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POLITICS AND LIFE CHANCES IN A STATE SOCIALIST REGIME: DUAL CAREER PATHS INTO THE URBAN CHINESE ELITE, 1949 TO 1996

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Recent research on career mobility under communism suggests that party membership and education may have had different effects in administrative and professional careers. Using life history data from a nationally representative 1996 survey of urban Chinese adults, we subject this finding to more stringent tests and find even stronger contrasts between career paths. Only recently has college education improved a high school graduate's odds of becoming an elite administrator, while it has always been a virtual prerequisite for a professional position. On the other hand, party membership, always a prerequisite for top administrative posts, has never improved the odds of becoming an elite professional. We also find that professionals rarely become administrators, and vice versa. Differences between career paths have evolved over the decades, but they remain sharp. Thus, China has a hybrid mobility regime in which the loyalty principles of a political machine are combined with, and segregated from, the meritocratic standards of modern professions. Recent changes may reflect a return to generic state socialist practices rejected in the Mao years rather than the influence of an emerging market economy.

“What happens to a revolutionary group when it has been in power for over a generation and forced to face the problems of [governance]? Has the Communist Party of the Soviet Union . . . developed into . . . a ruling class? Or is it merely a non-hereditary elite? If so, what are the . . . characteristics of this elite? . . . [Answers] to these and . . . similar questions . . . [are] significant [for] both . . . sociological theory and practical politics.”

—Barrington Moore (1944:267)

IN this period of rapid change away from the economic and political institutions of mid-century Communism, many scholars have rushed to examine changes in the stratification order. These efforts have tended to

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obscure an uncomfortable fact: We still lack convincing answers to many questions posed long ago, when Communist regimes first attracted sociological attention. For example, we now ask how the spread of markets or the decline of Communist parties will change the value of education or political status, yet our empirical understanding of

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their relative value in earlier decades has not advanced significantly beyond the explorations in the early postwar years.

Our lack of firmly grounded knowledge is most worrisome when we ask questions about the social advantages of party members or government officials—subjects of intense current interest. Whether we are speaking of intergenerational mobility (before and after the revolution or across subsequent generations), the extensive distribution of income in kind (such as housing and privileged access to public property and facilities), or the relative importance of party membership and educational attainment in career mobility, the empirical analysis of the role of politics in such fundamental social processes is still in its early stages.

POLITICS AND LIFE CHANCES: APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM

FROM POSTWAR SOVIET STUDIES TO COMPARATIVE MOBILITY RESEARCH

Postwar analysts of the Soviet Union were preoccupied with the question of how simultaneous demands for professional competence and political loyalty could be satisfied in a way that would permit that nation to prosper. Barrington Moore (1944, 1954) defined the issue as one of competing principles for the allocation of power and status. He reasoned that the Soviet Union was unlikely to maintain the extreme emphasis on ideological loyalty that was characteristic of the Stalin era—that emphasis would likely evolve into a managerial-bureaucratic elite dominated by principles of merit, *or* into a form of traditional authority based on party loyalty, or to some mixture thereof (Moore 1950, 1954).

Moore (1944:269) pointed out that the Communist Party, in its early years in power, showed a sharp preference for promoting its own members into elite positions: The percentage of factory directors who were party members increased from 29 to more than 97 percent from 1923 to 1936.¹

¹ High rates of party membership in high-status occupations were later reported in a wide variety of Communist regimes; in most cross-tabulations, membership rates rose monotonically with occu-

Other scholars stated that the ruling Party enshrined a principle of mobility in which political loyalty and conformity was an explicit and central part of the process of evaluating candidates for promotion (Connor 1979; Feldmesser 1953). In effect, these scholars were describing a ruling party that operated as a conventional political machine that rewarded loyalty by allocating desirable jobs. Thus, the principle of allocation was a form of “principled” particularism, as opposed to the “universalistic” principle of merit (Walder 1985, 1986:162–89).²

Moore’s open-ended discussion of historical alternatives contrasts sharply with the more focused analyses and predictions of later scholars, who employed data from surveys of postwar Soviet emigrés in studies of social stratification and mobility (Feldmesser 1953; Inkeles 1950; Inkeles and Bauer 1959:67–100). Inkeles was acutely aware of the political demands for loyalty placed on Soviet professional and political elites and of the arbitrary terror to which they were subjected during the Stalin era. He was impressed, therefore, by evidence of a strong emphasis on higher education as a credential for upward social mobility, and he predicted that this trend would become more pronounced over time as the Soviet regime matured and concentrated on economic development.

pational status (see Denitch 1976:91; Gerber 2000; Hough 1977, Pohoski 1986:34–35; Shkaratan 1973:66–67, 83–84; Yanowitch 1977:49).

