Article

Leisure class stratification among Chinese residents: Evidence from the CGSS

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Abstract: Amidst rapid societal progression in China, leisure has become a crucial component of Chinese residents' daily lives. However, the unequal distribution of social resources across social strata significantly affects their leisure patterns and practices. This study utilizes data from the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) spanning 2006, 2010, and 2017, analyzing the frequency and types of leisure engagement as dependent variables through mean, variance, and OLS regression analyses. The findings indicate considerable leisure stratification within Chinese society, both subjectively and objectively; there are significant differences in leisure participation frequency and type among different social strata, particularly in developed leisure activities. The conclusions of this study may aid in understanding the current state of leisure class stratification among Chinese residents, while its practical recommendations could help mitigate the issues of leisure stratification within Chinese society.

Keywords: leisure class stratification; China; measurement

1. Introduction

Leisure, as an essential part of modern life, has become an integral aspect of fulfilling the desire for a better quality of living among the populace [1]. Societally, leisure activities are closely connected with 'human modernization' and the enrichment of people's spiritual lives, influencing work, lifestyle, culture, and broader social activities in various forms [2–5]. Leisure is recognized as a fundamental human need and right, serving as a necessary means for recovery, development, and self-actualization [6–9], with governments and social organizations viewing it as a pivotal tool for social integration [10]. However, these roles as "means" and "tools" presuppose that leisure is sufficiently and equitably distributed. If leisure allocation within society and groups is inadequate and imbalanced, the foundation for these roles is undermined.

China's rapid productivity growth has generated immense material wealth, indicated by the consistent increase in residents' per capita disposable income, bolstering urban and rural consumption capabilities and leading to a continuous improvement in consumption levels and the enhancement of consumption structure [11]. People are increasingly liberated from production to enjoy more free time and are becoming more aware of the importance of life quality. The shift from survival to development-oriented lifestyles has raised the recognition of the significance of leisure for personal growth [1]. Nevertheless, studies suggest China faces challenges like "class solidification" and "narrow social mobility channels," with an increasing characteristic of social closure and a stronger intergenerational transmission of class

position or occupational status [12]. In this context, disparities in leisure practices among different social strata in China may exist, with growing public concern and sensitivity toward leisure inequality [11,13]. This study aims to investigate the current state of leisure class stratification in Chinese society using CGSS historical data and, based on this analysis, proposes practical strategies to address this stratification.

2. Literature review

As a critical avenue for understanding societal inequality [14,15], social stratification is perceived as the hierarchical differentiation among members and groups in society based on the varying possession of social resources [12]. Within a specific social system, an individual's social status and their access to resources (political, economic, cultural, etc.) dictate their leisure practices [10]. Therefore, inequalities within the realm of leisure are directly and closely linked to social class differentiation [16,17]. From Weber's "life chances" to Veblen's "leisure class," and Bourdieu's "cultural tastes," it's evident that the unequal distribution of societal resources among different classes directly affects people's leisure styles and practices [18–20]. Moreover, many social inequalities stem from class-based disparities in resource ownership [21–23]; the greater the level of social class stratification, the more severe the inequality in leisure [24,25]. China currently faces severe issues regarding social stratification [12], and while there has been extensive research on class differentiation in income and education, class disparities in the sphere of leisure—a domain of spiritual and cultural life—have not been adequately studied [13].

2.1. Concept of leisure class stratification

Currently, there is no clear concept of leisure class stratification in academia. As previously noted, the issue of leisure class stratification essentially relates to social stratification within the leisure domain. Research on this topic dates back to the early 21st century, when scholars began to focus on social stratification in Chinese leisure [26,27]. In their studies, scholars have utilized concepts such as leisure class gap [28,29], leisure stratification [30], and leisure class hierarchy [31] to describe the social class stratification issues in leisure. Given the growing trend of leisure class disparities and stratification in contemporary Chinese society [32,33], and the tendency to conceptualize social stratification issues like income, education, and housing in terms of class differences [34], this study employs the concept of "leisure class stratification" to encapsulate the social stratification phenomenon in the leisure domain. Leisure class stratification is defined as the divergence in leisure participation among different social classes.

2.2. Measures of leisure class stratification

In terms of measuring leisure class stratification, existing literature indicates that some scholars have focused on a single aspect of leisure participation, such as time [27,35] or expenditure [36,37]. Others have measured leisure participation in terms of type and frequency [30,32,33], with the majority of such studies utilizing

secondary data, particularly from the CGSS database. A few researchers have considered type, frequency, duration, and expenses of leisure participation [31], predominantly using primary data. Literature comparison reveals that the source of data significantly impacts the content measured in leisure class stratification, with secondary data limiting the dimensions of leisure participation that can be measured, while primary data does not face this constraint. However, primary data collection has its own drawbacks, such as difficulties in obtaining data and weak sample representativeness.

