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The impact of family class differences on the higher education accessibility of offspring: Evidence from China

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ABSTRACT

This study constructs a logit model to examine the impact of family class differences on the higher education accessibility of offspring, and examines the moderating effect of the higher education expansion policy on the relationship between family class differences and higher education accessibility of offspring. The data was collected from 5181 valid samples who responded to 2018 Chinese General Social Survey Questionnaire. The results show that both overall higher education accessibility and high-quality higher education accessibility of the offspring of upper-class families and middle-class families are significantly higher than the offspring of bottom class families. This suggested that the offspring of upper-class families is more likely to receive high-quality higher education than other classes. It was also revealed that higher education expansion policy significantly increases the overall higher education and high-quality higher education accessibility of offspring from different class families, as a result of which overall and high-quality higher education are significantly less accessible to the offspring of the bottom-class families. This implies that the higher education expansion policy has further widened the gap between the offspring of the bottom-class families and the offspring of the upper-class families and the middle-class families. As a result, this study proposes to improve the higher education financial support policy for the offspring of bottom-class families and to develop special programs for the offspring of bottom-class families.

Contribution/Originality: This study is the first of its kind to examine the moderating effect of the higher education expansion policy in addition to constructing a logit model that takes the moderating effect into account to test the impact of family class differences on the accessibility of higher education and high-quality higher education of offspring, in order to contribute to the promotion of equity in higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the continuous advancement of industrialization and urbanization in China, new social classes are gradually emerging while a few traditional social classes are being gradually deconstructed. The Chinese society is becoming a society characterized by family class differentiation, which are becoming more and more obvious (Liu & Guo, 2020). In this context, access to high-quality higher education is considered to be the main channel for the bottom-class families to achieve upward mobility across the family hierarchy. Out of the fear of family class

solidification, statements such as "it is difficult to produce noble offspring from a poor family" and "educational injustice leads to class solidification" are rapidly becoming popular in the current society. Meanwhile, after more than 20 years of development since the implementation of the higher education expansion policy in 1999, the gross enrollment rate of higher education in China had reached 57.8% in 2021. According to Trow's (1999) criteria for classifying the stages of higher education development, China's higher education has entered the stage of universal development, and people's demand for higher education has also changed at this stage, from the initial pursuit of "going to university" to "going to high-quality university".

In the current context of the increasing class division of Chinese families and the continuous expansion of higher education, it is worth considering what impact family class differences and the higher education expansion policy have on the higher educational accessibility of the offspring. To this end, in order to ensure the fair development of higher education in China, this study constructs a logit model to examine the impact of family class differences on the accessibility of higher education of the offspring based on the data of the Chinese General Social Survey, and examines the moderating role of the higher education expansion policy in this process, hoping to contribute to the sustainable and fair development of higher education in China.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of the current higher education expansion policy, research in Chinese academia on the relationship between family class differences and the higher education accessibility of offspring can be broadly divided into two categories. One category of studies addresses the relationship between higher education expansion, a macro policy, and the higher education accessibility of offspring of different class families. A considerable number of Chinese scholars have conducted a series of studies on this topic, but there are still significant differences in the findings. Some scholars argue that the higher education expansion policy has significantly reduced the gap in higher education accessibility of offspring of different class families in China (Ding, 2006; Liu, 2006; Wang, 2013). However, some other scholars argue that the higher education expansion policy has not reduced the gap in higher education accessibility of offspring of different class families in China. Although the higher education expansion policy has generally increased the higher education accessibility of offspring of different class families, the gap in higher education accessibility of offspring of different class families has not been reduced, and higher education access of offspring of advantaged class families has always been more advantageous than that of disadvantaged class families (Li, 2010; Liu & Wu, 2021; Ma, 2019; Song, Liu, & Wang, 2019).

