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Author(s): Bobai Li and Andrew G. Walder

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Career Advancement as Party Patronage: Sponsored Mobility into the Chinese Administrative Elite, 1949–1996¹

Bobai Li and Andrew G. Walder
Stanford University

Core features of mobility regimes are obscured by models common in comparative research. Party patronage in China is apparent only in the timing of career events. Elites are chosen from among party members, but only some are eventually chosen. Those who join the party while young enter a career path that includes sponsorship for adult education and more likely promotion. While the party's preference for youth from "red" classes has yielded to one for prior education, party sponsorship endures. Because patronage blurs distinctions between politics and merit, it confounds interpretations of returns to individual attributes.

Although interest in the subject has surged following recent changes in the world, research on stratification and mobility in communist states has a long history. Most of our attention is now trained on the consequences of these distinctive economic institutions and their recent transformations, but the role of political institutions—in particular, ruling communist parties—is a subject of equally vital importance. Despite decades of comparative mobility studies based on survey data from these regimes, analysis of the role of politics in career processes is still in its infancy. This is

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largely because data on individual party membership did not become available until the mid-1980s (Szelényi 1987), by which time for most countries the subject had assumed largely historical significance. However, in those countries where communist parties have relinquished power, the subject still presents questions of genuine comparative and historical importance. Where the party still rules, the subject remains vital for understanding the social consequences of current economic transformations.

Political inequalities were by no means neglected by students of comparative mobility, and the lack of data on party membership did not block the research agenda. The party's control over career opportunities was not ignored; it instead constituted a central if implicit role in defining the core intellectual problem. In early studies of communist regimes, the disparity between party elites and nonparty masses was a central topic of interest (Marcuse 1958; Rigby 1968; Sorokin 1959). Scarce aggregate data nonetheless made clear the marked advantages of party members in career advancement and the allocation of resources, and this led generations of scholars to conclude that political inequalities based on party affiliation were central to stratification under state socialism (Bauman 1974; Connor 1979; Feldmesser 1960; Goldthorpe 1966; Parkin 1969; Walder 1985, 1986). When survey data from such countries as Hungary and Poland became available in the 1970s, the lack of individual-level data on party membership still did not block the comparative agenda. Instead, knowledge of the party's system of power and privilege served to frame the intellectual problem, that is, given that communist regimes had political and economic institutions that differed in fundamental ways from those of other industrial societies, did they nonetheless exhibit a similar pattern of mobility that linked educational achievement to occupational attainment (Moore 1944 1950; Inkeles 1950)? The first generation of survey-based mobility studies appeared to answer this question decisively in the affirmative (e.g., Ganzeboom, De Graaf, and Robert 1990; Giddens 1973; Inkeles and Bauer 1959; Parkin 1971; Meyer, Tuma, and Zagórski 1979; Simkus 1981; Treiman and Yip 1989). Inevitably, however, the perennial absence of party membership as a variable in mobility models excused researchers from carefully conceptualizing its role in the processes of status attainment.

When individual data on party membership finally became available in the mid-1980s, interest in the subject revived. For the first time, it was possible to directly examine the relationships among family background, educational attainment, party membership, and occupational mobility, and to shed new light on old questions that had heretofore been addressed only indirectly. The first studies have generally conceived of party membership as a credential to be earned by individuals and whose impact is analogous to, and compared with, that of education. Some would examine

the role of family background, education, and occupation in attaining party membership (Szelényi 1987; Walder 1995). Others would treat party membership as an intervening variable between family background and occupational outcomes (Blau and Ruan 1990; Lin and Bian 1991). Some studies, based on a conception of a single status hierarchy, have modeled the attainment of occupational prestige or an elite occupation and have shown that party membership has an effect independent of that of education (Blau and Ruan 1990; Lin and Bian 1991; Massey, Hodson, and Sekulic 1992). Studies of China have shown that the effects of party membership and education vary by type of career. Party membership is irrelevant for mobility into elite professions but vital for entry into the administrative elite, while education is paramount for professional occupations but only moderately important for administrative posts (Walder 1995; Walder, Li, and Treiman 2000).

Treating party membership as a credential is a convenient modeling solution. It permits comparison of “returns” to party membership and education, and in the tradition of comparative mobility research, it provides an accounting device for the extent to which career mobility is affected by principles other than the “meritocratic.” This approach makes two simple assumptions about party membership: first, that it operates as a qualification, much like a college degree, for which candidates for promotion into “closed” positions are screened (Sørensen 1983); and second, that it operates as a “signal” about unobserved attributes of the candidate, much as a college degree acts as a signal of unobserved abilities or other valuable personal qualities (Arrow 1973; Spence 1973; Stiglitz 1975). Party membership is in this sense a rough indicator of loyalty to the regime and worthiness to receive rewards (Walder 1995, p. 312). According to this minimalist approach, a candidate’s party membership indicates two things to the party officials who oversee personnel decisions in work organizations: that at some point the individual showed interest in party membership through efforts to meet the party’s standards for recruitment (participation in meetings, cooperation with party officials, and the display of the proper political and personal demeanor), and that at some point in the past a party committee in some organization certified that the individual’s behavior and background qualified him or her for membership (Walder 1995, pp. 312–14).

These ideas provide conceptual scaffolding for estimating the effects of party membership, but they leave unanswered key questions about the attainment of party membership and the role this plays in individuals’ careers. How exactly does party membership operate as a credential? Is it obtained by individuals based on open competition, or is it systematically granted by the party and party officials based on family background or other political considerations? Is it primarily an alternative career strat-

egy for those with little education or a qualification that enhances the careers of all highly motivated individuals? While the regime may enshrine party membership as a criterion for advancement, and while we may gauge its effects on career mobility, the organizational decisions and individual strategies that lead to these associations are still far from clear.

At the core of the problem is the fact that admission into the party does not in itself elevate a member to elite status. Ruling communist parties are not small elite clubs but mass political organizations composed predominantly of people from ordinary occupations (Schurmann 1968, p. 138). Aggregate tabulations show that party members enjoy substantial privileges over nonparty members, but this is primarily because those in elite occupations join at much higher rates (Rigby 1968; Szelényi 1987; Walder 1995). People from a variety of occupational backgrounds are incorporated into the party as a matter of policy. Moreover, those who join are well known to vary widely in their degree of commitment to the regime and its political program and in their motives for joining (see, e.g., Shirk 1982). Some are politically committed believers and join for patriotic motives; some are ambitious young political activists who seek party membership simply as a means to advance their careers; and others may join passively in response to party recruitment efforts in their place of work. Some join early in life, while others join in mid- or late-career. In short, the relationship of individual members to the party organization may vary enormously in unobserved ways, and while we have strong reasons to suspect such variations systematically affect career outcomes, no one has addressed the problem with relevant data.

SPONSORED MOBILITY THROUGH PARTY PATRONAGE

Party membership does not fit readily into the conceptual apparatus of comparative mobility research. Such research has long been founded on the distinction between ascription (or inherited status advantages) and achievement (based on meritocratic competition). The core research agenda has been to gauge the extent to which these principles influence educational attainment and intergenerational status inheritance across types of economic and political systems, and through time, as societies urbanize and industrialize. Ascription is the label for advantages or disadvantages attached to persons by birth, but which continue to affect their life chances from childhood on. Ethnicity, gender, parental education, and occupational status are measurable attributes of individuals that have long had a demonstrable impact on life chances. Achievement (or universalism) is the label given to processes presumed to be based on com-

petition, in which individual motivation and ability are assessed based on performance (obviously, this is an ideal-type).

Party membership, in contrast, represents neither a quality given by birth nor an achievement-based indicator of ability. To some extent, one can treat party membership as a status achieved through motivation, effort, and competition, and that may be conferred partly according to perceived leadership potential.² But it is essentially a relationship to a national political organization with branches in almost all places of work (and, in part, the officials who staff such branches) for which party members are rewarded. *Particularism* is the concept usually reserved for the principle that one's life chances are affected by a relationship with those with wealth or power. In this case, party loyalty is a form of "principled" particularism characteristic of modern political machines (Walder 1986; Walder et al. 2000). What has differentiated state socialist from other political machines is the enormous scope of the party's patronage: at one point, they controlled the vast majority of the nation's productive wealth and career opportunities.

To properly relate party membership to the ideal-types that motivate comparative mobility research does little more than to help frame our questions. We still need propositions that help us to understand how this "particularistic" principle of advancement and reward might be related to the more familiar ascriptive and merit-based principles in an analysis of career processes. We propose a model of party-sponsored mobility that focuses on the *timing* of party membership in an individual's life. This model, based loosely on ideas about elite mobility in England first offered by Turner (1960), posits that individuals are chosen by an elite relatively early in life according to some combination of ascriptive and behavioral characteristics, and that individuals so chosen at an early age enjoy subsequent advantages in certain forms of educational attainment and career advancement. It assumes that different kinds of people join the party early in life rather than later and that subsequent opportunities depend on the timing of membership. Party membership is therefore taken as a marker that an individual has been selected for potential sponsorship, but the important feature of this model is that *only early party membership brings these career advantages*. In other words, party membership does *not* operate as a credential that has the same effect regardless of the timing of its attainment within one's career. If in fact the effects of party membership vary systematically according to its timing, then standard mobility models may partially misconceive and mismeasure a mobility regime in

² For this reason, party membership is treated as a form of "political capital" analogous to "human capital" in some recent efforts to analyze income determination in planned and transitional economies (Liu 1999; Xie and Hannum 1996).

which patronage and particularism play a central role through the life course.

