

# Social Stratification and Social Mobility

SOSC 3880  
Spring 2026

TuTh 12:00PM - 01:20PM  
Rm 2302, Lift 17-18

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3345 Lifts 13-15/Lift 3  
Office Hours TBA

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*Subject to revision. Please check regularly for revised versions.*

Social stratification refers to the processes by which social and economic inequality emerges and is transmitted from one generation to the next. Social mobility, meanwhile, refers to the movement of individuals across social and economic strata, whether within their lifetime, or from one generation to the next. Research on social stratification and mobility examines how patterns of inequality emerge and persist over time, and what the implications of inequality are for society, families and individuals. Considering widening inequality in many societies in recent decades, this is a topic of considerable importance and relevance. The course focuses on social and economic inequality and its relationship to education, geography, employment, race and ethnicity, housing, and family structure.

Many of the required readings or videos in the primary course text refer to the United States because the study of stratification and mobility has a long history there, the data and methods are well-developed, inequality there is extreme, and the range of topics is broad. These readings will be starting point for discussions of stratification, mobility, and inequality in general and in HK, the mainland and Asia. Lectures will include discussion of relevant topics for HK, the mainland, and other parts of the world.

## Intended Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- 1. Describe the similarities and differences in key concepts, measures and theories that are used in analyzing social and economic inequality
- 2. Explain the key factors and processes of how inequality is created, and social mobility is achieved, especially in the context of Hong Kong and mainland China
- 3. Describe the consequences of inequality and propose public policies to tackle the issues

## Grading

Component	Percent
Monthly Reflections (3)	15

Proposed Multiple Choice Questions	10
In-Class Midterm (Multiple Choice)	20
In-Class Final (Multiple Choice)	25
Class Participation	5
Class Attendance	5
Final Project	
Presentation	10
Written	10

Submitted work will normally be marked within two weeks.

Work that is up to one week late will be down-marked by 0.33 (e.g. B to B-). Each additional week will result in another 0.33.

If you submit your work to Canvas a few minutes late, for example by missing the midnight deadline by a few minutes, do not worry.

## *Rubric*

Written work will be graded on a scale of F to A+, recorded as 0 to 4.33. Intermediate grades like A-, B+ etc. may be used.

Letter grade	Recorded as	I
A+	4.33	Exceptional work that not only shows a thorough understanding of class material, including lectures, readings, and videos, but also an extraordinary level of original and independent thinking.
A	4	Exceptional work that shows a thorough understanding of class material, and a high level of original and independent thinking.
B	3	Demonstrates an understanding of class material and offers some original and independent thinking.
C	2	Satisfactory. Basic understanding of class material.
D	1	Unsatisfactory. cursory or inadequate response to the prompt, or indication of incorrect or incomplete understanding of material.
F	0	Incomplete, off-topic, or otherwise seriously inadequate

## **Explanation of Assessments**

## *Monthly Reflections*

Once a month, you will write a personal reflection on what you have learned from the readings and discussions for that month. It should be 500-1000 words. It should show that you have done the assigned reading and paid attention to class discussion, but also provide some original thoughts, questions, or insights that show that you have thought about the material. These may include discussion of how topics covered in class relate to your personal experience, to Hong Kong, or to where you grew up.

## *Proposed Multiple-Choice Questions*

Every week, you will propose a multiple-choice question based on the lectures, readings, and viewings for that week. It should include a question, and five possible responses, identify the correct response, and include a sentence or two explaining why that is the correct response. They should be designed such that a classmate who has followed the lecture and done the readings should be able to answer without much difficulty.

## *In-Class Multiple Choice Exams*

This should be self-explanatory. I will use the submitted questions as a pool to draw from when designing the midterm and final. I will make the proposed questions available for you to review while you prepare for the exams. For the exam itself, I may edit proposed questions or add some of my own. Exams will be closed book and closed note, with no electronic devices.

## *Class participation*

Students are expected to participate in class discussion by raising questions or sharing thoughts. The TA will track contributions to discussion. Contributions to discussion should reflect familiarity with the contents of the lecture and the assigned readings and should make connections to them. A will be awarded for frequent, thoughtful contributions, B for regular, C for occasional, and D for sporadic or rare. We recognize that time will not allow for everyone to contribute in every class, and we will adjust expectations according to the amount of time available.

## *Class attendance*

The TA will take attendance at every class session. You may miss two classes without penalty. For any additional absences to be excused, you will need documentation that you will have to submit to the TA. Normally, only absences due to illness, family emergency, job interview, or participation in an official school activity will be excused.

