

# INTERGENERATIONAL SOCIAL MOBILITY IN POST-REFORM CONTEMPORARY CHINA

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## Introduction

Social mobility represents the degree to which people can move between the socioeconomic strata across generations. In societies with low social mobility, one's success in life is highly dependent on circumstances of birth and upbringing.<sup>1</sup> Unsurprisingly, countries with low social mobility are also often associated with low life satisfaction, individual well-being, and social cohesion.<sup>2</sup>

The study of social mobility is important since social mobility is an indicator of a fair and just society where all members have an equal chance of moving up the social hierarchy through equality of opportunities. Promoting social mobility can be seen as a way to advance equality and eliminate barriers faced by different groups within the population. This is particularly relevant in today's China in light of its current socio-economic developments, the revival of Communist ideology, and the Xi administration's rally for "common prosperity" and equality as the country's next national agenda.<sup>3</sup>

Post-1978 marketization of China has resulted in a drastic shift in the spatial and social mobility of a large proportion of the population. De-collectivization and the loosening of migrant restrictions liberated the peasants to pursue better opportunities in the city where a large number of state investments were being poured into developing economic hubs.<sup>4</sup> Yet, China is still known to have one of the highest levels of social inequality and wealth disparity, with increasing media attention on its exploitative work culture.<sup>5</sup>

This research paper seeks to understand the issue of inequality in present-day China by describing the state of intergenerational social mobility at a macro level, using survey data collected in 2018. Specifically, this paper aims to answer the questions of how levels of social mobility have changed since the Reform era and what are the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hout, "A Summary of What We Know about Social Mobility," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 657, no. 1 (January 2015): 27–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716214547174>.

<sup>2</sup> "A broken social elevator? How to promote social mobility," COPE Policy Brief, OECD, June 2018, <https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/Social-Mobility-2018-PolicyBrief.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> "CPC releases key publication on its mission, contributions," The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, China SCIO, August 26, 2021, [http://english.scio.gov.cn/topnews/2021-08/26/content\\_77715862.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/topnews/2021-08/26/content_77715862.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Huimin Du and Wenfei Winnie Wang, "The Making of the 'Migrant Class'," *The SAGE Handbook of Contemporary China* 2 (2018): 985-1002, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526436085.n47>.

<sup>5</sup> Yanjie Bian et al., "Income Inequality and Class Stratification." *The SAGE Handbook of Contemporary China* 2 (2018): 1022-41. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526436085.n49>.

predictors of social mobility in the new generation of Chinese. In my study, I find that changes in absolute mobility levels differ significantly among class, meaning that whereas there has been a higher upward occupational mobility into secondary sectors among lower-class farmers, there has been a sharp decrease in downwards mobility among the upper elites. This can be traced back to two factors - the decreasing significance of education as a social leveler and the rise in levels of status inheritance.

### Literature Review

Studies of social mobility in China can be broadly categorized into three time periods: Mao Era, post-1978 reform era, and post-reform Era. Since my research focuses on modern-day China, the following literature review will cover works on the reform era and its consequences.

Large-scale, representative census or survey data is often used to analyze societal trends of status attainment.<sup>6</sup> While many of the earlier works were limited to particular cities due to the unavailability of national-scale datasets, more recent studies have been able to utilize nationally representative information to analyze mobility trends.<sup>7</sup>

There is a general consensus that the post-1978 reform era led to an increase in social mobility for the greater Chinese population. Under Mao's status hierarchy and rigid institutional structures, it was difficult for individuals to alter their social status. Chinese rural peasants were obligated to collective farming and the strict *Hukou* system entirely prevented them from gaining urban privileges, such as compulsory education and healthcare.<sup>8</sup> In the cities, state enterprises employed majority of the urban workforce, providing a system of job security known as the "iron rice bowl" for a majority of state employees who enjoyed generous welfare and guaranteed lifetime tenure.<sup>9</sup>

These institutional barriers that bounded residents to their place of birth were disrupted by Deng's market reforms and the rise of labor markets which widened opportunities available for both rural peasants and urbanites. A national agrarian policy implemented in 1980s resulted in reestablishment of the family as the basic unit of

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<sup>6</sup> Peter M. Blau and Danching Ruan, "Inequality of Opportunity in Urban China and America," *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* (1990); Chen Chen and Qin Bo, "The emergence of China's middle class: Social mobility in a rapidly urbanizing economy," *Habitat International* (2014): 528–535, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2014.10.007>; Yuan Cheng and Jianzhong Dai, "Intergenerational Mobility in Modern China," *European Sociological Review*, 11, no. 1 (1995): 17–35, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.esr.a036347>.

