

# The problem of international class solidification in the post pandemic era -- An analysis based on Marxist theory

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**Abstract.** Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the pandemic has significantly impacted the global economy and deeply affected social structures and class mobility. It has exacerbated income inequality, employment difficulties, and unequal distribution of social resources, leading to more pronounced social stratification. In China, despite government economic stimulus policies, small and medium-sized enterprises and the service industry have faced severe challenges, resulting in significant unemployment and income reduction among low-income workers. The rise of platform capitalism has introduced new labor relations, raising concerns about labor rights. This study uses a Marxist perspective to analyze post-pandemic social stratification in China, focusing on economic resource distribution, access to educational resources, and the effectiveness of social policies. The objective is to understand the structural causes and propose policy recommendations to promote social equity and mobility.

## 1. Introduction

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, it has not only had a huge impact on the global economy, but also had a profound impact on social structure and class mobility. The epidemic has exacerbated the problems of income inequality, employment difficulties and unequal distribution of social resources, which have made the phenomenon of social class solidification more obvious. According to the ILO (International Labour Organization), the pandemic has led to significant job losses worldwide, with the worst impact on low-income and informal workers [1]. In China, despite the government's aggressive economic stimulus policies, the impact of the epidemic on small and medium-sized enterprises and the service sector is still significant, resulting in a large number of low-income workers facing unemployment and income reduction [2]. Moreover, the gradual rise of platform capitalism creates new production relations and raises questions about the labor rights of low-income workers. Research in the field of education also shows that the popularity of online education during the epidemic has reduced the inequality of educational resources caused by different levels of development between regions to a certain extent.

Marxist theory emphasizes the decisive influence of production relations on the social structure, and this theoretical framework provides a powerful tool for analyzing social class

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changes in the context of the epidemic. Marx believes that the economic base determines the superstructure and the inequality in production relations will directly affect the class differentiation and class solidification of society. Based on this theoretical perspective, researchers can have a deeper understanding of the different impacts of the epidemic on different social strata and the structural reasons behind it.

From the existing studies, most of them have shown that the national policies built after the epidemic will gradually solve the problem of social class solidification, but the main limitation of these policies is that they can only solve the problem of solidification in the short term. The problem will not be solved in long term. The reason why other policies can only solve problems in the short term is that they often focus on temporary economic stimulus and relief measures. These policies may include direct cash subsidies, stimulating the market, etc. But the fundamental cause of class stratification cannot be identified. Through the theoretical framework of Marxism, this article can reveal the underlying reasons for class stratification and propose forward-looking and long-term policy recommendations. Based on the above academic background, this paper aims to analyze the problem of social class solidification in China in the post-epidemic era from a Marxist perspective. This paper will analyze the following dimensions: the distribution of economic resources, exploring the redistribution of economic resources after the epidemic and its impact on different social classes, and analyzing the differences in the circumstances of low-income groups, middle-class groups, and high-income groups in the process of economic recovery; and access to educational resources, investigating the uneven impact of online education on the distribution of educational resources during the epidemic period, focusing on the differential impact of family economic conditions on educational outcomes.

The effectiveness of social policies will be analyzed on the effect of government social policies during and after the epidemic on alleviating or exacerbating social class solidification, including economic relief, employment policies and public services. Then combine these resulting effects to assess the degree to which they solidify the hierarchy. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the phenomenon and causes of social class solidification in China in the post-epidemic era through the above multidimensional analysis and put forward corresponding policy recommendations. Theoretical innovation in this article is Combining Marxist theory with the special background of the post-epidemic era to enrich the theoretical research on the solidification of social classes. The solution will focus on policy recommendations, which will provide scientific basis for the government and all sectors of society to formulate more equitable and effective social policies to promote social equity and mobility.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Historical materialism was proposed by Marx and Engels in 1848. Marxism believes that the material mode of production is the basis of social development, the economic basis determines the superstructure and the development of production relations promotes social change. In the post-pandemic era, historical materialism helps to understand that economic crises and social contradictions are rooted in the disharmony of production relations. The epidemic exacerbated inequalities in production and distribution, making the analytical framework of historical materialism more applicable [3].

