

Psychological Changes in China' s Social Transformation: A Sociological Perspective and Implications for Psychologists

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Abstract

Social psychology encompasses both sociological and psychological orientations. Although they have largely developed independently, both have devoted considerable attention to researching the social transformations and changes wrought by modernization. Sociologists have conducted extensive studies on social transformation from two perspectives: changes in society or social structure, and changes in individuals. The former encompasses urbanization, shifts in social stratification, changes in social mobility, and transformations in family structure, among others; the latter primarily concerns Chinese experiences, social mentality, group psychology, and organizational psychology. Compared with psychologically oriented research, sociologically oriented research is characterized by: a tendency to employ indigenous concepts, the use of qualitative research methods, particular focus on meso-level group psychology, attention to political and policy influences, and a stronger historical macro-perspective. These are aspects from which psychologically oriented social psychologists could learn and benefit. It is hoped that social psychologists of both orientations will engage in greater collaboration in future research, thereby jointly advancing understanding of China and the Chinese people amid the transformation process.

Full Text

Preamble

Cultural and Psychological Changes in the Process of Chinese Societal Change: Sociological Research and Its Enlightenment for Psychologists

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Abstract

Social psychology has long maintained two distinct orientations: sociological and psychological. Although these perspectives have largely developed independently, both have devoted considerable attention to studying the social transformation and change brought about by modernization. Sociologists have extensively examined social transformation from two angles: changes in society or social structure, and changes in people themselves. The former encompasses urbanization, shifts in social stratification, changes in social mobility, and transformations in family structure, while the latter primarily concerns what scholars term “Chinese experience,” social mentality, group psychology, and organizational psychology.

Compared with psychological approaches, sociological research exhibits several distinctive characteristics: a preference for emic concepts and qualitative methods, particular attention to meso-level group psychology, sustained focus on political and policy influences, and a more macro-historical perspective. These represent valuable features that psychologically-oriented social psychologists should learn from and adopt. We anticipate that social psychologists from these two orientations will collaborate more extensively in future research, jointly advancing our understanding of China and the Chinese people amid ongoing transformation.

Keywords: Social change; social transformation; modernization; social psychology; cultural change

Since its inception, social psychology has comprised two major branches: sociological social psychology (SSP) and psychological social psychology (PSP). The former, represented by European sociologists, concerns “group life,” while the latter, represented by American psychologists, focuses on individuals in social situations (Zhou, 2014a). Due to differences in disciplinary traditions, academic thought, research objects, and methodologies, these two perspectives have often remained relatively independent, although scholars increasingly recognize the importance of mutual learning and integration (Oishi et al., 2009; Chirkov, 2020a, 2020b).

China’s social psychology development similarly reflects these two orientations,

evidenced by two separate academic organizations: the Chinese Association of Social Psychology (sociologically oriented) and the Social Psychology Professional Committee of the Chinese Psychological Society (psychologically oriented). Despite their differences, scholars from both orientations have long focused on a common topic: how China's rapid development affects culture, psychology, and behavior. Sociologists typically refer to this as social transformation research, while psychologists call it social change research.

We previously provided a comprehensive review of social change research from a psychological perspective (Cai et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2018). The primary purpose of this paper is to review and organize sociological research on social transformation, enabling us to grasp these research trajectories more comprehensively and clearly. As psychological researchers, we also aim to identify how psychologists can draw inspiration from sociologists' work (Greenwood, 2014; Oishi et al., 2009). After all, "stones from other hills may serve to polish jade," and only through mutual learning and complementarity can disciplines develop together.

Given the vast volume of sociological research on China's social transformation, we must focus specifically on aspects related to psychological change. We exclude studies that do not directly involve psychological factors, such as enterprise-government relations (e.g., Li & Wei, 2014), policy research (e.g., Xie, 2019), and international relations (e.g., Tang, 2019), despite their belonging to the broader field of social transformation research. Specifically, we examine social transformation research that falls into two categories: studies concerning changes in society or social structure itself, and studies concerning changes in people resulting from social transformation. These two categories correspond to independent variables (or antecedents) and outcome variables in psychological research on social change. Before introducing these two types of research, we first discuss the important academic concept of "social transformation."

1. Social Transformation and Its Meaning

Historically, human society has undergone two major social transformations: the first from primitive society to civilized society, and the second from modern industrialization-driven modernization (Zhou, 2014a). The modernization process began in 17th-century Britain (Du, 2009) and has continued for two to three centuries, bringing enormous transformation and change worldwide (Yu, 2017; Zheng, 2009).