<sup>7</sup> C. Zhang, "Unequal Occupational Mobilities Between Rural Migrant and Urban Resident Workers in Urban China," *Frontiers in Sociology* 5, no. 55 (September 4, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.00055>.

<sup>8</sup> Yangjie Bian, "Chinese Social Stratification and Social Mobility," *Annual Review of Sociology* (2002): 91–116, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.140823>.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1997* (Hill and Wang, 1996).

production and dismantled collective farming.<sup>10</sup> This meant that peasant households were given income rights over their land as well as the autonomy to choose whether or not to continue working in agriculture. The influx of peasants into the city, coupled with the decision to decentralize the state industry, created an urban market economy that included nonstate entities and private entrepreneurs. The urban state-sector working class, previously protected by Mao's framework of communism, became more stratified and de-empowered in the reformed economy.<sup>11</sup> China's decentralization also extended to education, where a greater emphasis was placed on local governments, both in rural and urban areas, to improve the quality of education and access.<sup>12</sup>

Existing empirical literature on the effects of reform policies on social mobility largely supports this assertion. Davis conducted occupational histories of over 1,000 individuals from Shanghai and Wuhan between 1986 and 1990 and found that the reform era policies reduced middle-class reproduction in urban China.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Blau and Ruan found that neither father's education nor occupation affected the child's occupational attainment, implying an opportunity structure in which status inheritance had been eliminated due to the reforms.<sup>14</sup> A more recent work by Chen and Qin argues that rapid urbanization increased social mobility by creating an increase of opportunities for the lower class.<sup>15</sup> The rapid scale of the middle class from 17.4% of the population in 1995 to 54.8% in 2021 is attributed to the diminished institutionalized importance of one's *Hukou* status and parental achievements and the relatively high degree of education among rural migrants.

Despite a large number of seminal works examining social mobility during the Reform Era and the effects of Deng's policies on opening up opportunities in China, there is little empirical evidence about more recent trends. For example, while China's nouveau riche is arguably seen as a product of class mobility, the second generation of rich points to the phenomenon of class reproduction and immobility which has yet to be well-researched.<sup>16</sup> As such, my work seeks to contribute to the thin literature on social mobility in contemporary post-reform era China to understand how more recent structural changes have impacted opportunities for upward or downward social mobility in each group of the population.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Bian, "Chinese Social Stratification...".

<sup>12</sup> G. Fan, "Changes in Educational Institutions in China: 1978–2020: Analysis of Education Policies and Legal Texts from a National Perspective," *Handbook of Education Policy Studies* (June 3, 2020): 111–129, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8347-2\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8347-2_6).

<sup>13</sup> Deborah Davis, "'Skidding': Downward Mobility among Children of the Maoist Middle Class," *Modern China* 18, no. 4 (October 1992): 410–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009770049201800402>.

<sup>14</sup> Blau and Ruan, "Inequality of Opportunity...".

<sup>15</sup> Chen and Qin, "The emergence of China's middle class...".

<sup>16</sup> Bian et al., "Income Inequality...".

## Methodology

### *Survey Data*

Data employed in this paper was collected from the Wave 7 World Values Survey (WVS) administered in 2018.<sup>17</sup> This dataset has three advantages. Firstly, it is the most recent microdata that is available publicly, allowing this data source to provide new empirical evidence on the state of social mobility of the new generation of reform-era Chinese. Secondly, this dataset contains comprehensive demographic attributes as respondents self-reported their perceived social status, year of birth, the highest level of educational attainment of themselves and their father, as well as their occupation and their father's. Thirdly, this survey sampled all 29 provinces across China to produce a nationally representative sampling of the entire adult population (Table 1). This allows findings from this dataset to be statistically generalizable to the entire Chinese population aged 18 to 70.