² Principles of party loyalty are “particularistic” in the sense that the term indicates treatment of individuals according to their *relationship* with others. The “principled” particularism of political parties is conceptually distinct from *personal* ties based on kinship and friendship and predates the organizational weapon of Lenin. In fact, it has been described as one of the American Revolution’s most important political innovations:

The new parties of professional politicians . . . brought together large numbers of ordinary people in order to counter the family influence and personal connections of Federalist gentry and older aristocratic Republicans. . . . Loyalty to the party became the sole criterion of the political worth of a person. Family ties, personal connections, personal wealth, even individual achievement did not matter as much as loyalty to the party and devotion to its cause. (Wood 1993:299)

Inkeles (1960) was one of the first to develop arguments about the homogenizing effects of modern social change—arguments that in the 1960s would collectively be labelled “modernization theory.” His evidence about the Soviet Union was part of the early empirical foundation for the argument that modern societies, despite wide cultural and political differences, exhibit similar subjective hierarchies of occupational prestige (Inkeles and Rossi 1956, 1957; Treiman 1977). This work, and Inkeles’s finding about the role of education in career and intergenerational mobility, helped to inspire research in the growing subfield of comparative social stratification. Such research has shown that all national societies exhibit similar patterns of intergenerational mobility and status attainment (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Ganzeboom, Luijckx, and Treiman 1989) in which education is the single most important determinant of occupational outcomes—and also the most important mechanism of social reproduction because the children of high status persons acquire superior education (Ishida, Müller, and Ridge 1995; Müller 1996; Shavit and Blossfeld 1993; Treiman and Yip 1989), and those with superior education obtain high status positions (Ishida et al. 1995; Shavit and Müller 1998; Treiman and Yip 1989).

Analyses of survey data by sociologists in Poland, Hungary, and neighboring countries in the 1970s, and subsequent work by Western sociologists using the same data, broadly confirmed Inkeles’s early predictions regarding the importance of education for status attainment (Ganzeboom, De Graaf, and Robert 1990; Hernes and Knudsen 1991; Ishida et al. 1995; Krymkowski 1991; Simkus 1981; Słomczyński 1978, 1986; Treiman and Yip 1989). Whatever the demands for political loyalty imposed by these regimes, the link between education and occupational mobility resembled that in the United States and other Western nations. In some comparative studies, that link was even tighter in Communist regimes than in the United States (Meyer, Tuma, and Zagórski 1979).

These findings, however, were tantalizingly partial. The clear message about the importance of education in allocating individuals to high status occupations was accompanied by a curious silence about the

question of screening for political loyalty. Scholars who remembered the way the issue was originally framed in early postwar sociology wondered about the implications of these findings for the idea that the Party operated as a political machine that allocated desirable jobs on a particularistic basis (Walder 1985). Did the apparent importance of meritocratic principles signal a decline in the operation of political particularism? Or did political particularism still operate, except that rising levels of education permitted the Party to prefer its own members without sacrificing demands for education? Were principles of selection for party members so similar to the principles of selection for elite occupations that the two had merely become different indicators of elite status? While these questions go to the heart of the issues that originally inspired modernization theory and research on comparative social mobility, they could not be explored for one simple reason: Data about party membership, the clearest single measure of political loyalty and long suspected to be a key credential for career advancement, were unavailable. Political sensitivities of that period prevented survey researchers from gathering data on Communist Party membership or publishing results of such analyses. Not until the late 1980s were such data made available, by which time they were largely of historical interest.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN “NEW CLASS” TRADITION

These unanswered questions were revisited in the 1970s by European neo-Marxist scholars. Reworking and challenging the ideas of Trotsky ([1937] 1972) and Djilas (1957) about the ruling classes of bureaucratic Communist regimes and drawing insights from Polanyi’s ([1944] 1957) comparative analysis of economic systems, Konrád and Szelényi (1979) suggested that the well-established route via higher education into professional and managerial positions meant that Communist regimes were in the midst of a fundamental change in the composition of their ruling class. What Trotsky and Djilas had described as a ruling bureaucratic elite, selected primarily for political loyalty and conformity and only secondarily for compe-

tence, was now being transformed into a bureaucratic elite that was both highly educated and loyal. "The intellectuals," in their memorable formulation, were "on the road to class power": The former distinctions between highly educated but politically suspect "experts" and the loyal but indifferently educated "reds" were being overcome.

Szelényi's original essay with Konrád, and his subsequent elaborations of this view (1982, 1983), indirectly raised the possibility that there may have been two distinct paths to upward mobility within which screening for political loyalty and educational achievement was applied to different degrees. Szelényi's arguments about elite formation implied that Communist regimes had established two separate career paths, one leading to administrative positions of power and privilege, and the other leading to professional positions with little power. These two paths would involve screening for political and educational credentials to a different, though unspecified, degree—the professional path would emphasize education, and the administrative path would emphasize political loyalty, but it was not clear to what extent professionals would be screened for loyalty and administrators would be screened for higher education. To claim that intellectuals were on the road to class power seemed to imply that by the 1970s in central Europe, at least, the distinctions between the two paths, whatever they had been in the past, would largely have disappeared.

Szelényi himself did not pursue the implications of his argument for the analysis of career mobility. He focused instead on questions about the composition of the elite (1982), and on the material advantages enjoyed by members of the "redistributive class" (1983). Because he was writing about a nascent trend, it was not clear to what extent the educated professionals should have been considered as part of the "redistributive class." Szelényi's (1983) early analysis of housing treated professionals as part of that class, but he later concluded that his earlier predictions about the incorporation of the "intellectuals" into the ruling elite had been premature (Szelényi 1986, 1988: 216–18). Despite this ambiguity, Szelényi's work indicated that

any approach to the problem of how education and politics are reconciled in career mobility must consider the possibility of qualitatively different mobility processes into distinct elite positions. This insight proved to be important when survey data on party membership and other political activities became widely available in the 1990s.