Another category of studies directly addresses the relationship between family class, a micro element, and the higher education accessibility of offspring. Fewer scholars have focused on this topic so far, and there are still significant differences in the findings. Based on the data from the Chinese General Social Survey in 2015, Xu and Fang (2020) finds that the higher the class of family is in, the more advantage of higher education accessibility of its offspring has, and higher education accessibility of the offspring of bottom-class families is always lower. In contrast, based on the data from Chinese College Student Learning and Development Tracking Survey in 2010-2013, Liu (2014) finds that offspring's learning ability and family origin significantly both affect their higher education accessibility, and always show that the effect of offspring's learning ability on their higher education accessibility is significantly stronger than that of their family origin.

A review of the literature reveals that the findings of current Chinese academic research on the relationship between the higher education expansion policy, family class differences and higher education accessibility of offspring are significantly different and even contradictory. In this regard, this study argues that the reason for this current state of research is that the current Chinese academic has not fully considered the linkage effect between family class differences and the higher education expansion policy when studying the impact of family class differences and the higher education expansion policy on the higher education accessibility of offspring. The impact of family class differences is always ignored when examining the impact of the higher education expansion policy on

the higher education accessibility of offspring. And the impact of the higher education expansion policy is always ignored when examining the impact of family class differences on the higher education accessibility of offspring. At the same time, it is important to note that the current Chinese academic has examined the impact of family class differences and the higher education expansion policy on the higher education accessibility of offspring only at an overall level, and has rarely considered the impact of family class differences and the higher education expansion policy on the high-quality higher education accessibility of offspring. In addition, most of the current research data in Chinese academia is from around 2013, which is relatively outdated and likely does not accurately reflect the development trend in recent years.

To this end, in order to enrich the existing research results and break the relative lack of research on the linkage effect between family class differences and the higher education expansion policy in Chinese academia. Based on the data from the newly published Chinese General Social Survey in 2018, this study attempts to examine the impact of family class differences on the overall higher education accessibility of offspring by constructing a logit model that considers the moderating effect, examines the moderating effect of the higher education expansion policy on the relationship between family class differences and the overall higher education accessibility of offspring. On this basis, this study further analyzes the impact of family class differences and the higher education expansion policy on the high-quality higher education accessibility of offspring.

3. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

On one hand, according to the effective maintenance of inequality hypothesis and the credentialism hypothesis, access to higher education is an important and effective means to maintain family class advantage and achieve upward family class mobility (Song et al., 2019). It is for their offspring to receive higher education to maintain the current social status of their families, achieve upward family class mobility and gain more social advantages (Wang, Song, & Liu, 2020). Their offspring may also prevent the decline of their families' social status and loss of social advantages if they do not receive higher education. In such a state, upper-class and middle-class families usually have a strong willingness to invest in higher education for their offspring. When the competition for access to higher education is high, upper-class families and middle-class families tend to take full advantage of their class advantages, such as directly increasing investments in higher education for their offspring and attempting to change the higher education screening mechanism and other measures to make their offspring vested in the existing higher education system and maintain their offspring's advantage in access to higher education resources (Li, 2014; Yue & Qiu, 2020).

Additionally, due to educational reproducibility, when access to higher education becomes relatively universal, competition among upper-class and middle-class families for their offspring access to higher education shifts from access to higher education to access to high-quality higher education (Xia & Wei, 2020). In other words, both upper-class and middle-class families seek to ensure that their offspring are always at an absolute advantage over bottom-class families in access to higher education and high-quality higher education (Liu & Guo, 2020). However, there are some differences in the pursuit of overall higher education resources and high-quality higher education resources between upper-class families and middle-class families as well. According to the maximization maintenance inequality hypothesis, and taking the current development of China's higher education into account, upper-class families are more likely to pursue high-quality higher education resources more strongly than middle-class families, while the pursuit of overall higher education resources is likely not to differ significantly from middle-class families.