The theory of Class Struggle was proposed by Marx in 1867. According to Marxism, class struggle is the driving force for social progress. The contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is the core contradiction of capitalist society. After the epidemic, class contradictions were further intensified, especially conflicts of interest between low-income workers and capitalists. The theory of class struggle helps to understand such conflicts and to find solutions [4].

Marx proposed the Surplus value theory in 1867 that capitalists obtain surplus value by exploiting workers' surplus labor time, which is the root cause of capital accumulation and inequality. During the pandemic, many enterprises maintain profits by lowering wages and, increasing working hours, and more. The theory of surplus value can explain this phenomenon and provide a theoretical basis for workers to fight for their rights and interests [4].

Class Immobility refers to the lack of mobility between classes, which to some extent reflects the persistent inequality of opportunities in the social ladder. The low variation of income mobility means that preendowed factors such as family origin have a greater impact on individual mobility opportunities, while self-induced factors such as individual ability and effort have a lesser impact [5,6].

### **3. How will social resources be allocated after the epidemic, and what will be the impact on different classes?**

Before getting into the details of how resource allocation affects hierarchies, it is necessary to define a hierarchy. According to Bourdieu's stratum theory, specific groups and classes tend to use various kinds of capital to defend or seize favorable social positions, and in this way, "capital" is transformed into the "habit" of the class [7]. Then, this paper will first divide the class into high-income groups, middle-income workers, and generally low-income workers in production relations/low-income workers in platform production relations.

#### **3.1 Education resource**

Education provides systematic knowledge and skills training to equip individuals to enter professional fields and well-paying jobs. Education is regarded as an important means to promote social equity. By providing equal access to education, societies can reduce inequalities based on family background and economic status, giving everyone the opportunity to realize their potential. Universal education and support measures such as scholarships and grants can help children from low-income families break the cycle of poverty and achieve upward mobility [8]. By receiving a high-quality education, individuals can gain access to more career options and higher salary levels, thereby improving their socioeconomic status. Before the epidemic, offline education was a very important part. It has an absolute leadership. In China, the higher the level of education can obtain, the higher salary will be in the future. Higher education, for example, is particularly significant because a college degree is often associated with higher earnings and career opportunities. In order to overcome the epidemic, countries have launched a mixture of online education models and offline education models. The emergence of online education gives more people in remote areas access to more educational opportunities. However, these educational resources are generally not of high quality. As Scherer pointed out in his research, the educational quality of online education has certain defects and cannot really reach the original educational quality of colleges and universities [9].

The emergence of online education breaks the monopoly of higher social classes on cultural capital - such as educational background, academic achievement, and language ability, which is usually obtained through family education and formal education. However, this is followed by the devaluation of diplomas as the literacy level of all is raised by the ease with which knowledge is acquired. "The devaluation of qualifications is when people become more educated and think they can get better jobs, but the requirements of good jobs also increase [10]. This had a different effect on the class proposed above. In the context of the devaluation of academic qualifications, the impact of online education on different income

groups is more significant. High-income groups continue to maintain advantages through diversified investment in education and strong social capital; Middle-income workers face greater economic and educational pressure and need additional vocational training to supplement their educational disadvantage. Low-income workers with traditional production relations face more serious social inequality due to a lack of educational resources and devaluation of academic qualifications. Although low-income workers in platform production relations have certain opportunities to upgrade their skills, the instability of work and income remains a major challenge. The devaluation of qualifications has exacerbated the gap between different income groups, and inequality in education and occupation has further widened.

### **3.2 Economic resource**

The pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation of enterprises and governments, and the application of digital technologies in telecommuting, online education, telemedicine and e-commerce has increased significantly. For example, the use of telecommuting software from Microsoft, Zoom and others has surged during the pandemic. The platform economy has shown strong resilience and growth potential during the pandemic. E-commerce platforms such as Amazon and Alibaba have seen significant sales growth during the pandemic, while travel platforms such as Uber and Didi have quickly turned to food delivery and logistics businesses [11].