THE DUAL PATH MODEL

In the early 1990s, the first studies of social mobility to employ data on both party membership and education showed that Communist Party membership was not simply a spurious correlate of high status: *Despite the clear importance of education*, party membership remained an important predictor of elite occupational status, net of the effects of education. In their analysis of data from a 1986 survey of the Chinese city of Tianjin, Blau and Ruan (1990) found that both education and party membership contributed independently to occupational prestige for both men and women in all age cohorts. Lin and Bian's (1991:671) 1985 survey of the same city yielded similar conclusions: Party membership and education contributed to the attainment of occupational status. And in their analysis of Yugoslav survey data from 1984–85, Massey, Hodson and Sekulic (1992) also found that both party membership and education contributed independently to career mobility into the "managerial-professional" occupational category.

These findings led to a restatement of the original queries of the postwar period. If there were *both* political and educational requirements for career advancement, *how were these competing criteria combined in practice?* Walder (1995) posed this question with reference to Szelényi's arguments about elite composition. Were these criteria reconciled by creating two specialized paths—one that emphasized expertise and education (but not politics) and led to professional occupations (with little decision-making authority), and a second path that emphasized political loyalty (but not higher education) and led to influential leadership positions? To the extent that different standards were enforced in careers that led to different kinds of elite positions, one could conclude that the two criteria were reconciled by creating separate

career paths. On the other hand, if the same political and educational standards were enforced across elite occupations, this would indicate the formation of a unitary, politically incorporated elite of the kind once envisaged by Konrád and Szelényi (1979).

Observing that the question required an examination of the relationships among party membership, education, and elite occupations, Walder (1995:312–15) proposed that these relationships were measures of two underlying processes. The first is a screening process, whereby elite positions are considered as “closed” positions in organizations, access to which involves screening for both education and party membership (Sørensen 1983). In this screening process, party membership is treated as a political credential that is evaluated in the same manner as a school degree. The second process is one of political incorporation, whereby individuals of different educational attainments or occupational positions are recruited into the Party. The pattern of association among party membership, education, and occupation therefore reflects processes of both political screening and political incorporation.

Walder (1995) then asked whether screening for political and educational credentials differed in careers that led to professional positions versus administrative positions. A multinomial logit analysis of the probability that those with party membership or a college education would enter either the professional elite or the administrative elite indicated clear differences between the two paths (Walder 1995:318, table 3). A college education was the strongest predictor of entry into a high professional occupation versus all other occupations, while party membership was not a statistically significant predictor. The strongest predictor of entry into an administrative position versus all other occupations, on the other hand, was party membership—a college education also had a significant positive effect. In the crucial contrast of the probability of entering an administrative position versus a high professional position, there were clear differences in the value of the two key credentials: College education made it more likely that an individual would become a high professional rather than an administrator, while party membership made it more likely that a per-

son would become an administrator rather than a high professional.

THE LIMITATIONS OF EARLIER RESEARCH

Walder’s results suggested clear differences in screening for education and party membership in careers that led to different kinds of elite positions. Those who entered decision-making positions were screened carefully for prior party membership and also for education. Those who entered high-level professional positions were screened even more carefully for education, but were not screened at all for party membership. Yet these results provided only tentative support for the dual path model because, apart from the obvious fact that the sample was of the core urban districts of only one large Chinese city, the data employed were far from ideal for the analysis of career processes.

One shortcoming is that the 1986 Tianjin data were almost wholly cross-sectional. The survey asked only for the current occupation and did not ask about prior jobs, not even the first job. If respondents had not been asked how long they had held their current position, and what date they had joined the Party (if they had done so), no conclusions could be drawn about paths into elite occupations because it would not be possible to establish the temporal order of career events. Only entry into the *current* position could be analyzed in relation to the level of education and prior entry into the Party. Yet respondents may well have held *prior* jobs that were also in an elite occupation, and they may have returned to school to complete their education after joining the Party or after attaining an elite occupation for the first time.

A second shortcoming is that even if strong confidence in the conclusions were warranted, these conclusions would still be the average effects of processes that occurred over almost half a century that had seen enormous fluctuations in Party policy. These processes do not remain static after a Communist Party establishes political power and a command economy (See Whyte 1985; Zhou, Tuma, and Moen 1996): The arguments from Moore and Inkeles through Szelényi and recent stratification

researchers have all been about change through time, and evidence about *average* effects over half a century tells us little about the pattern of change. With cross-sectional data we encounter generic difficulties in handling this temporal dimension—the timing of career events and the problem of censored observations. Overcoming these problems requires life history data and event history modeling that allow the untangling of time-bound processes over individuals' careers and across different periods of recent history.

DATA AND MEASURES

The present analysis employs data from a life history survey of a nationally representative sample of 3,087 urban Chinese adults, ages 20 to 69, conducted in the last half of 1996.³ The questionnaire covered a broad range of topics about both the respondent and family members, but at its core it included complete educational and activity (including work) histories for all respondents.

Occupational data were collected in several forms, but only a limited range of this information is employed here because our purpose is to replicate and extend Walder's (1995) analysis using similar measures. Thus, we use a 13-category classification of occupations that is a minor variant of the classification used in the 1986 Tianjin survey.⁴ To define elite occupations, Walder

³ The survey was part of a nationally representative sample of 6,473 urban and rural households. The national survey was based on a multi-stage stratified design in which 100 county-level units were the primary sampling units and 200 residents' committees and villages were the sampling points. The survey was designed and carried out in collaboration with faculty in the Department of Sociology, People's University of China, Beijing. Details are provided in Treiman (1998) and may be obtained on request from the authors.