2.3. Measurement methods for leisure class stratification

The current methods for measuring leisure class stratification primarily include two approaches: aggregation and latent class analysis (LCA). The aggregation method groups survey samples based on certain class division criteria, using the average leisure participation of each group as a measure and depicting the extent of stratification through comparative means [38,39]. LCA, on the other hand, employs a latent category variable to explain the correlation between leisure participation indicators, estimating the correlations through this latent variable [11,40]. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses: the aggregation method is highly operational with clear results that show the degree of stratification, but it overlooks the influence of variables like gender, age, and education level. LCA retains more sample information and provides detailed dimensions of leisure participation within categories, though it less directly displays the extent of stratification between classes. This study attempts to integrate the strengths of both methods to measure the current state of leisure class stratification among Chinese residents.

2.4. Assessment of leisure class stratification among Chinese residents

Current literature suggests that while early studies recognized a trend of social stratification in leisure activities, they did not find significant disparities in certain aspects of leisure participation among residents [41,26]. Apart from few exceptions [38,42], more recent research indicates a clear stratification among Chinese residents in terms of types, frequency, duration, and expenditure of leisure activities [43–45]. Some scholars note that despite the evident stratification in leisure activities across different classes, there is no unified pattern to this disparity [39], pointing out, for example, that lower social classes may have more leisure time and that the frequency of leisure activities does not show a regular pattern across classes [31]. In summary, while the conclusion that leisure activities are showing a trend of class stratification is credible, debates continue over specifics due to differences in the data, methods, and criteria for class division used by researchers.

Given the state of research, there is still controversy over the current assessment of leisure class stratification among Chinese residents, mainly stemming from the various data sources, methodologies, and class division criteria used in studies. This research will utilize historical data and, by controlling for non-class factors, undertake a more precise measurement of the current state of leisure class stratification among Chinese society's residents, and explore the reasons for the emergence of the leisure class stratification.

3. Theoretical foundations and research hypotheses

The theoretical foundations of this study are grounded in Bourdieu's theory of cultural stratification, which posits that social class is delineated through cultural orientation and characteristics, emphasizing differences in cultural tastes, lifestyles, and economic disparities. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital ranges from minor attitudes and habits to significant lifestyle choices and educational attainment. Variations in cultural capital position different groups advantageously or disadvantageously within specific fields, leading to the perception of certain cultures as high or low. Social class and cultural capital are intertwined, with class determining habits and lifestyles, which in turn shape individualized lifestyles and the cultural activities individuals engage in, thereby differentiating their social status [46].

Bourdieu contends that social class and cultural interests align [47], with the dominant class, possessing abundant economic and cultural resources, pursuing high-class interests, making their cultural participation superior to that of the middle and ordinary classes. In contrast, the ordinary class, limited by resource access, tends to engage in more general daily leisure activities. The middle class, situated between the dominant and ordinary classes, exhibits ambiguous cultural participation, seeking to differentiate themselves from the ordinary class while aspiring to emulate the dominant class through selective cultural activities. The CGSS survey reveals that Chinese educational attainment spans 13 levels, ranging from "no education" to "postgraduate and above", with distinct cultural interests characterizing each level.

Based on this analysis, Bourdieu suggests a positive correlation between social class and cultural interest, leading to the first hypothesis:

H1: There is significant class differentiation in the frequency and type of leisure participation among Chinese residents.

Bourdieu also emphasizes the pivotal role of family cultural capital in child development, noting that family structure and parental education significantly influence children's cognitive, emotional, and personality development [48]. Studies like Liang Xingmei's confirm that family economic, cultural, and occupational levels influence parenting styles, which exhibit class differences [49]. Cultural capital, as a form of segmented capital, reflects an individual's social hierarchy and impacts the social class of children. Cultural stratification theory suggests that leisure cultural tastes can achieve class reproduction through intergenerational transmission, highlighting the importance of family background in cultural capital accumulation [50]. This leads to the second hypothesis:

H2: The intergenerational transmission mechanism influences the class differentiation of children's leisure participation, with higher parental education levels correlating with higher levels of children's leisure participation.

4. Method

4.1. Data source

This research utilizes data from the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) for the years 2006, 2010, and 2017. The CGSS is one of China's earliest nationwide,

comprehensive, and continuous academic survey projects, systematically collecting cross-sectional survey data across various layers of society including communities, families, and individuals. The rich stratification of research levels, large sample sizes, and the facilitation of longitudinal comparisons are some of its strengths, which broaden the scope and sample scale of the study. This provides a wealth of information and a more comprehensive observation, enhancing the reliability and explicability of the research findings.

