

Revolution, Reform, and Status Inheritance: Urban China, 1949–1996¹

Andrew G. Walder
Stanford University

Songhua Hu
McKinsey & Company

Do regime change and market reform disrupt patterns of intergenerational mobility? China's political trajectory is distinctive from that of other communist regimes in two ways. During its first three decades, the regime enforced unusually restrictive barriers to elite status inheritance. And during the subsequent market transition, unlike most of its counterparts, the Communist Party survived intact. Data from a multigeneration survey suggest that despite their obvious exclusion from the party and related administrative careers in the Mao era, certain prerevolution elites transmitted one type of elite status to their offspring to a surprising degree. Party elites, in contrast, were hit hard by radical Maoism but recovered quickly afterward, and their offspring inherited elite status at much higher rates.

The questions about transitional economies that preoccupy us today closely parallel those asked about the same nations more than half a century ago. As we examine the exit from state socialism, we paraphrase much older questions: What long-run impact does revolution really have on class structure and equality of opportunity? Do prior elites manage to prosper despite radically new political and economic circumstances? Do major political and social changes do little more than allow new elites to rise and consolidate their own positions? What is the actual long-run impact of revolution and reform? These are fundamental questions for

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the discipline, whether one's subfield is social stratification and mobility or political sociology. As we explore the consequences of state socialism's recent decline, we are increasingly aware of how similar these questions are to the ones originally posed by the establishment of communist regimes during the 20th century—and of how limited our knowledge still is of the earlier impact of these revolutions.

Research on present-day transitional economies has been preoccupied almost exclusively with intragenerational processes—the impact of market expansion, privatization, and to some extent regime change, on individual earnings or career mobility based on occupation, political connections (past or present), educational levels, and other relevant variables. The resulting literature is large and has generated considerable controversy, although most of the controversy has focused primarily on the impact of market mechanisms on the earnings of individuals or households (Nee 1989, 1991, 1996; Peng 1992; Bian and Logan 1996; Parish and Michelson 1996; Xie and Hannum 1996; Gerber and Hout 1998; Bian and Zhang 2002; Gerber 2002; Walder 2002; Wu 2002; Zhou 2002; Wu and Xie 2003; Hauser and Xie 2005; Walder and Nguyen 2008).² A literature on changes in career patterns and job shifts through time, and the changing impact of political affiliation and education on individual careers, has explored related questions with considerably less controversy (Hanley, Yershova, and Anderson 1995; Szelényi and Szelényi 1995; Szelényi, Szelényi, and Kovách 1995; Zhou, Tuma, and Moen 1996, 1997; Walder, Li, and Treiman 2000; Li and Walder 2001; Wu 2006).

Only recently have publications begun to investigate the intergenerational impact of these changes (Gerber and Hout 2004). The reason for this delay is understandable—it takes longer to gauge the impact of major social and political changes on the next generation, and it is still early to make definitive statements about regimes that collapsed barely a generation ago. Yet the availability of multigeneration survey data makes it possible to begin exploring this question and a long-neglected topic that is directly related—the degree of status inheritance under state socialism that provides the only baseline against which changes in the current period can be gauged. Intergenerational mobility has long been viewed as a key indicator of the long-run impact of social and political change (e.g., modernization and revolution). The net impact of social origin on individual life chances is a central measure of equality of opportunity in a society,

² A distinct but related controversy is about the underlying cause of enduring income advantages of *former* party members in postcommunist regimes. Gerber (2000) finds that these advantages in Russia are due solely to unobserved individual characteristics, which suggest that such individuals would do well in any institutional circumstances. This article contains a cogent summary of the controversies about market transition and income inequality (see also Gerber 2001; Rona-Tas and Guseva 2001).

the extent to which status boundaries have crystallized, and the extent to which and mechanisms through which an identifiable elite has consolidated its status.

While all state socialist regimes shared an economic model based on “redistributive” rather than market principles, and while their ruling parties shared the same structure, they also exhibited striking differences in their internal politics. Within many countries, sharp changes in policy occurred during the socialist period. Across different regimes there were sharp policy differences under state socialism and even wider political differences in more recent years among postcommunist and reforming communist regimes. These political changes, or “regime dynamics,” should have a direct impact on the life chances of individuals (Zhou et al. 1996; Bian, Shu, and Logan 2001; Walder 2003). China, in particular, has followed a political trajectory that has long differed from its counterparts in the Soviet Union and East Central Europe. China denounced these other socialist regimes as too moderate in the early 1960s. From 1949 until 1978, the Chinese regime pursued distinctive policies designed to curtail the ability of both pre- and postrevolution elites to transmit higher status to their offspring—policies that were completely abandoned afterward. After 1978, China’s political trajectory as it undertook market reform continued down a distinctive path: despite political liberalization, the Communist Party survived and even prospered, in sharp contrast with regimes that collapsed and built postcommunist political institutions. Both before and after its transition to a market economy, the Chinese regime had features that would lead us to expect a different pattern of status inheritance. In the Mao era, unusually strong institutional barriers to status transmission were put in place, while political liberalization and continued party rule after Mao would lead us to expect at least continued status inheritance among the party elite—and more likely an increase rather than the reverse.

From the early 1950s, the new Chinese regime instituted policies designed to punish members of elite households from the prerevolution period—to keep them out of the Communist Party and out of positions of power and privilege. It also instituted policies designed to identify and treat preferentially those who came from politically reliable households—especially those who had joined the party and served in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) before its victory (Kraus 1981). Similar policies were enforced very early in the history of the Soviet Union and newer regimes in the Soviet bloc, but they were either haphazardly enforced or abandoned early (Feldmesser 1960; Bauman 1974; Fitzpatrick 1978, 1979). Moreover, from 1966 to 1976, the Cultural Revolution instituted draconian policies that targeted the new political elites and sought to prevent them from passing on their status to their children (Whyte 1973). There was

no counterpart to this effort in the history of the Soviet bloc. Questions about recent changes in intergenerational status transmission in China are hampered by the fact that we still have yet to measure the actual net impact of earlier policies on elite households and therefore have no real baseline against which to measure change.

A nationally representative multigeneration life-course survey makes it possible for the first time to address these questions. This article examines status inheritance for almost half a century after 1949, with a focus on both pre- and postrevolution elites. Of particular interest is the impact of the draconian Mao-era policies and their subsequent relaxation that coincided with market reform. What was the impact of discriminatory policies on the offspring of old elites—were they able to overcome the political barriers placed in their path? To what extent did the offspring of new postrevolution elites enjoy inherent career advantages beyond what their educations would predict—despite the challenges they faced in the late Mao era—and did these advantages grow or shrink in the post-Mao era of market transition?