⁴ Two differences between the classifications are pertinent to the current exercise: (1) The categories used to identify "administrators" are more restrictive in the current study because only "middle-level management personnel" and "high-level management or leader of unit" are included; and (2) the professional category is divided into three rather than two levels.

began with the occupational categories employed in the 1980 census. The category "professional and technical personnel" represented 5 percent of the Chinese labor force in the 1980 census and 18 percent of the nonagricultural labor force. In the 1986 urban survey, these "professionals" made up 21 percent of the sample. Reasoning that this category, which included such occupations as secondary school teachers, nurses, and factory technicians, was too broad to be defined as "elite," Walder restricted the definition of the professional elite to those who occupied "high professional" positions (e.g., engineers, economic planners, scientists, university faculty, medical doctors). This smaller category made up 3 percent of the Tianjin sample. The census category "heads of organizations," which includes individuals in decision-making or managerial positions in public agencies or enterprises and their subunits, made up 1.6 percent of the national labor force or 9.7 percent of the nonagricultural labor force in the 1980 census and 8.2 percent of the Tianjin sample. The categories "professional" and "administrator" (or "cadre"), thus defined, were treated as the two occupations of interest.

In the present study, elite "cadre" occupations are "middle-level management" and "high-level management or leader"; elite "professional" occupations are "middle-level professional/technical" and "high-level professional/technical." These categories are recoded into the elite "cadre" and "professional" categories, which are the destination occupations of interest in our analyses. Thus defined, 9.4 percent of the 1996 urban sample had ever held elite cadre positions, while 6 percent had ever been elite professionals.

The remaining variables used in the analysis require little elaboration. "College education" includes all tertiary education of any kind, whether or not a degree was earned;⁵ "high school" is defined as any upper middle school (senior high) education, whether academic or technical in nature. Those who

⁵ College education is coded as any spell of post-secondary education, including part-time adult educational programs, regular university education, and graduate study.

stated that they were currently party members were assumed to have been party members throughout the period since the year they joined (detailed party membership histories were not collected). All of these definitions are the same as the ones used in the earlier study. Other variables that serve as controls include gender (1 if male, 0 if female), age (in the relevant year), father a party member (1 if a party member in the relevant year, 0 otherwise), father a cadre and father a professional (both are dummy variables for father's occupation when the respondent was age 14, using the occupational categories as defined above).

METHODS

This data set enables us to examine career mobility throughout individuals' lives and across different historical periods, something not possible with cross-sectional data. Event history analysis is used to reveal the temporal processes of individuals' career paths. This involves a shift in the unit of analysis from the individual to life events that occur at specific points in time (e.g., the attainment of party membership and the transition from nonelite to elite positions). Moreover, some covariates such as education and occupation are time-varying and thus must be measured at different time points in the individual's life. To do so, we transform the individual's life history into multiple annualized spells and record all the measures on a yearly basis. Piecewise exponential hazard rate models with period-specific effects are used in the following analyses. The general form of the models is given as

$$r_{jkp}(t) = \exp[X(t)\beta_{jkp}],$$

where $r_{jkp}(t)$ is the hazard rate of the transition (j , k) in period p between $(t, t + \Delta t)$, $X(t)$ is a vector of covariates at time t , and β_{jkp} is a vector of coefficients associated with $X(t)$. Under this general form, we estimate minor variants of the model, depending on the definitions of k and p . In most models, there is only one destination state; in some models, there are multiple destination states ($k \in D_j$), and these become competing-risks models (Blossfeld and Rohwer 1995). We estimate the transitions for the whole study period

(1949–1996), and separately for different historical periods in order to examine changes in the effects of independent variables over time. Multiplicative hazard ratios, rather than standard additive coefficients for the log hazard rate, are estimated and reported. The two formats are completely equivalent, except that an intercept term is redundant in the multiplicative coefficient vector. We choose hazard ratios because they are easier to interpret.

All models are maximum-likelihood estimations (MLE). However, standard MLE may be biased owing to the multistage sampling design of our data. One problem is that because the respondents were selected from households with different numbers of adults, they did not have equal probabilities of being selected. To correct this problem, we apply a case weight to the estimation, which is the inverse of the probability that an individual was selected.⁶ A second problem is that the observations within the same sampling cluster (e.g., county, city district or town, and neighborhood residents' committee) may not be mutually independent. We use the method of robust variance estimates (Lin and Wei 1989; Royall 1986; StataCorp 1997:145–67) to adjust for the effects of clustering. This method calculates the standard error of each estimated coefficient based on the primary sampling units (i.e., county-level jurisdiction in our data), rather than on individual observations. This does not change the point estimates, but it ensures unbiased standard errors of the estimated coefficients.

AN EVENT HISTORY ANALYSIS OF CAREER PATHS

With life history data and event history techniques, we can readily distinguish the two separate processes—political screening and political incorporation—that affect the association between party membership and occupational status. In the models reported in this section, we are interested mainly in the associations among party membership, education, and elite occupational statuses. Vari-

⁶ The case weight is defined as the number of adults in the respondent's household divided by the average number of adults in all households.

ables for gender, age, and father's party membership and occupation were included in all equations as controls, and while their coefficients are reported, they will not be interpreted.

A REPLICATION OF THE DUAL PATH MODEL

The crucial question in the dual path model is whether political and educational credentials are screened differently for entry into administrative (cadre) positions and professional positions. To answer this question, we first estimate the transition into either kind of elite position; then we estimate the transitions into the cadre elite and the professional elite separately as competing risks (see Table 1).⁷ In these models, individuals were dropped from the risk set once they made a transition into either of the two elite occupations.

