

Sociology of Industrial Societies

Social class and mobility

Tak Wing Chan

tw.chan@sociology.ox.ac.uk

Department of Sociology
University of Oxford

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Outline

Introduction

Substantive and theoretical interests in social mobility

- Marxist interests

- Liberal concern

- British ethical socialist

Oxford mobility study

- Data and class schema

- Mobility table

- Marginal distribution and mobility

- Inflow and outflow rates

- Absolute vs relative mobility rates

Recent trends

Lecture plan

- ▶ Why should we care about social mobility? Because it addresses a range of concerns, Marxist, liberal, British 'ethical' socialist, related to the long term trend of industrial societies.
- ▶ Landmark research in Britain: Oxford Social Mobility Study 1972 (Goldthorpe, 1987; Goldthorpe and Mills, 2004).
- ▶ Key analytical distinctions: inflow vs outflow rates, absolute vs relative mobility rates, odds and odds ratio, loglinear models.
- ▶ Two substantive questions:
 - ▶ How open is Britain? How 'fluid' is its class structure?
 - ▶ Prospect of social class formation.

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Marxist interests in social mobility

- ▶ Much of modern stratification research can be traced back to Marx's theories of social class and history, and critiques of these theories (Elster, 1985).
- ▶ Despite the obvious significance of class in Marx's theoretical enterprise, he did not have a systematic theory of class. His comments on class are scattered and sometimes inconsistent. But the key to understanding Marx's ideas of class is his theory of history: (**historical materialism**).
- ▶ 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles' *The Communist Manifesto*.
- ▶ Like almost all nineteenth century social theorists, Marx has an evolutionary view of social change, a **teleology**:
... ⇒ feudalism ⇒ capitalism ⇒ socialism ⇒ communism.

Marxist interests in social mobility

- ▶ Each developmental stage, **mode of production**, is defined by:
 - ▶ **Productive forces** (technology).
 - ▶ **Relations of production** (social).
- ▶ A basic distinction: base vs superstructure
 - ▶ **Base** (productive forces and relations of production)
 - ▶ **Superstructure** (state, family, religion, ideology, media, ...)
- ▶ **The base determines the superstructure.** The superstructure operates in such a way which reinforces or reproduces the base. Marx was also a **functionalist!**
- ▶ E.g. control of means of production implies political control of the state (the state is an instrument of the ruling class); 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas'.

Marxist interests in social mobility

- ▶ Each developmental stage has **two fundamental social classes** (under feudalism: feudal lord vs serf; under capitalism: capitalist vs wage earner), defined in terms of how they are related to the **means of production** (owners vs non-owners of the means of production; producers vs non-producers).
- ▶ Classes are defined in terms of **production relation**, not in terms of consumption or income distribution, ...
- ▶ The two fundamental social classes are necessarily locked in an **exploitative**, and therefore **contradictory and antagonistic relationship**.

Marxist interests in social mobility

- ▶ Class structure will **polarise**.
- ▶ Other social groups in society are **transitional** in nature. Some are residuals from the old order (e.g. the petty bourgeoisie under capitalism). Transitional classes will eventually be absorbed into the two basic opposing camps.
- ▶ The logic of capitalism eventually leads to capital concentration, polarisation and 'emiseration' of the working class. Concentration of workers in factories also facilitates **class in itself** turning into **class for itself**.
- ▶ Opposition of interests eventually leads to class conflict. The proletariat overthrows the capitalists and becomes the universal class of the classless society.

