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Bourdieu and Chinese Sociology

by Nabo Chen *and* Xiaowei Zang

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Introduction

Pierre Bourdieu has since the early 1990s become a well-known name in the social science community in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Social scientists in China have eagerly examined his works and used his ideas, concepts, and methodology to study empirical issues in China. We provide in this paper a brief discussion of this new development in China. We first review the history of the discipline of sociology in the PRC to explain why Bourdieu was introduced to China only recently. We then conduct a content analysis of the published studies of Bourdieu in China to show how he and his sociological approach have been introduced to Chinese social scientists. Finally, we discuss how Bourdieu's theories and analytic tools have been applied to research on social issues in China.

Our review does not discuss the works by scholars outside China who have used Bourdieu's concepts and methodology to study social issues in China. Representative works in this growing literature include Bilik [2002], Cooper [1993], Lau [2003; Lau 2004], Liu [2006], Smart [1993], Xu and Xu [2008], and Zang [2006] that address a wide range of social issues such as bank accounting classification and terminology in early twentieth-century China, the habitus and "logic of practice" of China's trade unionists, and friendship formation in China.

The History of the Discipline of Sociology in the PRC

It is necessary to discuss the history of the sociology discipline in China to understand why Bourdieu was an unheard name in the PRC until the late 1980s. In 1952, many of the social science disciplines, including sociology and political science, were abolished because the PRC government regarded them as undesirable and contradictory to communist ideology. In 1978, when China started economic reforms and opened its door to the rest of the world, sociology and political science were reestablished. There were some major difficulties during the process of the reestablishment, however. In particular, during the period of 1952-1978, no sociology students were recruited. The sociology researchers trained and graduated before 1952 had either passed away or moved to other disciplines such as history and ethnology before 1978. Hence, some short-term and long-term measures were adopted to deal with the difficulties: 1) Some philosophers took some crash courses to be trained as sociology teachers; 2) post-graduate students were recruited and taught; 3) a few departments of sociology were reestablished. The first sociology department was established at Shanghai University in 1980. The Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou established its sociology department in 1981 and recruited post-graduate students next year. More importantly, three training programs were set up during 1980-1981 in Peking and Tianjin respectively. A number of American sociologists, including Peter Blau, Nan Lin, and C.K. Yang and his colleagues from the University of Pittsburgh, were invited to give guest lectures in these three training programs. Some Chinese students trained in these programs were later recruited to pursue post-graduate studies in the US. Some of these Chinese students returned from the West in the mid- and late 1980s. This has determined the heavy influence of American sociology on the reestablishment of sociology in China. For example, much of sociological research in China has been focused on social stratification, social networks, etc. – the main research topics in mainstream American sociology. Inadequate attention has been paid to European sociology. This partly explains why Bourdieu's works were not introduced into China until the late 1980s.

Publications of Bourdieu's Works in China

Table 1 provides information about some of Bourdieu's books that have been translated into Chinese and published in China. Some translators are sociologists such as Li Meng and Li Kang. Others are experts on French studies, such as Gui Yufang, Xu Jun, Liu Hui, Liu Chengfu, Xing Kechao, He Qing, Tan Lide, and so on. Almost all of them work at China's key universities or research institutions. For example, Li

Meng, Li Kang, and Gui Yufang are professors at Peking University, He Qing works at Zhejiang University, Tan Lide and Liu Hui are employed by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Liu Chengfu is based at Nanjing University. The publishers that have published Bourdieu's works include the Commercial Press, the Joint Publishing Company, the Central Compilation & Translation Press, and the Yilin Press. They are well-known presses in China. The Commercial Press started its business in 1897 whereas the Joint Publishing Company was formally established in 1937.