If we combine our two elite occupations into one "elite" status, the results resemble those of earlier studies (Blau and Ruan 1990; Lin and Bian 1991; Massey et al. 1992): Both party membership and education appear important in the attainment of an elite occupation between 1949 and 1996 (Table 1, Model 1).⁸ Party membership increased the odds of attaining an elite status by a factor of almost 4. A high school education increased the odds by a factor of 3, while a college education increased the odds by an additional factor of 2.7. As earlier studies found, education is indeed important in career mobility, and selection according to education does not preclude selection ac-

⁷ Our models address only each respondent's first transition into an elite occupation. Although our data show that some individuals experienced multiple transitions, the later transitions may simply entail restoration of a previous status after a demotion (often politically motivated). Thus, including the later transitions could result in overestimated coefficients for some covariates.

⁸ Our replication of the three earlier Chinese studies is important because all three studies were based on the same annual panel survey of 1,011 households conducted by the Tianjin City Government during the 1980s. Blau and Ruan (1990) employed the same data set that was later employed by Walder (1995). Lin and Bian (1991) employed data from the prior year's survey of the same households.

ording to party affiliation, which is a different individual attribute.

Despite the strength of this general pattern, sharp contrasts appear when we use "competing risks" models to examine separately the transitions into the two different elite categories. Model 2 of Table 1 yields coefficients for entry into a cadre (administrative) position (respondents who had already entered a professional position were censored). The same procedure applies to Model 3 for evaluating entry into a professional position. These two "competing risks" models enable us to determine how political

Table 1. Robust Maximum-Likelihood Estimates of the Hazard Ratios for the Attainment of Elite Positions in Urban China, 1949 to 1996

Independent Variable	Any Elite Position (Model 1)	Cadre Elite (Model 2)	Professional Elite (Model 3)
Early reform period, 1978-1987	.97 (-.20)	1.09 (.50)	.80 (-.80)
Late reform period, 1988-1996	.72* (-2.14)	.81 (-1.13)	.57 (-1.91)
Male	2.17*** (5.84)	3.01*** (6.06)	1.15 (.64)
Age	1.01 (1.07)	1.01 (.84)	1.00 (.25)
Father was cadre	1.31 (1.23)	1.15 (.54)	1.49 (1.23)
Father was professional	2.02* (2.59)	1.31 (.73)	2.68* (2.46)
Party member	3.80*** (9.05)	5.27*** (9.79)	1.63 (1.88)
College education	2.72*** (5.62)	1.44 (1.35)	6.13*** (8.60)
High school education	3.14*** (8.60)	2.38*** (5.68)	8.96*** (6.56)
Chi-square	476.7	335.9	272.6
Number of events (unweighted)	368	249	119

Note: Numbers in parentheses are z-ratios. For all models, N = 2,888. All estimates are adjusted to account for the sample design effects (the use of case weights and a stratified multistage probability sample). Reference category for college education is "high school"; for high school education it is "below high school."

* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001 (one-tailed tests)

and educational credentials are screened differently in the two types of elite positions.⁹

The same contrasts observed earlier (Walder 1995) emerge in more pronounced form here. Controlling for the effects of other variables, party members are 5.3 times more likely to become cadres than are non-members, while they are not more likely to become elite professionals (the estimated odds increase by only .63 and are not statistically significant). Educational attainment, as expected, is of paramount importance in the professional career: Those who attended college are 6 times more likely to become professionals than are high school graduates, who in turn enjoy a 9-fold advantage over those without a high school diploma. However, college education does not significantly improve the odds of becoming an elite cadre above the 2.4-fold advantage conferred by a high school education. In the earlier study (Walder 1995: 318, table 3, model 3), the estimated effects of college education and party membership appeared to be of roughly equal magnitudes. This difference in our findings suggests that the cross-sectional methods of the earlier study may have overestimated the effect of college education. In sum, the contrasts between career paths are even clearer in the present study. In careers that lead to an elite cadre position, party membership is the most important single credential while college education does not confer any significant advantage over those with a high school education. On the other hand, in career paths that lead into the elite professions, each level of education greatly multiplies the odds of gaining such a status, while party membership matters very little.¹⁰

⁹ In interpreting “competing risks” models it is appropriate to compare only the coefficients, not the significance levels, especially when the frequency of the competing events is substantially different (Blossfeld and Rohwer 1995). To make the probability statistics comparable, additional procedures are needed to adjust for the difference in numbers of events. Because the contrasts between the models are sharp and straightforward, we did not apply such adjusting procedures, which are complicated and difficult to implement in *Stata 5.0*.