High-income groups are more likely to adapt to and take advantage of the opportunities presented by digital transformation, such as telecommuting and online education. They often have better digital skills and resources to benefit from the emerging tech and platform economy. For example, the demand for telecommuting tools and technical consulting services has grown significantly, creating new opportunities for high-income professionals [12]. Meanwhile, middle-income workers face greater employment pressure during the pandemic, and many traditional industries are affected. However, digital transformation also offers them new job opportunities and the possibility of upgrading their skills. For example, many manufacturing and service jobs are gradually shifting to positions requiring digital skills, prompting middle-income workers to reskill and make career transitions. Moreover, low-income workers, especially those in the platform economy, such as ride-hailing drivers and food delivery workers, are at significant risk of economic insecurity and unemployment. Their jobs often lack stability and social security, and free working hours and AI algorithms force these workers to work longer hours [13]. For example, many platform economy workers lost a steady source of income during the pandemic.

## **4. What is the driving force of the epidemic to solidify social class?**

### **4.1 The widening educational inequality of the epidemic promotes the solidification of class**

The French Marxist theorist Louis Althusser proposed that the education system is part of the ideological state apparatus, which inculcates the ideology of the ruling class through education and maintains the existing social structure. School education not only imparts knowledge and skills but also implicitly transmits the values and ideologies of the ruling class, shaping students' worldviews and behavior patterns and thereby maintaining existing class relations [14]. The education system provides the different levels of labor needed by the capitalist production system by screening and diverting students and assigning them to different career tracks. The education system plays an important stratifying role in this

process, ensuring that students of different classes end up in careers that correspond to their class background, thereby reproducing the social class structure. In China, the original problem of educational inequality is caused by the differences between regions, which leads to the solidification of social classes. After the epidemic, the emergence of online education gradually broke the monopoly of institutionalized cultural capital by the upper class. However, suppose too many people move from the lower working class to the upper middle-income class through the re-possession of institutionalized cultural capital, such as academic qualifications. In that case, it may lead to the loss of the working class and challenge the status of the original upper middle-income class. It is obvious, then, that there has been a devaluation of academic qualifications in order to protect the status of the old middle and upper-income class. Many young people with higher education degrees end up being forced into low-paying jobs as food delivery workers or in the service industry, and these young people come from lower-middle-income families. This shows that the lower the number of low-income households have moved into the upper middle income, and the solidification of the class has gradually increased.

## **4.2 The impact of the digital economy promoted by the epidemic on the solidification of class**

According to Marxism, the capitalist economic system maintains the social class structure through the reproduction of the relations of production. The relations of production include the relations between capitalists (the bourgeoisie) and workers (the proletariat). In the digital economy, this production relationship has undergone new changes and solidification. Platform capitalism is the most visible product of the digital economy. After the epidemic, the gradual rise of technology companies and the rapid growth of the platform economy have made the traditional manufacturing industry once again face a crisis of layoffs. Moreover, the massive unemployment caused by the epidemic has led to the closure of many companies, and these low-income workers with fixed employment are forced to enter the platform capitalist system. In platform capitalism, the forms of digital labor control mainly include ideological control under the cover of "labor freedom", time control under the cover of "more capable people", flow control under the cover of "community celebrities", and social relationship control under the cover of "good life" [13]. It is clear that by changing the production relationship between workers and platforms, high-income platform owners are implicitly "removing" themselves from the struggle of low-income workers. Workers lack stable jobs, social security and labor rights protection. Through algorithms and data analysis, platform companies maximize the residual value of workers, making workers more unstable and exploited, which intensifies class solidification.

## **5. How can Marxism alleviate social class contradictions in the post-epidemic era?**

### **5.1 Employment**

From a Marxist perspective, first of all, focusing on the inequality of production relations, the government can enact new labor laws to restrain platform companies and protect the rights and interests of platform workers. For example, the government should strengthen the supervision of platform companies and enact legislation to protect the labor rights enjoyed by platform workers. For example, social insurance policies should be formulated for platform employees so that they receive a minimum amount of social security. As Duan Mozhe proposed in his research, Meituan's delivery algorithm needs to be improved to

increase riders' income [15]. With the development of the platform economy, labor rights will increasingly become an issue of concern. Platform enterprises should balance economic interests and workers' rights and interests to achieve equal and sustainable development. For example, "on the basis of the current Labor Law, expand the scope of protection, redefine the identification standards of labor relations, skip the identification process of labor relations, and advocate that the wage protection system of the current Labor Law applies to couriers." [4]