On the other hand, for disadvantaged groups such as bottom-class families, although higher education for their offspring is likely to achieve upward family class mobility to a certain extent, due to the risk of completion failure in higher education, bottom-class families often find it difficult to bear the real and opportunity costs of failure if their offspring fail to complete higher education successfully (Wang et al., 2020). In addition, China's long-standing

policy of higher education expansion has led to a sustained influx of graduates with higher education into the labor market. According to the status competition concept of signal screening theory, the higher education expansion policy sharply increases the number of graduates with higher education and rapidly decreases the distinction between higher education and non-higher education, so that the signal function of higher education to employers decreases rapidly, which leads to the "inflation" of higher education, the decrease of market value of higher education, the loss of scarcity of higher education, and the gradual weakening of the symbolic functions of higher education.

The offspring from bottom-class families are also predisposed to have lower expected returns to higher education than the offspring from upper-class and middle-class families due to their families' lack of social resources (Pan & Yang, 2019; Song et al., 2019; Yue & Qiu, 2020). It means that receiving higher education will likely not give them more competitive advantage in the labor market (Liu, 2021). At the same time, the higher education expansion policy also brings about a reform of the higher education fee system, which largely increases the cost and risk of failure for bottom-class families to invest in higher education for their offspring (Wang et al., 2020; Zhang, 2015). This has led to a higher perception of the risk of failure in completing higher education for their offspring. Based on rational choice theory and the relative risk aversion hypothesis, it is likely that a significant number of the offspring of bottom-class families will make economically rational choices, either voluntarily or being persuaded, to forego higher education and enter the labor market directly because of the direct economic costs, indirect opportunity costs, probability of success, and benefits of higher education (Becker, 2003; Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Zhang & Hu, 2014).

However, it is also important to note that while the higher education expansion policy has increased access to higher education offered by a large number of general higher education institutions, it has also had a relatively small impact on access to high-quality higher education offered by key higher education institutions. The higher education expansion policy has not yet led to a significant surge in the number of graduates with high-quality higher education, and quality higher education is still of considerable market value and scarcity. Therefore, it is likely that the higher education expansion policy do not have a significant suppressing effect on the bottom-class families' willingness to invest in high-quality higher education for their offspring, as evidenced by Zhu (2018) in-depth interviews with the fathers of bottom-class families. The fathers still generally consider it "worthwhile" for their offspring to receive high-quality higher education from key higher education institutions.

Based on the above theoretical analysis, the following hypotheses were proposed in this study.

Hypothesis 1a: Compared to the offspring of bottom-class families, the offspring of upper-class families and middle-class families are more likely to have access to higher education.

Hypothesis 1b: Compared to the offspring of bottom-class families, the offspring of upper-class families and middle-class families are more likely to have access to high-quality higher education.

Hypothesis 1c: Compared to the offspring of middle-class families, the offspring of upper-class families are more likely to have access to high-quality higher education.

Hypothesis 2a: Compared to the offspring of bottom-class families, the higher education expansion policy further increases the likelihood of higher education for the offspring of upper-class families and middle-class families.

Hypothesis 2b: Compared to the offspring of bottom-class families, the higher education expansion policy does not further increase the likelihood of high-quality higher education for the offspring of upper-class families and middle-class families.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Data Source

The data for this study was obtained from the 2018 Chinese General Social Survey. According to the study objectives, variables setting, and the actual design of the questionnaire, 5181 valid samples were obtained in this study after eliminating missing and invalid data.

4.2. Variables Setting

4.2.1. Dependent Variables

The first dependent variable in this study was Higher Education (HE). Higher Education (HE) was measured by the corresponding question "Have you received higher education?" in the questionnaire. The question options included "Yes" and "No". In this study, based on the studies of Song et al. (2019) and Wang et al. (2020), "Yes" was assigned 1 point and "No" was assigned 0.

To further highlight the difference in the quality of higher education, a second dependent variable, High-Quality Higher Education (HQHE) was introduced in this study. High-Quality Higher Education (HQHE) was measured by the corresponding question "If you have attended college, what is the grade of the college you have attended?" in the questionnaire. The question options included "Higher education institutions under the central government or other state ministries", "Provincial higher education institutions", "Regional higher education institutions", "Other full-time higher education institutions" and "Part-time higher education institutions". In this study, Higher education institutions under the central government or other state ministries" was assigned 1 point, "Provincial higher education institutions", "Regional higher education institutions", "Other full-time higher education institutions" and "Part-time higher education institutions" were assigned 0.