¹⁰ Zhou et al. (1996) also analyze entry into professional and cadre positions, but their results are not comparable to ours as their models did

BOUNDARIES BETWEEN PATHS AND CHANGE THROUGH TIME

These findings, of course, presume that the two career paths are mutually separate with little mobility between them and that there is no significant change over time. However, these are important empirical questions. Are there clear boundaries between the two paths? In other words, is it highly unlikely that someone who enters a professional occupation will subsequently move into a cadre position, or vice versa? Have the differences between career paths remained relatively stable from the outset of the regime, or have they varied through time? In China, the obvious strategy for such an investigation is to compare the Mao era (which ended shortly after his death in September 1976) with the period of reform begun shortly thereafter under Deng Xiaoping. The Mao period saw frequent campaigns that denigrated professional expertise—policies that reached their extreme during the purges of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1971) and the simultaneous closure and gutting of the universities, which lasted until 1978 (Unger 1982). Despite wide policy changes within the Mao era, we treat it here as a single period (1949–1977).¹¹ For two reasons, we divide the subsequent reform era into two periods (1978–1987 and 1988–1996). First, while the regime’s policy toward intellectuals changed decisively in 1978 (Lee 1991), it may have taken awhile before the shift in personnel policies was carried out fully by Party officials at the lower levels of the bureaucracy. Second, economic changes began with the sweeping de-collectivization of agriculture in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but did not begin in urban areas until the mid-1980s. Therefore, there are reasons to believe that in urban areas, the second de-

not include party membership and they examined only the first job.

¹¹ We examined a number of different periods with cut points at 1958, 1966, and 1973, but could not reliably confirm significant changes. Our efforts were hampered by the small numbers of people with college educations and professional occupations in our sample who were active in the early period. Shorter time periods led to small cell sizes and unstable estimates.

Table 2. Robust Maximum-Likelihood Estimates of the Hazard Ratios for the Attainment of Cadre Positions in Urban China, 1949 to 1996

Independent Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	Mao Era (1949–1977)	Early Reform (1978–1987)	Late Reform (1988–1996)	Mao Era (1949–1977)	Early Reform (1978–1987)	Late Reform (1988–1996)
Male	2.32* (2.08)	4.32*** (4.53)	2.42** (2.99)	2.34* (2.10)	4.55*** (4.55)	2.33** (2.75)
Age	.98 (-1.23)	1.02 (1.86)	1.00 (.05)	.98 (-1.09)	1.02* (2.09)	1.01 (.58)
Father was cadre	1.42 (.52)	1.46 (1.03)	.95 (-.12)	1.44 (.54)	1.48 (1.06)	.87 (-.34)
Father was professional	.68 (-.41)	1.69 (1.01)	1.17 (.27)	.69 (-.39)	1.51 (.75)	1.22 (.37)
Party member	8.41*** (7.78)	5.46*** (6.07)	2.90** (3.36)	8.36*** (7.45)	5.38*** (6.15)	2.98*** (3.49)
College education	1.00 (.00)	.89 (-.32)	1.76 (1.63)	1.54 (.70)	3.10* (2.39)	3.13** (3.09)
High school education	2.55** (3.16)	2.20** (3.24)	2.68** (3.13)	2.50** (3.13)	2.19** (3.41)	2.94** (3.17)
Professional occupation ^a	—	—	—	1.08 (.24)	1.07 (.28)	.67 (-1.19)
Professional × college education	—	—	—	.53 (-.88)	.15** (-2.79)	.37 (-1.64)
Chi-square	130.6	150.2	69.2	131.3	159.8	79.5
Number of events (unweighted)	90	99	77	90	99	77

Note: Numbers in parentheses are z-ratios. For all models, N = 2,944. All estimates are adjusted to account for the sample design effects (the use of case weights and a stratified multistage probability sample). Reference category for college education is "high school"; for high school education it is "below high school."

^a Includes both middle- and high-level professionals and low-level professionals.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed tests)

cade of reform may exhibit more decisive changes than the first (Bian and Logan 1996).

Table 2 estimates separate equations, by period, for transitions into elite cadre positions; Table 3 does the same for transitions into elite professional positions.¹² These models clearly show that the contrasts between career paths have persisted across all periods, even though there have been defi-

¹² Unlike the models for cadres and professionals reported in Table 1, these are not "competing risks" models. Individuals who had earlier attained another elite occupation are not regarded as censored, for the simple reason that we are now interested in examining transitions between the two different kinds of elite positions and transitions from nonelite positions.

nite changes in the estimated effects of both party membership and college education in recent years. In *both* paths, the effects of college education have increased markedly (although in Table 2 this is only clear after adding interaction effects for the administrative career), while the effects of party membership have declined over time, especially in the cadre career path.

Let us first examine Model 1, without interaction effects, which corresponds to the models estimated for 1949–1996 in Table 1. Table 2 reveals a steady decline in the impact of party membership on the attainment of a cadre position. In the Mao era (1949–1977), prior party membership increased the odds of such a promotion by a factor of 8.4; in the first decade of reform this effect had

Table 3. Robust Maximum-Likelihood Estimates of the Hazard Ratios for the Attainment of Professional Positions in Urban China, 1949 to 1996

Independent Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	Mao Era (1949–1977)	Early Reform (1978–1987)	Late Reform (1988–1996)	Mao Era (1949–1977)	Early Reform (1978–1987)	Late Reform (1988–1996)
Male	1.25 (.63)	1.28 (.70)	.87 (–.57)	1.30 (.73)	1.40 (.96)	.95 (–.19)
Age	.99 (–.30)	.99 (–.51)	1.02 (.89)	1.00 (–.12)	1.00 (–.06)	1.02 (1.09)
Father was cadre	5.06*** (4.27)	1.01 (.01)	1.09 (.18)	4.99*** (4.24)	.98 (–.03)	1.07 (.14)
Father was professional	1.14 (.12)	3.94* (2.15)	2.31* (1.99)	1.18 (.14)	3.90* (2.15)	2.38* (2.03)
Party member	1.38 (.75)	1.63 (1.06)	.60 (–1.10)	1.85 (1.32)	2.07 (1.61)	.99 (–.02)
College education	4.84*** (4.10)	4.11*** (3.62)	9.46*** (5.71)	4.90*** (4.03)	3.96*** (3.48)	9.76*** (5.79)
High school education	8.72*** (5.51)	6.32*** (3.92)	5.68** (3.11)	9.12*** (5.44)	6.87*** (3.98)	5.89** (3.16)
Cadre occupation	—	—	—	.56 (–.49)	.59 (–.48)	.76 (–.52)
Cadre × Communist Party member	—	—	—	.40 (–.51)	.25 (–.92)	.16 (–1.52)
Chi-square	106.5	63.1	112.4	110.3	68.1	118.1
Number of events (unweighted)	39	43	46	39	43	46