TAB. 1. *Publications of Bourdieu's Works in China*

Book Title	Year	Translator	Publisher
Ziyou Jiaoliu (Free Exchange)	1997	Gui Yufang	Joint Publishing
Shijian Yu Fansi: Fansi Shehuixue Daoyin (An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology)	1998	Li Meng Li Kang	Central Compilation & Translation Press
Guanyu Dianshi (On Television)	2000	Xu Jun	Liaoning Education Press
Yishu de Fazhi (Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field)	2001	Liu Hui	Central Compilation & Translation Press
Nanxing Tongzhi (Masculine Domination)	2002	Liu Hui	Sea Sky Publishing House
Jichengren (The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relation to Culture with a New Epilogue, 1979)	2002	Xing Kechao	The Commercial Press
Shijian Gan (The Logic of Practice)	2003	Jiang Zhihua	Yilin Press
Guojia Jingying: Mingpai Daxue (The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power)	2004	Yang Liping	The Commercial Press
Yuyan Yiwei Zhe Shenme: Yuyan Jiaohuan de Jingji [CE QUE PARLER VEUT DIRE]	2005	Liu Hui Zhu Sizhen	The Commercial Press
Kexue de Shehui Yongtu: Xiegei Kexue Chang de Linchuang Shehuixue [LES USAGES SOCIAUX DE LA SCIENCE]	2005	Zhang Yan Liu Chengfu	Nanjing University Press
Ezhi Yehuo (Contre-feux)	2007	He Qing	Guangxi Normal University Press
Shijian Lixing: Guanyu Xingwei Lilun (Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action)	2007	Tan Lide	Joint Publishing

An Overview of Research on Bourdieu in China

To provide an overview of research on Bourdieu by Chinese scholars, we have searched post-graduate theses, journal articles, and conference papers from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI thereafter) between 1979 and 2008.¹ We have used “Bourdieu (in Chinese)” as the key word in our search engine. we have found a total of 444 academic publications with the word “Bourdieu” in their titles. They include 3 conference papers, 39 Mphil theses,² 11 PhD theses, and 391 journal articles. We have decided not to discuss PhD theses, conference papers, and MPhil theses in this article since they are not seen as published outputs.

The 391 journal articles were found from 264 academic journals in the CNKI. Among them, 194 journals published only one article on Bourdieu, 32 journals, two articles, 17 journals, three articles, 7 journals, four articles, and 11 journals, five articles or more. We understand that we could find more articles if we used a different approach in our search. Nevertheless, we are confident that we have reasonably outlined the state of research on Bourdieu in China (see table 2).

TAB. 2. *Chinese Journals that published five or more articles about Bourdieu*

Journal Title	No of Articles
Dushu (Study)	17
Shehui (Society)	16
Shehuixue Yanjiu (Sociological Studies)	13
Guowai Shehui Kexue (Social Sciences Abroad)	7
Jiaoyu Lilun Yu Shijian(Theory and practice of Education)	7
Tianjian Shehui Kexue (Tianjin Social Sciences)	6
Guangxi Shehui Kexue (Guangxi Social Sciences)	5
Guowai Lilun Dongtai (Foreign Theoretical Trends)	5
Kaifang Shidai (Open Times)	5
Shehui Kexue (Social Sciences)	5
Sixiang Zhanxian (Thinking)	5

We have found that the earliest article about Bourdieu in our databank was an introduction to Bourdieu’s book “Questions de Sociologie,” which was published in a journal called “*Dushu*” in 1987. This is a good journal on research in the humanities

¹ CNKI, a key national e-publishing project of China, started in 1996. It includes the full text of works from some 5,058 science journals and more than 3,402 social sciences and humanities journals. For more information about CNKI, see <http://www.global.cnki.net/Aboutcnki/Introduction.htm>.

² Mphil theses are obtained from a sub-database of CNKI – the National Outstanding Mater Theses Full Text Database.

and social sciences in China. *Dushu* published 16 more articles on Bourdieu after 1987. The contributors of these articles were scholars in different academic disciplines, which indirectly reflect the general interest in Bourdieu in the social sciences and humanities community in China.