TWO TRADITIONS OF MOBILITY RESEARCH

Two distinct traditions of mobility research have focused on the broad issues we have raised. The first treats state socialist regimes as an interesting subset of cases in cross-national comparative research on intergenerational mobility. This tradition originated in questions about the impact of economic modernization on the class structures of societies and their relative degree of openness or social fluidity. The aim is to gauge differences in overall rates of intergenerational mobility in order to characterize the degree of social fluidity in a society as a whole. In a sense, this work examines the metabolism of the entire social structure to measure the extent to which inequality is reproduced across generations. Higher rates of mobility indicate a more open social structure, in which occupational destination is less constrained by social origin overall; lower rates indicate a more closed social structure, in which opportunities are less equally distributed. Work in this vein applies either occupational prestige scales that strive for cross-national validity or ordinal measures of association for mobility tables that can gauge the overall extent to which individuals' occupational status is higher or lower than that of their parents. The central concern of this tradition is to distinguish structural mobility due to economic expansion from circulation mobility that indicates increased social openness and to determine the extent to which formal education becomes a key arbiter of occupational advancement (Grusky and Hauser 1984; Hout 1988; Ganzeboom, Luijkx, and Treiman 1989; Ganzeboom,

Treiman, and Ultee 1991; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Ishida, Müller, and Ridge 1995). As applied to state socialism, the tradition has sought to test the claim that communist regimes instituted greater equality of opportunity net of economic growth and structural change (Blau and Ruan 1990; Ganzeboom, DeGraaf, and Robert 1990; Szélenyi 1998, pp. 59–77; Gerber and Hout 2004; Wu and Treiman 2007).

A second tradition is focused much more narrowly on elite formation and the political dimensions of mobility characteristic of these regimes—especially the role of party membership in career advancement and the kinds of credentials that lead into different elite positions—both under state socialism and in the subsequent market transition. These questions are inspired more by issues in political sociology than by the questions that drive research on comparative intergenerational mobility, and they are ultimately motivated by questions about elite cohesion, regime stability, and political change. This tradition originated in questions raised long ago about whether a new “ruling class” had come to dominate the single-party dictatorships that were the legacy of the Russian revolution, especially after the ascendancy of Stalin (Trotsky 1937; Rizzi 1939; Burnham 1941; Moore 1944; Timasheff 1944; Djilas 1957; Konrad and Szélenyi 1979).

For contemporary sociologists armed with survey data, these issues translated into questions about the political dimensions of mobility in communist regimes that had no direct counterpart in societies without single-party dictatorships and centrally planned economies—and that were neglected in the other tradition (Walder 1985). What is the relative role of party membership and education in career advancement, and does this change through time? Are such credentials weighed differently in career paths that involve different levels of political and administrative power? Are party membership and elite status relatively open for competition from people from all manner of origins, or do these elite statuses come to be inherited across generations? This tradition neglects broader questions about social fluidity and overall rates of mobility in favor of a more narrow focus on those at the apex of power and privilege—and the impact of politics on mobility (Szélenyi 1987, 1998, pp. 99–121; Massey, Hodson, and Sekulić 1992; Hanley et al. 1995; Szélenyi and Szélenyi 1995; Szélenyi et al. 1995; Walder 1995; Eyal, Szélenyi, and Townsley 1998; Walder et al. 2000; Bian et al. 2001; Li and Walder 2001; Hanley 2003).³

Our study is firmly rooted in this second tradition, which we extend

³ An offshoot of this tradition is Szélenyi's (1988) analysis of the family origins of private entrepreneurs in rural Hungary during the socialist period—although it evidently is concerned with a new kind of rural elite that did not emerge until the earliest stages of market reform.

further into questions of status inheritance, examining not only the advantages of the postrevolution party elite but also the fate of offspring of prerevolution elites during the Mao era and beyond. We do so fully aware that China's political trajectory is distinct from other communist regimes, past and present, and that our findings for China are likely to differ from those for other countries.

CHINA: POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUITY

While China has not experienced the more obvious forms of regime change of other transitional economies (Walder 2003), it has experienced less visible but nonetheless striking political changes over the past several decades. To fully appreciate these changes, one must examine the politics of the period before the onset of reform in the late 1970s—especially the decade after 1966 associated with the Cultural Revolution. This period saw unprecedented attacks on incumbent officials and policies designed to prevent their families from consolidating their elite status and passing advantages to their offspring (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, pp. 252–72). No classes were admitted to any universities from 1966 to 1972, and until 1978 only small entering classes were selected through political recommendation by party officials (Unger 1982; Deng and Treiman 1997). Government officials and professionals were sent *en masse* to labor in rural regions or factories for most of the period from 1968 to 1972, and they did not begin to return to their original office positions in large numbers until 1973.⁴ During the entire decade after 1966, regular personnel practices of formal evaluation and promotion were discontinued, and there were no wage raises from 1963 to 1978 (Walder 1986, pp. 191–205). More widely analyzed is the “rustication” policy whereby almost all high school graduates were sent to the countryside for indefinite periods. The practice began in 1968 and continued for a decade, during which time some 18 million youths were relocated to rural communities (Unger 1982; Zhou and Hou 1999). Not until the late 1970s did large numbers of these individuals return to the cities and resume interrupted educations and careers. These radical policies presented seemingly insurmountable barriers to the transmission of elite status to offspring because normal educational and career advancement were disrupted.

These radical changes were in addition to a class-label policy that was enforced from 1949 until it was discontinued in 1978. These labels were

⁴ During these years, a total of 1.2 million party and government officials at the county level and above were sent for extended periods to perform manual labor, the “vast majority” of the nation's office personnel (CCP Organization Department 2000, p. 9).

emphasized in educational advancement and job assignments where they were designed to show preferences to households of revolutionaries and former exploited classes and to discriminate against members of former propertied and politically conservative elites (Kraus 1981). The radical policies of the Mao period deepened the discrimination against those from “reactionary” households who had “bad class background.” However, their impact on the “red” households of former revolutionaries was ambiguous because many people from this background had become officials in the interim period and became the primary targets, as “revisionists”; they were removed from power in disgrace during these years.

In 1978, only two years after Mao’s death, all of these policies were repudiated and discontinued. Discrimination according to class labels was curtailed, universities were revitalized, standard entrance examinations were restored, the sending of urban youths to rural regions ended, officials who were unjustly purged were rehabilitated and (if they survived) restored to their posts, and pre-Cultural Revolution wage and personnel practices were restored (Walder 1986, pp. 224–35; Lee 1991, pp. 169–92). These were major political changes with obvious implications for career mobility and status inheritance, even though they did not presage the regime change later observed in other socialist states. Although we know that these earlier draconian policies were enforced, we still know little about their actual impact.

ASCRIPTIVE CLASS LABELS AND HOUSEHOLD POLITICAL STATUS

The primary mechanism through which the Maoist regime intervened in status transmission was the labeling of households. After the party consolidated political power in 1949, the entire urban and rural population was classified according to politically defined class labels. The classification system was based on the family’s employment status, income sources, and political loyalties at the time of the “liberation” of the local community. The class label was assigned to an entire household based on the designation of the male household head, and in subsequent generations it was inherited through the male line (Kraus 1981). The specific class designations were detailed, but they were sorted into three broad categories. The majority of the population was classified as red, or presumably predisposed to be inherently loyal toward the party and its policies. By far the largest component of this group were all those who were deemed to be among the “exploited” social classes of the prerevolution social order. Industrial workers, poor urban residents, the landless poor, and “lower-middle” peasants composed the majority of China’s pre-1949 population, and they were given the designation “red proletarian.” Also

included in this favored red category were households headed by men who had joined the Chinese Communist Party or fought in the PLA before its victory, many of whom were appointed to leadership positions after 1949 as a reward for their active service. The red households overall comprised some 82% of the urban population, only 4.4% of which was in this smaller “revolutionary” group (table 1).