We propose that party membership should be conceived not as a credential but as something roughly analogous to membership in a club that can confer advantages upon members throughout their lives. In Turner's (1960) conception of "sponsored" mobility, favored status is granted to individuals by an established elite according to the "supposed merits" of individuals. Candidates are selected early in life, and they are put onto a separate path of career advancement. Turner suggested that elite mobility in England was "sponsored" in that children of the elite were placed in separate and exclusive schools at an early age, schools that provide large subsequent advantages in entering the corporate, legal, and civil service elite. This pattern presumably contrasted with "contest" mobility, a system in which ability-based competition is predominant at each step in the educational ladder.³ What makes the notion of "sponsored" mobility relevant to the case of party membership in a socialist state is the fact that some group exercises control over the allocation of elite status and that there are explicitly observed criteria of elite selection other than educational attainment.⁴ If party members are "sponsored" in this fashion, then the timing of party membership should have observable effects on individuals' subsequent careers.

The time-dependent implications of Turner's concept of sponsored mobility have been developed further by Rosenbaum (1976, 1979, 1984), who conceives of career advancement in a corporate hierarchy as a series of contests, or "tournaments," through the life course. A victory in an early tournament qualifies one for competition in the next, an evidently path-dependent process in which events early in the career can alter the outcomes of subsequent competition for career advancement.⁵ If we conceive

³ Turner's conception has not had a large impact on comparative mobility research except for comparisons of education in the United States and England (e.g., Kerckhoff and Everett 1986; Kinloch 1969; Tang 1992; Turner 1975; for exceptions, see Kerckhoff 1974, 1990; Raffe 1979; Winfield et al. 1989). Research has converged on the conclusion that the educational systems of both countries contain elements of both contest and sponsored mobility (Rosenbaum 1976, 1979, 1984; Useem and Karabel 1986) and that in the end mobility outcomes are largely similar in England and the United States (Kerckhoff 1990; Treiman and Terrill 1975; Winfield et al. 1989).

⁴ As Turner (1960, p. 858) noted, "system[s] of sponsored mobility develop most readily in societies with but a single elite or with a recognized elite hierarchy."

⁵ In tournament mobility, "careers are conceptualized as a sequence of competitions, each of which has implications for an individual's mobility chances in all subsequent selections. Although tournaments can be constructed with numerous variants in the rules, the central principle involves an important distinction between winners and losers at each selection point. Winners have the opportunity to compete for high levels, but they have no assurance of attaining them; losers are permitted to compete only for low levels or are denied the opportunity to compete any further at all. As in a

of entry into the party as the first of a series of career “tournaments,” then the analogies with the tournament model are also clear. This is apparently a promising conceptualization of how party membership might affect career outcomes under state socialism. But does the conception fit the observable career processes of state socialist societies? We therefore confront a series of qualitatively new research questions in the form of testable hypotheses.

UNRAVELING THE PROCESS OF PARTY SPONSORSHIP

Recent research on China has shown that party membership matters only for the attainment of elite administrative positions but has no measurable impact on the attainment of elite professional positions (Walder 1995; Walder et al. 2000). We therefore focus our attention exclusively on the administrative career path and further explore the relationships between party membership, educational credentials, and occupational mobility, established in previous studies that treat party membership as a credential. Instead of asking how party members differ from nonmembers in career opportunities, we ask how individuals are recruited into the party and how party members are subsequently selected for positions of administrative power.

The Timing of Party Membership

Are party members selected early in their careers, or is party membership a credential for which individuals compete as part of a career-long quest for advancement? While party membership has long been thought to yield career advantages, only a minority of party members eventually attain elite administrative posts, given the large number of party members and the limited availability of administrative positions. This fact leads naturally to the suspicion that some party members are selected for future leadership positions, while others are selected for different reasons. What determines the likelihood that a party member will eventually become an elite administrator? While status attainment models may suggest such factors as education and parental status, the concepts of sponsored and tournament mobility require us to look closely at the timing of party membership in an individual’s career.

The central feature of sponsored mobility is that selection occurs early for a separate career path to eventual elite status. Turner (1960, pp.

contest model, winners must continue competing in order to attain high levels, for there is no assurance; but as in a sponsored model, early selections have irreversible consequences for losers” (Rosenbaum 1979, pp. 222–23).

859–60) argued that early selection is designed to cultivate the appropriate elite manners, loyalty, and ideology. According to Rosenbaum (1990, p. 292), however, early selection and subsequent competitions are a mechanism that permits a firm to make efficient investments. By eliminating a large number of people from contention in the beginning, tournaments reduce the number of candidates that require an investment of a firm's resources, providing a way of rationing and sequencing firm investments for an ever-smaller cohort of candidates. Both rationales can be readily applied to elite selection in socialist states where the cultivation of loyalty and the constraints of resources are even more pronounced. Moreover, although party membership itself signals political worth, party members continue to be observed and evaluated. Because loyalty and reliability are not immediately observable, screening involves a long process. Given that member recruitment is the primary channel through which the party selects loyal candidates for leadership positions, party members are likely to be sponsored in ways parallel to Turner and Rosenbaum's accounts. If party members are sponsored, the party will focus recruitment efforts on the young. The more recruitment is focused on the young, the more it approximates a pattern of sponsorship; the more evenly it is spread over the first third to half of the career, the less it approximates a pattern of sponsorship. We therefore offer two plausible hypotheses, the first of which is more representative of a sponsorship pattern than the second, a null hypothesis that people join the party at a relatively constant rate until midcareer (a null hypothesis of constant rates across the career would be unrealistic).

HYPOTHESIS 1.—The party concentrates on recruiting members while they are still very young. Understanding that those who join while young have the best future prospects, individuals are most interested in joining while still young, but their interest declines rapidly thereafter. In this "sponsored" pattern, observed rates of joining the party will be highest shortly after beginning the work career and will decline steadily afterward.

HYPOTHESIS 2.—The party recruits members actively up through the midcareer, but after the midpoint in a person's career, they are no longer considered good prospects. Individuals understand that party membership is a credential that brings roughly the same career benefits so long as they join before middle age, therefore they have a relatively constant interest in joining up to this time. In this nonsponsored pattern, rates of party membership are relatively high up through the midcareer, and begin to decline thereafter.

Do Early Entrants Have Different Characteristics from Later Ones?

In Turner's work, selection for sponsorship was heavily influenced by ascription: Children from elite families were favored in admissions to the elite schools. From 1949 to 1978, the Chinese Communist Party officially favored offspring of families headed by members of former exploited social classes (workers and peasants) and "revolutionary cadres, soldiers, or martyrs" who fought for the revolution before its victory, in party recruitment, school admissions, and job assignments. Some research suggests that in fact this policy provided cover for favoritism toward the children of high officials, most of whom were senior enough to be counted as "revolutionary cadres" (Kraus 1981; Unger 1982). Therefore it seems highly plausible that party recruitment may have been a mechanism for elite reproduction.

In Rosenbaum's "tournament" model, on the other hand, mobility contests are decided based on competition and performance. This resonates also with the fact that, for most periods in China, it took serious effort to earn party membership, and especially in the Mao era, young adults competed vigorously to display the kind of conformity and political activism that was explicitly judged in the recruitment of party members (Shirk 1982; Unger 1982; Walder 1986). One attribute that was frequently judged was demonstrated leadership and organizing ability. To the extent that early selection into the party is determined by ascriptive characteristics such as "class background," it conforms to Turner's definition of sponsorship; to the extent that selection is based on individual ability or formal education, it conforms more closely to Rosenbaum's definition of tournament mobility. Therefore there are two potential ways in which early and late entrants may differ: according to social background and according to educational attainment.

The principle of "counterselection" according to politically favored family backgrounds has been understood in two distinct ways by students of socialist regimes. Studies of eastern Europe have usually conceived of counterselection as a program designed to enhance the mobility of people from working-class and peasant backgrounds and to remake patterns of career and intergenerational mobility along more egalitarian grounds (Mateju 1993; Szelényi 1998, pp. 11–15). Studies of China, however, have tended to view such policies as a cover for a process whereby party elites transfer their high status to their own children (Shirk 1982; Unger 1982; Lee 1991; Deng and Treiman 1997). In either form, elite selection is based primarily on family background, rather than on educational credentials or prior occupational attainment. The first possible pattern of recruitment is therefore one of "counterselection":

HYPOTHESIS 3.—Party sponsorship is a mechanism for consolidating revolutionary power: "counterselection" will determine the recruitment of

young members for career sponsorship. Those from politically designated family categories will be favored over others, while prior educational attainment will be unimportant. To the extent that those with higher levels of education are recruited, they will tend to join later in their careers.