Next, we turned our attention to sociological research on Bourdieu in China. We found that two major sociology journals in China, "*Sociological Studies*" and "*Society*," had published 13 and 16 articles on Bourdieu respectively. It seems to us that Chinese sociologists have been more active than their counterparts in other disciplines in promoting Bourdieu's theories to readers in China. We also found that *Jiaoyu Lilun Yu Shijian* (Theory and Practice of Education), which is a journal on educational research, had published 7 articles on this topic. Education is perhaps the second major academic discipline in China that shows a strong interest in Bourdieu's works. This is partly because education researchers have found his theory about education and cultural capital useful in the study of school outcomes and educational stratification in China.

We then report the number of articles on Bourdieu published each year since 1987 (Figure 1). There is a steady increase in the amount of publications since 1987, the year when the first article about Bourdieu was published in a Chinese learned journal. In 2002, the number of the publications reached 22, almost three times of the works published in 2001. In 2008, the number of the publications was reported to be 98 pieces.

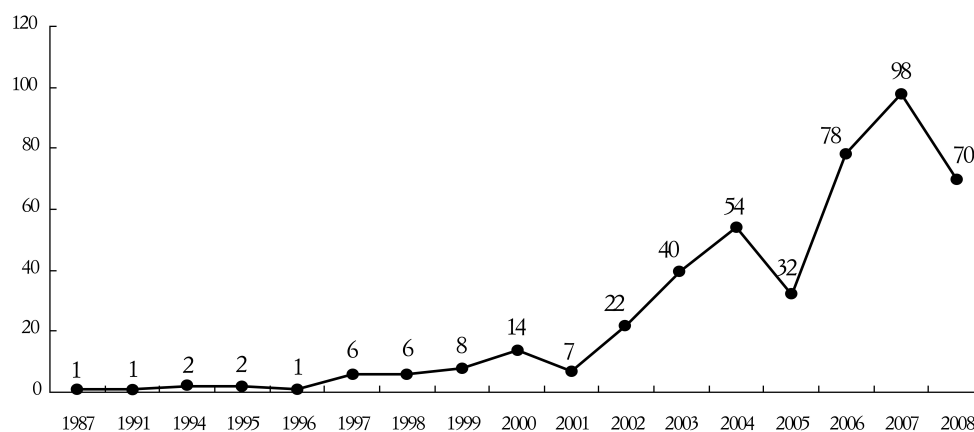


FIG. 1. Published Research Outputs on Bourdieu between 1987-2008 in CNKI.

Our data bank doesn't have complete information about the authors who have published articles about Bourdieu, but a brief review about some authors suggests that Chinese scholars with overseas educational experience have been a major driving

force for the study of Bourdieu in China. For example, Jing Jun published an influential article titled “*Knowledge, organization, and Symbolic Capital: A Field Study on Rebuilding of Confucius Temples in Northern China*” when he was an assistant professor at the New York State University. He later moved to Tsinghua University in China. As another example, Li Meng, one of the translators of *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* by Bourdieu, obtained his PhD degree from the University of Chicago. Most authors who have studied or used Bourdieu’s theories/concepts in their researches are young and rising stars in the Chinese academic community. Many of them were aged 40 or younger when they published their articles on Bourdieu. Some of them are now professors at key universities in China. For example, Li Meng and Li Kang are now the professors at Peking University. Liu Xin and Zhou Yi are professors of Fudan University, Zhang Wenhong is a professor at Shanghai University.

In the rest of this paper, we will discuss in some detail how the Chinese publications have introduced Bourdieu and his academic career to Chinese readers, discussed Bourdieu’s work, and used Bourdieu’s concepts and methodology to study social and cultural issues in China.