Marxist interests in social mobility

- ▶ Trouble is: **The class structure has not polarised.**
- ▶ Because of increasing scale of industrial production, commercial enterprises and the government, there are more administrators, managers, and professionals around (new middle classes).
- ▶ Also, the old middle classes, despite initial decline, have persisted (Steinmetz and Wright, 1989).
- ▶ Two questions arise.
 - ▶ If the middle class has grown, who is taking up the new places? **Structural change generates social mobility.**
 - ▶ What is the **implication of social mobility for class formation and class action?**

Marxist interests in social mobility

- ▶ Concentration of capital, increasing scale of industrial enterprises, etc. were thought to facilitate the growth of class consciousness and class formation—class in itself would turn into class for itself.
- ▶ This proves to be a lot more problematic. One necessary condition for class formation is demographic formation—inter- and intra-generational stability in the working class.
- ▶ This argument has a long history, e.g. Marx, Sombart—‘**Why is there no socialism in the United States?**’. Open frontier, no feudal traditions, greater fluidity . . . a greater possibility for members of the working class (or their children) to move to other small business, independent farming . . .

Liberal concern about social mobility

- ▶ That the US does not a higher level of social mobility than other industrial countries. But industrial countries in general have high mobility rates, and there is a long term trend for mobility rates to rise (Blau and Duncan, 1967).
- ▶ Why? A trend towards **universalism**—application of principles of rationality and efficiency in many areas of social and economic life.
 - ▶ Drive technological change and economic growth ⇒ occupational change and upgrading ⇒ social mobility.
 - ▶ High **geographical mobility** ⇒ decline of particularistic ties of kinship and neighbourhood.
 - ▶ **Achievement rather than ascription** in social selection (education, hiring, promotion).

Liberal concern about social mobility

- ▶ Social and political consequences: High rate of social mobility gives some **legitimacy** to inequality of conditions.
- ▶ More likely that people with valued abilities are placed in positions of responsibilities, thus bringing **benefits to all**.
- ▶ Keeps people in disadvantaged positions from despair and taking radical actions; **inhibits class formation**.

British ethical socialist tradition

- ▶ Connection to reformist Marxists, but do not accept marxist historicist analysis.
- ▶ Unlike Marxists, see equal opportunity and social mobility as a good thing. But doubt that industrial societies are already open and fluid.
- ▶ Believe that equality of condition is necessary for equality of opportunity (Halsey et al, 1980).

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Three theses (Goldthorpe, 1987)

- ▶ **Closure thesis:** Britain is hidebound by social class. Mobility, if it took place at all, is of a short-range type.
 - ▶ Those at the top of the class structure have the motivation and the resources to help their children to get there.
 - ▶ Elite positions are largely closed to people from other class background; very little long-range mobility into these positions.
- ▶ **Buffer-zone thesis:** The manual/non-manual divide is a very significant barrier to mobility. Any mobility crossing this line will be between the top layer of the manual occupations and the bottom layer of the non-manual occupations.
- ▶ **Counter-balance thesis:** Although educational expansion and reform has led to some increased mobility chances, this is offset by a decrease in mobility over the worklife. Thus, there is only a change in the channel, not the level, of mobility.

The Oxford Social Mobility Study of 1972

- ▶ A representative sample of about 10,000 **men** aged 20 to 64 in **England and Wales**.
- ▶ Does the omission of women in the sample imply intellectual sexism? The key issue is: what is the **unit of analysis** in stratification research—the individual or the household?
- ▶ Respondents were asked to report their **current occupation** and **employment status** and those of their **father** when the respondents were about 14 years old. Occupation and employment status data were then **coded into social classes**.
- ▶ People in each social class share similar **market situations** (conditions of employment, levels and sources of income, job security, . . .) and **work situations** (autonomy, supervisory authority in the workplace).