At the opposite end of the political spectrum from the favored red category were the “black” households, condemned for their reactionary political nature. Like the red group, the black category was defined by both economic status and political loyalties. Exploiting social classes, defined by their property ownership—capitalists, landlords, and rich peasants—were assigned to this category. The operative principle was that they hired labor and extracted surplus value from bourgeois property relations, and therefore they were deemed to be inherently hostile to the program of the Communist Party. Also included in this category were those who had joined the Nationalist Party or served in the Nationalist government or army. Both these groups were very small—totaling some 3.4% of the urban population (table 1).

A third group stood ambiguously between these two extremes. This “middle” or “ordinary” category was judged to be neither inherently loyal to the party nor reactionary. As a “petit bourgeois” category in Marxist terms, it was judged to be inherently opportunistic: favorable to revolutionary forces when they were ascendant, loyal to forces of reaction when they were strong. This group included urban and rural middle classes: white-collar workers, professionals, small peddlers and shopkeepers, and self-sufficient “middle peasants.” In prerevolution society, these were higher social statuses—they had relatively high levels of education, income, and property ownership (see table 1). But because they were not directly involved in the exploitation of others in the production process, they were not assumed to be disloyal by their very nature and condemned to the black category. This group was four times as large as the black category—some 14.3% of the urban population (table 1). After 1949, individuals in this category were not assumed to be disloyal and reactionary by nature and did not suffer the worst kinds of discrimination. However, they were not to be favored like those in the red category.

Although these categories are ascriptive markers based on (male) parental status, they are in fact political statuses in two fundamental senses. First, the categories themselves represent political judgments on the part of the regime about the inherent loyalties of families. The labels remained affixed to individual offspring of these households, regardless of their actual political loyalty and behavior, and advantages or disadvantages were applied by party organs in political assessments that accompanied school admissions, job assignments, promotions, and admission to the

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TABLE 1
SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HOUSEHOLDS, BY CLASS LABEL

Class Label	Parental Education (years)	Parental Party Membership (%)	Pre-1949 Property Ownership (%)	Grandfather in High-Status Occupation in 1948 (%)	% in Category
Red:					
Revolutionary ...	9.4	71.1	11.9	27.3	4.4
Proletarian	4.2	15.4	4.3	13.5	77.9
Middle	5.5	10.5	18.3	67.3	14.3
Black	6.8	2.9	59.2	82.5	3.4
Overall	4.7	16.8	5.7	23.5	100

SOURCE.—Retrospective survey data collected in 1996 (Treiman 1998).

NOTE.—Parental education is the highest level of education attained by one of the respondent's parents; parental party membership is the percentage of households where at least one parent joined the party; pre-1949 property ownership is defined as an answer of yes to one of several questions: whether the paternal grandfather or father owned "buildings other than home," "hired extra laborers besides family members," "collected rents," or "owned large business" before 1949; and high-status occupation is defined as "middle peasant," "small businessman," "rich peasant or landlord," "shop owner, landlord of building, or entrepreneur," "tutor or teacher," and "doctor, practitioner of Chinese medicine, or veterinarian."

party itself (Kraus 1981; Unger 1982; Lee 1991). Second, the political dimensions of the classification system took precedence over the designations based on social class. A member of a landlord, rich peasant, or capitalist household who joined the Communist Party or fought in the PLA (and there were many) would be classified as a revolutionary red—even though the father's household would be classified as reactionary. Similarly, workers or poor peasants who served Nationalists in some capacity would be classified in the reactionary black category, even though in Marxist terms they came from households that suffered from exploitation.

Not until recent years have data been available about the actual social characteristics of the households in these categories. Post-Mao surveys with retrospective questions about family class labels and parental backgrounds help us to understand how these categories were assigned in practice. The first notable finding is that the revolutionary red category shared many of the social characteristics of the black former exploiting classes and political reactionaries. Parental education in the revolutionary class was more than twice the average of that in the proletarian class and significantly higher even than the average for black and middle-class households (table 1). Clearly, the notion that the Chinese Communist movement was spearheaded by poorly educated rural revolutionaries is inaccurate. Part of the reason for this is that revolutionaries from middle-class and old elite families would in almost all cases be categorized as revolutionary. Data on prerevolution property ownership and occupa-

tional status of the grandparents of respondents suggest that levels of property ownership among the revolutionary households were not far below those for the former middle classes (and more than twice those of proletarian households), and more than one-quarter of their grandparents had relatively high-status occupations (table 1). In other words, these were households that, in the normal course of events, would be expected to do well after the revolution without the favoritism enshrined in the party's class line.

OLD AND NEW ELITES AFTER THE REVOLUTION

In combination with data about the occupational and political status of parents after 1949, these political categories can be used to classify urban Chinese households into three different kinds of elites. The first is the "revolutionary-cadre" elite. This group includes households headed by people who served in the Communist Party or PLA before 1949—and were classified as revolutionary—or who came to occupy prominent political and administrative posts after 1949. All of the households with revolutionary class labels are included in this category, and they constitute just under half of the revolutionary-cadre elite. The remainder are households in which one of the parents was appointed to an elite administrative post. The vast majority of these (some 43% of the total) have proletarian labels. The remaining 10% were almost entirely from households with middle-class labels. Parents from only two households managed to attain an elite administrative post despite a black class label (see table 2).

A second type of elite household is the "party household," in which at least one of the parents was a member of the Communist Party, but which is not otherwise classified in the revolutionary-cadre category. These household heads were the first generation to join the party after 1949. Only 17% of all adults in our urban sample were ever members of the Communist Party. Individuals who are admitted to the party have been screened for both family background and individual performance and have been investigated and certified as loyal by the party branches and committees of their workplaces (Walder 1995). Party membership itself does not confer privilege and high occupational status. However, it does connect individuals to networks of power in their places of work, confers a marker of political status and reliability, and marks an individual for future educational opportunities and career advancement (Li and Walder 2001). A household headed by a member of the Communist Party is therefore differentiated from the broad majority of households in its stronger connections to the regime. Some 90% of the households in this category

TABLE 2
SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HOUSEHOLD TYPES

Household Type	Pre-1949 Property Ownership (%)	Parental Education (years)	Parental Party Membership (%)	Revolutionary Class (%)	Proletarian Class (%)	Middle Class (%)	Black Class (%)	Total No. of Cases
Revolutionary-cadre ...	10.9	8.5	71.6	47.4	42.8	9.1	.7	285
Party household	6.2	6.3	100	0	89.9	9.1	1.0	308
Old elite	26.4	5.3	0	0	0	79.6	20.4	481
Ordinary	4.2	3.8	0	0	100	0	0	1,983
Overall	8.5	4.7	16.8	4.4	77.9	14.4	3.4	3,057

NOTE.—Pre-1949 property ownership, parental education, and party membership are defined as in table 1. Ordinary households are defined in the section on data and analytic strategy below.

had a red proletarian class label, and almost all of the remainder had middle-class labels (table 2).

A third type of elite household is in many ways a negative status, as it applies to those who were privileged in the prerevolution social order. These "old elite" households supplied the politicians, managers, bankers, and landlords who were the backbone of the old regime, whose properties were expropriated in the 1950s. They also supplied the relatively well-educated professionals and white-collar workers who, although owning no means of production, enjoyed relatively high incomes in the prerevolution period. The vast majority of these households (80%) were categorized as middle class, while the remainder had black class labels. These households were either actively discriminated against or not fully trusted as a matter of policy. They had relatively high educational attainment before 1949 (table 2) and, in the absence of active political discrimination, would normally be expected to transfer their status to subsequent generations at high rates (Ganzeboom et al. 1991).