“Social Science with Conscience:” The Chinese View of Bourdieu’s Career

How is Bourdieu perceived by social scientists in China? In 2003, one year after Bourdieu passed away, a Chinese journal (*Foreign Theoretical Trends*) published a Chinese translation of Craig Calhoun and Loïc Wacquant’s paper in *Thesis Eleven* [Calhoun and Wacquant 2002]. Calhoun and Wacquant ended their article about Bourdieu with this sentence: “Bourdieu was a scholar and researcher of great rigor and also a man and a citizen with a conscience attuned to inequality and domination.” Many Chinese scholars have similarly considered Bourdieu as a great social scientist and a symbol of social consciousness. For example, Zhang [2002] reviewed some of Bourdieu’s books, and then devoted about half of her article to a discussion of Bourdieu’s involvement in political campaigns for railway workers, undocumented immigrants and the unemployed during the 1990s and Bourdieu’s critique of neo-liberalism and globalization. Zhu’s article [2004], titled “Stranger: Bourdieu’s Life Trajectory and the Genesis of His Academic *Habitus*,” defined Bourdieu as a politically engaged intellectual. Zhu pointed out that Bourdieu was a “provincial, lower-class student first at Pau and then in Paris,” which made him a stranger to the academic circle in Paris and gave him an extraordinary capacity for critical social analysis and epistemic reflexivity. Both Zhang and Zhu acknowledged that Bourdieu was a controversial public figure despite his academic achievements. They noted that

Bourdieu's "enemies" included Thomas Ferenczi, J.C. Passeron, R. Castel, and L. Boltanski, and his former student, Jeannine Verder-Leroux. Zhu wrote: "Bourdieu thinks of himself as a man with an anti-establishment mind set, which supplies enormous energy for his critical reflexive sociology on one hand, and limits his cognitive vision on the other hand. As a result, he cannot see the hope to change the reality" [*ibidem*, p. 66].

Gong [2007] divided Bourdieu's career into three phrases. The first was the period of 1948-1968 when Bourdieu finished his studies in Inécole Normale Supérieure and then completed his military services and field studies in Algeria. During this period he published some books and became a research assistant, working with the philosopher and sociologist Raymond Aron. During the second phrase (1968-1981), Bourdieu built up his own academic style, published his acclaimed books (including *La Distinction*, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*), and established a journal titled *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. In the third phrase (1981-2002), Bourdieu held the chair of sociology at the Collège de France in 1981 and started to relate his academic pursuits to his political stance. He published *The Inheritors*, *The State Nobility*, *On Television*, *The Weight of the World*. Gong [2007] concluded that "Bourdieu was a philosopher before he became a sociologist."

Bourdieu's Key Concepts and Their Application in China

In this section, we discuss how some of Bourdieu's key concepts have been used in sociological research in China. We have found that his concepts such as field, habitus, practice, symbolic violence, cultural capital, symbolic capital, etc. are frequently used in sociological studies in China nowadays. Table 3 shows the frequency of usage of these concepts in the 391 articles collected from the CNKI. The most used concept is field, followed by practice/theory of practice, cultural capital, social capital, reflexivity, and so on.

Field

Some of the 70 articles on the field listed in Table 3 introduce and explain this concept to the Chinese reading public. Many of them are short articles. Other articles with "the field" in their titles use "the field" to analysis social space in China. They often create new term such as "the field of literature," "the field of sports," "the field of justice," "the field of rural area," and so on. Among them, "the education field," "the judiciary field," and "the field of cultural production" have been frequently used.

TAB. 3. *Frequency of the Titles with Bourdieu's Key Concepts*

Key Concepts in Titles	No. of Article
Field	70
Practice/theory of practice	49
Cultural Capital	47
Social Capital	29
Reflexivity	26
Habitus	21
Symbolic/Symbolic Capital	19

1) *The Education Field*: a total of 18 articles study the education field in China. Some of them focus on the interaction between teachers and students [Wang 2008], others analyze politics within and between universities in China [Le and Zhang 2005; Zong 2006]. Still, others discuss the effect of “the education field” on the power structure [Ma 2002; Xu 2003]. Xu [2003] compared John Dewey’s theories on education with those from Bourdieu and argued that Bourdieu had neglected possible changes in the education field. In Xu’s view, Dewey’s theories about the value of education could be a good supplement to Bourdieu’s theory. Liu’ study [2006] showed how the term “the field” could be understood mainly as an analytical framework. Other scholars studied the field of schools. Ma [2003] treated schools as a field and interpreted habitus within this field. Xia [2005] showed how a field had emerged by analyzing the Mobile Short Message contents of some secondary school students. She argued for the distinction of a private “field” among secondary school students from a public field regulated by school authorities, parents, and society.