Taking into account the completeness and rationality of the variables involved, samples with missing data on the required variables were excluded for each year of the study. This process resulted in a sample size of 9956 for the subjective class stratification and 6635 for the objective class stratification for the year 2006, with 6042 samples for the study of mechanisms influencing leisure participation. For 2010, the sample sizes were 10,314 for subjective class stratification and 7019 for objective class stratification, with 8087 samples for studying the mechanisms. In 2017, the samples consisted of 10,604 for subjective class stratification and 6559 for objective class stratification, with 6786 samples for the investigation of the influencing mechanisms of leisure participation.

4.2. Variable selection and processing

4.2.1. Dependent variable

Leisure participation among residents is measured by two dimensions: frequency and types of activities. The data for these variables are derived from a survey question asking if respondents regularly engaged in 12 leisure activities during the past year. The frequency options range from "daily," "several times a week," "several times a month," "several times a year or less," to "never," coded originally from 1 (daily) to 5 (never). For analytical convenience, these options are recoded from 5 (daily) to 1 (never), with higher scores indicating more frequent participation. The average score for the 12 leisure activities indicates the leisure participation frequency for each valid sample. Moreover, by coding a frequency score of 1 as 0 and scores of 2–5 as 1, and summing these binary scores, we derive the number of leisure activity types each respondent partakes in, representing their leisure participation type score.

4.2.2. Independent variables

Subjective social class is derived from individuals' perception of their social status, which may be influenced by personal values, self-identity, and social comparisons. The survey question "Where do you think you stand in society?" is used to determine subjective social class, which is then categorized into five classes from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), with the lowest class serving as the reference category for dummy variable creation in the regression model.

Objective social class (EGP class) bases on economic, occupational, and educational indicators. EGP classification divides occupations into 10 categories according to employment relations and skill levels in the labor market, with higher values indicating higher social class. Parental education level is categorized following the standard into four levels ranging from elementary or below to college and above. Occupation of parents when the respondent was 14 and the type of

household registration of the respondent are used as categorical variables. Yearly income is the natural logarithm of the individual's and family's total income in the year prior to the survey year. Urban-rural status coded as 1 for urban and 0 for rural.

4.2.3. Control variables

Gender and age are significant factors influencing leisure activity preferences. Education level, marital status, health status, availability of a car, and family composition also greatly impact leisure choices. Therefore, control variables include gender, age, ethnicity, religion, education level, car ownership, marital status, and number of children. Age is calculated by subtracting the birth year from the survey year, with the sample range between 18 and 70 years old. Health status is based on the question "How do you rate your current health status?" scored from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating better health. Respondent's education level is categorized the same as parental education level. Marital status is a categorical variable divided into unmarried, married, divorced, and widowed.

4.3. Descriptive statistical analysis of variables

In the three-year sample, the gender ratio of respondents is relatively balanced. The subjective social class survey from 2006 showed a pyramid structure, with fewer individuals at higher levels, indicating significant social inequality at the time. By 2010 and 2017, this structure changed noticeably. In 2010, the middle-class respondents accounted for 40.54% of the total sample, while in 2017, they made up 41.83% and 34.04% respectively. There was a marked increase in the middle and lower-middle classes, with a decrease in the lower class, suggesting a "bulging middle," a positive trend towards shared prosperity. Regarding educational levels, the largest proportion of respondents had only elementary education or below, highlighting the need for improvement in China's overall educational attainment. Car ownership among respondents was only 11.71% of the total sample in 2010, but by 2017, this figure had increased to 31.38%, reflecting China's economic development and the improvement of living standards. With the progression of time, both individual and family annual incomes showed a trend of doubling, indicating an enhancement in the economic status of the residents. Please see **Table 1** for detailed content.

Table 1. Descriptive statistical analysis of variables.

Variables	Range of values	2006 (*N* = 9946）	2010 (*N* = 10,314）	2017 (*N* = 10,604)
Gender	Male	4587	4926	4949
	Female	5359	5388	5655
Social class	Upper	125	76	64
	Upper middle	331	496	552
	Middle	2607	4182	4436
	Lower middle	2867	3516	3610
	Lower	4016	2004	1431

Table 1. (*Continued*).