The Oxford Class schema

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- I Service class—Higher-grade professionals, administrators, officials, managers, proprietors of moderate to big business
 - II Service class—Lower-grade professionals, administrators, officials, managers
 - III Routine non-manual workers
 - IV Small proprietors, self-employed, farmers
 - V Lower-grade technicians, supervisor of manual workers
 - VI Skilled manual workers
 - VII Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers
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- ▶ Manual/non-manual divide; 5- or 3-class versions.
- ▶ Cross-classification of all respondents according to class origin and destination: **inter-generational social mobility table.**

Mobility table (counts)

class origin	class destination							N	%
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII		
I	311	130	79	53	33	37	45	688	7.3
II	161	128	66	39	53	59	48	554	5.9
III	128	109	89	54	89	108	117	694	7.3
IV	167	152	106	324	116	191	273	1329	14.1
V	154	147	109	83	170	229	190	1082	11.5
VI	202	228	215	171	318	788	672	2594	27.5
VII	162	194	204	165	312	586	870	2493	24.6
N	1285	1087	870	887	1091	2000	2214	9434	
%	13.6	11.5	9.2	9.4	11.6	21.2	23.5		

Source: Goldthorpe (1987, p.49)

Marginal distributions and structural change

- ▶ The **marginal distribution** across the columns, the **destination distribution**, reveals the British class structure in 1972.
- ▶ Strictly speaking, the marginal distribution down the rows is not an estimation of the class structure of any particular time-point. It is the **origin distribution**.
- ▶ Comparing the **origin** and **destination** distributions, we see dramatic change in the class structure.
 - ▶ Only 7.3% of the respondents came from class I families. But 13.6% of them are themselves in class I. Similar increase in relative size for other classes non-manual classes, i.e. II, III.
 - ▶ Classes IV and VI have declined in relative size. A general **upgrading of the occupational/class structure**.

Structural vs circulation mobility

- ▶ Change in the class structure necessitates some mobility even for a completely closed society. **Structural mobility** vs **circulation mobility**. An old distinction:

Total mobility = structural mobility + circulation mobility.

- ▶ The people in the cells off the **main diagonal** are those who are mobile:

$$\text{Total mobility rate} = \frac{\text{number off diagonal}}{\text{total number}} = 72\%. \quad (1)$$

Inflow vs outflow rates

- ▶ To get more info about mobility pattern, we can construct tables of **inflow** and **outflow** rates.
- ▶ The same thing viewed from two angles. The inflow table tells us the recruitment pattern into each class destination.
- ▶ The outflow table shows the destination of people from each social origin.

Inflow Table (column percentage)

class origin	class desination							
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	<i>N</i>
I	24.2	12.0	9.1	6.0	3.0	1.9	2.0	7.3
II	12.5	11.8	7.6	4.4	4.9	3.0	2.2	5.9
III	10.0	10.0	10.2	6.1	8.2	5.4	5.3	7.3
IV	13.0	13.9	12.2	36.5	10.6	9.6	12.3	14.1
V	12.0	13.5	12.5	9.4	15.6	11.4	8.6	11.5
VI	15.7	21.0	24.8	19.2	29.2	39.4	30.3	27.5
VII	12.6	17.8	23.6	18.5	28.5	29.4	39.3	26.4
<i>N</i>	1285	1087	870	887	1091	2000	2214	9434

Inflow pattern

- ▶ Over a quarter of the members of class I come from the manual working classes (VI and VII)—**long-ranged upward mobility is not negligible**; inconsistent with the closure thesis.
- ▶ A quarter of the members of the service class are of service class origin, but all other classes supply over 10% of its current members. The **service class is quite heterogeneous** in composition, because it has been expanding rapidly. Implications for its cultural distinctiveness and ideological cohesion?
- ▶ Around 70% of the working class (classes VI and VII) are, at least, second generation working class. A mature working class coming of age, with subcultural distinctiveness and cohesion, and potential for class action ... ?