2) *The Judiciary Field*. The studies of the judiciary field take law as a field, including judiciary cases [X. Wang 2007; Xiong 2008], grass-root judiciary units [Wang 2006], and so on. Wang applied the term “the field” to the judiciary proceeding in rural China, aiming to illustrate how the implementation of the legal procedures were constrained by habitus in local rural areas. Wang [2007] also maintained that the judiciary logic in the academic field was different from the judiciary logic in the field of implementation. The goal of the former was to look for truth and justice while the latter reflected the logic of the bargaining processes among actors in a specific power field.

3) *The Field of Cultural Production*. Bourdieu discussed the field of cultural production extensively in *Distinction A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, *The Rule of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, and *The Field of Cultural Production*. Many Chinese writers have used the terms “the field of literature” or “the field of arts.” Others have conducted empirical research. For example, Zheng [2003]

analyzed how the internet literature and the literature of Hong Kong and Taiwan had led to “Petty Bourgeoisie” literature in China. However, research on the field of cultural production is still in the early stage and few articles on this topic have been published in the top social science journals in China.

Habitus

We found a total of 21 publications with “habitus” in their titles in our data bank. “Habitus” is closely related to “the field” in Bourdieu’s works. Not surprisingly, many of the articles in our database discuss “the field” and “habitus” together. For example, most of the works mentioned above discuss “habitus” when they described the features of the education field, the judiciary field, or the field of cultural production. One study on the education field highlighted habitus in the field of school: both teachers and students had accepted the idea of “whatever teachers do is for students’ benefits” [Ma 2003]. Another study focused on the unique way of social interaction in a village in China [Zhang 2002].

Our general impression is that Chinese sociologists have used “the field” more frequently than other concepts from Bourdieu. However, the application of these concepts by Chinese scholars in their researches has been limited. It seems to us that they have used Bourdieu’s two types of capital: cultural capital and symbolic capital, more productively in research on social stratification in China, to be discussed below.

Cultural Capital and Symbolic Capital

Chinese scholars have noted Bourdieu’s three types of capital: social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital. It seems to us that they have followed American sociologists in the use of the concept “social capital.” Hence, our focus here is on how Chinese scholars have used cultural capital and symbolic capital. We found from our databank a total of 47 articles with “cultural capital” in their titles and a total of 19 articles with “symbol” or “symbol capital” in their titles.

Cultural Capital

The concept cultural capital has appealed to Chinese sociologists very much. Liu [2003] used cultural capital in the discussion of classes and class distinction in China. His article briefly introduced Bourdieu’s general framework of social theory, methodology, and key concepts. It then discussed Bourdieu’s theoretical insights on

the concepts class, capital and class classification, class habitus, taste, etc. Next, it commented on Bourdieu's major contribution to class theory, highlighted the heuristic implication of his class theory, and examined how it could be used to address some empirical issues in Chinese Studies. It proposed a new direction of research since China was undergoing a great transforming from a planning economy to a market economy and from a society with simple patterns of consumption to a society of mass consumption. This transformation would provide empirical evidence to understand how a new class would emerge and how the habitus, doxa of a class would be modeled. Liu claimed that mainstream stratification research focused on social and economic conditions but did not pay sufficient attention to the effect of consumption on class formation and the way of life. Bourdieu's theory was a good supplement for research on Chinese social stratification.