After the revolution, households headed by revolutionary-cadres and party members were to be treated differently from old elites. Revolutionary-cadres had political power, and their households were to be shown state-sanctioned favoritism. This policy was unchallenged until 1966. During the subsequent Cultural Revolution, however, many of these same elite households were attacked as part of Mao's assault on revisionism in the party. Not until the mid-1970s did they resume their former positions, and not until the late 1970s and early 1980s were there widespread rehabilitations and restitution to the elite victims of the period (Lee 1991, pp. 163–92). In contrast, old elite families, while carrying forward family legacies of professional/managerial experience from the old regime, faced varying levels of discrimination. The policies that enforced this discrimination were not formally abolished until 1978, and it is still not clear what their net effect has been.

MECHANISMS OF STATUS TRANSMISSION

The most obvious mechanism through which household status is transmitted across generations is the class-label policy. Class labeling occurs at two important points in the life course. The first is entry into the Communist Party. After the revolution, party membership became a key credential for rapid advancement into positions of authority and privilege and even, for those with modest educations, an avenue into party-sponsored adult education (Walder 1995; Li and Walder 2001). The second is entry into the labor force and, subsequently, consideration for promotions (Hu 2008). At each of these junctures, party officials screen in-

dividuals for party membership and also for class origin (Walder et al. 2000). This is a formally organized screening process—a “loyalty filter”—enforced by the party organization, a political bureaucracy organized in all urban workplaces of any importance.

The formally organized personnel system and its explicit rules are by no means the only mechanisms at work. Particularistic ties also have an impact, and while they can potentially override official policy, they can also serve to reinforce it. Job searches in urban China typically involve the use of strong personal ties to bridge gaps in personal networks and influence workplace officials in their hiring decisions (Bian 1997). Personal influence of this variety operates whether labor is allocated through markets or through bureaucracies—so long as officials in work organizations have discretion over hiring decisions. Individuals with high-status positions and personal authority are in a better position to influence hiring decisions through their networks because they have more resources to employ in exchanges of favors.

A final class of mechanisms is more familiar to students of comparative intergenerational mobility. Parental education is a resource for offspring’s educational attainment, just as parents with higher-status occupations have higher career expectations for their children and instill higher career aspirations. We would therefore expect revolutionary households, with the highest levels of parental education of any group and also high occupational status, to transmit their status to offspring at high rates—even in the absence of official favoritism. In this type of mobility regime, however, these familiar mechanisms would also apply to political activism and party membership. For the same reason that high parental education and status provide resources and instill aspirations in offspring, parental party membership (and political rank) should provide an advantage in the attainment of party membership and the pursuit of an administrative career. Conversely, members of old elite households, with relatively high parental education but little political status and influence, are highly unlikely to have any advantages in attaining party membership and pursuing official careers. In fact, they are likely to suffer setbacks relative to the educational resources of their families, especially in the attainment of party membership, which is the key to a subsequent administrative career. Consequently, they are more likely to develop career strategies whose end is relatively high-status occupations that require educational credentials but do not require extensive political screening (Walder 1995; Walder et al. 2000).

THE DATA AND ANALYTIC STRATEGY

To examine the fate of these different elite households through time, we analyze data from the urban sample of a nationally representative life-history survey of 3,087 urban adults ages 20–69, conducted in China in 1996.⁵ Data from this survey were analyzed in earlier studies of urban and rural income determination (Walder 2002; Wu 2002; Wu and Xie 2003) and career mobility (Walder et al. 2000; Li and Walder 2001).⁶ The questionnaire requested information about the respondent's party membership as well as full educational and occupational histories. Similar information was also collected about other family members at various points in time: parental education, party membership and occupation when respondent was 14 years old, paternal grandfather's occupation in 1948, pre-1949 family property ownership, and family class label. We dropped 3 cases due to missing educational information, 4 cases due to missing party membership information, and 23 cases due to missing information about family class labels. This leaves a sample of 3,057 valid cases.

Like earlier analyses of elite careers, our analysis excludes the rural sample because it lacks the administrative and professional posts that are the target occupations in our analyses. Moreover, party membership is itself relatively rare among rural residents: 5.8% of all respondents in the rural sample were members of the Communist Party in 1996, compared to 17.3% of the urban respondents. If we aimed to estimate overall rates of mobility in the occupational structure as a whole, it would be essential to include both the rural and urban samples. The strong historical barriers to rural-urban migration in China, and the vast differences in rural and urban occupational structures, would result in severe sample selection bias in any estimate of overall levels of occupational inheritance (Wu and Treiman 2007). Our purpose is more narrowly focused and requires no information about the ability of those from farming households to move into higher-status nonagricultural occupations. We are targeting specific elite occupations that are clustered almost exclusively in urban areas, and

⁵ The survey, *Life Histories and Social Change in Contemporary China*, was part of a sample of 6,473 urban and rural households (Treiman 1998). The design was a multistage stratified probability sample of 100 county-level units drawn from a national list that excluded only Tibet. Within each county-level unit, two residents' committees or villages were chosen as the sampling points. The sample includes individuals registered as both permanent and temporary residents but excludes unregistered migrants. The data set, codebook, and documentation of the sample design and survey administration are available online from the UCLA Social Sciences Data Archive (<http://www.issr.ucla.edu/data-archives>).

⁶ The urban and rural samples were analyzed together in a recent study of intergenerational occupational mobility during the Mao era (Wu and Treiman 2007).

we aim to analyze changes through time in these urban occupational dynamics.

In the analyses presented below, we examine the odds that offspring from elite households attain three kinds of positions: party membership, an elite administrative post, and an elite profession.⁷ Our primary interest is in the extent to which members of various types of elite households are likely to attain one of these positions, net of a vector of other individual or parental characteristics that would otherwise predict these outcomes. Prior publications have already shown large effects for education and party membership in the attainment of different types of elite positions (Walder 1995; Walder et al. 2000; Li and Walder 2001). Our strategy has two components. First, we investigate whether family background has a net impact on the attainment of party membership and individual career outcomes after controlling for these individual characteristics—and for the education of parents. In all of the analyses, we derive separate estimates for the pre- and post-1977 periods. Second, we statistically compare the estimated odds ratios between these two periods to assess the nature and extent of change introduced in the post-Mao era.

The independent variables indicating elite family background are defined and coded as follows. Revolutionary-cadre households meet one of two criteria: either the class label was revolutionary, or at least one of the respondent's parents held an elite administrative (cadre) post when the respondent was 14 years old. In the sample, 285 respondents (or 9.3%) were coded as members of revolutionary-cadre households. A party household is one in which at least one of the respondent's parents was a party member when the respondent was 14 years old and which was not already classified as a cadre-revolutionary household. In the sample, 308 respondents (or 10.1%) belonged to this category.

In the analyses that we report below, we combine these two elite political categories into a single “new elite” category. The narrowly defined categories contain too few cases to generate statistically significant findings for many of the analyses we intend to conduct. This inevitably causes a loss of precision—the revolutionary-cadre elite is clearly more senior and has higher status than the households headed by ordinary party members who joined after 1949. The combined category is therefore less elite than would be ideal for this kind of analysis—making it less likely that we

⁷ “Elite profession” is defined the same way as in Walder et al. (2000): an occupation categorized as “middle-level professional/technical personnel” or “high-level professional/technical personnel.” “Elite administrative position” is defined differently from the earlier publication: “head of private enterprise” is excluded from the category “leading cadres of party and government organizations.” Operationally, this includes occupational codes 200–299 in the variable “respondent's occupation,” excluding those coded 246.

will detect advantages. When interpreting the results for this broader new elite category, however, we note significant differences between the two elite groups when we detect them in separate analyses that we do not report in the tables. The combined category of new elite includes 593 households, or 19.4% of the sampled households.