A second pattern is a "technocratic" one, in effect the opposite of the first. Many studies of mature communist regimes have noted a trend toward the recruitment of people with higher education. It has been described variously as the formation of a new technocratic elite (Bailes 1978; Lee 1991) or as a merger of the intelligentsia with the political ruling class (Konrád and Szelényi 1979). In this pattern, the party recruits heavily from those with higher education, and college graduates who join while relatively young are favored for important administrative posts.

HYPOTHESIS 4.—Party sponsorship is a mechanism for the formation of a technocratic elite: early members are selected heavily from among those with higher educations. Those from "red" households are not selected preferentially at an early age.

We state these two competing hypotheses at the outset because it has long been assumed that the first will characterize the initial years of a communist regime, while the second will emerge in a later period. Our model posits only that early members will be sponsored, but it does not require any assumptions about who becomes those early members. The question of whether party membership exhibits the characteristics of sponsorship is prior to the question of whether selection of individuals for sponsorship is based on counterselection or technocratic principles. One obvious possibility, long heralded by many observers of communism, is that technocratic patterns supplant counterselection through time.

Career Attainment and the Timing of Party Membership

To the extent that career advancement takes the form of party patronage, those who are selected as members early in their lives should enjoy subsequent career advantages. Joining the party early signals a higher degree of commitment and also permits a more extended process of observation, cultivation, and training. Therefore, other things being equal, those who join the party while young enjoy higher odds of subsequent promotion into an elite administrative position than those who join the party in midcareer. If, on the other hand, party membership enhances the odds of promotion regardless of the age at which it is earned, those who enter the party at midcareer should enjoy the same subsequent career advantages as those who join near the beginning of their career. Indeed, the desire to obtain a career-capping promotion to a leadership position may be a primary reason why someone would seek to join the party in midcareer.

HYPOTHESIS 5.—If the party seeks to identify candidates for career sponsorship early and indeed does treat early entrants more favorably, those who join the party early in their careers will increase their odds of advancement into elite administrative (cadre) positions. Those who join the party later in their careers will not increase their odds of such a promotion.

If those who join the party early in life are more likely to be promoted into leading posts, they may consider party membership as more central to their identity and may as a consequence of their success feel stronger loyalties to the party organization. Those who join later, however, will be more likely to have been admitted because of prior success in their careers and their rising prominence in their work organization. For them, party membership may be little more than a career accessory or an honorary award, while the party's motivation may be primarily to coopt people who have emerged as important figures in their places of work.

Party Membership and Educational Opportunity

To the extent that the party recruits young members according to the pattern of "counterselection"—favoring those from politically designated family backgrounds at the expense of those with higher education—it will be faced with a pool of candidates for sponsorship into elite positions who are insufficiently educated. A relatively straightforward solution to this problem is to send the younger recruits back to school for continuing education. This practice conforms to Turner's notion of sponsored mobility in that it would be individuals selected according to ascriptive standards that are allocated educational opportunity. It also resonates with Rosenbaum's tournament model, in which those who win early competitions are selected to receive further investments in training. After the revolution, the Chinese communist government established an extensive system of adult education (e.g., party schools, worker's colleges, television/correspondence/night colleges, and vocational training programs) in which working adults were sent back to school for further education (Ministry of Education 1984, pp. 575–627). Adult education provides a potential channel through which the party invests in the education of current and future administrators. Therefore, early selection into the party may lead to career advancement through opportunities for adult higher education.

HYPOTHESIS 6.—Young party members who have not already attended college will improve their chances of returning to school for college education—an important mechanism through which sponsorship affects career outcomes.

The sponsoring of young party members for continuing education is a potentially important mechanism whereby the demand for political loyalty

may be reconciled with the educational requirements for leadership and management. If this hypothesis is supported by the evidence, we will have altered the ways in which we have posed questions about the relative role of education and party membership in career advancement. For we will no longer be able to interpret a positive association between a college education and a higher administrative position as a straightforward measure of a meritocratic process, even in the kinds of event-history models used in recent studies (see, e.g., Walder et al. 2000). If early recruitment into the party brings enhanced educational opportunities, then the treatment of party membership and education as conceptually equivalent credentials becomes highly problematic, and gauging their relative effects on career mobility may be more complicated than comparing the magnitudes of their respective coefficients. The reason is that educational attainment may itself be part of the process of sponsorship enjoyed by those who join the party while young. Moreover, estimates of the effect of education on recruitment into the party may mask two qualitatively different processes: early recruitment of those without a college education who will be sponsored subsequently for education and career advancement, and later recruitment of those with college education who have already attained professional success. If in fact the relationship between party membership, education, and promotion into administrative positions is so highly dependent on the timing of events in the career, then there is one final logical implication for what we should observe in career patterns:

HYPOTHESIS 7.—Those who receive a college education in this “sponsored” fashion will be much more likely to be promoted into cadre positions than those who receive a formal college education before entering the workforce.

In other words, if we divide college graduates into two groups—those who receive higher education through the normal educational ladder and those who join the party while young and are subsequently sent back to college by their workplaces to complete their education—we should observe that the latter group is more likely to be promoted eventually into an elite administrative position.

DATA AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Uncovering the processes of party-sponsored mobility evidently requires life-history data and event-history analysis. Cross-sectional data and conventional regression models will not do because we need to make distinctions about the timing of different career events, especially the timing of higher education, party membership, and promotion into an elite ad-

ministrative post. Because recent work has demonstrated that career patterns in China have been altered due to shifting state policies across historical periods (Walder et al. 2000; Zhou, Tuma, and Moen 1996), life-history data are essential in order to distinguish the effects of timing within the career from period effects. Our analyses employ career and educational history data from a nationally representative sample of Chinese adults conducted in 1996. All regions of the People's Republic of China except Tibet were included in the sampling frame. The survey used a multistage sampling design, and the primary sampling unit was the county-level (*xian ji*) jurisdiction as defined by the Chinese census bureau. Through multistage sampling procedures, the survey obtained a representative sample of all adult residents (ages 20–69) registered as “urban” or “rural” nationwide. Field interviews were conducted for a total number of 6,473 cases (for details, see Treiman 1998). We employ only the urban sample of 3,087 cases because rural society has few party members and few organizations with career lines that can be organized by party committees.

The data set contains detailed information about respondents' educational and career histories, which enables us to model life events in the ways suggested by the conceptions of sponsored and tournament mobility. We use duration-dependent event-history models to investigate whether recruitment into the Chinese Communist Party exhibits the time-dependent patterns suggested by the sponsored mobility model (hypotheses 1 and 2) and whether early and late recruitment into the party are based on different standards (hypotheses 3 and 4). We then use nonparametric models to determine whether young recruits have qualitatively different careers than later recruits (hypotheses 5, 6, and 7). Because our analyses involve different types of event-history models and different sets of variables, we will describe them separately as we introduce each of the analyses to follow.

THE TIMING OF RECRUITMENT INTO THE PARTY

Our first question is about the temporal pattern of party recruitment. Are rates of joining the party highest during the first few years of work, something that would suggest a pattern of sponsorship (hypothesis 1)? Or are rates of joining relatively constant by individuals' midcareers (i.e., during the first 10–15 years of work), a pattern more consistent with the proposition that party membership is a credential whose value is relatively independent of its timing (hypothesis 2)? To explore these hypotheses, we examine recruitment into the party regardless of the historical period in which it takes place. Figure 1 graphs the hazard rate of joining the party along two time dimensions: age and labor force experience. The line of

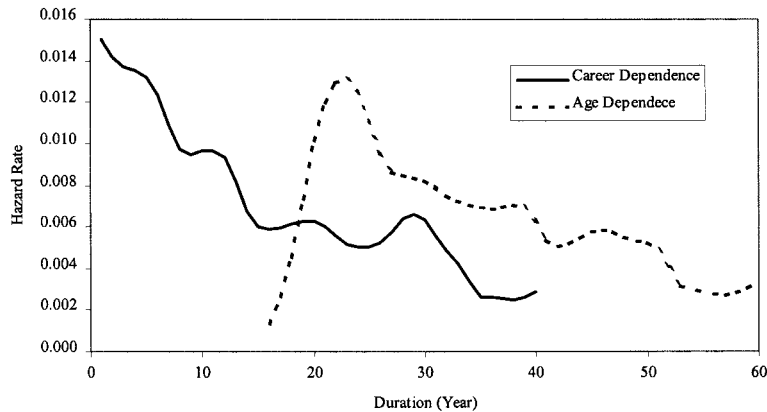


FIG. 1.—Age dependence and career dependence of party recruitment

age dependence, which is the hazard function by respondents' natural age, shows a left-skewed bell-shaped pattern, with the hazard rate increasing rapidly in the late teens, reaching its peak at age 22 or 23, and declining steadily thereafter. When the time clock is set to individuals' labor force experience (measured in years after entering the first job), the patterns becomes even clearer: The hazard rate is highest at the beginning of the career and declines almost monotonically over time.