Modernization is a rich, interdisciplinary concept. Sociologists' concentrated discussions emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with notable contributions from Marx, Weber, and Habermas (Hu & Mou, 2008), which directly led to the birth of the sociology of development (Wen & Wang, 2017). Early Western scholars, based on Western developmental experience, understood modernization as the transformation from traditional agricultural society to modern industrial society, encompassing secularization, industrialization, commercial-

ization, urbanization, and rationalization (Lin, 2008). They believed that all regions would follow a trajectory similar to the West. However, with socioeconomic progress, particularly the substantial development of East Asian and Latin American economies, scholars gradually realized by the 1960s and 1970s that no single form of modernization exists. Different countries' modernization paths and outcomes vary significantly due to their distinct histories, religions, and geographies. In other words, modernization does not equal Westernization, and its endpoint is not European or American society; there is no singular modernity. Consequently, scholars proposed the concept of multiple modernities (see reviews in Eisenstadt, 2000; Tu, 2000; for further discussions on modernization see Chen, 2006; Lin, 2008; Liu, 2018; Fourie, 2012; Giddens, 1991; Lee, 2013).

Modernization has profoundly transformed Chinese society (Sun, 2005). Research on China's social transformation has largely followed the Western trajectory from binary opposition to pluralistic coexistence, encompassing two major academic approaches: historically oriented and sociologically oriented. The former focuses on pre-1949 Chinese society, particularly the "tradition-modernity" relationship, proposing theories such as impact-response, tradition-modernity, imperialism, and China-centered approaches (Zhou, 2010). The latter concentrates on post-1949 Chinese society, particularly the "state-society" relationship, proposing theories including compromise, penetration, and transformation between state and society (Zhao, 1999). In recent years, scholars have recognized that these conceptual pairs can coexist, no longer viewing tradition and modernity, or state and society, as mutually exclusive.

Through theoretical reflection and empirical research, sociologists have identified several salient characteristics of China's social transformation: (1) pronounced duality and complexity, where duality refers to simultaneous societal optimization, progress, and coordination alongside maladies, costs, and imbalances, while complexity means each aspect of change becomes particularly intricate within China's specific social context (Liu, 2007; Zheng, 2008); (2) ideological continuity with contextual flexibility, meaning that while maintaining mainstream ideology, many policies can be adapted according to specific circumstances (Zheng, 2009); (3) typically gradual reform, where many transformations or institutional improvements proceed step-by-step (Ma, 2005); and (4) absolute governmental authority, where the state can exercise strong market regulation even in a market-oriented context (Zhou, 2014b). These characteristics, combined with China's unique historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors, make mainland China's social transformation distinctly different from that of Europe and America.

2. Changes in Society or Social Structure

Modernization-driven social transformation in China manifests in numerous aspects. Among these, both sociology and psychology share common interests in urbanization, social stratification, and family structure. In sociology, these changes are typically studied as direct consequences or manifestations of social

transformation, whereas in psychology they are often treated as antecedent variables or macro-level psychological indicators causing psychological and behavioral changes. For example, in psychological research, urbanization is frequently regarded as a core cause of psychological and behavioral change (Greenfield, 2009), while the ratio of divorce to marriage rates often serves directly as a macro-level indicator of individualism (Grossmann & Varnum, 2015).

2.1 Urbanization and Townization

In Chinese sociology, the English term “Urbanization” corresponds to two Chinese concepts: “chengshihua” (urbanization) and “chengzhenhua” (townization), with different researchers defining them differently (Wang, 2004). Generally, the former emphasizes the role of large cities and urban agglomerations in modernization, while the latter values the role of small and medium-sized cities (Yu, 2004). Compared with Western urbanization, China’s urban/town development exhibits several characteristics: (1) county towns and designated towns significantly absorb rural populations; (2) governments often play a top-down dominant and planning role; (3) the process shows obvious “leapfrog development” features (such as establishing development zones and relocating impoverished populations); (4) distinctively Chinese institutions like public land ownership and the household registration system exert continuous influence; and (5) policies favor developing small and medium-sized cities while controlling the population size of large cities (Li et al., 2012). Over the past decades, urbanization has greatly promoted China’s social development but has also created problems, most notably: (1) exacerbating wealth disparity and urban-rural gaps; (2) intensifying land resource scarcity; and (3) causing severe environmental damage (He & Zhou, 2013; Wu & Shao, 2015). In response to these issues, the concept and policy of “New Urbanization” emerged. Compared with traditional townization, New Urbanization focuses more on development quality, development modes, and urban-rural integration (Zhang & Jiao, 2016).