The contrasting old elite category contains households with black or middle-class labels that were not otherwise categorized as revolutionary-cadre or party households. These households either were actively discriminated against (black classes) or were denied the favoritism promised to red households (middle classes). We combined the black and middle-class categories for the same reason that we combined the two new elite categories, with a similar loss of precision. The black classes, according to policy, were to suffer the most rigid forms of discrimination, while the middle-class households, as a neutral category, were by policy disadvantaged more subtly, only in relation to those from red backgrounds. The combined category therefore makes it less likely that actual disadvantages will be detected statistically. However, we report significant differences between the black and middle-class categories when we detect them in separate analyses that we do not report in the tables. In the sample, 481 respondents (15.7%) belonged to this combined category.

Finally, if a household does not qualify for inclusion in either the new or old elite categories, it is designated as an “ordinary” household. In practice, these are households whose class labels are red—usually proletarian, urban poor, or landless peasant—and are not headed by members of the Communist Party. They make up 65% of the sample and will enter the analyses below as the excluded contrast category. Definitions of the variables used in the analysis and marginal tabulations are presented in the appendix (table A1).

To assess the changing impact of parental status, we employ event-history analyses. Time-varying characteristics are transformed into annual spells to permit them to vary for the same individuals. Exponential hazard-rate models with period-specific effects are specified in a model with the general form

$$r(t) = \exp[p\beta_p + X(t)\beta_x + pX(t)\beta_i],$$

where $r(t)$ is the hazard rate of attaining a given position in period p between $(t, t + \Delta t)$, p is a dummy variable indicating pre- and post-1977 periods, β_p is the coefficient indicating the effect of periods, $X(t)$ is a vector of covariates on personal characteristics and family background at time

t as well as a control dummy variable for left-censorship,⁸ β_x is a vector of coefficients predicted from models, $pX(t)$ is the interaction term between period and the vector of covariates, and β_i is a vector of coefficients indicating the interactive effects. In the tables, we report multiplicative hazard ratios rather than standard additive coefficients for the log hazard rate. The two formats contain the same information, but the former is easier to interpret.

We are interested in the effect of family background on career outcomes in the Mao era, as well as in the extent of change introduced in the post-Mao market reforms. The hazard ratios are obtained for two different periods: β_x for the 27 years after the 1949 revolution until the end of the Mao era (1950–77) and $\beta_x + \beta_i$ for the subsequent 18 years of political liberalization and market reform (1978–96). The hazard ratios indicate the net impact of each variable on the odds of attaining a given position during each period, based on the observed events and the population at risk of such events in the relevant time period. The term β_i will allow us to assess the latter with the rigor of statistical tests.

It would be preferable, of course, to derive separate estimates for the first 17 years of the Mao period, before the onset of the draconian Cultural Revolution policies of 1966–76. Our focus on elite positions, however, means that our dependent variable is a rare event. Separating the Cultural Revolution decade from the rest of the Mao era reduces the number of cases to the point where we are able to generate few statistically significant coefficients. In the analyses that we report in the tables, the Mao era is therefore treated as a whole, even though we recognize that its last 10 years were, in policy terms, quite different from the previous 17. When we have been able to detect statistically significant differences within the Mao era, we note them below, but we do not report the results in the tables.

All models use maximum-likelihood estimation (MLE). The respondents were selected from a stratified sample, undermining the assumption

⁸ During the post-Mao period, people in the risk set consisted of two groups: those who did not experience the event during the Mao era and those who joined the risk set after 1978. These two groups may differ systematically in both observed and unobserved ways. As a precaution, we added a dummy variable to indicate whether the respondent belonged to the former group (coded 1) or the latter (coded 0). Besides the left-censorship problem, right-censorship is also sometimes cited as a potential problem for event-history analysis. For example, in our case, we do not have information about respondents beyond 1996, the time of the survey. The problem of right-censorship is about internal validity. That is, we do not know whether results of the study would be the same if the dependent variable representing the status were evaluated at a different ending date. However, in this study, right-censorship is not a problem because we investigate two periods, 1950–77 and 1978–96, that are both within the boundary of the censorship date.

of conventional variance estimates—independence of observations. Therefore, we use robust MLE to adjust standard errors for clustering on the primary sampling units. This does not change the coefficient estimates, but it ensures unbiased standard errors of the coefficients.⁹

THE ATTAINMENT OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP

Under state socialism, party membership is itself a marker of status and a credential that predicts future career advancement. Past research on China has shown that party membership has a large net impact on the attainment of elite administrative positions both before and after the onset of market transition (Walder et al. 2000). The impact of party membership is especially large for those who join while still young: these individuals are essentially sponsored both for rapid future career advancement and even educational attainment through adult schooling (Li and Walder 2001). In a transitional economy where the Communist Party remains in power, trends in the attainment of party membership across periods can yield useful information about changes in patterns of status inheritance.

Table 3 reports estimates for two models that differ only in the inclusion of parental education as a control variable. Model 1 (cols. 1*a*–1*c*) excludes this control, while model 2 (cols. 2*a*–2*c*) includes it. In both models, column *a* reports hazard ratios for the Mao era, and column *b* is for the post-Mao era. Column *c* in both models reports hazard ratios that represent the difference between the two time periods, expressed as the ratio of the coefficients for the preceding two columns. Both models show that party membership was strongly affected by gender, age, and education. Women are only 34% as likely as men to join the party, and this effect is constant across periods. The impact of age is large in the Mao period but drops considerably afterward. In the Mao era, each year of age (at age 25) adds 20% to the odds of joining the party.¹⁰ In the post-Mao era, this effect falls to 12% per year at age 25, and the difference in the coefficients is statistically significant in the model without controls for parental education. The impact of respondent's education rises considerably between periods. It is small in the Mao era—the odds of joining the party rise only 5% per year of education—but the odds increase to 20% per year of education in the post-Mao period. The difference between periods is statistically significant in both models.

Table 3 also shows that household status has a strong net impact on

⁹ See the documentation for the *streg* command in Stata.

¹⁰ The coefficient for age is estimated at 0 years of age. The quadratic term age^2 indicates that this effect diminishes by 0.9929 for each year of age, which yields a hazard ratio of 1.20 at age 25. The impact of age reaches 0 at age 50 and is thereafter negative.

Revolution, Reform, and Status Inheritance

TABLE 3
ROBUST MAXIMUM-LIKELIHOOD ESTIMATES OF HAZARD RATIOS FOR THE
ATTAINMENT OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP, BY PERIOD, URBAN CHINA, 1950–96

	1950–77 (1a)	1978–96 (1b)	Change (1c)	1950–77 (2a)	1978–96 (2b)	Change (2c)
Female .....	.35*** (.05)	.34*** (.05)	.97 (.23)	.35*** (.05)	.34*** (.05)	.96 (.23)
Age	1.43*** (.13)	1.16*** (.06)	.82* (.08)	1.42*** (.13)	1.17*** (.06)	.82 (.09)
Age ² .....	.993*** (.00)	.998*** (.00)	1.00** (.00)	.993*** (.00)	.998*** (.00)	1.00** (.00)
Years of education	1.04 (.02)	1.21*** (.03)	1.17*** (.03)	1.05** (.02)	1.20*** (.03)	1.15*** (.03)
Family background:						
New elite	1.65* (.33)	1.43* (.21)	.87 (.24)	1.89*** (.37)	1.35* (.20)	.72 (.19)
Old elite .....	.48*** (.08)	.99 (.20)	2.07** (.50)	.54*** (.09)	.94 (.20)	1.74* (.44)
Parental education .....				.93*** (.02)	1.03 (.02)	1.10*** (.03)
Wald χ^2	554.0			613.9		
df	14			16		
N events	255	254		255	254	
N cases	1,825	2,784		1,825	2,784	

NOTE.—Models include estimates for period effect and left-censorship controls not reported here. Robust SEs are in parentheses.