Table 1 statistically confirms the career-stage dependence pattern of party recruitment with Gompertz models, which are suitable for the monotonic hazard function in figure 1.⁶ The general form of the models is given as

$$r(t) = \exp(\alpha X_{\alpha} + \beta X_{\beta} t), \quad (1)$$

where $r(t)$ is the hazard rate at time t , X_{α} is a vector of covariates with corresponding time constant effects α , X_{β} is a vector of covariates with corresponding time varying effects β .⁷

⁶ The hazard rate of labor force duration dependence in figure 1 is approximately monotonic and therefore has to be estimated by parametric models, especially given our interest in the timing of joining the party. Other models, such as the Weibull and log-logistic models, are also suitable for such a monotonic function (see Blossfeld and Rohwer 1995, chap. 7). We employ Gompertz models because they are easier to interpret, especially for nonproportional models with time-varying effects (e.g., model 3 of table 1).

⁷ A closely related model is the Makeham model, an extension of the Gompertz model that allows estimates of an extra positive constant (i.e., a Makeham term, say $\gamma > 0$) in addition to the Gompertz terms (i.e., α and β). The model assumes that the hazard rate is always greater than zero regardless of the length of duration, an unrealistic assumption for the case of party recruitment because the rate of joining will become zero at advanced ages (e.g., after retirement).

TABLE 1
 MAXIMUM LIKELIHOOD ESTIMATES OF THE GOMPERTZ MODELS FOR PARTY
 RECRUITMENT IN URBAN CHINA, 1949–96

VARIABLES	MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3	
	α Term	β Term	α Term	β Term	α Term	β Term
Constant	-4.265 (.067)	-.037 (.005)	-6.477 (.288)	.030 (.028)	-7.412 (.321)	.045 (.028)
Gender (male) .....	...	...	1.256 (.100)	...	1.203 (.101)	...
Age (in 10 years) .....	...	...	.306 (.055)	-.014 (.005)	.446 (.058)	-.017 (.005)
Red background .....	...	...	...	...	.623 (.111)	...
High school education ...	...	...	...	...	.498 (.102)	...
College education .....	...	...	...	...	.243 (.238)	.046 (.015)
χ^2	66.1		286.5		368.1	
<i>df</i>	1		4		8	

NOTE.—SEs are given in parentheses. Unweighted $N = 3,079$; number of events is 525.

In its simplest specification (i.e., the model without any covariates), if the constant $\beta = 0$, it becomes an exponential model with a constant log hazard rate of α . If $\beta < 0$, however, the log hazard rate is decreasing from the initial value $\alpha(t = 0)$, with an annual rate of β ; and the opposite is true if $\beta > 0$. Thus, to support hypotheses 1, that party recruitment occurs mainly in the early career, we need to have a significantly negative β term.

The models in table 1 require further clarification. In all models, observation starts at the first job, with two exceptions. First, for those who started working before age 18, the period of observation begins at 18. This is because an individual has to be 18 or older to qualify for party membership.⁸ Second, for individuals who entered college before entering the labor force, the observation begins at the time of college entrance.⁹

⁸ Some people did join the party before age 18, but this was rare and occurred largely in schools and in the army, rather than in workplaces.

⁹ College education includes (1) specialized college education, including part-time adult educational programs through television, correspondence, on-the-job training, night schools, and professional training, which if completed confer credentials equivalent to two-year college degree; (2) regular university education (4 years or more); and (3) graduate studies at either masters or doctoral level. Here college entrance is defined as the first time the individual moves directly from secondary school (academic or vocational) to either of the first two types of tertiary education listed above (graduate study is excluded).

This is because, as past studies have shown, college students may join the party at significant rates (Szelényi 1987). Moreover, those who joined the party before the period of observation are not treated as censored, but as joining immediately after the initial time (i.e., duration = .5 years).¹⁰ These models are estimated by Transitional Data Analysis (Rohwer 1997).¹¹

Model 1 is the null Gompertz model with two constant coefficients. As expected, this model provides a much better fit than the null exponential model ($\chi^2 = 66.2$; $df = 1$). The β term is significantly negative ($\beta = -.037$; $p < .001$), indicating that the rate of joining the party is the highest at the very outset of the work career and declines over time. The initial rate (i.e., the rate at time 0) is $.014(e^{-4.265} \cong .014)$, and it declines at an annual rate of about 4% ($e^{-.037} \cong .964$) for every additional year. In our data, 17.3% of the sample reported having joined the party, and half of all party members joined by their eighth year in the labor force. If we ignore right-censored observations and assume that every individual has a maximum duration of 40 years, model 1 predicts that about a quarter of all individuals would eventually join the party, and accordingly, the predicted median time of joining the party is after 12 years in the labor force.¹²

The time dependence revealed in model 1 may be an artifact of unobserved heterogeneities (Blossfeld and Rohwer 1995, chap. 10). To minimize this, we add two control variables. In model 2, *gender* is a dummy variable with male coded as "1." *Age* is measured by respondents' age (in 10 years) in 1996 and is a time-constant variable used to account for cohort effects. Model 2 improves the fit over model 1 significantly ($\chi^2 = 220.4$; $df = 3$),

¹⁰ In our sample, there are 27 such cases, some 5% of the total number of party members. Technically, these cases are left censored and should be excluded from the analysis. However, these young party members compose a substantial proportion of the *early recruits* who become candidates for sponsorship. For this reason, we retain these cases in the models. The best way of doing this, given that our time clock is the duration in the labor force, is to treat these people as joining the party immediately after beginning the first job (duration = .5 years).

¹¹ The Gompertz models in tables 1 and 2 are estimated by TDA, while subsequent models are estimated by STATA (StataCorp 1997). The estimations from TDA do not adjust for the effects of our survey's multistage sampling design.

¹² These predicted rates are calculated based the survivor function,

$$S(t) = \exp\left[-\frac{\alpha}{\beta}[\exp(\beta t) - 1]\right]$$

where t is duration and α and β are the constant coefficients estimated in the null Gompertz model. At time 40, the proportion of party members in the sample is $1 - S(40) = .25$. Solving the eq. (1), $S(t) = .125$ yields the median of duration $t = 12$ years.

indicating strong gender and cohort effects.¹³ Model 2 shows that men have a substantial advantage (see also Rigby 1968; Szelényi 1987) and that it persists through the whole career. The positive effect of the *age* variable in the α term suggests that earlier cohorts are more likely to join the party early in their careers than later cohorts. However, the negative sign of the β term indicates that as the career proceeds the rate of joining the party declines much more rapidly for older cohorts than for younger ones.¹⁴ After controlling for cohort effects, the intercept in the β term becomes insignificant. All of this implies that the time-dependence in party recruitment is much more pronounced for earlier age cohorts. It also hints that these relationships change across historical periods, something we will investigate below.

These results confirm the patterns illustrated in figure 1, and they support hypothesis 1, the pattern consistent with sponsorship, rather than hypothesis 2, the pattern consistent with credentialism. People are most likely to join the party when very young, and this likelihood declines steadily with age. Viewed cross-sectionally, in any given period young adults are much more likely to join the party than their older counterparts. Party recruitment is concentrated among the very young, as we would expect in a sponsored pattern.

SELECTION CRITERIA FOR PARTY RECRUITMENT

Do those who join the party while young have different social backgrounds from those who join later? Two background characteristics are of particular interest. The first is parental status, especially whether young party recruits came predominantly from households that the regime sought to favor. From 1949 to 1977, party policy explicitly favored people from "red" backgrounds, which included workers, peasants, and those from households headed by people who had joined the party or Red Army before 1949, or who were from elite cadre families (e.g., Kraus 1981; Unger 1982). Did these ascriptive characteristics influence recruitment into the party, and did they do so equally regardless of the age at which they joined the party? To the extent that they did, we observe a pattern of

¹³ The effect of gender is not statistically significant in the β term and thus is excluded in the model. The reported model yielded the best fit among all possible model specifications for the available variables. The same applies to red background and high school education in model 3.

¹⁴ Some previous studies based on aggregate or cross-sectional data have found a positive relationship between age and party membership in the Soviet Union (Rigby 1968) and Hungary (Szelényi 1987). Our analysis indicates that these cross-sectional correlations are the likely result of longer exposure of older respondents to the risk of party membership, which may nonetheless be highest among the young, not the old.

“counterselection” consistent with hypothesis 3. The second background characteristic of interest is the level of prior educational attainment. Has the party recruited preferentially from among college students and young college graduates? To the extent that it has, we observe a “technocratic” pattern consistent with hypothesis 4.