Other researchers similarly have taken cultural capital as a key variable to analyze Chinese social stratification. Some have used the term to study the disadvantages of Chinese migrant workers³ and their children [Zhen 2006; Zhou 2007]. Liu [2007] discussed the difficulty migrant workers faced in their attempt to be integrated into urban society due to their limited cultural capital. Zhou [2007] conducted a questionnaire survey on migrant families living in Beijing to examine the effect of their cultural capital on their children's school performances. Other researchers are interested in using the concept of cultural capital to study the emerging middle class in China.⁴ As a new emerging social group, the middle class provides a good case study for scholars to understand how taste, rules, and habitus of a class have gradually configured and became its class distinction. Xu [2007] sampled 30 issues of a magazine called *Fashion.Cosmo* between 2000 and 2005. Her content analysis of these magazines showed the white collar workers' taste in food, fashion, beauty, furniture, and travel. Xu suggested that the taste the middle classes were interested in acquiring included 1) success and confidence; 2) good body figure and physical appearance; 3) freedom and personality. Xu concluded that her research showed the applicability of Bourdieu's theory about class and distinction to research on classes in China.

³ In China, the term migrant worker refers to rural migrant laborers in urban areas. In 2003, China had 113.9 million migrant workers (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-05/15/content_330991.htm). They receive low wage for manual labor and therefore are often considered to be a disadvantage group in urban China.

⁴ The Chinese middle class is consisted of entrepreneurs and managers in high-tech companies, foreign firms and financial institutions as well as some self-employed private entrepreneurs.

Symbolic Capital

Chinese scholars have understood that Bourdieu distinguished cultural, economic, and symbolic capital from one another. One noteworthy article about symbolic capital was published in 1998, entitled “Knowledge, Organization, and Symbolic Capital: A Field Study on Rebuilding of Confucius Temples in Northern China” [Jing 1998]. The author examined the impact of knowledge on local religious revival.⁵ He asked: What kinds of knowledge was influential in organizing local religion activities? Who owned these kinds of knowledge? How did the ways of knowledge exploitation reflect social changes? The author used the concept “symbolic capital” to address these questions. He firstly reviewed Bourdieu’s comparative studies of Nigeria and France. Then he argued that Bourdieu neglected the effect of economic and social change in evaluating the importance of knowledge. He used ethnographic data to show how different kinds of knowledge were used to gain “symbolic power” during the rebuilding of two Confucius temples in northern China. He contributed to Bourdieu’s theoretical model about “symbolic capital” in two ways: 1) he developed a new typology of knowledge; 2) he analyzed the effect of social change on the importance and usage of knowledge.

There are a few articles on how symbolic capital had been changed during the transition from traditional China to modern China. Based on fieldwork in Yang Village in Eastern Fujian province, Zhang [2001] showed how new symbolic capital had been created, transformed, and understood in that village. Overall, the amount of empirical studies on this topic is limited.

Theory of Practice, Reflexivity, and Research Methodology

Bourdieu’s theory of practice emphasizes the importance of the body and practices within the social world. It has led to Bourdieu’s contributions to the methodology of social science – to reconcile the objective (the field) and the subjective (habitus) by “practice.” That is, “Practice = Habitus + Capital + the Field.” As a result, sociologists in a social world must at all times conduct their research with conscious attention to the effects of their own position, their own set of internalized structures, and how these are likely to distort or prejudice their objectivity. This is the essence of reflexive sociology.

⁵ During the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976), the religious activities were abandoned in China. Religious architectures, including temples, churches, mosques, etc. were destroyed by Red Guards. Religious activities were tolerated by the Chinese government after 1979. Religious revival has been found in various parts of China.

Bourdieu's *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* was translated into Chinese and published in China in 1998 by Li Meng and Li kang. This has triggered an exciting discussion on reflexivity in China. Figure 2 shows that all articles in our database on this topic were published in and after 1998. The two articles published in 1998 were both the reviews of the Chinese version of *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.