## *Proposal for final project*

By week 7, students will submit a short proposal (250 words or so) describing their plans for their final project. They are welcome to discuss this with me in advance and may amend their plans afterwards.

## *Final project*

For the final project, students may produce 1) a review of a major book related to social mobility or inequality, 2) a literature review, 3) a research proposal, 4) or a research project, according to their interests. It should be approximately 2000-2500 words, double-spaced, not including references. This will usually be about 8-10 typed pages.

I expect projects to be individual. I am willing to discuss proposals for group projects, but for any such project, the contributions of different team members must be clearly delineated enough that I can mark them separately. I am open to coordination, where for example a group of students identify a set of books on a topic of interest, and each choose one book to write a review.

### *Book review*

A book review should be on a major recent book related to the topic of inequality. The review should summarize the book, including its methods, data, and key findings, and discuss it in the context of the material covered in class. Students are welcome to select one of the books excerpted in Grusky and Hill (2018) and read the original in its entirety and report on it.

### *Literature review*

The literature review should introduce and discuss 5-8 academic journal articles on a specific topic related to inequality and the themes of the class. Normally the articles should be from major or at least reputable academic journals. The selection of articles should include some recent ones. A literature review should include not only a summary of the works including the data and the methods, but some reflections and comparison across the different works.

### *Research proposal*

Students applying for postgraduate studies or preparing for a capstone project may use this opportunity to develop a proposal for a research project related to inequality. It would normally include a discussion of the research question, the data and methods, and expected findings. If you are thinking about this, please talk to me in office hours.

### *Research project*

Students with appropriate training in methods, may propose and carry out a research project involving the analysis of data to address a research question related to inequality and stratification.

## *Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks*

Assessment tasks all have broad coverage of topics covered in the class, and map to all Course ILOs.

## **Communications**

Please use the Canvas forum for questions about class policy, or any question that may be of interest to other classmates. If you email me with a question that I think should be posed on Canvas, I will reply to ask you to do that and answer the question there.

Email to me should be used for specific issues like absences, late work, etc.

If you have questions or thoughts about class material that you would like to discuss, please come to my office rather than emailing. I do not find email useful for discussing complex questions and prefer in person discussions.

## Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

All the work you submit must be new and not previously submitted in any other class. If you are working on a related topic for another class, you will need to inform me and the other instructor so that we can coordinate. It is not acceptable to submit the same work for credit to two classes, unless both instructors consent beforehand, and an arrangement is in place to ensure that the total amount of work is equivalent to two projects done separately.

You may use AI tools to edit text for which you generated the original draft, but if you do, please include your original below the rewritten text.

I recommend against use of AI tools to generate responses from scratch. In an advanced class like this, responses generated by AI even when not obviously the product of AI are not likely to receive high marks because the text is likely to be at a very basic level in terms, especially in terms of originality and independence.

## Required Reading and Viewing

David B. Grusky and Jasmine Hill, eds. 2018. *Inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Routledge.  
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9780429499821/inequality-21st-century-david-grusky-jasmine-hill>

This book is available online at the library website.

For many of the chapters excerpted in Grusky and Hill, videos are available at <https://inequality.stanford.edu/publications/americas-poverty-course> in which the authors discuss their work. You may wish to watch these videos before or after reading the chapters.

You will also be required to watch selected videos from Raj Chetty's online course at Harvard, Using Big Data to Solve Economic and Social Problems:  
<https://opportunityinsights.org/course/> These will be indicated below as Chetty Lecture X, where X is the number of the lecture.

Additional materials may be announced during the semester.

## Suggested reading and viewing

### Websites

I will refer to these websites frequently during class. Make sure to visit each of them before the first class.

Inequality.org at the Institute for Policy Studies <https://inequality.org/>

Opportunity Insights - <https://opportunityinsights.org>

World Inequality Database - <https://wid.world/>

Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality - <https://inequality.stanford.edu/research>

Harvard Program on Inequality and Social Policy - <https://inequality.hks.harvard.edu/>

Center for Equitable Growth - <http://ceg.berkeley.edu/>

## Schedule

Items identified as *Optional* are optional and included because they may be of interest to students seeking more information about the topic.