Moreover, a certain degree of public ownership can help to improve the quality of labor output and the allocation of resources. According to the Marxist theory of exploitation, common ownership can eliminate the exploitation of workers by capitalists, increase the enthusiasm and responsibility of workers, and thus improve work efficiency and output quality. Stocksy Unite, for example, is a photo library platform owned by photographers that was founded in 2012. Photographers are not only contributors to the platform but also co-owners and decision-makers, sharing in the profits of the platform. The success of this case lies in profit sharing. For example, the platform distributes 50% of the revenue to the photographer, which is more generous than traditional photo library platforms. Also democratic governance plays a important role. For instance, All members have the right to vote and participate in decision-making on the platform. As a result, these workers on the platform generally have higher incomes than those whose data is controlled by the platform owners with absolute high incomes.

## **5.2 Education**

The first is to carry out the disenchantment of education; the main reason why the devaluation of education mentioned in the previous article leads to the employment problem is that people hope that all parents want their children to go to a good university to find a good job. The better the school, the better the job. However, this idea is actually wrong. More and more people are crowded into the ranks of higher education. On the one hand, education is over, and the requirements of vocational recruitment are much higher than the actual ability of the job demand, resulting in the waste of human resources. On the other hand, it is beneficial to the dominant class of society, which will increase the cost of education by controlling the recruitment rules and the right to define ability so that the disadvantaged group will be unable to reach high-quality education resources [16]. The focus of education should be on vocational education. For example, Germany's vocational education system uses a dual system; that is, apprentices are trained in vocational schools and enterprises at the same time. Apprentices spend a few days a week working in a company and a few days receiving theoretical education at school. This system ensures that apprentices gain practical work experience during their studies, improving their skills and competitiveness for employment. This ensures that the offspring of low-income groups are less likely to be unemployed and forced into low-paid work.

## **6. Conclusion**

First, the pandemic has exacerbated social stratification, particularly affecting low-income groups and informal workers. The ILO (International Labour Organization) report pointed out that the pandemic has caused a large number of job losses, with low-income and informal workers bearing the brunt. In China, despite the government's economic stimulus policies, the impact on small and medium-sized enterprises and the service sector remains significant, resulting in a large number of low-income workers facing unemployment and income reduction. The rise of platform capitalism has further exacerbated labor rights issues for low-income workers and increased their economic insecurity.

Second, the allocation of educational resources has also changed during the pandemic. The popularity of online education has reduced the inequality of educational resources caused by regional differences to a certain extent, but it has also brought about the problem of the devaluation of diplomas. The devaluation of academic qualifications has a significant impact on different income groups, and high-income groups continue to maintain their advantages through diversified education investment, while middle-income and low-income workers face greater economic and educational pressure, leading to further aggravation of social inequality.

In terms of economic resources, governments' economic stimulus policies and digitization processes also have different impacts on social classes. High-income groups are more likely to adapt to and take advantage of the opportunities presented by digital transformation, such as telecommuting and online education. Middle-income workers need to adapt to the new economic environment through skills retraining and career transition. Low-income workers, especially those in the platform economy, face greater instability and exploitation.

In order to alleviate the social class contradictions in the post-epidemic period, Marxism provides some important theoretical guidance and practical suggestions. In terms of employment, the government needs to strengthen the supervision of platform companies, protect the labor rights of platform workers, improve industry income, improve the data system, and improve the fairness of resource allocation. In terms of education, it is necessary to disenchant academic qualifications, change the educational goal from simple employment orientation to promoting the all-round development of people, adopt multiple evaluation standards, promote the combination of schools and enterprises, and make up for the cultural capital differences between different classes.

To sum up, the problem of social class consolidation in the post-epidemic era is complex and requires the joint efforts of many parties. Through the theoretical perspective of Marxism, researchers can better understand and deal with this problem and provide theoretical support and policy suggestions for realizing social equity and mobility. The government, enterprises, educational institutions and all sectors of society should work together to formulate more equitable and effective social policies, promote social equity and mobility, alleviate the phenomenon of social class solidification, and promote social progress and development.

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