Outflow Table (row percentage)

class	class destination							
origin	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	<i>N</i>
I	45.2	18.9	11.5	7.7	4.8	5.4	6.5	688
II	29.1	23.1	11.9	7.0	9.6	10.6	8.7	554
III	18.4	15.7	12.8	7.8	12.8	15.6	16.9	694
IV	12.6	11.4	8.0	24.4	8.7	14.4	20.5	1329
V	14.2	13.6	10.1	7.7	15.7	21.2	17.6	1082
VI	7.8	8.8	8.3	6.6	12.3	30.4	25.9	2594
VII	6.5	7.8	8.2	6.6	12.5	23.5	34.9	2493
<i>N</i>	13.6	11.5	9.2	9.4	11.6	21.2	23.5	9434

Outflow patterns

- ▶ The outflow pattern from class VI (skilled manual) is very similar to that from class VII (unskilled manual)—inconsistent with the buffer-zone thesis.
- ▶ Having crossed the manual / non-manual divide, there is no concentration in the classes on the boundary (class III or IV).
- ▶ In **absolute** terms, there is considerable upward mobility (14% of those of unskilled manual background managed to get into class I+II) and downward mobility (> 10% of those from class I skidded down to class VI+VII).

Outflow patterns

- ▶ But it is also clear that there are marked differences in the **relative** chance of mobility. Take the example of getting into the service class (I+II):
 - ▶ among people from working class background: about 16%
 - ▶ those from the intermediate classes (III, IV, V) background: about 30%
 - ▶ those from the service class: about 60%
- ▶ Similar difference by class origins in the **relative** chance of ending up in the manual working class is also evident. Be clear about whether one is talking about **absolute** or **relative** mobility rates.

Absolute and relative mobility rates

- ▶ Changes in the occupational structure means that there is more room at the top, which leads to high **absolute mobility rates**: total mobility rate, inflow, outflow, upward, downward rates.
- ▶ It is a separate question to ask if all social classes have been able to benefit from the increased opportunity to the same degree?
- ▶ High absolute mobility rates can co-exist with highly unequal relative mobility chances. This is an extremely important distinction. **Odds** and **odds ratios** are the building blocks for understanding **relatively mobility rates**.

Odds and odds ratio

- ▶ What are odds? Consider this example: For people from the class I, their odds of obtaining a class I job as opposed to a class VII job is defined as follows:

$$\text{odds}_{I-VII} = \frac{311}{45} = 6.91$$

- ▶ For people of class VII origin, their odds for making class I instead of class VII:

$$\text{odds}_{I-VII} = \frac{162}{870} = 0.19$$

- ▶ The odds ratio is simply the ratio of these two odds:

$$\text{odds ratio} = \frac{6.91}{0.19} = 37.12$$

Odds and odds ratio

- ▶ This means that for people of class I origin, their odds of getting to class I as opposed to class VII is about 37 times as high as the corresponding odds for people of class VII origin.
- ▶ An odds ratio of 1 would mean that people from the two class origins have the same odds of avoiding class VII and getting to class I. That may be thought of as a situation of equal opportunity.
- ▶ The further the odds ratio is from 1, the more unequal is the relative mobility chance.

Odds and odds ratio

- ▶ Why is odds ratio a measure of relative mobility rates? Recall that structural changes (reflected in the discrepancies between the origin and destination marginals of the mobility table) itself **requires** social mobility.
- ▶ Total, inflow, outflow mobility rates all have two components:
 - ▶ The impact of structural changes.
 - ▶ The underlying openness or fluidity of a society.
- ▶ We want a measure which is insensitive to structural changes or the marginals, so that we can measure the underlying openness.

Odds and odds ratio

- Suppose the mobility table of a particular society looks like this:

	S	I	W
S	10	...	2
I
W	10	...	100

- In this society, the odds of making S rather than W, for people of S and W origin are respectively:

$$\text{odds}_S = \frac{10}{2} = 5, \quad \text{odds}_W = \frac{10}{100} = 0.1$$

Thus, the odds ratio is equal to $\frac{\text{odds}_S}{\text{odds}_W} = \frac{5}{0.1} = 50$

Odds and odds ratio

- ▶ Suppose the speed of structural change is much greater, such that the S class in the destination distribution is really twice as big, i.e. every cell in the S-column is doubled.