To study the post-reform era, respondents from the dataset will be divided into subsets according to their birth cohorts. China's new generation is the social cohort that was born at the early stages of the reform era, in the 1980s and 1990s, with a distinct generational identity from previous generations.<sup>18</sup> While they experienced their formative years during the reform era, they entered working adulthood most recently in the post-reform era today. Thus, the data will be grouped into respondents who were born between 1980 to 2000 and those born before 1980 to examine the demographic and mobility trends of the new generation.

### *Respondent's Class and Father's Class*

Occupation is one of the common proxies for socio-economic status and is used widely as a measure of social mobility. The survey initially coded occupations into 11 broad, randomized categories. For meaningful regression analysis, the data was recoded in accordance with the International Standard Classification of Occupation<sup>19</sup> and Occupational Classification System of the People's Republic of China to rank the occupational groups by level of prestige (Table 2).<sup>20</sup> The key organizing principles of the occupational prestige rankings are not only the level of skill required of the job but

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<sup>17</sup> C. Haerpfer et al., "World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2020) Cross-National Data-Set [Data set]," *World Values Survey Association*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.14281/18241.13>.

<sup>18</sup> C. Li, "Children of the reform and opening-up: China's new generation and new era of development," *J. Chin. Sociol.* 7, 18 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-020-00130-x>.

<sup>19</sup> International Labour Office, *International Standard Classification of Occupations: ISCO-08*, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2012, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_172572.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_172572.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> "我国职业分类管理进入新阶段," Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security of the People's Republic of China, 我国职业分类管理进入新阶段, August 4, 2015, [http://www.mohrss.gov.cn/SYrlzyhshbzb/dongtaixinwen/buneyiaowen/201508/t20150804\\_216945.htm](http://www.mohrss.gov.cn/SYrlzyhshbzb/dongtaixinwen/buneyiaowen/201508/t20150804_216945.htm).

also its status in society. For example, skilled labor in the informal sector would often be deemed as inferior to a low-skilled but permanent job in the formal sector.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, it is important to note that the quality of the WVS data is far from perfect and one of the key limitations is the lack of differential treatment in response options for urban and rural samples. This means that while farm proprietors or managers might have a high level of prestige in the rural areas, it is still classified under the agricultural industry and thus relegated to the lower prestige ranks according to the International Standard Classification rankings.

Respondents were also asked to answer their fathers’ occupation when the respondent was 14 years old. This is useful as it would reflect the occupational class of their fathers during their presumably prime years, instead of their current job status which is likely to be skewed towards being retired or unemployed. The same occupational scheme was used to categorize the occupational groups of their fathers.

**TABLE 2 Recoded Occupational Classification**

Code	Occupation	Example
0	Never had a job	
1	Farm worker	Farm laborer, tractor driver
2	Farm proprietor/manager	
3	Unskilled worker	Laborer, porter, unskilled factory worker, cleaner
4	Semi-skilled worker	Bricklayer, bus driver, cannery worker, carpenter, sheet metal worker, baker
5	Skilled worker	Foreman, motor mechanic, printer, seamstress,
6	Service	Restaurant owner, police officer, waitress, barber, caretaker
7	Sales	Sales manager, shop owner, shop assistant, insurance agent, buyer
8	Clerical	Secretary, clerk, office manager, civil servant, bookkeeper
9	Professional and technical	Doctor, teacher, engineer, artist, accountant, nurse
10	Higher administrative	Banker, executive in big business, high government official, union official

Table 2: Recoded survey data occupational classifications

### Findings and Discussion

Absolute mobility considers whether adults tend to have a higher status than their parents did at the same age. It accounts for how many respondents remain in the same class as their fathers and how many experience occupational mobility. Table 3 presents the absolute mobility rates across two cohorts using a cross-tabulation of

<sup>21</sup> V. Iversen, A. Krishna, & K. Sen, “Beyond Poverty Escapes—Social Mobility in Developing Countries: A Review Article,” *The World Bank Research Observer* 34, no. 2 (August 2019): 239–273, <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lkz003>.

respondents and their fathers' occupational attainment as a proxy for socio-economic status.