2.2 Changes in Social Class

China’s rapid development has caused enormous changes in social stratification (Li, 1992). Lu (2003, 2010) argues that before reform and opening-up (pre-1978), China had “two classes and one stratum” (working class, peasant class, and intellectual stratum). After decades of development, ten distinct strata have emerged: “state and social managers, managerial personnel, private entrepreneurs, professional and technical personnel, clerical staff, individual business owners, commercial and service employees, industrial workers, agricultural laborers, and urban unemployed/semi-employed persons.” Scholars have also identified many characteristics of social stratification changes during China’s transformation. Sun (2003) contends that as social resources increasingly concentrate among minority groups, the gap between upper and lower strata continuously widens, the lower stratum expands, and growing tension between them has created a certain degree of societal “fracture.” Li (2008) suggests that before

2005, China's social strata were in constant dissolution and recombination, after which they showed signs of stabilization with several features: (1) economic stratification became increasingly important relative to political stratification; (2) status indicators became more non-ascriptive (e.g., educational credentials); (3) the wealth gap continuously expanded; (4) central groups (e.g., government officials, intellectuals) benefited more from social transformation than marginal groups (e.g., peasants, workers); and (5) new strata emerged represented by individual business owners and private entrepreneurs. In contrast, Li (2003) views China's class changes as a "dual reproduction" with continuity, arguing that no fundamental change has occurred with social development.

Beyond structural changes, inter-stratum mobility and its transformation have received considerable attention. Researchers have revealed several characteristics: (1) mobility initially increased (Bian, 2002), particularly reflected in growing stratum diversity and the rise of the middle class (Li & Cui, 2020; Lu, 2010); (2) vertical intergenerational transmission became more pronounced (e.g., the emergence of "second-generation rich" and "second-generation official" groups; Deng, 2013; Zhou, 2009), cross-stratum mobility became increasingly difficult (Li & Zhu, 2015), high-stratum mobility declined (Fan & Ding, 2010; Yang, 2014), while upward mobility within low and middle strata remained relatively high (Bian & Li, 2014; Zhang, 2011); (3) education's function as a mechanism for enhancing mobility gradually weakened, particularly in differential access to educational resources and benefits across strata (Huang et al., 2014; Luo & Liu, 2018; Yang et al., 2014); and (4) income inequality hindered upward mobility (Diao, 2012; Chen & Fan, 2016). These studies collectively reflect that social class mobility was relatively high in the early reform period but has continuously declined with development, with social strata shifting from rapid transformation to relative stability (Zhou, 2019).

Overall, since reform and opening-up, China's social stratum diversity initially increased but subsequently decreased, and mobility showed an inverted U-shaped pattern of first rising then falling. Stratum boundaries and internal identities gradually formed, and stratum reproduction increased. These features indicate that China's social strata are becoming increasingly rigidified (Li, 2008; Sun, 2009).

2.3 Changes in Family Structure

The family constitutes society's basic unit and plays a crucial role in individual-society interaction. Traditional Chinese culture maintained strict family structural norms, such as "father as son's guide, husband as wife's guide." However, rapid socio-cultural development has profoundly transformed China's family structure characteristics. Since reform and opening-up, particularly entering the new century, China's family structure changes have shown several prominent features: (1) clear trends toward miniaturization, aging, and diversification (Peng & Hu, 2015; Wang, 2006, 2013; Zhou, 2014; Zhou & Fang, 2016); (2) traditional "patriarchal extended family" structures remain attractive but

are increasingly difficult to maintain (Jin, 2010); (3) kinship relations remain important but their dominance gradually declines (Tang & Chen, 2012); (4) intergenerational relationship models based on economic capacity rather than blood ethics have become increasingly prevalent, with relationships becoming more equal (Cao, 2011; Zhou, 2000); (5) filial piety remains popular (Liu & Yang, 2000) but its connotation is changing, with core content shifting from supporting parents to fulfilling parental expectations (Cao, 2011; Fei, 1985); (6) fertility intentions and levels show declining trends (Hou et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2016), with fertility rates continuously decreasing for many years (Ji & Zheng, 2018) and single-gender preferences weakening (Hou et al., 2018); (7) state-level policies (such as family planning, the two-child policy, public land ownership, and women's liberation movements) have exerted significant top-down influences (Wang et al., 2015; You & Yao, 2020); (8) gender equality concepts have become deeply rooted but are not equally reflected in social practice (Liu, 2020; Xu, 2016; Yang et al., 2014); and (9) divorce rates continue rising, with single-parent families increasingly common (Su et al., 2015; Xu & Ye, 2002).