* $P < .05$.

** $P < .01$.

*** $P < .001$.

party membership, even after controlling for individual characteristics and parental education. In the Mao period, new elite households have a net advantage of 89% in the odds of joining the party, while old elite households have a net disadvantage—individuals from these households are barely more than half as likely as those from ordinary households to join the party. This implies a huge net difference between the old and new elite groups: during the Mao era, the net odds of party membership for individuals from new elite households are more than triple those for individuals from old elite households.

These differences narrow greatly in the post-Mao era. The net advantage of the new elite households endures but appears to shrink in magnitude, although the change in these effects across periods is not statistically significant. However, the disadvantage of old elite households relative to ordinary households disappears completely, and this change in coefficients is statistically significant. Party membership in the post-Mao era is now much more open to those from old elite households, who no

longer appear to suffer the discrimination they faced in the Mao era. New elite households maintain their net advantages over all others, although there are signs that this advantage may be narrowing.

In separate analyses not reported in the tables, we looked more closely at differences between the groups that we combined into new and old elites. The advantages of revolutionary-cadre and party households were of similar magnitude in the Mao era, but in the post-Mao period the advantages of the revolutionary-cadre households endured while those of party households disappeared.¹¹ Within the old elite category, discrimination against black households was far more severe than that against middle-class households in the Mao period, although both groups suffered discrimination relative to ordinary households. These differences were statistically significant within periods.¹² We also looked for differences within the Mao period before and after the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and found that new elite advantages and old elite disadvantages were restricted to the Cultural Revolution period. The effects that we detected for the entire Mao period were in fact due to the impact of the Cultural Revolution.¹³

THE ATTAINMENT OF ELITE POSITIONS

Prior research on China has shown that there are two distinct types of elite occupations in the post-1949 period. Elite government and management positions are prestigious posts that involve decision-making authority over individuals and assets. High professional positions are prestigious posts that involve the exercise of rare skill and that receive relatively high levels of remuneration, but they lack the authority that is exercised in the managerial posts. Prior research has shown that the attainment of these two different types of elite posts involves different levels of screening on different individual credentials, with political credentials

¹¹ The hazard ratio for cadre households was virtually unchanged from the Mao era, at 1.74, while that for party households dropped to 0.98.

¹² The hazard ratio for black households in the Mao era was 0.07, while that for the middle-class households was 0.68.

¹³ There were no detectable group differences in the pre-Cultural Revolution period, while the new elite advantages and old elite disadvantages were large in the Cultural Revolution decade and statistically significant. The between-period difference for the new elite households was statistically significant. The results for these alternative analyses are available on request. The control variable for time period was not statistically significant, which means that those who were eligible for party membership during the Mao period did not join the party at higher rates in the post-Mao period than those who joined the risk set during that period. In testing alternative time specifications, we found that a linear model was not as good a fit as the two-period model, while the three-period model was a better fit.

being far more important than educational credentials for administrative posts and the reverse holding true for professional positions (Walder 1995; Walder et al. 2000). No one has yet examined the extent to which parents in old and new elite households have been able to transmit their status to their offspring, net of parental education and individual characteristics.

Elite Administrative Posts

Table 4 replicates, in part, earlier published findings on the changing impact of education and party membership on administrative careers (Walder et al. 2000). In light of our earlier findings that household status has a strong net impact on party membership, models 1 and 2 differ in the inclusion of individual party membership as a control variable. This will help us to determine how much of the household effect is due to respondents' party membership. In the Mao period, the modest impact of education relative to party membership is evident. In both models, one year of education increased the odds of attaining an elite administrative post by only 7% or 8%. This means that six years of education (the difference between completing primary and high school) increases the odds by only 50% ($1.07^6 = 1.50$). The overriding importance of political credentials during the Mao era is clear (table 4, col. 2a). Party membership increased the odds of an administrative post by more than sevenfold—a figure equal to the impact of more than 29 years of education ($1.07^{29} = 7.11$).

The remarkable finding about the Mao era to emerge from this table is that no type of elite household conferred advantages net of education and party membership—the Cultural Revolution stopped the inheritance of elite administrative posts dead in its tracks. This shows the impact of the radical anti-elite policies of the last decade of the Mao era: after 1966 an entire generation of youths was sent to the countryside, universities were closed and later reopened with reduced enrollment, vast numbers of officials were sent to labor for several years in rural areas, and regular promotion practices were curtailed (Unger 1982; Zhou and Hou 1999). Prior small samples of émigré populations led to similar conclusions more than 20 years ago (Parish 1984). This is the first time that a national probability sample has confirmed the extent to which Mao-era policies inhibited status inheritance among elite households. China may have been unique in this respect among mature state socialist regimes.

After Mao, new elite households rapidly recovered the ability to transmit their status to offspring. This is true despite the fact that the impacts of age, education, and party membership have changed very little. Six years of education now doubles the odds of attaining an elite administrative post ($1.14^6 = 2.19$). Despite the spread of markets, the impact of

TABLE 4
 ROBUST MAXIMUM-LIKELIHOOD ESTIMATES OF HAZARD RATIOS FOR THE
 ATTAINMENT OF ELITE ADMINISTRATIVE POSTS, BY PERIOD, URBAN CHINA, 1950–96

	1950–77 (1a)	1978–96 (1b)	Change (1c)	1950–77 (2a)	1978–96 (2b)	Change (2c)
Female .....	.55** (.13)	.29*** (.05)	.54* (.17)	.75 (.16)	.40*** (.07)	.53* (.16)
Age	1.31** (.13)	1.30*** (.08)	.99 (.12)	1.18 (.12)	1.23*** (.08)	1.05 (.12)
Age ² .....	.996* (.00)	.997*** (.00)	1.00 (.00)	.997 (.00)	.997*** (.00)	1.00 (.00)
Years of education	1.08*** (.02)	1.12*** (.03)	1.04 (.04)	1.07** (.02)	1.09** (.03)	1.02 (.04)
Party membership				7.20*** (1.66)	5.98*** (.98)	.83 (.20)
Family background:						
New elite .....	.53 (.28)	1.74** (.33)	3.28* (1.95)	.42 ⁺ (.21)	1.39 ⁺ (.26)	3.31* (1.89)
Old elite .....	.79 (.19)	.75 (.21)	.95 (.39)	1.02 (.25)	.87 (.25)	.85 (.34)
Parental education .....	.95 (.03)	1.04 (.02)	1.09* (.05)	.96 (.03)	1.05* (.02)	1.09* (.04)
Wald χ^2	338.1			742.8		
df	16			18		
N events	106			106		
N cases	1,796			1,796		

NOTE.—Models include estimates for period effect and left-censorship controls not reported here. Robust SEs are in parentheses.