Class	Topic and Assigned Reading/Viewing
	<b>Recent Trends in Inequality</b>
3/2	<p>Introduction and Overview Why Do We Care About Inequality? Global Trends Sign-up for Discussion Group Leadership</p> <p>Grusky and Hill, 1-10 Chetty, Lecture 4</p> <p><i>Optional</i> Alvaredo, Facundo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucman. 2022. <i>World Inequality Report 2022</i>. <a href="#">Executive Summary</a> and <a href="#">Chapter 1 Global Economic Inequality: Insights</a>.</p> <p>United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs. 2020. World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World. <a href="#">Executive Summary</a> and <a href="#">Chapter 1 Inequality: Where We Stand Today</a></p> <p>Chetty, Raj, David Grusky, Maximilian Hell, Nathaniel Hendren, Robert Manduca, and Jimmy Narang. 2016. <a href="#">The Fading American Dream: Trends in American Income Mobility Since 1940</a>. <i>Science</i>. 356(6336):398-406.</p>
5/2	<p>Hong Kong</p> <p>Sun, Fiona. 2022. Wealth gap between Hong Kong's crazy rich, miserably poor widens since handover. <i>South China Morning Post</i>. 20 June 2022.</p>

	<p><a href="https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3182249/wealth-gap-between-hong-kongs-crazy-rich-miserably-poor">https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3182249/wealth-gap-between-hong-kongs-crazy-rich-miserably-poor</a></p> <p>OxFam Hong Kong. 2018. <a href="#"><i>Hong Kong Inequality Report</i></a> OxFam Hong Kong. 2024. <a href="#"><i>Poverty Report 2024</i></a></p> <p><i>Optional</i></p> <p>Piketty, Thomas and Li Yang. 2021. Income and Wealth Inequality in Hong Kong, 1981-2020: The Rise of Pluto-Communism. World Inequality Lab Working Paper No. 2021/18 <a href="#">DOWNLOAD PDF</a> <a href="#">Summary of key findings</a></p> <p>Hong Kong's Gini coefficient compared with other countries <a href="https://www.hkeconomy.gov.hk/en/pdf/gini_comparison.pdf">https://www.hkeconomy.gov.hk/en/pdf/gini_comparison.pdf</a> Undated.</p>
10/2	<p>Mainland China</p> <p>Mazzocco, Ilaria. 2022. How Inequality Is Undermining China's Prosperity. Big Data in China Report. Center for Strategic and International Studies. <a href="https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-inequality-undermining-chinas-prosperity">https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-inequality-undermining-chinas-prosperity</a></p> <p>Hofman, Bert. 2021. China's Common Prosperity Drive. EAI Commentary #33. National University of Singapore East Asian Institute. <a href="https://research.nus.edu.sg/eai/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/09/EAIC-33-20210903.pdf">https://research.nus.edu.sg/eai/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/09/EAIC-33-20210903.pdf</a></p> <p><i>Optional</i></p> <p>Piketty, Thomas, Li Yang and Gabriel Zucman. 2019. Capital Accumulation, Private Property, and Rising Inequality in China, 1978–2015. <i>American Economic Review</i>. 109(7):2469-96. <a href="#">LINK</a></p> <p>Xie Yu and Xiang Zhou. 2014. Income inequality in today's China. <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences</i>. 111(19):6928-6933. <a href="http://www.pnas.org/content/111/19/6928.full">http://www.pnas.org/content/111/19/6928.full</a></p> <p>Yi Fan, Junjian Yi, Junsen Zhang. 2021. Rising Intergenerational Income Persistence in China. <i>American Economic Journal: Economic Policy</i>. 13(1):202-30. <a href="https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20170097">https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20170097</a></p>
12/2	<p>Inequality and Social Mobility in China in the Past</p> <p>Campbell, Cameron and James Z. Lee. 2011. Kinship and the Long-Term Persistence of Inequality in Liaoning, China, 1749-2005. <i>Chinese Sociological Review</i>. 44(1):71-104. <a href="#">PMC3626260</a></p>
17/2	Public Holiday
19/2	Public Holiday
	<b>Patterns of Inequality</b>
24/2	Classic Theory