TABLE 3 *Intergenerational Occupational Mobility in China, 1948-1979 and 1980-2000 Cohorts*

Panel I: Respondent's birth cohort 1948-1979										
Respondent's Occupation	Father's Occupation									
	Farm worker	Farm proprietor /manager	Unskilled worker	Semi-skilled worker	Skilled worker	Service	Sales	Clerical	Professional /technical	Higher administrative
Farm worker	40%	1%	9%	7%	3%	5%	0%	7%	6%	5%
Farm proprietor/manager	0%	29%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	5%	0%
Unskilled worker	8%	7%	17%	6%	5%	3%	0%	4%	6%	0%
Semi-skilled worker	9%	14%	26%	28%	6%	3%	16%	10%	5%	10%
Skilled worker	12%	18%	13%	9%	27%	28%	20%	11%	9%	13%
Service	7%	9%	9%	14%	13%	23%	20%	7%	12%	3%
Sales	12%	12%	9%	15%	17%	8%	24%	13%	12%	13%
Clerical	4%	6%	9%	9%	13%	13%	8%	23%	12%	20%
Professional and technical	6%	2%	9%	10%	11%	13%	8%	21%	30%	28%
Higher administrative	2%	1%	0%	2%	5%	5%	4%	3%	5%	10%
Total (N=1948)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

  

Panel II: Respondent's birth cohort 1980-2000										
Respondent's Occupation	Father's Occupation									
	Farm worker	Farm proprietor /manager	Unskilled worker	Semi-skilled worker	Skilled worker	Service	Sales	Clerical	Professional /technical	Higher administrative
Farm worker	8%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%
Farm proprietor/manager	0%	7%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Unskilled worker	2%	5%	11%	2%	2%	3%	0%	3%	0%	0%
Semi-skilled worker	12%	15%	11%	12%	5%	3%	4%	5%	0%	0%
Skilled worker	13%	21%	13%	14%	12%	19%	10%	5%	2%	0%
Service	16%	12%	11%	12%	15%	23%	10%	13%	3%	10%
Sales	23%	25%	17%	24%	22%	16%	31%	15%	9%	25%
Clerical	10%	5%	20%	12%	18%	10%	18%	18%	17%	20%
Professional and technical	14%	10%	13%	20%	22%	23%	18%	33%	66%	40%
Higher administrative	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%	3%	4%	10%	2%	5%
Total (N=1088)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 3: Intergenerational occupational mobility in china, 1948-1978 and 1990-2000 cohorts

*Occupational Mobility of the Working and Middle Class*

From Table 3, we see that occupational persistence in the rural lower classes has decreased between the two cohorts, signaling increased mobility in the rural peasant class. For the earlier generations born between 1948 to 1979 who were generally adults during the reform era, 40% of them who had farm workers as parents ended up as farm workers. This relatively high rate of occupational persistence fell drastically in the new generation born between 1980 and 2000 as only 8% of children born to farm workers stayed in this occupational class. Instead, the majority of children born to farm workers worked in the service staff or sales industry, and 14% of them even attained the status of professional or technical.

Increased upward occupational mobility in the rural working class is unsurprising considering how China's rapid urbanization and an expanding economy created millions of jobs in the commercial and service sectors.<sup>22</sup> Deng's agricultural de-collectivization and loosening of migrant restriction under the reformed *Hukou* system liberated workers from rural regions to pursue opportunities in the city that

<sup>22</sup> Chen and Qin, "The emergence of China's middle class...".

were deemed more profitable.<sup>23</sup> Table 4 also points to the decreasing rural-urban divide impact on occupational attainment, demonstrating how opportunities that were once reserved for urbanities have become increasingly accessible to rural residents.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to conclude that this phenomenon of increased upward mobility into secondary sectors is truly a cause for celebration in terms of equality of opportunities. While the structural changes provided increased access to the burgeoning middle class, the working rural population was subjected to a host of institutional challenges, such as job instability, worker exploitation, and entrapment in the secondary sector.<sup>24</sup> In 2014, the Xi administration attempted to address the issue of urban poverty and migrant discrimination through their commitment to facilitating rural migrants' integration under the National New-type Urbanization Plan.<sup>25</sup> Although the goals of this initiative seemingly complement the pattern of increased upward occupational mobility in the lower classes and suggests some degree of success by the CCP to achieve equality of opportunities, critics have pointed out that such efforts only serve to bolster the Party's ideological interest of enhancing socialist legitimacy while further mediating the country's integration into the capitalist economy.<sup>26</sup> Without further analysis of the micro-level mechanisms of the working class and their pathways for mobility, these findings can, at best, only underscore the pressing need to address the multifaceted complexities of the post-reform era as the new generation of Chinese continue to move into the lower-middle class in large numbers.

