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The quest for higher education by the Chinese middle class : retrenching social mobility?

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**Abstract**

This article examines how and why the Chinese second-generation middle class, who are unable to obtain admission in China's premier universities, turn their back on other public universities and instead attend private universities in their country. It finds that their parents capitalize on their privileged guanxi (connections) to send their children to private universities and then study abroad to secure a generational reproduction of their class status and mobility. The Chinese new middle class families look upon joint-partnership private universities as the stepping stone for overseas study. In addition, this article examines how extant Western class theories, including Weberian, Neo-Weberian, and Bourdieuan theories, cannot provide an adequate account of class formation and the generational stratification in present-day China. To explain this reproduction of class in contemporary China, this paper explores how and why the Maoist social institutions of danwei (work unit) and hukou (household registration) still matter in post-reform China in determining middle class's life chance. Seen in this light, the progenies of cadres and skilled professionals are the main beneficiaries of

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