To answer these questions, we add three variables—*red background*, *high school education*, and *college education*—to the previous model. *Red background* is a dummy variable with three categories of individuals coded as “1”: those from revolutionary families (i.e., revolutionary cadre, soldier, and martyr; see Unger 1982, pp. 13–14), those whose fathers were elite administrators when the respondent was 14 years old, and those whose fathers were party members.¹⁵ Using this measure of red status, 739 cases, or 24% of our sample, come from such red families. *College education* is a time-constant dummy variable including only those who went to college before entering the labor force; individuals who took college-level courses after working for a period of time (i.e., through further education) were excluded. We exclude these individuals because, as we will show later, there are qualitative differences between regular education and continuing education that have direct consequences for our analysis. Because only 179 cases, or 6% of our sample, have college-level education, we include *high school education*, those who attended senior high school before entering the labor force (either academic or technical), as an additional measure of education. A total of 829 individuals, or 28% of our sample, had some high school-level education.

The selection model is reported in model 3 of table 1. This is again the best fit model (improving from model 2 with $\chi^2 = 81.6$; $df = 4$) among all possible model specifications. People from a red family background have higher odds of joining the party throughout their careers. Strikingly, while the party did recruit at higher rates from those with a high school education (as suggested by the positive and significant coefficient of high school education in α term), a college education does not increase the odds of joining the party early in the career (as indicated by the small and nonsignificant coefficients for *college education* in the α term). Unlike red background and high school education, however, the effect of college education increases—at an annual rate of about 5% ($e^{.046} = 1.047$)—as an individual’s career proceeds. At this rate, the effect of college education will surpass that of red background after 13.5 years ($.623/.046 = 13.5$) in

¹⁵ Past research has suggested that children from working-class and peasant households did not enjoy the same advantages as the children of the political elite (Unger 1982). Adding worker and peasant households would mean that more than 80% of our sample is in the red category. We limit our examination of “counterselection” to those households with demonstrably close ties to the regime.

the labor force. While red background is important in the early career and thereafter, late in the career, a college education becomes the paramount predictor of party membership.

These results strongly support the counterselection model represented by hypothesis 3. The party recruits preferentially those young people from red households, but older recruits are selected according to different criteria. Among those who join at later stages in the career, college education surpasses red background as a criterion for recruitment. The relationship between education and party membership observed in past studies appears to mask a sharply differentiated career-dependent pattern. If the entire period from 1949 to 1996 is considered as a whole, the college educated have been recruited into the party at later career stages than those from red households. Those from red households have been sponsored, while the college educated are coopted into the party at a later career stage.

CHANGING PATTERNS THROUGH HISTORICAL TIME

The results so far summarize an aggregate pattern for the entire period from 1949 to 1996. Although the cohort effects revealed by the *age* variable hint that the time-dependent pattern of party recruitment was stronger in the Mao era (1949–76) than in subsequent periods, the extent to which these patterns are confounded with temporal shifts in party policies is not yet clear. Of particular interest is the question of whether the “counterselection” pattern of recruitment has given way to the “technocratic” one so often thought to characterize eastern European regimes and the Soviet Union during the 1960s and 1970s. We will now investigate the extent to which “counterselection” is restricted to the Mao years.

Table 2 reports results from the same Gompertz models employed in table 1. The models are modified from the earlier ones in the following ways. First, we split the durations into two parts, with those occurring in the Mao period coded as “0” and the reform period as “1.” Second, we include *reform period* as a dummy variable and its interactions with our key variables, *red background*, *high school education*, and *college education*, into the model. Finally, we estimate the model with different definitions of historical periods and compare the results.¹⁶

¹⁶ Examining historical effects, especially timing-dependent ones, is technically difficult with Gompertz models due to the conflict between different time clocks (for a brief discussion of models with several domains, see Rohwer 1997, p. 145). Therefore, the strategies employed here are by no means perfect solutions. The effects of the period dummy and its interactions with other key variables can serve only as proxy estimates of the differences between the two historical periods. And different periodizations are

TABLE 2
HISTORICAL VARIATIONS OF PARTY RECRUITMENT IN URBAN CHINA, 1949–96

VARIABLES	MODEL 1 (1949–77 vs. 1978–96)		MODEL 2 (1949–87 vs. 1988–96)	
	α Term	β Term	α Term	β Term
Constant	-6.421 (.451)	.017 (.032)	-7.424 (.379)	.072 (.033)
Gender (male)	1.202 (.101)	...	1.209 (.101)	...
Age (in 10 years) .....	.311 (.080)	-.015 (.005)	.456 (.068)	-.021 (.006)
Red background .....	.835 (.164)	...	.733 (.130)	...
High school education .....	.095 (.161)	...	.334 (.120)	...
College education	-.425 (.447)	.073 (.036)	-.576 (.348)	.087 (.019)
Reform period	-1.098 (.262)	.049 (.013)	-.721 (.344)	.014 (.015)
Reform \times red background	-.430 (.219)	...	-.511 (.248)	...
Reform \times high school .....	.876 (.216)	...	.877 (.254)	...
Reform \times college education ...	1.704 (.549)	-.061 (.040)	2.733 (.551)	-.122 (.036)
χ^2 (df)	409.7 (14)		401.1 (14)	

NOTE.—SEs are given in parentheses. Unweighted $N = 3,079$; N of events is 525.

In model 1, 1978—the year when decisive shifts in party policy against Maoism began—is designated as the starting point for the reform period. The results suggest that the patterns of party recruitment reported in table 1 apply largely to the Mao period and have been reversed since 1978. Holding other factors constant, the positive effect of the reform period in the β term ($\beta = .049$; $p < .001$) indicates that the pattern of career-stage dependence in party recruitment has been weakened in the reform period. Moreover, while the importance of red background has declined, the effects of education, especially college education, has become increasingly pronounced in the reform period, as suggested by interaction effects in

employed in order to examine internal heterogeneities within the reform period (1978–96), on the one hand, and to simplify the model, on the other. In table 2, we report only the results for year 1978 and 1988 because 1978 marks the beginning of the reform period and 1988 presents the sharpest contrasts between the two post-Mao periods. Moreover, we report the best fit models, which include only statistically significant effects and effects directly related to our arguments. Results for other periodizations are available on request.

the α term. Finally, in the reform period, college education becomes significant in early selection, but its effect declines (though not significantly) over time.

While model 1 considers the post-Mao period as a whole, prior research shows that change accelerated in urban areas after a lag of roughly a decade (Bian and Logan 1996; Walder et al. 2000). If so, the career-stage effects observed in model 1 may still be confounded with period effects. After estimating the same model with different starting dates for the “reform” period, we have found, consistent with past research, that 1988 yields the clearest contrasts with least sacrifice of the overall model fit. The results for this periodization are shown in table 2, model 2.

There are two interesting contrasts between models 1 and 2. On the one hand, the main effects of *reform period*, both the magnitude and the significance level, are considerably reduced in both terms of model 2. These imply that deviation from the time-dependent pattern in party recruitment occurred mainly in the early reform period (1978–87). The late reform period returns to a pattern of sponsorship observed in the Mao era. On the other hand, the main effects of college education and its interaction effects with reform period are larger in both vectors in model 2. Combining the early reform period with the Mao period in fact appears to strengthen the negative effect of college education, while maintaining those of red background and high school education in early party selection. This suggests that there is no qualitative difference between party recruitment patterns in the Mao period and the early reform period in terms of selection standards for early recruits. By the same token, the interaction effect between the reform period and college education increases from 1.70 to 2.73, almost triple in terms of odds ratios, in model 2, meaning that the party did not begin to recruit heavily from among young college graduates until the late reform period (1988–96). Moreover, in the late reform period, unlike the Mao and early reform periods, college graduates have become less rather than more likely to join the party as they age.

The results herald a rather dramatic shift from a sponsored pattern of “counterselection” characteristic of the Mao period to a “technocratic” pattern that emerges after 1988. The contrast between the two periodizations leads us to infer that the early reform period was a transitional one in which no clear patterns of sponsorship are observed and the long-established phenomenon of time dependence in party recruitment was temporarily suspended. Such a suspension may be largely due to the disruptive effects of the Cultural Revolution, during which party organizations were severely damaged. To recover, the party had to recruit anyone qualified without any bias toward young loyalists. When the time-dependent pattern reemerges after 1987, it is the technocratic rather than

the counterselection pattern. The party has resumed its targeting of individuals from specific backgrounds for early recruitment. But it is now college students and college graduates rather than those from red backgrounds who are preferred.

THE CAREER CONSEQUENCES OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP

Career-stage differences in party recruitment may be due either to the party's preferences, to individual preferences, or both. On the one hand, party branches may consciously seek to identify young party loyalists. On the other hand, young adults whose future careers are still far from determined may pursue party membership more assiduously than their older counterparts. Or perhaps those who failed to join early may abandon their efforts through time. In any case, we already know from prior research that party membership is associated with promotion into elite administrative (though not professional) positions (Walder 1995; Walder et al. 2000). Is it early rather than later membership that brings such career advantages (hypothesis 5)? How much advantage, if any, does early membership bring? If early membership brings substantial career rewards, then mobility fits the sponsored pattern; if the advantages accrue relatively independently of timing, then party membership could be properly treated as a credential.