Similar to the trend of rural farm workers, unskilled and semi-skilled workers of the new generation experience increased intergenerational mobility compared to their peers from the older cohort. For the 1948 to 1979 cohort, children born to fathers who were either unskilled or semi-skilled workers had the highest chance of ending up in either of those same two occupations (Table 3). This is contrary to findings from the 1980 to 2000 cohort: of all the children born to fathers who were unskilled workers, only 11% remained as unskilled workers. Instead, 17% moved onto the sales sector while 20% attain jobs in the clerical sector. For children born to fathers who worked as semi-skilled workers, 24% end up in Sales, while 20% procured positions in the professional or technical fields. Increased intergenerational occupational mobility of the working and lower-middle-class reinstates existing widely-held beliefs that China's marketization has increased social mobility and reduced institutional structures and rigid status hierarchies.

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<sup>23</sup> Du and Wang, "The Making of...".

<sup>24</sup> Bian et al., "Income Inequality..."; Du and Wang, "The Making of...".

<sup>25</sup> "China unveils landmark urbanization plan," The State Council of the People's Republic of China, Retrieved November 20, 2021, [http://english.www.gov.cn/policies/policy\\_watch/2014/08/23/content\\_281474983027472.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/policies/policy_watch/2014/08/23/content_281474983027472.htm).

<sup>26</sup>Yin-wah Chu, "China's new urbanization plan: Progress and structural constraints," *Cities* 103 (August 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2020.102736>.

*Occupational Mobility of the Upper Class*

While there is evidence of a trend of greater mobility among the working class and the lower middle class, this is not the case in the upper echelons of Chinese society. From Table 3, we observe an increase in class reproduction in more prestigious occupations, namely in the professional or technical field as well as in the higher administrative sector. In the 1948 to 1979 cohort, only 30% of children born to fathers working in the professional or technical sector ended up as in the same occupational class. This level of occupational persistence doubled in the following cohort in which 66% of children born to professional or technical workers attained the same occupational status. Findings across the two cohorts at the higher administrative level parallel this pattern of status inheritance. Children born to fathers who held jobs in the higher administrative sector, such as a high government official or an executive in a large business, had a larger chance of ending up in the same occupational class in the post-reform era as compared to the reform era.

The *nouveau riche*, a class of elites that emerged during the reform era, are symbols of social mobility and opportunities to rise up the social hierarchy in China - as far as the wealthy are concerned. However, the rise of the second generation of the rich, commonly referred to as the *Fuerdai* (富二代) in popular discourse, reflects a contradiction of egalitarian ideals and illustrates the growing pattern of class immobility in the upper elites.<sup>27</sup> My contribution lends empirical credence to earlier scholarly works that theorized the birth of China's Weberian system of class closure, in which prestige, power, and wealth have become highly centralized and institutionally protected by the elite class.<sup>28</sup> With this system of closed ranks and high class reproduction, there is a dwindling chance of the lower and middle classes rising into elite positions independently.

More strikingly, this flip side continues to challenge the notion that market liberalization unanimously decentralizes and liberates the masses. Rather, while the new generation of the reform era has benefited from the rapid improvement of living conditions, they currently face unprecedented levels of social barriers that restrict them from attaining equal opportunities in the capital market. By assessing the reform through the lens of class, it becomes clearer that these structural economic changes had been shaped by the ruling elite's efforts to preserve their power and create an exit strategy through the transformation of power into capital and occupational ranks.<sup>29</sup>

*Predictors of Social Mobility*

Besides studying the absolute mobility across the two cohorts through the use of occupation as a proxy for socio-economic attainment, regression analysis conducted

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<sup>27</sup> Bian et al., "Income Inequality...".