Regarding these changes, scholars note that while traditional and modern elements contest each other in family patterns during social transformation, they are not necessarily contradictory. On one hand, tradition can be reinterpreted in modern contexts (Shen, 2010); on the other, core family values (such as harmony, unity, and respect for elders) remain widely accepted (Xu, 2013; Yang & He, 2014). Among factors influencing family change, individual will and concepts are becoming decisive, making family structure increasingly diverse and complex (Ma et al., 2011).

3. Changes in People

Psychological changes among people during social transformation constitute a core sociological concern. In sociological writings, these psychological changes are often encompassed by the concepts of “Chinese experience” and “social mentality,” with considerable research also covered under group psychology and organizational psychology. Although these concepts overlap substantially in content, we introduce research in these four areas separately to maximally preserve the original research landscape.

3.1 Chinese Experience

“Chinese experience,” primarily proposed by sociologist Zhou Xiaohong, contrasts with “Chinese practice” to describe the psychological experiences modernization has brought to Chinese people. It mainly refers to micro-level changes in values and social mentality among Chinese people against the backdrop of macro-level social transformation. Zhou argues that “Chinese experience” has these characteristics: (1) it includes both positive (e.g., openness, tolerance, progress) and negative (e.g., money worship, resentment of wealth, indifference) psychological experiences; (2) it possesses uniqueness due to China's unique history, population, and social structure; and (3) it has universality to some

extent because the transition from tradition to modernity represents a universal national development direction. In the book *Chinese Experience*, Zhou et al. (2017) provide a relatively comprehensive description of changes in Chinese psychology or Chinese experience.

Regarding well-being, people's sources of happiness increasingly depend on material goods, with the pursuit of improved living standards and material enjoyment gradually replacing the revolutionary idealism ("finding joy in hardship") of the early PRC period. In the decades following reform and opening-up, especially from the 1990s to the early 21st century, Chinese people's happiness significantly decreased (Brockmann et al., 2009), perhaps because economic growth did not benefit all groups equally but instead created relative deprivation for most people.

In consumption psychology, as basic living needs are met, people's purchasing motivations are no longer solely for items' practical value but also for their symbolic value (e.g., pursuing "brand names" when buying goods). With globalization, people increasingly desire to conform to world trends rather than maintain local traditions in their daily lifestyles. With productivity improvements, people maintain traditional savings intentions while simultaneously accepting hedonistic life practices (Tang, 2010; Zhao, 2009).

Regarding trust levels, interpersonal trust is declining, and the once-dominant close-distant relationship as a trust criterion is giving way to pure interest relationships. As scholars describe, this represents a shift from relationship-based "trust through closeness" to interest-based "relevance through benefit" (Jing et al., 2019). On the other hand, although interpersonal trust has decreased, multiple surveys reflect that trust in the central government has remained consistently high (Lu et al., 2016; Zhong & Wang, 2015).

In intergenerational relations, parental investment has increased while children's obligations and responsibilities have weakened (Wang, 2011). Parental authority has decreased due to social structural changes (Chen, 2010), and relationships with children have become relatively more equal. The core value of "filial piety" has shifted from blind obedience to parents to respecting parents without compromising children's personality independence and autonomy. Additionally, cultural 反哺 (reverse socialization where children influence parents) has contributed to intergenerational equality (Zhou, 2015).

In information transmission, mass media has cultivated mass modernity, while new media has further dissolved the central government's traditional monopoly on discourse. Particularly, the emergence of internet communication, mobile communication, and social media has provided the public with channels to voice opinions, enabling civil discourse to form public opinion supervision and political participation functions. Conversely, the internet has also increased people's loneliness and alienation (Ji & Zhou, 2017; Tian & Jia, 2011; Yang & Wu, 2002; Kraut et al., 1998).

In love and sexuality, people have become more autonomous. In mate selection,

family background and political identity have become less important, while individual education, occupation, and income have become much more significant (Davis, 2014; Wang & Nehring, 2014). In marriage, external social control has weakened, individual autonomy has greatly increased, and people increasingly recognize the importance of spousal affection in maintaining marriage (Zhang & Zhong, 2017; Pan & Hou, 2013). Regarding sexuality, topics such as premarital sex and cohabitation have become less sensitive, and people have become more tolerant and understanding of sex-related issues (Huang & Pan, 2016; Lin et al., 2016; Yeung & Hu, 2016).

