



## My Thesis in 300 Words

### By Xi Ni

The study of occupation has become a central theme in social science research for decades. However, after the boom in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century, the status of this field is slightly subtle: while still been mentioned in various studies, occupation is often served as the control variable rather than research objects. Nonetheless, along with the globalization trend and technology evolution, occupation research had gradually found its way back to the academic foci. More recently, there have been debates on the changes in the occupational structure due to technological advances, leading to the concern of the extent to which division of labor has changed in the midst of a rapid socio-economic transformation in our society. As existing research in the occupational structure were mostly conducted in Western developed countries, we have little understanding about the situations in developing countries like China, which are gradually moving away from the traditional industries and emerging into a new occupational structure that is yet to be fully understood.

Therefore, my dissertation tries to discuss the dynamics of occupational structure change, and its driving force as well as its impact on labor market outcomes in China during the past decades. Different from the conventional operation, this paper adopts a job-approach, treats occupation rather than individuals as the basic analytical units. By analyzing Census(1990-2010) and CGSS(2005-2015) dataset, findings show that: influenced by the synergy of multiple factors (large scale internal migration, higher education expansion, urbanization and the legacy of a centrally planned economy), China's overall occupational structure, after experiencing a gradual upgradation (1990-2000), began to reveal a trend of polarization: the share of bottom-tier employment has increased rapidly, while the growth of middle-tier occupations has stagnated and even shrunk, and the high-tier share gains momentum. This trend, differentiated by various contexts (gender, sector, region), also affects income inequality at the individual level eventually. In general, the income gap between “good jobs” and “bad jobs” has been widening year by year, however, how this gap evolves within various job-clusters differs accordingly.

The process of completing this article was very bumpy. The first draft was formed at the end of 2018. After another year of revision, it caught up with the times of turmoil like each of us. Ever since, this article gradually left my control and was even almost abandoned by me several times. To this day, the paper is still far from perfect. However, what my supervisor once said to me made me decide to let go: There is no absolutely correct research, academic progress depends on the joint efforts of several generations of scholars. Here I want to share it with all my beloved peers who are struggling with perfection. Hope we all can enjoy a prosperous and healthy PhD life.

## PRESENTATIONS

**Dan Chen** and **Ka Wang Kelvin Lam** presented at the 2020 International Chinese Sociological Association. Nov 21, 2020.

**Francisco Olivos** presented at the 2020 Inequality Conference for Young Scholars, Chile. Nov 24, 2020.

**Yao, Wei** will present her paper at the first online conference of the Association of Chinese Criminology and Criminal Justice in the United States. January 2021.

# A Brief Introduction to Historical Sociology

By Yu Li

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The term “sociology” was reinvented by the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857) in 1838 to refer to the scientific study of society. This definition holds today. Comte claimed that this new discipline consisted of two branches: dynamics, or the study of the processes by which societies change; statics, or the study of the processes by which societies endure. In short, change plus order is sociology. Changes take place when historical issues occurred, while orders remain when events are organized regularly in a proper way. Since the emergence of the subject of sociology, it is inherently historical. More modern founders of sociology -- Marx, Weber, Durkheim -- have demonstrated it. They

focused on how historical shifts were generated and how historical issues affected the contemporary world.

Historical sociologists, different from historians who insist on time and place as fundamental principles of variation, try to organize their research around theoretical questions, more often from the perspective of structure, about social transformation, which cannot be answered with a focus on a single era in a single nation. They usually explain in a contingency way: First, to distinguish inconsequential everyday human actions from the rare moments when people transformed social structure; second, to explain why transformative events occur at the particular times and places and not elsewhere; third, to show how events make possible later events. Thus, the comparative method is frequently used in historical studies.

In the field of historical sociology, capitalism has always been the striking topic to draw attention to generations of scholars. Among them, a body of Marxist researchers keeps studying the logic of the capitalist system and especially its manifold impacts on human life from various aspects, ranging from economic crises to inequalities. Now, more and more scholars provide powerful critical analyses of capitalism with abundant case studies.