Timing of Party Recruitment and Selection of Elite Administrators

To answer these questions, we examine the effect of early party recruitment on entry into the cadre elite. We use logistic regression instead of event-history models in this analysis because standard event-history models will produce biased estimates of the effects of early party selection. Because those who joined the party earlier would have a longer risk period—given that early party membership does not mean early promotion into the cadre positions, the actual effect of early selection would be offset and the main effect of party membership would be exaggerated in standard event-history analysis.¹⁷ Logistic regression models, on the other hand, do not have similar drawbacks because the duration of the risk period is ignored. Therefore, we estimate logistic models with careful treatment of the timing of events and censored observations.

Table 3 reports the relative odds ratios of becoming an elite cadre from

¹⁷ This problem could be avoided by normalizing the duration of party membership with reference to the potential mean length of risk period. We did try such a procedure in Cox models, which produced results similar to the logistic models reported here.

TABLE 3
 ROBUST MLE OF LOGISTIC MODELS FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF CADRE POSITIONS IN URBAN CHINA, 1949–96

VARIABLES	MODEL 1			MODEL 2		
	Mao Period 1949–77	Early Reform 1978–87	Late Reform 1988–96	Mao Period 1949–77	Early Reform 1978–87	Late Reform 1988–96
Age	1.10 (8.03)	1.03 (3.22)	1.00 (.13)	1.10 (8.29)	1.03 (3.10)	1.00 (.65)
Gender (male)	3.26 (2.93)	5.72 (5.20)	2.96 (3.38)	3.33 (2.97)	5.72 (5.20)	2.93 (3.21)
High school education	2.30 (3.29)	1.54 (1.50)	3.39 (3.37)	2.08 (2.65)	1.53 (1.50)	3.37 (3.31)
College education .....	.65 (-.93)	.65 (-.63)	.63 (-.99)	.63 (-1.01)	.65 (-.62)	.63 (-.98)
Party members	3.81 (4.66)	5.42 (6.00)	2.63 (2.97)	7.51 (6.31)	5.57 (5.50)	3.98 (4.16)
Timing of party membership ...	...	...	...	.92 (-3.09)	1.00 (-.11)	.96 (-1.90)
χ^2	171.7	163.9	62.9	181.1	163.9	65.5
<i>df</i>	5	5	5	6	6	6
<i>N</i> of events	107	105	72	107	105	72
<i>N</i>	1,940	2,614	2,846	1,940	2,614	2,846

NOTE.—Coefficients are relative odds ratios. Numbers in parentheses are *z*-scores. All models use the method of robust estimate of variance to account for the effects of the sampling design (including case weight and cluster effects). The reference category for “college education” is “high school education”; for “high school education” it is “below high school.”

logistic regression and robust maximum likelihood estimation.¹⁸ The dependent variable is whether the individual has ever attained an elite cadre position. Elite cadres in this and subsequent analyses are defined as the heads of work organizations, which include individuals with decision-making and managerial positions in public agencies and their first-level subunits. The survey recorded 13 broad occupational categories defined by the Chinese census bureau, among which “middle-level management” and “high-level management or leader” are coded as elite cadre occupations. With this definition, 284 cases or 9.3% of our current urban sample had ever held elite cadre positions from 1949 to 1996.¹⁹ The independent variables are *age*, *gender*, *high school education*, *college education*, *party membership*, and *the timing of joining the party*. Age and gender are identical to those used in the Gompertz models employed earlier. In order to compare their relative effects, high school education and college education are recoded in a new way such that the high school education is the reference group of college education. Party membership is a dummy variable coded “1” for those *who joined before becoming a cadre* (including those who never became a cadre). Those who joined after becoming a cadre are treated as nonmembers. The timing of joining the party is measured as the number of years from the time the individual entered the work force to the time of joining the party.²⁰ Those who were not party members are coded as “0” such that this variable can be regarded as the interaction between *party membership* and the duration of waiting time. In order to assess the effects in different historical eras, we estimate the models respectively for three periods: the Mao period (1949–77), the early reform period (1978–87), and the late reform period (1988–96). Only

¹⁸ Standard maximum-likelihood estimation (MLE) may be biased due to the multistage sampling design of our data. Respondents were selected from households with different numbers of adults and therefore do not have equal probabilities of selection. Moreover, the clustering of observations complicates the proper calculation of standard errors. To correct these problems, we first apply a case weight, which is the inverse of the probability that an individual was selected, and then employ robust variance estimation (Royall 1986; Lin and Wei 1989; StataCorp 1997) in which the standard errors are calculated based on the primary sampling units (i.e., county-level jurisdiction in our data), rather than on individual observations. Robust MLE does not change the point estimates, but it ensures unbiased standard errors. Except in tables 1 and 2, all the models employ robust MLE.

¹⁹ Six individuals who attained cadre positions before 1949 are excluded from the analysis.

²⁰ The timing of joining the party is measured with reference to the timing of labor force entry: $(\text{timing}) = (\text{year joined party}) - (\text{year began first job})$. For those who worked before age 18, *year began first job* is set to birth year plus 18. The timing of joining the party is set to 0 for those who joined the party before the first job or before age 18. For those who have never joined or joined the party after becoming a cadre, the timing of joining is set to 0.

those at risk in a particular period are included in the analysis. In other words, those who entered the labor force in later periods, or those who had already obtained cadre positions in previous period, are excluded from the analysis in the current period.

The key variables in table 3 are *party membership* and *timing of membership*. As shown in model 1, party membership substantially increases the odds of becoming an elite cadre across all three periods. The effect of party membership is strongest in the early reform period, although it declines afterward. Moreover, consistent with previous studies (Walder et al. 2000), a high school education is sufficient for promotion into cadre positions, while a college education does not bring much additional advantage (the effects are even negative) in any of the three periods. When we add the timing of membership to the model, we see subtle changes in the effects of party membership. In the Mao period, the effect of party membership depends on the timing of joining: the earlier the individual joins, the more likely it is that she or he will become an elite cadre. When an individual joins the party in the early career (i.e., timing equals 0), she or he is 6.5 times more likely to become an elite cadre than is a nonparty member. The advantage of joining while young, however, declines at a rate of 8% every year thereafter; after 24 years in the labor force, the advantage of joining disappears. Clearly, the career advantages of party membership accrue primarily to those who joined the party early in their careers. This is consistent with our suspicion that there are generic advantages attached to early selection into the party and conforms to hypothesis 5.

The timing effect of party membership is not present, however, in the early reform period. The timing variable does not improve the fit of the model at all, nor does it have any effect on the odds of becoming an elite cadre. As a result, the main effect of party membership does not change significantly from model 1. This suggests that all party members, regardless of their age at membership, enjoyed advantages over nonmembers to the same degree. This is consistent with the results of table 2, where we found that the early reform period did not conform to the general pattern of recruiting heavily from the young (we will elaborate on this point later). In contrast, the late reform period exhibits a pattern similar to the Mao years, although both the model and the timing effect just fail to meet the 0.05 level of statistical significance (in part because of the small number of events). Enhanced opportunities are enjoyed by those who join while young, and every year of delay decreases the odds of promotion by 4%.

Except for the early reform period, which has emerged as transitional, the results in table 3 are a decisive answer to the question of whether early incorporation into the party brings substantial career advantages.

Whether it is the party's preference or individuals' preferences that lead to such high rates of incorporation early in the career, early incorporation opens doors into the cadre elite.

Party-Sponsored College Opportunities

If the party-state created a cadre elite in the Mao period by drawing on such a low proportion of the college educated, how was it able to minimize the long-noted problems of having uneducated reds exercise authority over highly educated professionals (Schurmann 1968)? The solution is disarmingly simple. Those who join the party early are given further education as adults before promotion into leadership positions.

The Chinese regime has created various channels through which working adults are sent back to school for further education. This, along with the rapid expansion of the regular educational system, has resulted in an extensive system of adult further education, which includes peasant, worker, and cadre education in the Mao era and adult higher education such as correspondence, television, and night college in the reform period. The impacts of adult further education are surprisingly large. On the one hand, a large portion of the population has received its final education through certain kinds of adult education. On the other hand, credentials earned through adult education have been officially treated as equivalent to those earned through the regular schooling system (Ministry of Education 1984, pp. 575–627).

Table 4 shows the large overall impact of adult further education on the attainment of educational credentials. Among 3,087 cases in our sample, about two-thirds did not have a chance to go to regular high school, and only 5.8% attended college before their first job. Consistent with the above analyses, party members and elite cadres do not have significantly better educations than other individuals through the regular schooling system. When we include adult education attained after a period of employment, we can see that for the whole sample, the percentage of college educated almost doubles, from 5.8% to 11.3%, while the proportion with less than high school education decreases only slightly from 67.4% to 62.1%. More dramatic changes are evident among party members and elite cadres. Due to continuing education for adults, the proportion with college education increased from 9% to 24% among party members and from 6.6% to 26.6% among elite cadres, while the proportion with less than high school education decreased substantially for both (from 59.6% to 46.7% for party members and from 61.7% to 40.7% for elite cadres). These figures show that adult education has been the main channel through which the party has promoted the education of those it has selected as candidates for eventual leadership positions.