Overall, Chinese society has experienced a process moving from tradition to modernity, particularly manifested in shifts from ethical and political orientations to economic orientations, from collectivism to individualism in culture, from morality to interest in economy, and from authoritarianism to rule of law and from “government for the people” to democracy in politics. Meanwhile, factors such as wealth disparity and social justice have intensified anxiety symptoms among Chinese people during this era of change (Zhou, 2014c), producing numerous negative social mentalities (Xia, 2011) or “dimensions of sorrow” (Fang, 2008). Regarding the future, Zhou (2014a) notes that improvements in social psychological resilience, open and diverse social mentality, and awakened global consciousness will characterize the development direction of Chinese people’s social mentality.

3.2 Social Mentality

Since the 1980s, the term “social mentality” has frequently appeared in academic and public discourse (Jing, 1989; Liu, 2004). As a concept, social mentality carries different meanings across disciplinary contexts (Shi & Liu, 2015). In social psychology, different researchers emphasize different aspects in defining this concept (Liu, 2006; Ma, 2008; Yang, 2006). Wang (2013) defines social mentality as “the universal and consistent psychological characteristics and behavioral patterns exhibited by most or a large proportion of members in a society under the influence of a certain period’s social environment and culture, which continuously change, constitute an atmosphere, and become templates influencing each individual member’s behavior under certain cultural and subcultural conditions.” Although this concept appears similar to values in psychology, compared with the values concept that emphasizes stability, social mentality emphasizes both stability and dynamism, focusing more on group-level and individual-group interaction processes with broader and richer connotations (Wang, 2014).

Based on social mentality’s stability and dynamism, scholars propose classifying it into changing social mentality, phased social mentality, stable social mentality, and super-stable social mentality according to change speed and external influence degree. More stable structures change more slowly, and super-stable social mentality can be regarded as national character or ethnicity (Wang, 2013).

Regarding social mentality’s content structure and operational measurement, dif-

ferent scholars hold different views. Wang proposed a relatively comprehensive indicator system including social needs (social and individual), social cognition (social thinking, group and relationship cognition, attitudes and evaluation), social emotions (basic emotions, complex emotions, emotional atmosphere), social values (individual and social), and social behaviors (rational and irrational) (Wang, 2013, 2014). Based on this, Wang and colleagues constructed a social mentality index system and regularly conduct national social mentality surveys, having published a series of *Research Reports on Chinese Social Mentality* (Wang, 2020).

Other researchers have operationalized and measured social mentality from different perspectives. Yu and Wang (2017), analyzing survey data, note that developing the economy, governing by law, and enhancing security are universal national expectations. Sun et al. (2014), analyzing new CGSS (Chinese General Social Survey) data, find that Chinese citizens generally hold negative attitudes toward existing social justice and fairness. Lin et al. (2015), comparing 2003 and 2013 CGSS data, find significant differentiation in Chinese residents' social mentality, with key social concerns shifting from unemployment and subsistence to wealth disparity. Chen et al. (2019), analyzing CGSS2015 data, identify a positive relationship between public social participation and social mentality. Gao et al. (2013), through online surveys, find that Chinese residents' overall social mentality is good but not fully satisfied in social justice, trust, and security. Some researchers term these phenomena—negative social mentality during social transformation—as social psychological imbalance (Fan & Tang, 2015; Hou, 2006; Lin, 2018; Tong & Zhai, 2008). Overall, current social mentality research finds that Chinese citizens' social mentality shows low levels of social trust and justice, reflected in low general trust levels and perceived lack of social fairness (Li & Wang, 2018), moral decline (Sun, 2001; Yu, 2014), and fluctuating happiness levels (Yu, 2016; Wang & Liu, 2019). Zhou (2009, 2011) argues that since reform and opening-up, Chinese people's social mentality has experienced stages of traditional values rupture, and modern values' emergence, setback, recovery, and development (also see Xie & Yu, 2016). Modern Chinese social mentality demonstrates significant duality, manifesting as conflicts and balances between “tradition and modernity, ideal and reality, urban and rural, East and West, positive and negative.”