4.2.2. Independent Variable

The independent variable in this study was Family Class (FC), which was measured by the corresponding question "Which social class do you think your family was in when you were 14 years old?" in the questionnaire. The question options included a total of 10 options ranging from 1 to 10 points. In this study, based on the studies of Song et al. (2019) and Wang et al. (2020) scores of 7, 8, 9, and 10 were set for upper-class families, scores of 4, 5, and 6 were set for middle-class families, and scores of 1, 2, and 3 were set for bottom-class families.

4.2.3. Moderating Variable

With reference to the approach of Wang et al. (2020), Higher Education Expansion (HEE) was measured by the corresponding question "In which year did you obtain your highest completed education" in the questionnaire. According to this question, the year when respondents took the college entrance examination was required to be calculated, and the year 1999, when the higher education expansion policy was first implemented, was used as the boundary. The respondent who took the entrance examination after 1999 was considered to have experienced higher education expansion and was assigned 1 point. The respondent who took the entrance examination before 1999 was considered to have not experienced higher education expansion and was assigned 0.

4.2.4. Control Variables

Following the existing studies (Li, 2010; Liu & Wu, 2021; Ma, 2019; Song et al., 2019), the actual design of the questionnaire was taken into account. there were demographic factors like Gender (Gender of the respondent, Female was assigned 1 and Male was assigned 0), Ethnicity (Ethnicity of the respondent, Minorities was assigned 1 and Han Chinese was assigned 0), Household Registration (HR, Household registration of the respondent at age 14, Rural household registration = 1, Urban household registration = 0), Father's Years of Education (FYoE, Years of education of the respondent's father) and Mother's Years of Education (MYoE, Years of education of the respondent's mother), which were included as control variables.

4.3. Models Setting

Given that the dependent variables Higher Education (HE) and High-Quality Higher Education (HQHE) were both binary discrete variables, this study chose to construct the logit models to more accurately estimate the effects of Family Class (FC) and Higher Education Expansion (HEE) on Higher Education (HE) as well as High-Quality

Higher Education (HQHE). In addition, to examine whether there was a moderating effect of Higher Education Expansion (HEE) on the relationship between Family Class (FC) and Higher Education (HE), High-Quality Higher Education (HQHE), this study also introduced Product Term (PT) of Family Class (FC) and Higher Education Expansion (HEE) in the model. The specific estimated models were constructed as follows.

$$HE_i = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 * FC_i + \beta_2 * HEE_i + \beta_3 * PT_i + \sum_{j=4}^{k} \beta_j X_{j,i} + \mu_i \qquad (1)$$

$$HQHE_i = \alpha_2 + \varepsilon_1 * FC_i + \varepsilon_2 * HEE_i + \varepsilon_3 * PT_i + \sum_{j=4}^{k} \varepsilon_j X_{j,i} + \pi_i \qquad (2)$$

In Equation 1 and Equation 2, HE_i, $HQHE_i$, FC_i, HEE_i, PT_i and $\sum_{j=4}^{k} X_{j,i}$ respectively represent the i-th respondent's Higher Education (HE), High-Quality Higher Education (HQHE), Family Class (FC), Higher Education Expansion (HEE), Product Term (PT) of Higher Education (HE) and High-Quality Higher Education (HQHE), and a series of control variables including Gender, Ethnicity, Household Registration (HR), Father's Years of Education (FYoE) and Mother's Years of Education (MYoE). β_1, β_2, β_3, $\sum_{j=4}^{k} \beta_j$, ε_1, ε_2, ε_3 and $\sum_{j=4}^{k} \varepsilon_j$ respectively represent the regression coefficients of Family Class (FC), Higher Education Expansion (HEE), Product Term (PT) of Higher Education (HE) and High−Quality Higher Education (HQHE). Additionally, a series of control variables in Equation 1 and Equation 2 α_1 and α_2 respectively represent the constant terms of Equation 1 and Equation 2 while μ_i and π_i respectively represent the random interference terms of Equation 1 and Equation 2.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for each of the above variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of each variable.