Variables	Range of values	2006 (*N* = 9946）	2010 (*N* = 10,314）	2017 (*N* = 10,604)
Marital status	Single	1306	1086	1431
	Married	8103	8529	8351
	Divorced	169	234	274
	Widowed	368	465	584
Education level	Elementary	3217	3357	3248
	Junior school	3312	3198	3127
	High school	2236	2068	1995
	College	1181	1691	2234
Car ownership	Yes	-	1208	3328
	No	-	9106	7276
Age	[18, 70]	42.47	44.49	47.17
Personal income	[0, 6,000,000]	8057.68	19,857.10	4205.09
Family income	[0, 9,998,000]	24,144.55	43,437.95	82,715.85

4.4. Study strategies

4.4.1. OLS regression analysis

The frequency of residents' leisure participation is used as the dependent variable and subjective social class as the independent variable, to determine the differentiation in leisure participation frequency across subjective social classes. When leisure participation type is the dependent variable, the analysis reveals the subjective class differentiation in leisure participation types during the study year. Additionally, respondents' occupations are converted to their objective social class EGP, and the above analysis is repeated to determine the objective class differentiation in Chinese residents' leisure participation frequency and types.

4.4.2. Variance analysis

The regression analysis measures residents' leisure participation types using 12 leisure items without further categorization. For a clearer understanding of the differences in leisure participation types across social classes, this study classifies the 12 leisure activities into developmental, entertainment, and social interaction types based on the nature of the activity, as shown in **Table 2**. The participation levels in the three types of leisure activities are calculated for different years and social classes, alongside the variance within the same leisure activity type across different classes, to measure disparities in participation levels. This also provides a theoretical basis for proposing practical strategies.

Table 2. Classification of leisure activity types.

Category of leisure activities	Leisure activities
Developmental leisure activities	Reading books, newspapers, magazines; participating in cultural activities; engaging in physical exercise; doing handicrafts
Entertainment leisure activities	Watching TV or DVDs; going to the movies; shopping; listening to music at home; watching sports events; surfing the internet
Social interaction leisure activities	Gathering with relatives; socializing with friends

5. Results

5.1. Subjective social stratification and leisure diversification

The regression data from **Table 3** on the frequency of leisure participation among Chinese residents according to subjective social stratification reveals that there is a stratification phenomenon in leisure participation frequency. There are discernible differences between different social strata. For residents in the lower, lower-middle, middle, and upper-middle classes, leisure participation frequency increases with social status. However, the highest social stratum exhibits the lowest frequency of leisure participation. This may be attributed to the diversity of leisure activities; the secondary data used in this study aimed to understand the general trends of leisure participation, hence the survey included 12 popular leisure activities. It did not cover certain unique, niche, and not yet widespread activities like golf, skiing, or diving, which may be preferred by those in higher strata. Additionally, as the higher social strata represent a smaller proportion of the total population, there are fewer samples from this group in the study, which might reduce the measured frequency of leisure participation for the upper class. Overall, it can be suggested that the frequency of leisure participation among Chinese residents increases with social status.

Table 3. Subjective social stratification of leisure participation.

Variables	2006	2010	2017
Lower class = 0			
Lower-middle class	0.178 (0.013)***	0.073 (0.012)***	0.077 (0.013)***
Middle class	0.266 (0.014)***	0.169 (0.012)***	0.146 (0.013)***
Upper-middle class	0.358 (0.031)***	0.274 (0.023)***	0.183 (0.023)***
Upper class	0.012 (0.048)	0.204 (0.052)**	0.015 (0.015)***
Health status	0.006 (0.008)	0.025 (0.004)***	0.058 (0.005)***
Car ownership		0.164 (0.014)***	0.116 (0.010)***
Number of minor children		–0.066 (0.005)***	0.000 (0.002)
Educational attainment	0.374 (0.006)***	0.257 (0.005)***	0.243 (0.005)***
Marital status (Single = 0)			
Married	–0.310 (0.019)***	–0.172 (0.017)***	–0.079 (0.015)***
Divorced	–0.221 (0.045)***	–0.167 (0.033)***	–0.041 (0.031)
Widowed	–0.308 (0.036)***	–0.142 (0.028)***	–0.148 (0.026)***
Gender (Female = 0)	0.032 (0.011)**	–0.046 (0.009)***	–0.082 (0.009)***
Age	–0.002 (0.001)***	–0.001 (0.000)**	–0.003 (0.000)***
Ethnicity	0.102 (0.022)***	0.075 (0.016)***	0.045 (0.017)**
Non-religious = 0	0.056 (0.016)***	0.054 (0.014)***	0.015 (0.015)
Constant	1.400 (0.042)***	1.640 (0.033)***	1.624 (0.034)***

Note: $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, and $***p < 0.001$.