3.3 Group Psychology

Social groups typically refer to collections of individuals sharing certain characteristics, such as left-behind children, pregnant women, or laid-off workers (Fang, 2008). Changes in specific groups' psychology and behavior during social transformation constitute a major theme in sociological research (e.g., Luo & Wen, 2014; Shen, 2006). Long (2010), analyzing CGSS data, finds that different social groups show significant differences in beliefs about career success and social trust. For instance, regarding factors influencing career success, entrepreneur groups emphasize ascriptive factors (e.g., family background) over

achievement factors (e.g., enterprising spirit), while peasant and worker groups show the opposite pattern. Worker groups also demonstrate distrust of official information channels and clear perception of social conflict (also see Long & Feng, 2015). Liu et al. (2012), analyzing CGSS data, find that all Chinese social groups' national well-being increased between 2003 and 2010. Wu (2013) finds that educational inequality between urban and rural groups is expanding over time, first manifested in parents' education level's significant effect on children's education, and second in gradually expanding urban-rural differences in non-compulsory education stages. Overall, relative to other social groups, disadvantaged bottom groups (e.g., migrant workers, minimum livelihood guarantee recipients, "drifting" populations) experience stronger relative deprivation during social transformation (Yu & Wang, 2017).

Particularly noteworthy is research on migrant populations (Chen, 2017; Li, 2012; Jiang, 2018; Yan, 2011). Researchers find that for new urban populations, urbanization does not necessarily bring only positive outcomes (see reviews in Liang & Wang, 2010; Pan, 2011). For example, Chen and Zhang (2015), analyzing Chinese social survey data, find that for rural-to-urban migrants, rural household registration negatively correlates with integration indicators such as identity and cultural behavior. Wang (2001) finds that the new generation of rural migrant workers experiences contradictory identity between "urbanite" and "peasant." Yang (2015) similarly finds that migrant populations' social integration levels are not high, constrained by social institutions (e.g., household registration) and social structures (e.g., community environment). In other words, compared with urban natives, these studies find that rural-to-urban migrants benefit less from urbanization and identify less as "urbanites." A series of studies have analyzed possible reasons, identifying numerous factors influencing migrant groups' urban integration: (1) whether they can establish new social networks in communities (Cai & Cao, 2009); (2) whether they can actually benefit from urbanization (e.g., income, education; Wang & Peng, 2009); (3) whether political institutions (e.g., household registration, social security) and market institutions (e.g., labor market demand) hinder individuals' urbanization process (Li, 2003; Zhang, 2007); and (4) whether they can develop sufficient psychological identification with their new identity (Li, 2006). Zhou (1998) finds that increased social mobility enables individuals to "break free from land constraints," shifting values and behavior patterns from traditional to modern; however, due to constraints, rural-to-urban migrants' modernization is typically "incomplete modernization."

3.4 Organizational Psychology

Changes at the meso-level of enterprise organizations constitute an important area of sociological concern. Overall, social transformation research particularly involves two aspects: leadership and management models in enterprises, and interpersonal relationships within organizations.

Leadership and Management Models in Enterprises

Sociological research finds that during rapid social transformation, China's leadership models have shifted from "paternalistic" to "fraternal" and from "pyramid" to "flattened" structures. Since the 1980s, scholars through case studies and interviews have identified China's unique enterprise leadership model: paternalistic leadership, defined as "leadership displaying clear discipline and authority, fatherly benevolence, and moral integrity within a rule-of-man atmosphere" (see reviews in Yang et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2017; Zheng & Huang, 2019), refined into a three-dimensional framework encompassing authority, benevolence, and morality (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Zhang et al., 2013; Cheng et al., 2000). However, with economic development and social structural changes, the foundation supporting paternalistic leadership has shifted (see reviews in Sun et al., 2020), and Chinese enterprise leadership is gradually becoming "fraternal leadership," which "emphasizes inspiring organizational members' resonance through vision during equal communication, winning subordinates' heartfelt obedience through outstanding talent and approachable style" (Yang & Ding, 2012). Similarly, scholars propose that with institutional transformation, China's enterprise leadership has shifted from "centralized leadership" to "popularity-based leadership" to "heart-winning leadership" (Shen, 2012). Regarding management models, researchers argue that China's enterprise management is shifting from traditional "pyramid management" emphasizing organizational structure to "flattened management" delegating power and responsibility (Cao, 2001). Flattened management has emerged largely due to mature computer information technology and increased high-quality employees, both inseparable from social transformation itself (Zhu, 2009). From pyramid to flattened management, employee-organization relationships become looser and more flexible, employee-leader relationships increasingly emphasize coordination and interaction, and employee-employee relationships increasingly value unity and cooperation (Zhao & Zhu, 2013).

