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Machine brings class and change (International Forum)

Danny Tao Ling (Dorling)
丹尼·道灵

The current classes we recognize are classes of the machine age, of cities, of the age we think of as modern. What made capitalism so new were the machines, capitalism changes so will class.

Writing about class feeds the English obsession with class. But in England class is a relevant and important subject. The English are now most separated into separate social classes simply by how much money they have. Often this results in greater spatial separation as that money buys differing locations and someone's address begins to reveal more and more about them. In England your zip code/postcode is the unhidden part of your wealth.

Compared to how accent, dress, first name and even surname can still reveal so much about who you are in Britain, most European societies have overcome to some extent many of the restrictions of older class systems. They have not necessarily become 'better' places or have rid themselves of the associated problems in society. But what has happened in most other parts of Europe and the world is that a revolution or invasion has abruptly disrupted what were traditional class systems; by comparison, the gradual loss of its global hegemonic status has not had so much impact on Britain.

The same schools, same established church, same universities, same classes, dominate - as they did some time ago, but under that façade of slow movement there are changes afoot.

Social class in Britain is clearly no longer neatly defined by occupation. The same occupation label can conceal a wide range of incomes. People of the same income can have access to widely varying resources of wealth, so knowing income alone is no longer enough. Class is no longer simply a vertical ranking linked to capital and a system of production in some way. Someone can now more easily have multiple class identities.

In much of the UK, without some inheritance from wealthy parents or grandparents you cannot possibly get a mortgage almost no matter how well you 'perform' occupationally. In some ways we are returning to a gilded age where family wealth matters more. Classes in the future in the UK could be less about what we do and more about where we are from. There is always a range of opportunity but the level and extent of that range and both vary and narrow.

The current classes we recognize are classes of the machine age, of cities, of the age we think of as modern. Our current class divisions became established as societies industrialized. Relationships began to be more clearly ordered primarily around the connections between people and the machine, and between people in connection with how they related to machines. Capitalists' classes concern the divisions between the interests of those who owned the machines and those who were forced to operate them. These classes become untenable outside of factory-town settings, but they form the majority of class systems in operation today as across the planet more people live in cities than villages and more work in factories than ever before.

What is new is capitalism, and what made capitalism so new were the machines. Without machines being built to harness the power of carbon, initially through coal,

we would not have been able to transform our world so much in such a short time, and in doing so reorder our societies so dramatically.

The classes that best define us are changing as we change and as the political, economic and social structures that surround us change. Machine-based capitalism has been around for just over half a dozen generations; it appears to be slowing down. Last year I wrote a book, “Population 10 Billion”, suggesting that this might signal the beginnings of a transition. It is stunning to discover that such a short time is long enough to form the bedrock of the class labels we most commonly allocate each other today: working, middle and upper.

机器带来的阶层固化和变化（国际论坛）

丹尼·道灵

英国现代的社会阶层划分，是资本主义机器大生产的产物。随着资本主义的悄然变化，社会阶层的变革时代正在来临。

有关社会阶层的问题常能引起英国人的热议。这是一个与他们生活息息相关且无法回避的话题。财富拥有量直接决定给人们贴上何种阶层的标签。阶层之间最明显的区分依据，就是其所在社区。房产地理位置的优越与否，几乎可以揭示一个人的身份地位。因此，地址邮政编码也隐含着这个人的财富信息。

在许多欧洲国家，战争或改革早已打破了原本分明的等级限制。虽然社会也未必变得更加平等，但古老的等级属性基本已经成为过去。然而在英国，连“失去全球霸主地位”都未能颠覆其顽固的社会阶层划分。口音、衣着、姓氏等因素，仍然很大程度反映着一个人所处的阶层。

同时，职业已经不能成为衡量英国人所属阶层的标准，因为工作收入可能仅占个人总收入的一小部分。阶层也不再仅仅与财富关联，与之关联的因素还有诸如教育、种族、宗教，一些人甚至可能同时具有多个阶层的属性。但在决定一个人所处阶层方面，财富的作用越来越大。

在英国，如果你没有从富有的父母或祖父母那里继承财产，无论多么努力工作，或许都无法得到房屋抵押贷款。我们实际上正在回到“镀金时代”，家庭是否积累了足够的财富，对个人一生的发展有非常大的影响。未来，阶层划分的决定因素很大程度上是家庭出身，而不是职业。会有例外，只不过非常少见。

现代社会存在的不同阶层，是工业时代的产物，也是近代社会留下的烙印。英国现有的阶层是工业化之后逐渐形成的，人和机器的关系成为区分阶层的标志：资本主义将拥有机器和被迫使用机器的人们划分为不同的阶层。在城市人口超过农村人口、工业人口超过农业人口的英国当今社会，这种阶层划分方式还在大部分地区使用。因此，资本主义才是产生现今阶层分化的关键因素，机器则是资本主义产生的根源。

几十年的时间在人类历史长河中不过一瞬，但这时间足够把人们分为蓝领、白领和金领等阶层。然而，随着政治、经济、社会结构的改变，社会阶层也必然随之变化。靠机器大生产崛起的资本主义制度，在影响了好几代人之后，似乎在慢慢减速，变革的时代正在来临。

Original Submission:

Writing about class feeds the English obsession with class. But in England class is a relevant and important subject. The English are now most separated into separate social classes simply by how much money they have. Often this results in greater spatial separation as that money buys differing locations and someone's address begins to reveal more and more about them. In England your zip code/postcode is the unhidden part of your wealth.