Similarly, as indicated by the data from **Table 4** on the types of leisure activities, there is a clear stratification in the types of leisure activities participated in

by residents. Apart from the lowest frequency of varied leisure activities among the upper stratum, there is a positive correlation between social status and the diversity of leisure activities participated in by the residents from the lower to upper-middle classes; as the social stratum raises, so does the diversity of leisure activities engage in.

Table 4. Subjective social stratification of leisure activity types.

Variables	2006	2010	2017
Lower class = 0			
Lower-middle class	0.960 (0.063)***	0.476 (0.061)***	0.556 (0.062)***
Middle class	1.360 (0.066)***	0.767 (0.061)***	0.785 (0.062)***
Upper-middle class	1.776 (0.146)***	1.221 (0.112)***	0.838 (0.108)***
Upper class	–0.029 (0.230)	0.920 (0.255)**	0.677 (0.276)*
Health status	–0.007 (0.039)	0.117 (0.021)***	0.279 (0.022)***
Car ownership		0.815 (0.070)***	0.645 (0.050)***
Number of minor children		–0.336 (0.027)***	0.005 (0.009)
Educational attainment	1.614 (0.029)***	1.292 (0.024)***	1.226 (0.023)***
Marital status (Single = 0)			
Married	–1.157 (0.090)***	–0.287 (0.083)**	–0.140 (0.075)
Divorced	–0.651 (0.212)**	–0.238 (0.162)	–0.011 (0.148)
Widowed	–1.067 (.169)***	–0.326 (0.141)*	–0.434 (0.123)***
Gender (Female = 0)	0.214 (0.052)***	–0.271 (0.044)***	–0.382 (0.043)***
Age	–0.021 (0.002)***	–0.017 (0.002)***	–0.030 (0.002)***
Ethnicity	0.351 (0.104)**	0.388 (0.077)***	0.439 (0.083)***
Non-religious = 0	0.297 (0.076)***	0.173 (0.068)*	0.043 (0.073)
Constant	2.367 (0.200)***	3.907 (0.165)***	4.143 (0.165)***

Note: *$p < 0.05$, **p < 0.01, and ***$p < 0.001$.

5.2. Objective class differentiation and leisure diversification

Tables 5 and **6** present the regression results for the objective social class differentiation in the leisure participation degree and types among Chinese residents, respectively. The results indicate a positive influence of objective social class on the degree of leisure participation. An increase in objective class level correlates with higher frequency and diversity of leisure activities. In this study, the objective social class is classified according to residents' occupations. Hence, there is a positive relationship between residents' occupational status and both the frequency and variety of their leisure engagements. The higher the occupational rank of the residents, the more frequent and diverse are the leisure activities they partake in. In summary, there is a clear class differentiation among Chinese residents in terms of both the frequency and types of leisure participation. As the subjective social class increases, both the frequency and diversity of leisure participation improve, demonstrating a typical class stratification pattern in the leisure activities of Chinese residents. Assumption H1 is confirmed.

Table 5. Frequency of leisure participation by objective social stratification.

Variables	2006	2010	2017
EGP	0.032 (0.003)***	0.037 (0.002)***	0.037 (0.002)***
Gender	0.045 (0.014)***	–0.016 (0.010)	–0.058 (0.011)***
Age	–0.004 (0.001)***	–0.006 (0.001)***	–0.007 (0.001)***
Ethnicity	0.145 (0.031)**	0.071 (0.017)***	0.016 (0.020)
Religion	0.062 (0.021)***	0.041 (0.016)*	0.020 (0.018)
Health status	0.025 (0.011)	0.021 (0.005)***	0.043 (0.006)***
Car ownership		0.132 (0.016)***	0.110 (0.012)***
Number of minor children			0.
Education level	0.303 (0.009)***	0.209 (0.007)***	0.161 (0.006)***
Marital status (Single = 0)			
Married	–0.305 (0.024)***	–0.167 (0.019)***	–0.047 (0.018)**
Divorced	–0.305 (0.053)**	–0.172 (0.038)***	–0.026 (0.037)
Widowed	–0.318 (0.048)***	–0.159 (0.037)***	–0.121 (0.035)**
Constant	1.937 (0.063)***	2.192 (0.045)***	2.300 (0.046)***

Note: $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, and $***p < 0.001$.

Table 6. Types of leisure participation by objective social stratification.