<sup>28</sup> Guo-Xun Su, "Revisiting Max Weber in the Context of China," *Society* 27, no. 5 (2007): 1 – 25.

<sup>29</sup> Y. Wu, "The Strange Case of China," *Boundary* 2 46, no. 2 (2019): 139–162, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-7497076>.



between respondent's occupational attainment and several predictors presents several key insights into the shifting mechanisms that shape status attainment in the new generation. As seen from Table 4, the predictors tested included individual attributes such as respondent's educational level, gender, location of residence (urban or rural), as well as inherited factors like father's occupation and father's educational level.

**TABLE 4 Results for Multivariate Linear Regression Model**

	1948-1979 Cohort (n=1948)	1980-2000 Cohort (n=1088)
(Constant)	0.162	1.89*
Respondent's Educational Level	1.159*	0.949*
Gender [ref=male]		
Female	0.129	0.615*
Location [ref=rural]		
Urban	1.249*	0.484*
Father's Occupation	0.108*	0.129*
Father's Educational Level	0.029	-0.07
Adjusted R-Square	0.425	0.333
F-test	171*	67*

Dependent variable: Respondent's Occupation

\*p<0.001 = results were significant

Table 4: Results for Multivariate Linear Regression Model

In both cohorts, the coefficient scores of respondent's educational level are statistically significant, meaning that higher educational attainment continues to play a influential role in securing better occupations. However, the decrease from 1.159 to 0.949 highlights how the impact of educational attainment has diminished over the two cohorts. This means that while an individual's achievements in educational attainment continue to be associated with a more prestigious job, other inherited or individual factors have had a larger effect in more recent times. The statistical decrease lends support to the observations of academics who postulate that China parallels developments of a Weberian system of closed ranks in which prestigious occupations have been institutionally gatekept by the elite. Whereas earlier research conducted in the reform era focused largely on the ability of education to create an opportunity structure in which status inheritance had been eliminated, findings from this paper suggest that the relationship between an individual's educational attainment and their occupational success has overall witnessed a decrease. While the promotion of compulsory education and the expansion of tertiary education in the post-reform era may have allowed more individuals of humble backgrounds to attain a higher education, they are now less likely to obtain a more prestigious job because of it. Education as a social leveler and pathway for upward social mobility is no longer as

relevant for this new generation, cementing the assertion that the post-reform era is witnessing an unprecedented state of class immobility.

A prescribed factor that has increased in influence on the respondent's status attainment is the father's occupation. While earlier parts of the paper looked at the proportion of respondents that had a higher occupational attainment than their fathers or that maintained the same occupational level, Table 4 presents the overall impacts that a father's occupation has on a child's occupation. It shows that the coefficient between father's occupation and child's occupation has increased from 0.108 to 0.129 from the earlier cohort to the new cohort, representing the growing significance of inherited factors in status attainment. This corroborates the finding that the level of social mobility in China has decreased as inherited factors, such as the family to which one was born to, now accounts for a larger part in determining one's success in life.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the level of social immobility in China has increased since the implementation of market reforms in the late 1970s. Although this practice of status inheritance is not unique to the new generation of post-reform era Chinese, its social significance is amplified as it stands in stark contrast with present-day party slogans of "common prosperity" to build an equitable society. Empirically, my contribution points out that the absolute levels of social mobility vary significantly along the boundaries of class. That is, the lower agricultural classes experienced an increased ability to move upward into secondary professions, while the upper occupational classes witnessed a sharp decrease in downward mobility. In general, the weakening of intergenerational mobility can be attributed to two mechanisms. Firstly, education as a social leveler has decreased in significance, elucidating how individual performance factors have lower returns to professional attainment for the new generation today. Secondly, an individual's inherited social factors, such as their father's social status, have a greater impact on one's occupational attainment.

While my paper investigates social mobility trends in the post-reform era on a macro-scale, further research on the present microlevel mechanisms that influence social mobility is needed to establish the specific pathways that enable the new generation to move up or down the social ladder. Further research would also benefit from adopting a class-specific level of analysis to update and nuance earlier works that studied mobility during the reform era.

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