

Although a typical sociological theory course would attribute the origin of sociology to its European founding fathers, such as Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, I consider the true origin of today's sociology to be American. During its period of rapid industrialization and development in the late 19th century, following the Civil War, America faced numerous social issues that required public attention, such as urbanization, poverty, crimes, migration, immigration, education, and labor conflicts. The founding fathers of American sociology, such as William Graham Sumner, Lester F. Ward, Franklin Henry Giddings, Edward A. Ross, Charles Horton Cooley, and Albion Small, all shared a common interest in improving the wellbeing of less privileged Americans and understanding social issues that plague them.

Chinese sociology has had a similar origin. As discussed by Xiaogang Wu in his review article published in this issue, Chinese sociology began with an applied focus. This character has given Chinese sociology a prominent role in public discourse of social phenomena, but at the same time marks Chinese sociology as something less than a mature, scholarly field. Sometimes, the boundary between a public discourse and a scholarly debate is blurred. It is also for this reason that Chinese sociology has had a limited impact on the sociology community in the world at large.

The state of Chinese sociology is due for a big change. It will move in the direction of contributing significantly to the sociology discipline in the world. I base this prediction on three factors. First, as I stated earlier, social phenomena in China are changing rapidly and are thus in need of rigorous research. In other words, the rapidly changing social reality in China provides an unusually rich context for conducting sociological research. Second, all different parties, including the Chinese government, universities, and the public, all demand high quality sociological research, so that they can better and more objectively understand social issues faced by Chinese society. They are also eager to fund sociological research to attain this objective, as discussed by Xiaogang Wu's paper. Third, young generations of sociologists, trained either in China or abroad, are now well versed in western, particularly American, sociology and will engage in disciplinary discourses with their counterparts in the West.

It is within this context that the *Chinese Journal of Sociology (CHS)*, a joint venture between Shanghai University and SAGE Publications, is being launched.

The journal has two explicit goals: (1) to introduce Chinese sociology to the world, and (2) to promote sociological research on contemporary China. These are daunting tasks. I think that they can be achieved gradually. I am honored to serve as the inaugural editor of *CHS*. In this endeavor, I am helped greatly by Xiulin Sun, my associate editor, an excellent editorial board with many distinguished scholars, and a highly capable editorial team at Shanghai University. A few decades into the future, I hope that *CHS* will be recognized as a leading sociological journal on China.

Yu Xie
Editor