TABLE 4
DISTRIBUTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL LEVELS IN URBAN CHINA, 1949–96

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	REGULAR EDUCATIONAL LEVEL			FINAL EDUCATIONAL LEVEL		
	Overall	Party Members	Elite Cadres	Overall	Party Members	Elite Cadres
Below high school ...	2,079 (67.4)	319 (59.6)	179 (61.7)	1,918 (62.1)	250 (46.7)	118 (40.7)
High school	829 (26.9)	168 (31.4)	92 (31.7)	821 (26.6)	158 (29.5)	95 (32.8)
College	179 (5.8)	48 (9.0)	19 (6.6)	348 (11.3)	127 (23.7)	77 (26.6)
Total	3,087	535	290	3,087	535	290

NOTE.—Regular educational level includes only schooling attained before entering the labor force, while final educational level includes adult education acquired after a period of formal employment. Elite cadres include all individuals who had ever been in cadre positions, regardless of their occupational status at the time of interview. Numbers in parentheses are percentages.

Unlike the regular schooling system based largely on local, provincial, and national entrance examinations, access to adult education is granted by workplaces that select candidates and provide financial sponsorship. Although some types of adult education require entrance examinations, selection standards are usually low. More important, because there is no separate job placement system linked to adult education, people usually take leave from their jobs, continue to receive salary and benefits, and return to their workplace after finishing adult education. Thus, continuing education is sponsored in a quite literal sense of the term. The specific arrangements made for adult education therefore permit local party organizations to direct these opportunities preferentially to those being groomed for administrative positions.²¹

Table 5 reports tests of the proposition that opportunities for continuing *higher* education are allocated preferentially to party members and cadres, which in turn improves the overall educational level of the political elite. The models in table 5 are piecewise exponential models defined as

$$r_p(t) = \exp(\beta_p \cdot X_p), \tag{2}$$

where $r_p(t)$ is the hazard rate of going back to college for continuing education in period p , X_p is a vector of covariates (including a constant intercept) with corresponding coefficients β_p for period p . We provide estimates for three periods—Mao period (1949–77), the early reform period

²¹ It is also possible that adult education occurs before the attainment of party membership and cadre positions; that is, some people may be sponsored for adult education first and then recruited later into the party or promoted into cadre positions.

TABLE 5
 ROBUST MLE OF ATTAINMENT OF CONTINUING COLLEGE EDUCATION IN URBAN CHINA, 1949–96

VARIABLES	MODEL 1			MODEL 2		
	Mao Period 1949–77	Early Reform 1978–87	Late Reform 1988–96	Mao Period 1949–77	Early Reform 1978–87	Late Reform 1988–96
Age .....	.91 (-3.14)	.96 (-2.94)	.92 (-4.60)	.90 (-2.96)	.94 (-4.28)	.90 (-6.76)
Gender (male)	1.94 (1.87)	1.62 (2.13)	1.07 (.23)	1.94 (1.87)	1.44 (1.57)	.99 (-.03)
Father's year of education ...	1.17 (4.04)	1.11 (3.81)	1.06 (1.44)	1.17 (4.06)	1.11 (3.93)	1.07 (1.62)
Father cadre	1.15 (.20)	1.88 (2.46)	.82 (-.51)	1.15 (.20)	2.03 (2.82)	.82 (-.48)
High school	3.04 (2.37)	5.09 (4.69)	3.62 (4.08)	3.04 (2.39)	4.65 (4.33)	3.35 (3.72)
Party members	5.39 (4.65)	3.25 (4.31)	7.01 (6.27)	5.36 (4.73)	2.51 (3.21)	5.69 (5.03)
Cadres .....	...	...	...	1.08 (.09)	4.92 (4.34)	4.89 (5.02)
χ^2	64.2	106.4	97.2	64.2	121.0	109.0
<i>df</i>	6	6	6	7	7	7
<i>N</i> of events	37	73	52	37	64	52
<i>N</i>	1,793	2,522	2,716	1,793	2,522	2,716

NOTE.—Coefficients are relative odds ratios. Numbers in parentheses are *z*-scores. All models use the method of robust estimate of variance to account for the effects of the sampling design (including case weight and cluster effects).

(1978–87), and the late reform period (1988–96)—respectively. The analysis includes only those without a college education before entering the labor force, and those who already had a college education are treated as censored and omitted from the sample.²² The observation period begins at the time of entering the labor force and ends whenever the individual went to college for continuing education (for those who began work before age 16, the initial time is set at age 16). Our main interests are the relative effects of party membership, cadre occupation, prior education, and age; gender, father's education, and father's cadre status are treated as control variables.

Model 1 reports the estimates without including a variable for cadre occupation. We can see that the chances for adult higher education are far from equal. First, the negative effects of age across three periods strongly indicate that opportunities for continuing higher education are given predominately to young adults—each additional year of age decreases the odds by about 10%, 4%, and 8% in successive periods. Second, party members and those who already had a high school education enjoy roughly the same large advantages. In the Mao period, party members are 4.4 times more likely than nonmembers to attend college through adult education. The effect of party membership is even more pronounced in the late reform period. When we include cadre occupation in model 2, we find that except in the Mao period, cadres are about 4 times more likely to obtain adult college education, holding other factors constant. In general, being young, a party member, or a cadre greatly enhances one's chance of attaining a college degree through adult education. Therefore, those who join the party early are more likely to attend college as adults than are those who join later.²³

We should also note some potential ambiguities in interpreting the relative effects of party membership and cadre position on opportunities for

²² Our treatment of continuing college education does not take into account the disruptive effects of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). During this period, colleges and universities initially were closed (1966–72) and afterward (1973–76) only admitted students who had worked for a period. If people in these cohorts attended regular universities by taking the entrance examination after it was restored in 1977, they are treated as having attended continuing college education. Uncovering the disruptive effects of the Cultural Revolution on continuing college education would require separate and more focused analyses (see Zhou and Hou 1999). Only a small number in this age cohort in our sample (24 cases, or 13% of those who would attend college) returned to college through regular national entrance examination from 1977 to 1979.

²³ Due to the very large impact of age, the timing of joining the party was not significant and therefore not included in the models. Although we can infer that early party members will have an advantage over later joiners, it should be noted that the advantage of early joiners is, statistically speaking, not produced by the timing of joining per se, but by the independent effects of age.

adult college education. In the sponsored mobility model, party-sponsored adult college education occurs either before or after young party recruits are promoted into cadre positions. The relative importance of party membership and cadre status therefore reflects these two potential sequences of events. In the Mao period, the coefficients suggest that sponsored adult college education took place largely before young party recruits were promoted into cadre positions. There are two reasons why cadres did not acquire further college education at a higher rate. First, cadres in the Mao period were less educated, as many of them were revolutionaries who joined the party or the army before 1949, and thus could obtain only low-level adult education. Second, the Cultural Revolution may have exerted a negative effect on cadre education, not only because the educational system was disrupted but also because many party officials and government bureaucrats were purged (Deng and Treiman 1997). In the early reform period, however, further college education occurred mainly after promotion into cadre positions. In this period, as revealed in preceding analyses, the party began to recruit members during mid- to late-career and to promote them quickly thereafter into cadre positions without a long period of screening, cultivation, and training. As a result, further education occurred mainly after rather than before individuals were promoted. Not until the late reform period are the effects of party membership and cadre position roughly equal. Both cadres and young party recruits are being sent to college, either to augment their education or to prepare for future promotions.²⁴ Despite these complexities, it is fairly clear that for most of its history the party has tended to recruit young members in workplaces who will subsequently be sponsored for further education, rather than recruiting those who already have a college degree while they are still young.²⁵

²⁴ This, along with the historic shift toward recruitment of young college graduates as party members, indicates the strong commitment to education that has characterized party policy for more than a decade (Lee 1991). As the older cohorts of party cadres retire, and as younger cohorts enter with higher educational levels, we would expect the role of adult college education eventually to decline.

²⁵ The estimated effect of prior high school education is of equal magnitude to that of party membership. This indicates that despite the preferential access enjoyed by young party recruits to the system of adult college courses, a party member cannot take advantage of the opportunity without high school education, and that the system is large enough to permit large numbers of nonmembers to receive adult college training. It is also possible that one variant of party-sponsored mobility undetected by our models is at work: some with a high school education may be selected for adult college education first and recruited into the party and promoted into cadre positions later.

Career Consequences of Adult Education

Party-sponsored adult education has changed the landscape of career mobility dramatically, for education is not merely a cause but an outcome of mobility. If, further, those sponsored for adult college education are more likely to be promoted into administrative positions than those who attended college before working, we should observe two groups of college-educated individuals with different career destinations. Those who obtain college education via adult education should be promoted into administrative positions at higher rates than the former (hypothesis 7).