Note: Numbers in parentheses are z-ratios. For all models, N = 2,910. All estimates are adjusted to account for the sample design effects (the use of case weights and a stratified multistage probability sample). Reference category is “high school” for college education; for high school education it is “below high school.”

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed tests)

shrunk to 5.5, and in the second decade to 2.9. The effect of college education (relative to high school) also began to rise by the late reform period, from no effect to a modest positive effect, although the effect is not statistically significant. However, a larger increase is observed once we control for the strong interactions between college education and professional position in Model 2. Table 3, Model 1, shows parallel changes in the professional path. The already-large impact of college education relative to high school is roughly doubled by the late reform period, from an effect of 4.8 to one of 9.5; the impact of a high school education declines, indicating rising educational standards in the professional path.¹³

¹³ However, the total effect of college educa-

The expanded models in Tables 2 and 3 are designed to examine boundaries between career paths. In Table 2, which shows models for the attainment of cadre positions, Model 2 includes a term identifying those who had already attained a professional position (including, in this case, a low-level profession) and an interaction term identifying professionals with a college education. The non-

tion in the professional path (calculated by multiplying the odds ratios for both college education and high school education), already massive in the Mao period, does not increase at the same rate. The 42-fold advantage of college attendees relative to those without at least a high school education increases to 55-fold in the later reform period. This means that a college education has always been a virtual prerequisite for holding such positions.

significant effect of professional occupation across all periods indicates that professionals have never been more likely to move into administrative positions than individuals in nonelite occupations. The odds of becoming a cadre are smaller still for professionals who also have a college education, as suggested by the negative interaction terms.¹⁴ These results reveal barriers to moving from the professional to the administrative path that persist in the post-Mao period. This pattern contrasts sharply with a common career path in the United States, particularly in technical fields like engineering—a path that leads from professional to management positions (Rosenbaum 1984).

Table 3 reports expanded models for professional occupations in which we consider the interaction between cadre position and party membership. Similar barriers appear to impede movement from administrative to professional positions. In all three periods, cadres appear less likely than those in nonelite occupations to move into professional positions, and cadres who are also party members are even less likely to do so.¹⁵ Once individuals have acquired both party membership and a cadre position they are unlikely to switch into a professional position.¹⁶

¹⁴ Only in the early reform period is the interaction term statistically significant. The number of cases in the cells defined by these interaction terms ranges from 60 to 182, and the number of events is very small. These interpretations are therefore tentative.

¹⁵ The predicted odds ratios for cadre party members, derived by multiplying the main effects of party membership, cadre occupation, and the interaction term, are .41 for the Mao era, .31 for the early reform period, and .12 for the late reform period. The number of cases in the cells defined by these interaction terms ranges from 63 to 167, with very few events, leading to low confidence levels for the estimates.

¹⁶ We cannot ignore interesting shifts in the effects of parental political status evident in our control variables. Whereas the children of cadres had large advantages in professional careers in the Mao era, this advantage disappeared and was replaced by a similarly large advantage for children of professionals in the post-Mao era. These intergenerational issues are beyond the scope of this article, but we note potentially profound changes in intergenerational mobility in recent decades.

In sum, sharp distinctions in China between the cadre and professional career paths are an enduring, though evolving, phenomenon. Mao-era patterns survive today, despite the rising impact of higher education in both career paths and the declining impact of party membership in the cadre path. Entry into the cadre elite in the Mao era virtually required party membership, and a high school education was also helpful (though less than one-third as important), while a college education provided no additional advantage. By the 1990s, the advantage of party membership had been cut by more than one-half, roughly equal to the effect of a high school education. For nonprofessionals, the impact of a college education relative to a high school education has risen to the point where it is the same as for party membership. Entry into the professional elite, on the other hand, has never been facilitated by party membership, while higher education has always been important. In the reform periods, these features have become more pronounced—the impact of college education has doubled, the impact of high school has dropped, and the impact of party membership for noncadres has been virtually eliminated. In sum, despite the marked changes in the cadre career path, clear differences between the two paths remain, and over time the boundaries between them have become more pronounced.