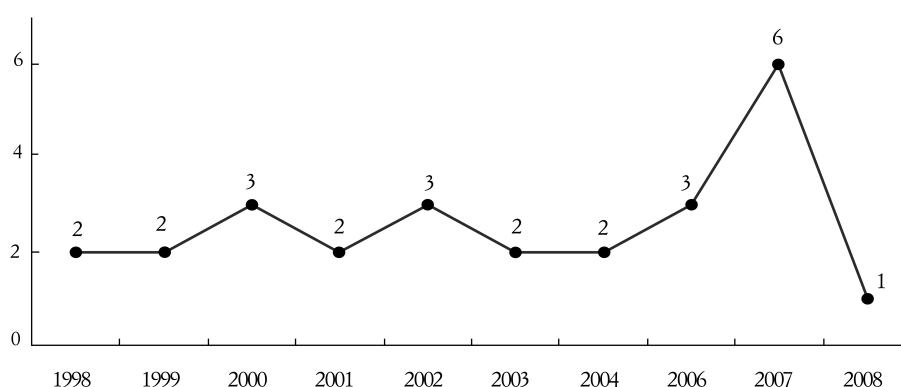


FIG. 2. Articles on “Reflexivity.”

Some Chinese scholars have compared Bourdieu's theory of practice and reflexivity with those by other sociologists' such as Giddens, Habermas, and Garfinkel [S. Wang 2007; Wen 2003]. Others have discussed how Bourdieu's theory of practice can be used for social science research in China [Huang 2005; S. Wang 2007]. For example, Philip C.C. Huang, a US scholar, published a Chinese article in *China Social Sciences* in 2005, arguing that Bourdieu's theory of practice would provide a good methodology for Chinese social science researchers [Huang 2005]. He proposed that Chinese scholars should derive theories from fieldwork, and then test their validity in empirical research. This approach would help China to build its own social sciences and theories.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this paper we first briefly reviewed the history of the discipline of sociology in the PRC to explain why Bourdieu was introduced to China only recently. We then provided information about the Chinese translations of Bourdieu's works. We also conducted a content analysis of the published studies of Bourdieu in China to show how he and his sociological approach have been introduced to Chinese social

scientists. Finally, we discussed how Bourdieu's theories and analytic tools have been applied to research on social issues in China.

We pointed out that the discipline of sociology in China has relied heavily on theories and methodology from American sociology since the 1980s. However, Bourdieu's theory has become increasingly popular in social science research on China. This exciting development has provided an opportunity for Chinese social scientists to learn more about sociological research in Europe. It is likely that there will be more interaction between Chinese sociologists and their counterparts in Europe because of the influence of major European figures including Habermas and Bourdieu.

At the same time, our review raises an important question: Why did Chinese social scientists first learn about Bourdieu from North America? It could have taken a longer time for them to appreciate Bourdieu had he not been accepted in North America. What can be done to increase the appreciation of European scholarship by social scientists in China? One obvious solution is to increase collaboration between China and Europe. For example, the European academic community should work out a plan to set up more scholarships for Chinese students to pursue graduate studies in Europe. The European academic community should also organize delegations to visit its counterpart in China more frequently. Suggestions and actions by our European colleagues are encouraged so as to increase the interaction between them and their counterparts in China.

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Bourdieu and Chinese Sociology

Abstract: In this paper we review the history of the discipline of sociology in the People's Republic of China to explain why Bourdieu was introduced to China only recently. We then conduct a content analysis of the published studies of Bourdieu in China to show how he and his sociological approach have been introduced to Chinese social scientists. We also discuss how Bourdieu's theories and analytic tools have been applied to research on social issues in China. Finally, we draw attention to the fact that Chinese social scientists first learn about Bourdieu from North America rather than from Europe, and urge efforts to increase collaboration between European sociologists and their counterparts in China.

Keywords: Bourdieu, China, sociology, theory, France.

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