	S	I	W
S	20	...	2
I
W	20	...	100

- ▶ Now the odds of making S rather than W are:

$$\text{odds}_S = \frac{20}{2} = 10, \quad \text{odds}_W = \frac{20}{100} = 0.2$$

- ▶ So the odds have changed, but what about the odds ratio?

$$\frac{\text{odds}_S}{\text{odds}_W} = \frac{10}{0.2} = 50$$

Odds and odds ratio

- ▶ Thus, the odds ratio does not change when all the cells of any column (by extension, any row) change by the same factor.
- ▶ In this sense, odds ratio is a measure of relative mobility chances net of structural influence, which is what we want!
- ▶ Obviously, there are many odds ratios one can calculate for a mobility table. In general, for a mobility table with k rows and k columns, there are altogether $(k - 1)^2$ odds ratios to be calculated.
- ▶ Loglinear and related statistical models are tools that help us summarise and describe the complex pattern of association of mobility tables.

Summary of key results in Goldthorpe (1987)

- ▶ In terms of absolute mobility rates, there was quite a high level of mobility in Britain. The three theses of closure, buffer zone, and counter-balance do not stand up to empirical tests.
- ▶ Such high level of mobility is largely because of a very impressive change in the occupational structure. Structural change **requires** social mobility.
- ▶ Why have previous researchers got it so wrong? Because of a failure to make the key analytical distinction between absolute and relative mobility rates. High volume of mobility can coexist with highly unequal relative mobility chances (as measured by odds ratios). Or better, they don't have the technical tools that help them make this distinction properly.

Summary of key results in Goldthorpe (1987)

- ▶ In relative terms, mobility chances are very unequal. The upgrading of the class structure has provided more mobility chances, but people from some origins are much more capable of exploiting these new opportunities than others.
- ▶ What about class formation? Does the high level of mobility undermine the likelihood of class-based identity, subculture, and political action? The service class is indeed very heterogeneous. This has implications on its cohesion and subcultural distinctiveness.
- ▶ But it must also be noted that the pattern of absolute mobility rates is very asymmetrical—very little downward mobility into the manual working class \Rightarrow a much more homogeneous working class . . .

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Trends in social mobility since 1972

- ▶ Goldthorpe and Mills (2004) report results based on data from the General Household Surveys from 1973 through to 1992.
- ▶ In terms of **absolute mobility rates** for men and women:
 - ▶ No or very little change in rates of **total, upward and downward mobility** if individuals are classified according to their own occupation/employment status.
 - ▶ If class positions of married or cohabiting individuals are determined by the **dominant approach**, total mobility rates actually rise from 70 to 75%, mainly due to increase in **downward mobility** from 22 to over 30%, while **upward mobility** rate fall from 30 to 25%. Much of this change is related to the decline of class VI (skilled manual workers).

Trends in social mobility since 1972

- ▶ In terms of **relative mobility rates**: No statistical evidence of significant change in openness of society for men, any change detected is best characterised as trendless fluctuation. 'A movement toward greater social fluidity, though possible, is not "proven"'. (p.211)

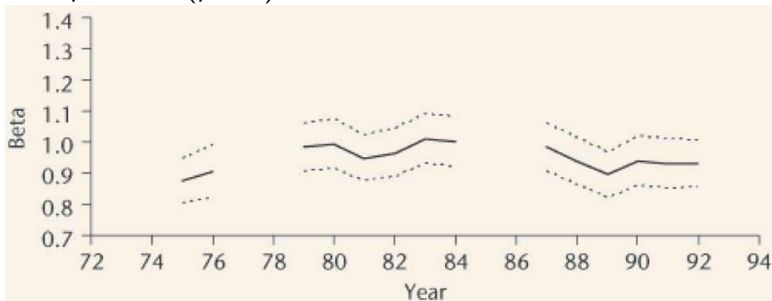


FIG. 8.4. Men 20–49, B series tables. Beta parameters from Unidiff model and 95 percent confidence intervals