## Academia in Russia

By Roman Matvienko



**1. Could you describe how you have pursued your academic interests before coming to Hong Kong (for example, your previous academic projects, teaching, and services for the community)?**

As a Master’s student, I investigated sociological implications of criticism of correlationism—“the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other”—in speculative realism of Quentin Meillassoux and Graham Harman. After graduation, I took part in applied research in the sociology of education and worked as an analyst and statistician in the Moscow government. In parallel to my work, I continued to read sociological literature relevant to my research interest in sports and human interaction

and used every opportunity to deepen my practical knowledge of sports. I even had the chance to officiate amateur and children’s rugby competitions!

**2. In general, what was your student experience in Russia like?**

My latest student experience is in the master’s program at the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences. It has been a tough but terrific year. I warmly recall days in our library, intensive sociological writing, and vivid discussions with my colleagues and teachers.

### 3. Why did you decide to continue your studies in Hong Kong?

Last year I took part in the workshop “Video Analysis in Sociology,” organized by our Department, and visited Hong Kong for the first time. I liked the educational environment at the university, campus, and the city itself. Moreover, my research plans met interest from Prof. Christian Greiffenhagen, so I applied for a PhD in CUHK.

### 4. What are the main topics of interest for social scientists in Russia?

These are the same topics that are of interest to sociologists everywhere—urban life, education, labor, mobility, state policy, legal enforcement, among others.

### 5. In terms of theoretical influence, which are the most discussed theories or renowned authors in Russia?

I believe the influence of the actor-network theorists (Bruno Latour, John Law, Annemarie Mol, to name a few) was the most significant in the 2010s. Yet there is no dominating approach or theoretical framework in the field. Some research groups are interested in critical theory and Pierre Bourdieu, other in system theory and Niklas Luhmann, third in cultural sociology and Jeffrey Alexander. I suggest one could easily find adherents of any classical or contemporary sociological tradition in Russia.

### 6. How are the roles and interactions between teachers and students managed in Russia?

I would say it depends on a university, a teacher, and a student. Roles and interaction take many forms and it is always a complex machinery behind them. In general, teachers teach and students learn. Details and particularities are the matter of an independent sociological inquiry.

### 7. If anyone in our department decides to continue with their career or engage in academic activities in Russia, what general advice would you give?

I have no professional experience inside Russian academia so I can merely share my “outsider” impression. Russian authorities implement a “neoliberal” model of higher education with short-term contracts, excessive teaching load, and a lack of academic freedoms and social guarantees even for high-ranked scholars. Therefore, my main advice is to specify the terms of your professional contract or a research grant in advance. I also recommend considering research programs of non-universities funds and bodies—for example, Oxford Russia Fund—to get an idea of what research work in Russia is like. Although more and more Russians speak English, I think it is worthwhile to know Russian to communicate either with students or with informants during field research. Some Russian universities are interested in attracting foreign scholars, so I advise to track vacancies on websites and social networks periodically.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### ✓ Awards:

- **Yunran Zhang** obtained the 2020 Jiang-Land-Wang Outstanding Student Paper Award from The Association of Chinese Criminology and Criminal Justice in the United States (ACCCJ). Her outstanding paper is entitled “Control, peer effects, and normalization of recreational drug use in China: Gender as a moderator”. ([read the paper](#))

### ✓ Job ads:

- Tenure-track Assistant Research Fellow, Associate Research Fellow, or full Research Fellow, the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. Deadline: December 31, 2020 ([see the ad](#))

### ✓ Call for papers:

- The special issue “Social Equity as a Pathway to Health Equity” of International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (Q2). Deadline for manuscript submissions: August 15, 2021. ([see the ad](#))
- The special issue “Ageing Masculinities: Social and Cultural Representations” of the Journal of Aging Studies (Q3). Deadline for abstracts: January 7, 2021. ([see the ad](#))