Variable	Sample size	Mean value	Standard deviation	Minimum value	Maximum value
HE	5181	0.181	0.385	0	1
HQHE	5181	0.028	0.166	0	1
FC	5181	3.485	1.798	1	10
HEE	5181	0.100	0.300	0	1
Gender	5181	0.477	0.500	0	1
Ethnicity	5181	0.063	0.242	0	1
HR	5181	0.786	0.410	0	1
FYoE	5181	5.601	4.427	0	19
MYoE	5181	4.024	4.383	0	19

Note: HE: Higher education; HQHE: High-quality higher education; FC: Family class; HEE: Higher education expansion; HR: Household registration; FYoE: Father's years of education; MYoE: Mother's years of education.

Observing Table 1 could find that the mean value of Higher Education (HE) is 0.181, indicating that 18.1% of the respondents have received higher education, which is slightly higher than the overall acceptance rate of higher education in China, but the mean value of High-Quality Higher Education (HQHE) is 0.028, indicating that only 2.8% of the respondents have received high-quality higher education, which means that among the respondents who have received higher education, receiving general higher education is the mainstream, and receiving high-quality higher education is the minority.

The mean value of Family Class (FC) is 3.485, indicating that the respondents mostly come from bottom-class families. The mean value of Higher Education Expansion (HEE) is 0.100, indicating that approximately 10% of the respondents have experienced the higher education expansion policy. The mean value of Gender is 0.477, indicating that 47.7% of the respondents are female and 52.3% are male, and this is close to the overall male to female ratio in China. The mean value of Ethnicity is 0.063, indicating that 6.3% of the respondents are ethnic minorities and 93.7% are Han Chinese, and this is close to the overall Han Chinese to ethnic minorities ratio in China. The mean value of Household Registration (HR) is 0.786, indicating that 78.6% of the respondents are rural household registration status at age 14 and 21.4% of the respondents are urban household registration status at age 14. The

mean values of Father's Years of Education (FYoE) and Mother's Years of Education (MYoE) are respectively 5.601 years and 4.024 years, indicating that most of the respondents' father and mother has only received primary education.

In order to observe more clearly the differences in the distribution of education among respondents in different class families, this study groups the sample data according to the differences in the distribution of respondents' family classes for statistical analysis of the differences in their access to higher education and high-quality higher education. The statistical results are presented in Table 2. As presented in Table 2, 5.17% of respondents' family class is in the upper-class, 40.42% in the middle-class, and 54.41% in the bottom-class. The overall distribution of respondents' family class has a pyramidal structure, which is more in line with the current social structure of China. In terms of the education distribution, overall, 18.14% of respondents have received higher education and 2.82% have received high-quality higher education. In terms of the family class, 26.12% and 24.40% of respondents from the upper-class families and middle-class families have received higher education, while only 12.74% of respondents from the bottom-class families have received higher education, and 4.48% and 4.15% of respondents from the upper-class families and middle-class families have received high-quality higher education, while only 1.67% of respondents from the bottom-class families have received high-quality higher education.

The above analysis shows that respondents from the bottom-class families have significantly lower access to both higher education and high-quality higher education than respondents from the upper-class families and middle-class families. However, the impacts of family class differences on the accessibility of higher education the offspring and the accessibility of high-quality higher education of the offspring need to be further estimated by the logit models. In addition, whether higher education expansion has a moderating effect also needs to be further tested by the logit models.

Table 2. Statistical analysis of the differences in the distribution of education among different family classes.