⁺ $P < .10$.

* $P < .05$.

** $P < .01$.

*** $P < .001$.

party membership is little diminished from the Mao era—it still confers a sixfold advantage, equal to that of 14 years of education ($1.14^{14} = 6.26$). Party membership is still close to a prerequisite to the achievement of positions of power. It is unlikely that this effect would exist in countries that have experienced significant regime change.¹⁴ The only other significant difference across periods is that the disadvantages of women have increased. In both models, a woman's net odds of promotion to an administrative post are roughly halved in the post-Mao period.

Those from old elite households have no net advantage in entering elite administrative posts in either period, nor do they suffer disadvantages. New elite households, however, enjoy a net advantage after Mao, much

¹⁴ In fact, in many postcommunist regimes, the Communist party no longer exists, and one is forced to refer to *former* party members (Gerber 2000).

of it mediated by individual party membership. The estimated net advantage enjoyed by new elite households is 74% in model 1; this shrinks to 39% and marginal statistical significance in model 2, which controls for respondents' party membership. In both models, the net impact of new elite status more than triples after Mao, a difference that is statistically significant in both models.

In separate analyses not reported in the tables, we looked more closely at differences between the groups that we combined into new and old elites, and we detected one finding of note. As was the case for the attainment of party membership, we found that the advantages for new elite households in the post-Mao era were restricted to the revolutionary-cadre households—the advantages of those from party households disappeared.¹⁵ When we looked at differences within the Mao period, we found that none of the 224 individuals in the risk set from new elite households attained an elite administrative post during the Cultural Revolution period, making it impossible to generate meaningful estimates for the model. Almost all of those who were promoted into such positions were from ordinary (proletarian) households. It is obvious that both cadre and party households were hit very hard by the policies of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁶

Elite Professional Posts

Table 5 also replicates, in part, earlier publications that have documented the very different roles of education and party membership in elite professional careers (Walder 1995; Walder et al. 2000). For the first time, however, we can gauge the extent to which family background affects the attainment of these positions and how that has changed through time. As in earlier publications, we find that party membership has no impact on the attainment of an elite professional post, while education has a massive impact. The relative impact of education and party membership on this career path has been constant throughout the history of the

¹⁵ The hazard ratio for the cadre households was 1.61 and significant at the .05 level, while that for the party household was 1.18. The control variable for the 1978–96 period was statistically significant, indicating a rehabilitation effect—those who were eligible for promotion but passed over in the Mao era were some 72% more likely to attain an elite administrative post than those who joined the risk set after 1977. A test of the cohort/class/period interaction term indicated that there were no group differences in this regard.

¹⁶ A linear time specification was not as good a fit as the two-period model reported here. New elite advantages in the post-Mao period were not due to better access to education. The results did not change when we excluded the respondent's education from the models.

TABLE 5
 ROBUST MAXIMUM-LIKELIHOOD ESTIMATES OF HAZARD RATIOS FOR THE
 ATTAINMENT OF ELITE PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS, BY PERIOD, URBAN CHINA, 1950–96

	1950–77 (1a)	1978–96 (1b)	Change (1c)	1950–77 (2a)	1978–96 (2b)	Change (2c)
Female .....	.57 (.17)	.77 (.16)	1.36 (.41)	.57 (.18)	.78 (.17)	1.36 (.42)
Age .....	.79* (.08)	.98 (.07)	1.24 (.16)	.79* (.08)	.98 (.07)	1.24 (.16)
Age ²	1.003 (.00)	.999 (.00)	1.00 (.00)	1.003 (.00)	1.000 (.00)	1.00 (.00)
Years of education	1.39*** (.06)	1.46*** (.07)	1.09 (.06)	1.37*** (.06)	1.46*** (.07)	1.06 (.06)
Party membership	1.51 (.58)	1.37 (.45)	.91 (.47)	1.71 (.69)	1.41 (.47)	.86 (.46)
Family background:						
New elite .....	.70 (.36)	1.29 (.32)	1.83 (.96)	.59 (.31)	1.21 (.30)	2.06 (1.08)
Old elite	1.83** (.37)	1.76** (.34)	.96 (.28)	1.49* (.30)	1.68** (.34)	1.13 (.35)
Parental education				1.08* (.03)	1.03 (.03)	.95 (.03)
Wald χ^2	302.5			306.1		
df	16			18		
N events	61	116		61	116	
N cases	1,802	2,877		1,802	2,877	

NOTE.—Models include estimates for period effect and left-censorship controls not reported here. Robust SEs are in parentheses.

* $P < .05$.

** $P < .01$.

*** $P < .001$.

People's Republic. Each year of education has increased the odds of an elite professional post by some 37%–46%, and the inclusion of controls for parental education (model 2) has virtually no effect on these estimates.

Table 5 reveals two new findings. First, elite professions were a refuge for the offspring of old elite households in the Mao era when they faced discrimination in joining the party. Net of the massive impact of education, the offspring of the old elite were still 83% more likely to attain an elite profession in the Mao era than other households (col. 1a), a net advantage that is still large (49%) after controlling for parental education (col. 2a). Parental education has a strong impact in the Mao period: each year of parental education adds 8% to the odds that offspring will attain a professional post (col. 2a). The net impact of parental education disappears in the post-Mao period, but the net advantage of those from old elite households remains large (col. 2b).

In separate analyses not reported in the tables, we looked more closely

at differences between the groups that we combined into new and old elites, and we detected one finding of note. The advantages of old elite households in both the Mao and post-Mao eras are actually due entirely to advantages that accrued to those from middle-class households.¹⁷ When we examined differences within the Mao era, we found that the advantages of the combined category of old elites (essentially, those of the middle classes) were restricted to the pre-Cultural Revolution period. During the Cultural Revolution, their advantage disappeared, as one might have expected.¹⁸ Finally, we looked more closely at the lack of new elite advantages in attaining elite professions in the post-Mao period that we reported in table 5. Is this due to the fact that the model controls for the respondent's education? When we exclude respondent's education from the model, we find that those from new elite households do indeed have a net advantage in attaining an elite profession.¹⁹ This means that those from new elite households enjoyed advantages in professional careers in the later period because of their better access to education.

Summary

Our analysis yields several clear findings. The most obvious is the remarkable extent to which Mao's Cultural Revolution succeeded in halting—or perhaps reversing—the ability of new elite households to transmit elite status to their offspring. Status inheritance continued in certain respects—namely, new elites' strong net advantages in the attainment of party membership. However, those from new elite families were unable to translate their advantages in attaining party membership into elite administrative posts, primarily due to the radical policies of the Cultural Revolution decade.

A second finding about the Mao period is no less remarkable. Individuals from old elite households, according to policies that were to be followed throughout the Mao period—even before the Cultural Revolution—

¹⁷ The hazard ratios in both periods for black households were close to 1.0, which indicated that they did not suffer disadvantages relative to ordinary households despite the discrimination they faced. The hazard ratios for middle-class households were somewhat larger than what we report in table 5 for the old elite.

¹⁸ The hazard ratio for the pre-Cultural Revolution period is 1.90 and statistically significant, while that for the Cultural Revolution period is 0.99.