Variables	2006	2010	2017
EGP	0.127 (0.013)***	0.177 (0.009)***	0.154 (0.009)***
Gender	0.225 (0.067)***	–0.319 (0.052)**	–0.192 (0.052)***
Age	–0.030 (0.003)***	–0.035 (0.003)***	–0.045 (0.003)***
Ethnicity	0.541 (0.147)**	0.365 (0.086)***	0.343 (0.097)***
Religion	0.319 (0.101)***	0.100 (0.081)	0.054 (0.090)
Health status	0.075 (0.051)	0.076 (0.025)**	0.143 (0.028)***
Car ownership		0.652 (0.081)***	0.522 (0.060)***
Education Level	1.311 (0.041)***	1.073 (0.033)***	.867 (0.031)***
Marital Status (Single = 0)			
Married	–1.213 (0.024)***	–0.367 (0.096)***	–0.024 (0.086)
Divorced	–1.186 (0.249)**	–0.390 (0.193)*	0.141 (0.183
Widowed	–1.271 (0.229)***	–0.654 (0.185)***	–0.338 (0.171)*
Constant	4.968 (0.298)***	6.591 (0.226)***	7.094 (0.225)***

Note: $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, and $***p < 0.001$.

5.3. Characteristics of leisure class stratification

Further classification of residents' leisure activities divides twelve types into three categories: self-development, entertainment, and social interaction. Participation levels for each category were calculated across different years and social strata to measure residents' leisure preferences, as shown in **Table 7.**

In 2006, lower, lower-middle, and upper-class residents showed higher involvement in entertainment activities, while middle and upper-middle-class residents preferred self-development activities. All social strata had generally low participation in social interaction activities. As social strata rose, so did participation

in all three types of leisure activities. Variance analysis showed significant differences in participation in self-development activities across social strata, with smaller differences in social interaction activities.

Table 7. Leisure activity participation by social strata.

		Self-development	Entertainment	Social interaction
2006	Lower class	1.92	2.66	1.53
	Lower-middle class	2.47	2.63	1.54
	Middle class	2.7	2.64	1.57
	Upper-middle class	2.79	2.17	1.67
	Upper class	1.91	2.74	1.79
	Variance	0.42	0.23	0.11
2010	Lower class	1.59	2.16	2.07
	Lower-middle class	1.74	2.35	2.21
	Middle class	1.92	2.55	2.34
	Upper-middle class	2.2	2.76	2.51
	Upper class	2.25	2.68	2.41
	Variance	0.29	0.25	0.17
2017	Lower class	1.61	2.26	2.04
	Lower-middle class	1.79	2.46	2.24
	Middle class	2.01	2.66	2.36
	Upper-middle class	2.21	2.76	2.45
	Upper class	1.99	2.48	2.3
	Variance	0.23	0.19	0.15

By 2010, the lower, lower-middle, and upper-class residents maintained high involvement in entertainment activities. Middle and upper-middle-class residents' preferences shifted from self-development to entertainment activities. In 2010, social interaction participation increased compared to 2006, with residents across all strata more engaged in social interactions than in self-development activities. The variance indicated that the differences in participation in self-development activities decreased, while those in social interaction activities increased compared to 2006.

Similar to 2010, in 2017, residents across all strata were more inclined toward entertainment activities, with continued low participation in self-development activities, indicating stable preferences from 2010 to 2017. Except for the upper class, participation increased with higher social strata. The variance analysis suggested that the differences in participation across all three types of leisure activities narrowed compared to 2010.

The analysis indicates that with rising social strata, there's an increase in overall leisure participation. In 2006, factors like inadequate transportation, lower economic levels, and underdeveloped information technology led people to seek leisure for entertainment or self-improvement. However, with advancements in transportation and information technology, social interaction has become essential, increasing participation in social leisure activities over time.

5.4. Intergenerational transmission of leisure class differentiation

5.4.1. Frequency of leisure participation

From the 2006 data of the study on the formation mechanism of class differentiation of residents' leisure participation, it can be seen that in the intergenerational transmission mechanism, the father's education level and the mother's education level have a significant positive impact on the frequency of their children's leisure participation, and the higher the parents' education level, the frequency of their children's leisure participation will also increase, while the data from the study in 2010 also This view can be confirmed, the study of 2017 data can be seen that the father's education level has a positive effect on the frequency of leisure participation of their children, while the mother's education level has a significant negative effect on the leisure participation of their children, that is to say, the higher the level of education of the mother, the frequency of their children's leisure participation will be reduced.

5.4.2. Types of leisure participation

In 2006 (as shown in **Table 8**), mothers' education level had a greater impact on the types of leisure participation of their children than fathers' education level, and the higher the mothers' education level, the richer the types of leisure activities their children participated in. In 2010 (as shown in **Table 9**), there was a significant positive effect of both the father's education and the mother's education on the type of leisure participation of their children. In 2017 (as shown in **Table 10**), there was a positive effect of the father's level of education on the type of leisure participation of his children.

