SPECIAL FOCUS:
SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN CHINESE SOCIETIES

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INTRODUCTION

INSTITUTION, CULTURE, AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINESE SOCIETIES†

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Comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in so far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for facts.

Emile Durkheim, The Rules of Sociological Methodology

Introduction

Social stratification research is an intrinsically international and comparative enterprise. Scholars have long been interested in identifying similarities and variations in stratification processes across different nations (Ganzeboom, Treiman and Ultee 1991). While most empirical analyses are focused on a single country with individuals as the unit of analysis, conclusions are often compared across countries; both similar and idiosyncratic features in the pattern of social stratification have been identified among different industrialized countries (Hout and DiPrete 2006), and the idiosyncratic features are often attributed to the unique institutional arrangement of the country (e.g., Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Kerckhoff 1995).

However, as countries may differ in many dimensions, one cannot ascertain the differences due to the institutional variations that the empirical analyses are focused upon. To overcome these problems, comparative studies increasingly employ a large number of cases (countries) that represent the existing variations and control for spurious factors. Nevertheless, such an analytical strategy suffers from

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