Table 6 estimates the attainment of elite cadre positions using piecewise exponential models with period specific effects defined in equation (2). In all the models, we include age, gender, and party membership as control variables, and our main purpose is to compare the effects of regular and adult college education. Consistent with the results reported in table 3, those who earned their college education through the regular system are not promoted into administrative positions at a substantially higher rate than people without a college education, other things being equal. Not only are the estimated effects small, but they are not statistically significant in most of the models. On the contrary, those with an adult college education are much more likely to be promoted into administrative positions, with odds ratios at least double that for regular college in all periods.

The gap between the two college-educated groups is much larger if we consider the fact that some obtained adult college education after being promoted into administrative positions, as shown in table 5. Table 4 showed clearly that the high percentage of college-educated party members and officials is primarily due to adult higher education. Of the 179 respondents with formal college education, only 27% ever joined the party. In contrast, 48% of the 169 respondents who attained college education through adult continuing educational system were party members. The contrast is even more striking for elite administrators: While only 11% (19) of those with formal college education have ever held an administrative position, 34% (58) of those with an adult college education are elite cadres. Party sponsorship therefore is not merely compatible with a "meritocratic" emphasis upon higher education; it is intimately connected to the process of educational attainment for those who enter the party while young and who are subsequently sponsored for elite administrative posts.

TABLE 6
 ROBUST MLE OF THE EFFECTS OF REGULAR AND ADULT COLLEGE EDUCATION ON THE
 ATTAINMENT OF ELITE CADRE POSITIONS IN URBAN CHINA, 1949–96

Variable	Overall 1949–96	Mao Period 1949–77	Early Reform 1978–87	Late Reform 1988–96
Age .....	.99 (-1.76)	.97 (-3.43)	1.00 (-.11)	.98 (-1.66)
Gender (male)	3.41 (6.61)	3.03 (2.91)	5.04 (4.70)	2.55 (2.88)
Party members	5.37 (9.59)	7.25 (7.58)	5.97 (6.58)	2.69 (2.68)
Regular college education ...	1.55 (1.27)	2.24 (1.89)	1.17 (.30)	1.74 (1.12)
Adult college education	3.50 (4.89)	4.44 (4.41)	2.46 (2.51)	4.92 (3.94)
χ^2	359.1	166.1	159.8	51.6
<i>df</i>	5	5	5	5
<i>N</i> of events	281	112	105	64

NOTE.—Coefficients are relative odds ratios. Numbers in parentheses are *z*-scores. *N* = 3,058. All models use the method of robust estimate of variance to account for the effects of the special sampling design (including case weight and cluster effects).

SUMMARY

Our findings conform very closely to the hypothesized characteristics of political sponsorship. Recruitment into the party is concentrated in the earliest years on the job, and hazard rates decline steadily thereafter—party membership is not a credential earned at relatively constant rates until the midcareer (hypothesis 1). In two of the three historical periods we have examined, those who join while young have different backgrounds than those who join later in life. In the Mao period, party recruitment conformed closely to the pattern of “counterselection”: early entrants were recruited heavily from among those with red backgrounds, while those with a college education tended not to join until later in their careers (hypothesis 3). In the late reform period, we observed a dramatic shift toward a “technocratic” pattern, in which individuals from red households are abandoned in favor of young college graduates (hypothesis 4). Only in the intervening early reform period, which emerges as a transitional one between two different patterns of sponsorship, are there no significant differences between early and late party recruits.

Are those who join the party early in their careers more likely to attain elite administrative positions (hypothesis 5)? In the Mao period, this was clearly the case, but not in the transitional early reform period. The late reform period returned to the pattern of promoting early recruits preferentially, but the estimated coefficients are just short of statistical sig-

nificance at the 0.05 level. This pattern of sponsorship is accomplished in part through the preferential sponsorship of party members with high school educations for adult college education. Party members are much more likely to return to school for college courses than nonmembers in all three historical periods (hypothesis 6). And those who take college-level courses in this fashion as working adults are far more likely than those with a regular college education to be promoted into elite administrative posts (hypothesis 7), although the advantages are smaller in the early reform period.

For most of its five decades in power, the Chinese Communist Party has recruited preferentially from among the very young. These young recruits have had different characteristics from older recruits; they have been promoted into administrative posts at higher rates; they have been given remedial college-level training at higher rates; and this remedial college training has greatly increased the odds of promotion into an elite administrative post, whereas a regular college education has not. The clear exception to this pattern is the early reform period (1978–87), which turns out to mark a transition between the Mao-era sponsorship of reds at the expense of college-educated experts and an emerging technocratic late-reform pattern that refocuses early recruitment efforts onto young college graduates while continuing to offer adult college education and preferential promotions to party members who still lack a higher education. The temporary suspension of party sponsorship in the early reform period appears to be part of a recovery from the damages wrought by the Cultural Revolution on the party, the bureaucracy, and individual careers.

INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

Sponsored mobility has permitted the party to balance its role as an elite organization with its simultaneous role as a mass party. The practice of sponsorship has enabled the incorporation of a broad “united front” of members from all walks of life, while further selecting a subset of members for promotion into positions of power. Our search for evidence of a form of party sponsorship led us to distinguish party members according to the age at which they join, and this distinction has revealed previously undetected complexities in the relationships among party membership, education, and occupational mobility. It turns out that the Chinese Communist Party attempted to reconcile the classic red versus expert dilemma in a fashion that was surprisingly subtle—especially for a regime that adopted such openly anti-intellectual policies for much of the later Mao period.

On the one hand, in the Mao period, the party emphasized different principles of recruitment at different career stages: demands for political loyalty (and ascriptive markers for the same) were emphasized when recruiting the young, while demands for educational attainment (and presumably professional competence) were directed primarily to those in mid- and late-career. After the selection of early members according to political criteria, later party recruitment was based on more open competition in which the educated professionals were incorporated into the party in mid- or late-career. Unlike their younger counterparts, however, these older party recruits, though well educated, were not sponsored for advancement into the administrative elite. For them, party membership may have been an intrinsic reward, or may have proffered status advantages in other areas of life. Through the late recruitment of more highly educated people, the party was able to improve the overall educational level of party members. And the party was able to incorporate the college educated into their organization in a largely symbolic way, signaling its openness to a broader constituency while not placing these educated party members in positions of power.

On the other hand, during the Mao era and afterward, the red versus expert dilemma was handled through the systematic sponsorship of party members and officials for adult college courses. If young party members lacked a college education at the time of entry (which they did overwhelmingly in the Mao era), they were sponsored by their workplace leaders for continuing adult education. Such continuing education may have led to an actual improvement of the individual's ability to perform in an administrative post, or it may have served largely a symbolic purpose of legitimating those chosen for leadership without educational qualifications (or both). Educational credentials earned in this way greatly increased the odds of entering into the administrative elite, even over those who had earned regular college degrees. The existence of a large system of adult education has permitted young party loyalists to receive higher education in order to prepare them for the exercise of leadership. This means that much of the association observed between higher education, party membership, and occupational attainment in China turns out to be due to the two phenomena we have revealed in this study: the late and largely symbolic incorporation of educated professionals into the party and the sponsorship of party members and cadres for adult college courses. Through these mechanisms, the Chinese Communist Party delayed for almost two generations the emergence of a "technocratic" pattern of the variety once heralded in European communist regimes in the 1970s (Konrád and Széleányi 1979; Lee 1991).

CONCLUSIONS

Party membership is neither a homogeneous elite status nor a credential analogous to an educational degree. Strong associations between party membership and elite positions are masked by elite selection processes that are left unspecified in the models commonly employed in comparative research on social mobility. While party members appear to enjoy certain career advantages, it is *early* entry into the party, not party membership per se, that leads to promotion into an administrative post. Although party membership itself signals political worth, party members continue to undergo observation and training. Early membership allows an individual to go through such an extended process of screening, cultivation, and training, permitting the evaluation of such perceived attributes as loyalty, reliability, and “ability” that otherwise are difficult to judge. Party membership obtained later in the career does not provide such career advantages and is largely a symbolic reward. Treating party membership as a credential thus would prevent us from detecting the institutional and organizational forces through which political standards are brought to bear on career mobility.

Party sponsorship, observed in the timing of career events, alters the nature of the association between education and career advancement as it has been commonly conceptualized in decades of research on comparative mobility. The political sponsorship of young party members for continuing college education clearly indicates that for a large portion of the upwardly mobile, educational attainment is as much an outcome as a cause of career advancement. While party sponsorship produces a strong correlation between education and elite occupation, such a correlation cannot be interpreted as a straightforward indicator of meritocratic principles, for it is partially the result of prior political selection processes. These processes conform to certain models of sponsored and tournament mobility based on observation of elite school systems and corporate hierarchies in market economies. However, when these familiar processes are orchestrated by a ruling party that has branches in all urban work organizations of any consequence, they take on a macrosocietal significance that is absent when they are orchestrated by a plurality of unconnected organizations or well-connected elite families. Through its formal designation of “members,” a ruling party inadvertently creates a category that turns out to provide an unusually convenient measure with which to gauge career processes that some researchers believe are common in social hierarchies throughout the world. Models of comparative mobility that have long sought to differentiate nations according to the returns to different kinds of individual credentials are too blunt an instrument to gauge the impact of politics on mobility.

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