Table 8. Mechanisms shaping the stratification of the population's leisure participation in 2006.

		Dependent variable = frequency of leisure participation	Dependent variable = type of leisure participation
(Constant)		0.172 (0.083)**	−3.368 (0.406） ***
Control variable	Sex ($F = 0$)	0.078 (0.013)***	0.438 (0.063)***
	Age	−0.004 (0.001)***	−0.028 (0.003)***
	Ethnicity	0.075 (0.025)***	0.240 (0.124)*
	Religion	0.052 (0.018)***	0.290 (0.091)***
	Marital status (Unmarried = 0)		
	Married	−0.166 (0.045)***	−0.550 (0.223)**
	Divorced	−0.059 (0.071)	−0.182 (0.347)
	Widowed	−0.162 (0.054)***	−0.413 (0.266)
	Health status	0.016 (0.009)	0.068 (0.044)
	Educational attainment	0.207 (0.008)***	0.882 (0.039)***
Intergenerational transmission mechanisms	Father's education level	0.043 (0.015)***	0.111 (0.075)
	Mother's education	0.099 (0.024)***	0.490 (0.116)***

In 2006 and 2010, when the level of economic development was still low and the status of women in the workplace was not yet high, mothers would have more time to spend on the family and accompany the growth of their children than fathers,

and since the level of education of an individual affects his or her own lifestyle as well as the way of education and method of educating his or her children, the mother's lifestyle and education are more likely to affect the leisure participation of her children. The mother's lifestyle and education are more likely to affect her children's leisure participation frequency and type of leisure participation. With the progress and development of the times, more and more fathers pay attention to the importance of the family, realise the indispensable role they play in their children's growth, and actively and positively guide their children to participate in leisure activities [51]. Therefore, the father's education level further affects the level of children's leisure participation.

Thus, H2 is confirmed: the intergenerational transmission mechanism affects the stratification of children's leisure participation, and the higher the level of education of parents, the higher the level of leisure participation of their children.

Table 9. Mechanisms shaping the stratification of the population's leisure participation in 2010.

		Dependent variable = frequency of leisure participation	Dependent variable = type of leisure participation
(Constant)		0.913 (0.055)***	1.081 (0.272)***
Control variable	Sex (*F* = 0)	−0.043 (0.010)***	−0.264 (0.050)***
	Age	−0.001 (0.000)***	−0.019 (0.002)***
	Ethnicity	0.018 (0.017)	0.094 (0.084)
	Religion	0.019 (0.015)	0.010 (0.077)
	Marital status (Unmarried = 0)		
	Married	−0.156 (0.020)***	−0.337 (0.100)***
	Divorced	−0.157 (0.036)***	−0.344 (0.180)**
	Widowed	−0.094 (0.032)***	−0.288 (0.160)**
	Health status	0.031 (0.005)***	0.135 (0.023)***
	Educational attainment	0.191 (0.006)***	00.976 (0.030)***
Intergenerational transmission mechanisms	Father's education level	0.098 (0.016)***	0.527 (0.081)***
	Mother's education	−0.029 (0.006)***	−0.145 (0.029)***

Table 10. Mechanisms shaping the stratification of the population's leisure participation in 2017.

		Dependent variable = frequency of leisure participation	Dependent variable = type of leisure participation
(Constant)		1.628 (0.082)***	3.502 (0.395)***
Control variable	Sex (*F* = 0)	−0.075 (0.011)***	−0.345 (0.052)***
	Age	−0.005 (0.000)***	−0.042 (0.003)***
	Ethnicity	−0.006 (0.020)	0.239 (0.095)**
	Religion	−0.017 (0.018)	−0.135 (0.089)
	Marital status (Unmarried = 0)		
	Married	−0.045 (0.021)**	−0.040 (0.099)
	Divorced	−0.072 (0.039)*	−0.235 (0.190)
	Widowed	−0.105 (0.032)***	−0.197 (0.155)
	Health status	0.052 (0.005)***	0.171 (0.026)***

Table 10. (*Continued*).

		Dependent variable = frequency of leisure participation	Dependent variable = type of leisure participation
Intergenerational transmission mechanisms	Educational attainment	0.085 (0.012)***	0.428 (0.060)***
	Father's education level	0.618 (0.007)***	0.863 (0.033)***
	Mother's education	0.024 (0.009)**	0.082 (0.045)*

6. Discussion

6.1. Class differentiation of Chinese residents in the field of leisure

Research indicates that leisure inequality exists among Chinese residents, with clear class divisions in leisure participation frequency and types. These findings are consistent with previous studies [32,33,37], supporting the homology theory that leisure differences correspond to social stratification, with cultural tastes distinguishing class levels [39,42]. Higher classes tend to engage in leisure activities that match their tastes and status.

