

SOCIAL CAPITAL, SOCIAL SUPPORT, AND STRATIFICATION

An Analysis of
the Sociology of Nan Lin

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There are moments in the order of things during which scholarly thinking takes a turn. What was a productive way of looking at things is put aside in transition to something new. The transition is occasionally based on solid evidence, sometimes an escape from boredom, perhaps too often it is a group of scholars hoping to find identity by institutionalizing new words. Whatever the reason for it, the transition puts a spotlight on individual character. The conservative hangs onto the old, eventually peeled away at death's door. The faddish jumps on the new, nervously eyeing the horizon for the next something new. Thankfully there are also people — in some circles known as entrepreneurs, or creatives, or network brokers — for whom transition is an opportunity to mix bits of the old and new to better understand the world.

This book is about transitions associated with the spread of social network imagery in sociology. The thread that holds together our selected transitions is a network broker who was protagonist in all three: Nan Lin. Chapter 2 is about the entry of social network imagery into theories of stratification and achievement, with advantage termed social capital, a complement to the earlier focus on human capital. Drawing on his background in social networks and stratification, Nan was early to bring network data into the Blau and Duncan occupational achievement models dominant during the 1970s. The heart of Lin's synthesis is that people are defined by their position in macro-structure (rather than the micro-structure around them), and relationships are presumed to be portals through which one person has rights to the

resources of the other. To provide a sense of the transition as Nan dealt with it, we include as Chapters 3 and 4 two of Nan's most cited papers on networks and social capital in their original. Chapter 5 is about the entry of social network imagery into theories of social support, expanding clinical psychology into social psychology. Drawing on his background in social networks, and sharing interests with his wife Alice, a senior administrator in the New York State social services organization, Nan was early to bring network data into research on social support. From his social capital image of a person's network providing access to needed resources, Nan crafted a unique perspective for conceptualizing, measuring, and modeling social support. Here again, to provide a sense of the transition Nan experienced, we include as Chapters 6 and 7 two of Nan's most cited papers on social support in their original. Chapter 8 is about the renovation of Chinese sociology from disdained ideology to admired social science. A fond visitor to his homeland China, Nan was articulate, charming, and generous in the right place at the right time to bring state-of-the-art sociology to China when China was ready to listen. With Nan's background in social networks informing his view of sociology, it is no surprise that social network imagery is prominent in contemporary Chinese sociology. Beginning with Blau and Duncan's model as a comparative baseline for rigorous empirical research, Nan expanded into indigenous images such as "local state socialism," "centrally managed capitalism," and "sentiment-based *guanxi*." Again to illustrate Nan's synthesis, we include as Chapters 9 and 10 two of Nan's most cited China papers.

The book speaks to the general audience of people interested in social capital, social support, or stratification — and people interested in academic entrepreneurs like Nan. The book is also aimed at the many students and colleagues who have experienced Nan's patient generosity. This is not the place for a greeting-card display of sentimentality. We leave that to you, if you are interested. Ask any student or

colleague of Nan's what it was like to work with him. Each has his or her story sure to induce a smile on any but the most truculent. Mr. Burt's stories come from his experience as a college and graduate student with Nan in the 1970s. Mr. Bian's come from his experience as a graduate student with Nan in the 1980s and early 1990s. Ms. Song's come from her experience as a graduate student with Nan in the 2000s. One and all experienced Nan as a turning point in their lives. We close in Chapter 11 with Nan's reflections on what he learned making the contributions detailed in the preceding chapters.