Interpersonal Relationships in Enterprises

Guanxi (关系) is a concept rich with Chinese indigenous characteristics (see reviews in Chang, 2011; Chen et al., 2013; Zhang & Pimpa, 2010). It differs from the English terms "connection" or "relation" (Zhai, 1993) and plays an important role in organizations (Luo et al., 2011). A series of studies have examined changes in *guanxi*'s role during increasingly market-oriented social transformation (Bian & Miao, 2020; Bian, 2018). Regarding *guanxi*'s post-reform role, market transition theory argues it will continuously decline with deepening marketization, while power persistence theory contends that social network relationships will not fade but strengthen due to increasing political capital importance. Bian (2013, 2017) argues that *guanxi*, as knowledge and network, is itself a social resource whose importance will increase with market competition and institutional uncertainty. In empirical research, Bian and Zhang (2014) analyzed several national surveys and found that information relationship resources (access to job-related information) and favor relationship resources (competitive advantages obtained through favor) generally increased in importance during job seeking. Bian and Miao (2020) analyzed this trend, arguing that as the market system stabilizes, favor relationship resources' im-

portance will not continue rising, but information relationship resources will become increasingly important with intensifying market competition.

4. Summary and Implications

4.1 Summary

In this paper, we reviewed two aspects of social transformation research related to psychology. One aspect concerns changes in Chinese society or social structure, finding that urbanization has accelerated but brought many problems; social stratification has increased, showing a diversified and complex landscape; inter-stratum mobility shows an inverted U-shaped trend of first increasing then decreasing, with recent declines in mobility between different strata and obvious rigidification trends; family structure shows clear trends toward miniaturization, aging, and diversification, with more equal intergenerational relations, declining fertility intentions, weakening traditional family patterns, and increasing single-parent families. The other aspect examines psychological changes during transformation, finding that “Chinese experience,” “social mentality,” group psychology, and organizational psychology have all changed significantly. Specifically, values have experienced rupture of traditional values and emergence, setback, recovery, and development of modern values; happiness increasingly depends on material goods, with significant declines from the 1990s to early 2000s; consumption increasingly emphasizes brands, materialism rises, and hedonism is pursued; trust has shifted from relationship-based to interest-based, with overall levels declining; intergenerational relations show increased parental investment but decreased authority, weakened children’s obligations, increased cultural 反哺, and growing equality; interpersonal communication increasingly relies on networks, enhancing loneliness and alienation; autonomy in love and sexuality has increased, with more open and inclusive attitudes; negative social mentality has risen, intensifying social psychological imbalance; group mentality differences have increased, with disadvantaged groups experiencing stronger relative deprivation; migrant workers’ identity contradictions have risen, showing “incomplete modernization” characteristics; leadership and management models have shifted from “paternalistic” to “fraternal” and from “pyramid” to “flattened” ; and *guanxi* networks as favor and information resources have become more rather than less important. Among these changes, some are positive and some negative; some relatively short-term and some long-term; some linear and some nonlinear. To some extent, these studies have preliminarily outlined the changing landscape of Chinese society and Chinese people at meso and macro levels over recent decades: rising individualism prevalent in modern society while many traditional values decline, though some traditional values continue or even strengthen (e.g., *guanxi*’s importance). Overall, China is and will be for some time in a transformation process from traditional to modern society, with tradition and modernity coexisting and East-West continuous collision and integration as China’s basic social characteristics.

4.2 Characteristics and Enlightenment

We previously comprehensively reviewed change research from a psychological perspective (Cai et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2018). Compared with psychological research on sociocultural change, sociological research on social transformation shows several obvious characteristics that undoubtedly have important implications for psychological research.

First, conceptually, many concepts sociologists adopt to describe psychological and behavioral changes are derived from language and life practice, carrying strong emic characteristics and being closer to Chinese social reality and everyday linguistic habits, such as “Chinese experience” and “social mentality,” making sociological findings more easily accepted and disseminated (Zhou, 2017; Wang, 2020). Psychological social change research typically uses constructs based on Western psychology that have been widely validated, such as cultural values, self, cognition, emotion, motivation, mental health, and social attitudes (Cai et al., 2020), to describe and study changes in Chinese psychology and behavior, thus carrying strong etic characteristics. The emic-etic debate has long existed in sociology and psychology (Liang, 2018; Yang et al., 2007; Xie, 2018; Zhai, 2018; Zhou, 2020; Cheung & Rensvold, 2000). Although using external, modern psychology-based concepts appears relatively scientific with clearer meanings and operations, these concepts often prove ill-fitting and unable to capture some uniquely Chinese cultural-psychological content when describing and studying Chinese people. In this sense, future social change research psychologists should learn more from sociologists, adopting an emic perspective to focus more on indigenous phenomena such as filial piety, face, and *renqing* (Yang et al., 2005), particularly drawing inspiration from sociological research to compensate for psychological research deficiencies. For instance, the cultural 反哺 phenomenon (Zhou, 2015) deserves psychological study.