In terms of participation frequency, residents from higher social strata have increased leisure involvement. Lower-class individuals see leisure as a way to restore energy after work, while higher-class residents use leisure time to improve life quality, leading to more frequent leisure activities [7,41]. Upper-class residents often use leisure as a means to flaunt wealth and status. Regarding the types of leisure activities, a class divide is evident, with upper-class residents preferring 'medium' or 'high-brow' leisure activities [30]. As a result, upper-class individuals in the study show less diversity in their leisure activities. However, there is a positive correlation between social strata and leisure activity diversity for the other classes, indicating that with higher social status, residents are inclined to participate in a broader range of leisure activities.

The study categorizes twelve leisure activities into three types: self-improvement, entertainment, and social interaction. Higher social strata participate more in self-improvement and social activities, highlighting a need to improve overall leisure quality with the proliferation of internet-based entertainment leading to increased engagement in passive leisure activities. Transport and IT developments have made social interaction a vital aspect of life, thus increasing participation in social leisure activities.

6.2. Differences in the transmission and inheritance of parental education affect the stratification of children's leisure

The "intergenerational transmission" mechanism formed by the transmission and inheritance of factors such as differences in parental education and educational styles between generations is one of the most important mechanisms for the stratification of residents' leisure participation. The education level of parents has a significant impact on the frequency and type of leisure participation of their children. The intergenerational transmission mechanism states that within a society or family, the transmission of specific beliefs, values, economic resources, and social status can take place in a variety of ways, including socialization, family culture, education,

economic resources, etc. In the intergenerational transmission mechanism, parents' education level has a significant impact on the frequency and type of leisure participation of their children. In the intergenerational transmission mechanism, parents will influence their children's values and beliefs through their own behaviour and family education. Highly educated parents will choose more democratic education methods, while low-educated parents often adopt negative education methods such as indulgence and punishment [35]. Children's human capital comes partly from parents, and highly educated parents invest in their children's education, environment and other aspects by virtue of the resources they have, and influence their children's attitudes and lifestyles through family education. At the same time, compared to fathers and mothers, mothers' lifestyles and education are more likely to influence the frequency and type of their children's leisure participation. With the progress and development of the times, more and more fathers pay attention to the importance of the family, realize the indispensable role they play in their children's growth, and guide their children's participation in leisure activities in a positive way. Therefore, the educational level of fathers further affects the level of their children's leisure participation.

6.3. Implications and practical suggestions

In today's society, the polarization of the leisure class has become a social phenomenon that cannot be ignored. This differentiation is not only reflected in the differences in leisure activities and time among different economic classes, but also has a deeper impact on social equality, cohesion and the health and well-being of the public. Firstly, the polarization of the leisure class has exacerbated socio-economic inequalities. The affluent class is able to enjoy more diverse and high-quality leisure activities, whereas the low-income group is limited by economic conditions to participate in less costly forms of leisure. This difference is not only reflected in the material aspect, but also deepens the social class divide in an invisible way. Secondly, the division of the leisure class has weakened social cohesion. Joint participation in leisure activities is an important way to promote communication and understanding among members of society. When people from different classes find it increasingly difficult to meet and communicate with each other in leisure activities, social cohesion will naturally weaken, and barriers and misunderstandings will increase. Furthermore, leisure activities have a significant impact on the physical and mental health of individuals. The polarization of the leisure class may lead to significant differences in the health status of different segments of the population. Those who lack access to quality leisure activities may face higher levels of stress and health problems, which not only affects individual well-being, but also poses challenges to the overall health of society. In the face of these challenges, the Government and social organizations should take effective measures to reduce the polarization of the leisure class. It is recommended that the Government should pay more attention to equity and inclusiveness in the planning and provision of leisure facilities and services, so as to ensure that people from different economic strata can enjoy quality leisure activities. At the same time, leisure activities at the community level should be encouraged and supported to promote exchanges and understanding

among different classes and enhance social cohesion. Through these measures, we will not only reduce the polarization of the leisure class, but also promote the overall harmony and well-being of society.

7. Conclusion

China's rapid economic growth has improved living standards, making leisure an essential part of residents' lives. However, class immobility and the unequal distribution of resources are affecting leisure practices. Using data from the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) of 2006, 2010, and 2017 and employing methods like ANOVA and OLS regression, this study comprehensively analyzed leisure class stratification, finding significant differences in leisure participation among different social classes, especially in self-improvement activities.

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