Family class	Upper	Middle	Bottom	Total
Number of respondents in this class	268	2094	2819	5181
Percentage of the number of respondents in this class	5.17%	40.42%	54.41%	100.00%
Number of people with higher education	70	511	359	940
Percentage of the number of people with higher education in this class	26.12%	24.40%	12.74%	18.14%
Number of people with high-quality higher education	12	87	47	146
Percentage of the number of people with high-quality higher education in this class	4.48%	4.15%	1.67%	2.82%

5.2. Empirical Analysis

Table 3 reports the results of the logit model estimation for Higher Education (HE). The results show that in terms of the independent variable and the moderating variable, the probability of receiving higher education is significantly higher for respondents from both upper-class families and middle-class families than for those from bottom-class families at the 1% significance level, which verifies hypothesis 1a. Higher Education Expansion (HEE) respectively has a significant moderating effect on the gap in higher education accessibility between respondents from bottom-class families and those from upper-class families and middle-class families at the 10% and 5% significance levels. Specifically, before experiencing higher education expansion, respondents from upper-class families and middle-class families are respectively 2.0106 times and 1.8576 times more likely to receive higher education than respondents from bottom-class families.

After experiencing higher education expansion, respondents from upper-class families and middle-class families are respectively 2.46 times and 2.4912 times more likely to receive higher education than respondents from bottom-class families. Compared to before experiencing higher education expansion, an increase of 22.35% and 34.11%, respectively, indicates that compared to the offspring of bottom-class families, the higher education expansion

policy further increases the likelihood of receiving higher education for the offspring of upper-class families and middle-class families, which verifies hypothesis 2a.

In terms of the control variables, the probability of receiving higher education of female respondents is 16.13% lower than that of males and it is statistically significant at the 5% level of significance. There is no significant difference in the probability of receiving higher education between ethnic minorities respondents and Han Chinese respondents. The probability of receiving higher education of respondents with rural household registration is 71.15% lower than that of urban household registration and it is statistically significant at 1% level of significance.

Table 3 reports the logit model estimation results for High-Quality Higher Education (HQHE). The results show that in terms of the independent variable, respondents from upper-class families and respondents from middle-class families are more likely to receive high-quality higher education than respondents from bottom-class families at the 5% and 1% significance levels, respectively. Specifically, respondents from upper-class families and respondents from middle-class families are 2.294 and 2.04 times more likely to receive high-quality higher education than respondents from bottom-class families, respectively, which verifies Hypothesis 1b and Hypothesis 1c. In terms of the moderating variable, respondents who have experienced the higher education expansion policy are significantly more likely to receive high-quality higher education at the 1% significance level than those who have not experienced the higher education expansion policy.

Specifically, respondents who have experienced the higher education expansion policy are 3.034 times more likely to receive high-quality higher education than respondents who have not experienced the higher education expansion policy. The higher education expansion policy does significantly increase the probability of receiving high-quality higher education of respondents from different family class, but higher education expansion does not produce a significant moderating effect on the relationship between family class and higher-quality higher education accessibility of offspring, and the high-quality higher education accessibility gaps between respondents from bottom-class families and those from upper-class families and middle-class families are not significantly affected by the higher education expansion policy, which verifies hypothesis 2b.

Table 3. Logit estimation results for higher education and high-quality higher education.