Second, methodologically, sociology particularly emphasizes qualitative research, extensively using social observation, case studies, in-depth interviews, and focus groups, then through analytical reflection, conceptualizing phenomena and interpreting theories (e.g., Yan, 2016). In contrast, psychology almost exclusively relies on quantitative methods, using statistical analysis to infer possible patterns. Over-reliance on quantitative methods and statistical inference makes much psychological research and its findings inevitably trivial and fragmented, seeing trees but not the forest. Moreover, many psychological characteristics are overly decomposed during quantification, losing much information and even being improperly operationalized, leading to many inconsistent findings. Therefore, future psychological change research should appropriately adopt qualitative and mixed methods. Especially in early research stages, social observation, interviews, and case analysis can help researchers better understand conceptual connotations, employ more appropriate measurement methods, and develop more realistic research hypotheses. Additionally, sociology’s emphasis on reflection and theory is worth emulating. Chinese sociologists have proposed many theories while observing

and studying China's social transformation, such as China-centered theory (Zhou, 2010) and transformation theory (Zhao, 1999). Currently, Chinese psychology particularly needs theoretical integration and advancement of numerous fragmented findings.

Third, at the analytical level, when studying cultural change, psychological research typically focuses on macro and micro levels, with very few meso-level studies on individual-group interactions and inter-group relationships. Relatively, much sociological research takes meso-level groups as units of analysis, revealing landscapes rarely seen in psychological research through studying social strata and group changes (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019), such as sociology's attention to peasants and rural-to-urban migrant groups during social transformation. In contrast, psychological research on meso-level organizations, communities, and specific populations' psychological changes is scarce. This is an area that future psychological perspectives on social change research particularly need to address.

Fourth, when examining social transformation's context and causes, sociology often demonstrates a more macro perspective, better positioning China's social transformation within broader Chinese and world historical currents while paying more attention to political and policy change impacts. Although psychological change research also examines extensive factors including biological genes, natural ecology, socioeconomics, etc., it rarely considers historical, political (including domestic and international politics), and policy factors. Given that China's contemporary changes represent part of China's millennia-long social and cultural transformation trajectory and part of world civilization evolution, and that government-led top-down policies have played major roles (e.g., family planning, reform and opening-up), this deficiency is particularly prominent. Undoubtedly, future psychological research on Chinese social change needs a more macro-historical perspective, considering more fully international and domestic politics and various national policies across periods to better and more comprehensively reveal the historical patterns and underlying causes of Chinese social change and Chinese people's psychological transformation.

5. Conclusion

Since British industrialization and the French Revolution, humanity has embarked on a second worldwide modernization transformation from primitive to civilized society. As part of this global modernization transformation, China has experienced magnificent, unprecedented changes over the past century, particularly over the last half-century. Currently, the world is in a new great transformation of a new century. Exploring the laws of China's modernization transformation and the psychological journey of Chinese culture and Chinese people is a common historical mission for many disciplines. Psychology, particularly social psychology, given its special disciplinary nature, has an inescapable responsibility. Due to historical reasons, social psychology has had two different developmental paths from its birth: sociological social psychology and psycho-

logical social psychology. This paper reviewed and summarized sociological social psychology research on social transformation. Compared with psychological research, sociological research has more emic characteristics, employs more qualitative methods, focuses more on meso-level changes, has more historical perspective, and pays more attention to political and policy roles, revealing many new characteristics of China's social transformation and Chinese people's psychological changes. These characteristics of sociological research are also, to some extent, its advantages—areas that psychologists particularly need to learn from and adopt in future social change research. “Viewed horizontally, a range of hills; viewed vertically, a sequence of peaks—different perspectives yield different views.” As the international academic community calls for (Chirkov, 2020b; Gergen, 2012; Oishi et al., 2009), we hope that social psychologists from these two orientations can learn from each other's strengths, collaborate, and maintain more open and inclusive mindsets and broader, more diverse perspectives, never forgetting that “studying actual social psychology and its evolution should be the main task of mainland Chinese social psychologists” (Zhou, 1994). Together, we can advance research on social psychology and its evolution during China's social transformation and change to the next stage: a new stage that balances emic and etic perspectives, examines macro-meso-micro levels, considers biological, social, historical, and political factors, adopts qualitative and quantitative methods, and includes reductionist analysis, theoretical reflection, and integrative advancement.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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