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Compared to how accent, dress, first name and even surname can still reveal so much about who you are in Britain, most European societies have overcome to some extent many of the restrictions of older class systems. They have not necessarily become 'better' places or have rid themselves of the associated problems in society. But what has happened in most other parts of Europe and the world is that a revolution or invasion has abruptly disrupted what were traditional class systems; by comparison, the gradual loss of its global hegemonic status has not had so much impact on Britain. The same schools, same established church, same universities, same classes, dominate - as they did some time ago, but under that façade of slow movement there are changes afoot.

A hierarchy where wealth and income increasingly matter more than education, ethnicity, accent, dress, or religion is not fairer, but it is easier to reduce class divisions based mostly on money by promoting redistribution rather than teaching elocution. Across almost all of the rest of Europe

income inequalities are lower than in Britain. Thus, in Britain so often someone's address tells you more about who they are. This is not just true of London, but within any British city.

The UK has among the greatest income inequalities within Europe. Britain constitutes almost all of the UK and almost all of Britain, in terms of population, is England. Among large rich countries in the world only the USA has a greater degree of income inequality than the UK. Poorer countries tend to be much more unequal than richer countries. Among the more equal of poorer countries in the world is China, although income inequalities are rising there and are currently very similar to those found in the USA when the annual income of the best-off tenth of the population is compared to that of the worse-off tenth. As China becomes more unequal new social classes will be forming in China.

Class matters because it often feels as if it is the modern day truth of our identity which resides in our souls. We cannot escape it. It becomes a little differently defined in different times and places, but we have always had classes. Today, resources are distributed according to our current organizational principles of opportunity hoarding and exploitation. Earlier religions and belief systems produced rankings dissimilar to contemporary classes, but crucially they still produced ranks.

Like most mammals, human beings are animals influenced by issues of rank but, unlike other animals, humans have built rank up as the centerpiece of many of their belief systems, of their religions and societies. Wolves, chimps, bats and badgers exhibit behaviour that reveals rank structures. For humans, class is so much part of our being that - even as we write about it - I may not be aware of how I am performing it, demonstrating both my social class and my awareness of others. It is also worth pointing out that men appear more sensitive to being ranked than women. As the emancipation of women continues it is possible men's sensitivity to being ranked might diminish, or women's may rise. Class, wealth and income determine the parameters of our lives, from how we are educated to where we sleep at night through to when we might die.

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The current classes we recognize are classes of the machine age, of cities, of the age we think of as modern. We call these 'social classes' as if they were cast in stone, as if they were akin to taxa of species, but they are only a very recent rank ordering and they will soon be replaced in their turn. The older social classes that predated our current occupational hierarchy we now call castes. It

did not take long after the start of industrialization to recognize that it was the machines that made current class systems so different from the agricultural class systems before them. As Michael Young, wrote in Britain in 1958: ‘The soil grows castes; the machine makes classes’. Today, the market, in people, property and prestige is producing something new.

Older caste divisions become untenable outside of rural village settings, in places where the order of things is not replicated generation after generation. Just as with classes, people do not fit naturally into castes, and castes are not a natural division of humanity. How hierarchical our societies are can vary over time. Some claim that farming in the North China plain was carried out successfully for millennia without the kinds of caste systems that other agricultural societies developed. Just like classes today, castes yesterday and castes elsewhere were just as contingent on their times and places.

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Our current classes are often seen as classes of free-market capitalism, but it is not the market that is important in defining them. Markets have existed for millennia, as have bosses and servants, slaves and masters. What is new is capitalism, and what made capitalism so new were the machines. Without machines being built to harness the power of carbon, initially through coal, we would not have been able to transform our world so much in such a short time, and in doing so reorder our societies so dramatically.

Margaret Thatcher, a recent British Prime Minister had a good point to make when she wrote that currently ‘Class is a Communist concept. It groups people as bundles, and sets them against each other’. That doesn’t mean the concept was wrong, communists’ conceptualizations can often be spot on, but as capitalism changes so will class. It was not the concept that sets people against each other, it is being bundled into groups, now largely by dint of your family’s wealth, which does this, and it was the recognition that people were being set against each other in this way that helped define the current concept, the concept that is now being contested.

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The greatest change under our current system is the changing class position of women. This is occurring worldwide as we no longer produce so many humans; we no longer see so many births, since machines became so much more productive than people. Moving out of our current class system will see a further transformation of the position of women. Established gender divisions become untenable as the nature of homes change, as we have fewer children, and more of us live on our own more often and for longer. Almost everywhere in the world today women live longer than men. Before our current class system was established that was not the case. Across Britain, and in many similar and dissimilar countries, young women are now far better qualified than young men. Our current class systems are changing.

A much longer version of this article is available at: Dorling, D. (2014) **Thinking About Class** Sociology, 48, 3, 452-462, DOI:10.1177/0038038514523171

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