	Grusky and Hill, 11-36
26/2	The Recent Rise in Inequality  Grusky and Hill, 37-78
3/3	Elites/The One Percent  Grusky and Hill, 79-104
5/3	Elite Origins and Persistence
10/3	Gender, Sexuality, and Inequality I  Grusky and Hill, 345-379
12/3	Gender, Sexuality, and Inequality II  Grusky and Hill, 380-424
17/3	Gender Inequality in China  He Guangye and Xiaogang Wu. 2021. Family status and women's career mobility during urban China's economic transition. <i>Demographic Research</i> . <a href="https://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol44/8/">https://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol44/8/</a>  Zhou Yun. 2018. The Dual Demands: Gender Equity and Fertility Intentions After the One-Child Policy. <i>Journal of Contemporary China</i> . 28(117):367-384. <a href="#">Link</a>  <i>Optional</i>  Hong Fincher, Leta. 2020. "China's Leftover Women." <i>New York Times</i> , October 11, 2012. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/12/opinion/global/chinas-leftover-women.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/12/opinion/global/chinas-leftover-women.html</a>  He Guangye, Xiaogang Wu. 2017. Marketization, occupational segregation, and gender earnings inequality. <i>Social Science Research</i> . 65:96-111. <a href="https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X16300369">https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X16300369</a>  Zhao Menghan and Emily Hannum. 2019. Stark choices: Work-family tradeoffs among migrant women and men in urban China. <i>Chinese Sociological Review</i> . 51(4): 365–396. <a href="#">Link</a>
19/3	Poverty and the Underclass  Grusky and Hill, 105-130  Chetty, Lectures 2 and 3
24/3	Why is There So Much Poverty  Grusky and Hill, 131-174
26/3	Midterm
31/3	Education



	<p>Grusky and Hill, 175-208</p> <p>Chetty, Lectures 6-7</p> <p>Chetty, Raj, John Friedman, Emmanuel Saez, Nicholas Turner, and Danny Yagan. 2017. <a href="#">Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility</a>. Website with video, PPT, data and manuscript.</p> <p>Please also visit the related website where you can look up mobility scores for specific colleges: <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility">https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility</a></p> <p><i>Optional</i></p> <p>Chetty, Lectures 8-9</p>
2/4	<p>Education in China</p> <p>Wu Xiaogang. 2017. Higher education, elite formation, and social stratification in contemporary China: Preliminary findings from the Beijing College Students Panel Survey. <i>Chinese Journal of Sociology</i>. 3(1):3-31. <a href="https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2057150X16688144">https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2057150X16688144</a></p> <p>Wang Xiaobing, Renfu Liao, Linxiu Zhang, and Scott Rozelle. 2017. The Education Gap of China's Migrant Children and Rural Counterparts. <i>The Journal of Development Studies</i>. 53(11):1865-1881. <a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220388.2016.1274395">https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220388.2016.1274395</a></p> <p>Zheng Wei and Mark Bray. 2018. Equalising schooling, unequalising private supplementary tutoring: access and tracking through shadow education in China. 44(2):221-238. <a href="#">Link</a></p>
7/4	Mid-term Holiday
9/4	<p>Economic and Occupational Mobility</p> <p>Grusky and Hill, 209-274</p>
14/4	<p>Race, Ethnicity, and Inequality</p> <p>Grusky and Hill, 275-344</p> <p>Chetty, Lecture 10</p>
16/4	<p><i>Hukou</i> and inequality in the mainland</p> <p>Wu Xiaogang and Donald J. Treiman. 2007. Inequality and Equality Under Chinese Socialism: The Hukou System and Intergenerational Occupational Mobility. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>. 113(2):415-45. <a href="https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/518905">https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/518905</a></p> <p>Qian Yue and Zhenchao Qian. 2017. Assortative Mating by Education and <i>Hukou</i> in Shanghai. <i>Chinese Sociological Review</i>. 49(3):239-262. <a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21620555.2017.1288066">https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21620555.2017.1288066</a></p>

	<p>Chan, Kam Wing. 2013. The Chinese Hukou System at 50. <i>Eurasian Geography and Economics</i>. 50(2):197-221.</p> <p><a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2747/1539-7216.50.2.197">https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2747/1539-7216.50.2.197</a></p>
21/4	<p>How Inequality Spills Over Moving Towards Equality</p> <p>Grusky and Hill, 425-480</p>
23/4	<p>Geography</p> <p>Chetty, Lectures 1-3</p> <p><i>Optional</i></p> <p>Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez. 2014. <a href="#">Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States</a>. <i>Quarterly Journal of Economics</i>. 129(4): 1553-1623.</p> <p>Chetty, Raj, John Friedman, Nathaniel Hendren, Maggie R. Jones, and Sonya R. Porter. 2018. <a href="#">The Opportunity Atlas: Mapping the Childhood Roots of Social Mobility</a>. NBER Working Paper No. 25147.</p>
28/4	Presentations
30/4	Presentations
5/5	Presentations
7/5	Presentations