Type of education	Higher education (HE)		High-quality higher education (HQHE)	
	Coefficient	Odds ratio	Coefficient	Odds ratio
Family class (FC): Using the lower-class family as a reference				
Upper-class family	0.698*** (0.173)	2.011*** (0.349)	0.830** (0.346)	2.294** (0.794)
Middle-class family	0.619*** (0.091)	1.858*** (0.169)	0.713*** (0.208)	2.040*** (0.424)
Higher education expansion (HEE): With reference to not having experienced higher education expansion				
Experienced higher education expansion	2.131*** (0.157)	8.424*** (1.323)	1.110*** (0.380)	3.034*** (1.153)
Product term (PT): Using the lower-class family as a reference				
Upper-class family *HEE	−0.800* (0.423)	0.449* (0.190)	−1.318 (1.101)	0.268 (0.295)
Middle-class family *HEE	−0.456** (0.210)	0.634** (0.133)	−0.406 (0.475)	0.666 (0.316)
Gender: Male as reference				
Female	−0.176** (0.078)	0.839** (0.066)	−0.388** (0.173)	0.679** (0.117)
Ethnicity: Han Chinese as a reference				
Ethnic Minorities	−0.124 (0.173)	0.884 (0.153)	−0.228 (0.425)	0.796 (0.338)
Household registration (HR): Urban household registration as a reference				
Rural household registration	−1.243*** (0.085)	0.289*** (0.025)	−1.341*** (0.172)	0.262*** (0.045)
Constant	−1.127*** (0.097)	0.324*** (0.032)	−3.018*** (0.216)	0.049*** (0.011)
Sample size	5181		5181	

Note: *** represents p<0.01; ** represents p<0.05; * represents p<0.1. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.

In terms of the control variables, the probability of receiving high-quality higher education is 32.15% lower for female respondents than that of males and it is statistically significant at the 5% level of significance. There is no significant difference in the probability of receiving high-quality higher education between ethnic minorities respondents and Han Chinese respondents. The probability of receiving high-quality higher education of respondents with rural household registration is 73.83% lower than that of urban household registration and it is statistically significant at the 1% level of significance.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusion

Based on the data from the Chinese General Social Survey in 2018, this study constructs a logit model that takes the moderating effects into account. The study examines the impact of family class differences on the higher education accessibility and the high-quality higher education accessibility of offspring, and tests the moderating effect of the higher education expansion policy on the relationship between family class differences and the higher education accessibility as well as the high-quality higher education accessibility of offspring. The main findings are as follows.

Firstly, family class differences significantly affect the higher education accessibility of offspring and high-quality higher education accessibility of offspring, with both higher education accessibility of offspring and high-quality higher education accessibility of offspring from upper-class families and middle-class families being significantly higher than those from bottom-class families. Secondly, offspring of upper-class families are more likely to receive high-quality higher education than offspring of middle-class families. Thirdly, although the higher education expansion policy significantly increases the higher education accessibility of offspring and the high-quality higher education accessibility of offspring, it intensifies the higher education accessibility gap between the offspring from bottom-class families and the offspring from upper-class families and middle-class families. While there is no significant impact on the higher-quality higher education accessibility gap between the offspring from bottom-class families and the offspring from upper-class families and middle-class families.

6.2. Recommendations

Based on the above findings, this study proposes the following two recommendations.

Firstly, improving the higher education funding policy for the offspring from the bottom-class families. Family financial difficulties are often a significant barrier to access to higher education and quality higher education for the offspring from bottom-class families. In order to fulfill the promise of "no student will be deprived of education due to family financial difficulties," the government should make efforts to increase the amount of student loans for the offspring from bottom-class families according to the level of economic and social development. The government should also expand the coverage of student loans for the offspring from bottom-class families, and form an effective anti-poverty aid mechanism to alleviate the worries of bottom-class families. Such steps will ensure that family financial difficulties will not be a reason to prevent the offspring of bottom-class families from receiving higher education and high-quality higher education.

Secondly, special programs for higher education for the offspring from bottom-class families should be developed. Although higher education compensation policies such as national special programs, provincial special programs and higher education Institution special programs have been developed, these programs are mainly based on the criteria of household registration. The related studies (Ding, 2006; Li, 2010; Liu, 2006; Wen, Lian, & Yang, 2018; Xia & Wei, 2020; Xu & Fang, 2020) have shown that this compensatory index is mainly occupied by the dominant class of these groups, which is contrary to the original policy design. Therefore, when developing special programs for the offspring from bottom-class families, the government should precisely identify policy targets so that newly added opportunities of higher education and high-quality higher education can benefit the offspring from

bottom-class families and reduce the inequality in access to higher education and high-quality higher education caused by family class differences.

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