¹⁹ Excluding the respondent's education from col. 1*b* of table 5 yielded a hazard ratio of 1.98 for new elites and 2.58 for old elites, both statistically significant. The control variable for the 1978–96 period was not statistically significant, indicating that those who were passed over for an elite professional position in the Mao era were not more likely to attain such an appointment than those who joined the risk set after 1977. A test of the cohort/class/period interaction term indicated that there were no group differences in this regard. Full results are available on request.

were supposed to suffer consistent discrimination in job assignments and promotions. The result is clearly evident in our analysis of party membership, where the offspring of the old elite were admitted to the party at much lower rates than new elite and all other households. This discrimination did not deter them from attaining elite positions, however—it simply steered them away from administrative posts and toward the elite professions. Surprisingly, the offspring of old elite households still enjoyed large net advantages in attaining elite professional posts even during the Mao period (although only before the Cultural Revolution), despite the discrimination enshrined in the political labels that had such a clear impact on party membership. This advantage was actually due entirely to advantages of those from middle-class households, who were denied the privileged treatment to be accorded to the red households but were not subjected to the active discrimination that policy dictated toward the black households. It is interesting that despite a policy that dictated discrimination against them, the black households still were not disadvantaged in professional careers relative to ordinary households. Denied access to political careers, these households compensated by moving into the elite professions, which required education but not party membership. The middle classes were the only elite group to transfer status across generations during the Mao period—an advantage attributable in large part to parental education.²⁰

It is against this historical backdrop that the changes observed during China's market transition must be gauged. The first obvious finding is about party membership: despite a post-Mao political liberalization that removed discrimination against old elite households in party membership, the advantages of the offspring of the new elite remain—although these advantages are restricted to revolutionary-cadre households. More important is the fact that the massive impact of party membership in the attainment of an elite administrative post also remains undiminished in the era of market reform. This should not be surprising: despite market transition, China, unlike most other transitional economies, remains a one-party state.

The key finding about the post-Mao era is that the politically connected new elite households now enter elite administrative posts at higher net rates than others—although again, this advantage is restricted to the revolutionary-cadre households. Much of this effect is due to advantages in

²⁰ This is a partial confirmation of Kelley and Klein's (1977) argument that revolution in general favors those with human capital by equalizing property ownership and removing class barriers. Their point of reference was Bolivia, which did not lead them to consider regimes with the capacity and will to systematically label households and allocate economic opportunity as in China under Mao.

joining the party, but for the first time this effect is measurable. The net impact of new elite status increases threefold in the post-Mao era. In this respect, the value of political connections has increased. The historical trajectory of China's new elite suggests that the Cultural Revolution either delayed or interrupted the consolidation of their household status—an ascent that was resumed under the political liberalization that accompanied market reform.²¹ Obviously it would be a mistake to claim that this is an inherent outcome of the shift from plan to market. Instead, it shows that the impact of market transition is contingent on coterminous political changes—in this case, a political liberalization that follows fast on the heels of radical antielite policies.

The fate of old elite households in the post-Mao era also deserves comment. The barriers to party membership faced by the offspring of the old elite quickly disappeared, and their odds of joining the party are no longer different from those of individuals from ordinary households. Their affinity for elite professional careers, however, endures. The strategy that they adopted in the Mao years—perhaps reinforced by familial preferences developed over decades of political discrimination—still leads to advantages in the professional career line, which depends very heavily on educational credentials. Middle-class family heritage is the only household category that still confers a net advantage in an elite professional career. There is no sign that the offspring of the old elite are yet moving into elite administrative posts at higher rates.²²

CONCLUSION: POLITICS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

We cannot claim that these findings are typical of the impact of markets on a transitional economy's pattern of social change. China is different from most of today's transitional economies in two distinct ways. First, it is the only socialist regime that experienced a prolonged and massive assault on existing political elites in the decade immediately prior to market reform. Second, with the exception of Vietnam, China is the only communist regime to survive intact and to direct the process of market

²¹ There are parallels here to Szelényi's (1988) finding that a family legacy of pre-revolution entrepreneurship predicted movement into entrepreneurship after Hungary initiated rural market reforms.

²² The mechanism likely involved is a change through time in familial preferences in the face of discrimination, similar to processes that lead to gender differences in occupational aspirations (Correll 2004). The adjustment of individual aspirations described by Correll is likely to be partially responsible for the persistently low rates at which women join the party and attain elite administrative posts. There is no net gender effect in entering the elite professions.

reform. All other transitional economies experienced a variety of more thorough regime changes.

This raises a more fundamental question: What was the pattern of elite inheritance in the decades before market reform in other socialist states?²³ What was the long-term impact of political revolution and regime change after state socialism was established? If we view status inheritance as a key indicator of social change, these questions need to be answered before we can begin to assess the dual impact of market reform and regime change after 1989. Multigeneration life-course surveys of the variety conducted in China in 1996 are able to reach back into past generations to track social change through the lens of status inheritance.

To explore these questions in the context of other transitional economies would move sociological research further in the direction of examining the impact of politics on social structure and the impact of revolution and reform in the long run. Today's transitional economies are experiencing a wide range of epochal transformations—in political institutions, in the ownership and corporate organization of large enterprises, and in the relationship of their economies to the outside world. The impact of these changes can only be gauged against a baseline of knowledge about the outcomes of the prior period of revolution and socialist development. Did prerevolution elites do better in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the absence of the energetically enforced class-label policy of China and of anything like China's Cultural Revolution? Were the postrevolution administrative elites of these nations able to consolidate their family status at higher rates than those observed in China under Mao? And now that the new elites of the state socialist era have become the old elites of the postcommunist era, do their offspring do better or worse after the revolutionary events of 1989, especially in those countries that rapidly turned into highly competitive electoral democracies? The answers to these questions will force us to further explore the impact of political differences across state socialist regimes and through time and to move closer to confident answers about the long-term impact of the defining revolutionary movement of the 20th century.

²³ There is a good deal of prior research on educational attainment (Ganzeboom et al. 1990; Gerber and Hout 1995; Hanley and McKeever 1997; Széleányi 1998, pp. 21–41; Wong 1998) and party membership (Széleányi 1987; Wong 1996; Hanley 2003). However, these studies do not make the distinctions between new and old elites that is central to our analysis. Past studies of occupational attainment in the region have been dominated by studies of overall social fluidity and aggregate mobility rates to the neglect of more focused analyses of new political elites.

Revolution, Reform, and Status Inheritance

APPENDIX

TABLE A1
VARIABLE DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ($N = 3,057$)

Variable	Definition	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Female	1 = female	.50	0	1	.50
Age	Respondent's age in years, time varying	41.9	20	69	13.4
Years of education	Respondent's education in years, time varying; tabulation based on time of survey	8.1	0	24	4.1
Party membership	1 = party member, time varying; tabulation based on numbers of whomever joined the party	.17	0	1	.38
Revolutionary-cadre household	1 = family class label was "revolutionary," or at least one of respondent's parents was a leading cadre when respondent was 14	.09	0	1	.29
Party household	1 = at least one of respondent's parents was party member when respondent was 14	.10	0	1	.30
Old elite household	1 = family class label was not "red" and household was neither revolutionary-cadre household nor party household	.16	0	1	.36
Ordinary household	1 = not included in above categories of household types; reference category	.65	0	1	.48
Elite administrative post	1 = leading cadre, time varying; tabulation based on numbers of whomever entered such a position	.092	0	1	.29
Elite professional position	1 = middle- or high-level professional and technical staff, time varying; tabulation based on numbers of whomever entered such a position	.060	0	1	.24

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