POLITICAL INCORPORATION REVISITED

So far, our analyses of party membership have focused only on the process of political screening—the extent to which Party administrators who allocate people to positions within organizations exhibit a preference (other things being equal) for party members. With event history analysis of life history data, there is no danger that the association between occupation and party membership could be confounded with recruitment rates into the Party, or “political incorporation” (Walder 1995). Walder’s earlier study, however, noting the lack of any association between party membership and professional status, concluded that professionals were *neither* screened for party membership *nor* incorporated preferentially into the Party. Because our life history data

Table 4. Robust Maximum-Likelihood Estimates of the Hazard Ratios for the Attainment of Party Membership in Urban China, 1949 to 1996

Independent Variable	Model 1 ^a			Model 2 ^b		
	Mao Era (1949–1977)	Early Reform (1978–1987)	Late Reform (1988–1996)	Mao Era (1949–1977)	Early Reform (1978–1987)	Late Reform (1988–1996)
Male	2.54*** (6.19)	3.04*** (4.90)	3.19*** (4.35)	1.85*** (3.72)	2.60*** (3.99)	2.28*** (3.12)
Age	.96*** (-4.42)	1.01 (1.40)	.99 (-.46)	.97** (-2.77)	1.02* (2.24)	1.01 (.64)
Father was Party member	2.08*** (3.89)	1.58* (2.17)	1.07 (.33)	1.96** (3.06)	1.60 (1.94)	1.26 (1.01)
College education	.97 (-.08)	1.34 (.85)	1.56* (1.98)	1.26 (.62)	1.45 (1.00)	1.57 (1.73)
High school education	1.43* (2.20)	2.84*** (4.51)	3.65*** (5.59)	1.70** (2.74)	2.53*** (3.80)	3.19*** (4.40)
Cadre occupation	—	—	—	2.77** (3.21)	2.80** (2.98)	3.17** (2.95)
Professional occupation	—	—	—	.16* (-2.39)	1.03 (.07)	1.62 (.94)
Chi-square	101.5	81.1	94.4	72.3	84.3	90.9
Number of events (unweighted)	249	130	118	181	108	105

Note: Numbers in parentheses are z-ratios. N = 2,944 for Model 1, and N = 2,872 for Model 2. All estimates are adjusted to account for the sample design effects (the use of case weights and a stratified multi-stage probability sample). Reference category for college education is “high school”; for high school education, it is “below high school.”

^a Model 1 also includes those who were attending school or were in the army.

^b Model 2 includes only those who were working.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed tests)

permit a much more complete and accurate analysis of the process of political incorporation—in particular, because they permit us to examine the effects of occupation on recruitment into the Party throughout the career—we can further test the earlier conclusions about political incorporation, and in particular, we can examine whether there have been changes in recruitment through time.

Table 4 shows models for the attainment of party membership for the three different periods. The models indicate changes in party recruitment that parallel the changes in career patterns reported above. On the one hand, the effect of family political background, as indicated by father’s party membership, which doubled the odds of party membership in the Mao period, disappeared by the late reform period. On the other hand, education became much more important, as

indicated in Model 1. During the Mao period, the college educated were no more likely to enter the Party than were those with a high school education. In the late reform period, however, having a college education increased the odds of becoming a party member by 50 percent over a high school education. High school education increased the odds of becoming a party member by only 40 to 70 percent in the Mao era, but it more than tripled the odds in the post-Mao era. The rising impact of education is not so pronounced as it is for entry into the administrative elite because party members are recruited from all occupational groups, but the trend is clear.¹⁷

¹⁷ The same trend is observed in prior event history models of party membership based on two different urban Chinese samples (Bian, Shu, and Logan 1998; Zhou et al. 1996).

Model 2 reveals a sharp distinction between cadres and professionals, net of education. Those who held cadre positions before joining the Party were about three times as likely as persons in nonelite occupations to be incorporated into the Party, and this advantage was constant across periods. On the other hand, professionals, virtually shunned by the Party during the Mao period (when the odds of joining were only .16 that of people in nonelite occupations), are no longer discriminated against in the late reform period.¹⁸ In short, although professionals are no longer discriminated against in joining the Party, they still do not join at significantly higher rates than equally well-educated people in nonelite occupations.

INTERPRETATION: EXPLAINING THE OBSERVED PATTERNS

Our original questions about the existence of separate career paths were prompted by the fact that in China the Party controlled appointments in urban organizations—a defining feature of Communist regimes—and by the notion that individual candidates for promotion are screened for political credentials just as they are for educational credentials. While our findings clearly show that selective screening processes are at work in the allocation of individuals to elite positions with varying administrative power, we cannot assume that the resulting career patterns are a straightforward result of the Party's preferences as enforced in routine personnel decisions. The existence of selective political and educational screening per se does not explain why there are two such clearly differentiated career paths or why they have endured through time. The outcomes we observe are no more necessarily an outcome of such screening processes than would be a finding that success in *both* types of careers depends on *both* political and educational credentials—something that would arguably be the Party's preferred outcome. Furthermore, we cannot assume that the continuity and change observed in the post-Mao period

¹⁸ Strikingly similar results were obtained by Zhou et al. (1996:788), who estimated a somewhat different model that yielded hazard ratios for 1949–1965 of .25 and for 1980–1993 of 1.46.

is a straightforward result of changes either in the Party's preferences or in economic institutions, for reasons that we shall now explain.

THE EMERGENCE AND PERSISTENCE OF SEPARATE CAREER PATHS

Why the emergence and persistence of such clearly separated career paths? This question translates into two counterfactual questions: Why did China's revolutionary regime *not* enforce higher educational standards in the administrative path, and why did it *not* enforce political standards in the professional path? An obvious answer to the first question is that under Mao, China's socialist regime placed an emphasis on ideological rectitude and put college-educated professionals under suspicion to a degree never observed in Eastern Europe and not seen in the Soviet Union since the early 1930s (Fitzpatrick 1978). To the extent that we emphasize the Party's ideological propensities, however, we make it more difficult to explain the surprising lack of political standards in the promotion of individuals into elite professional positions. Why was the same party, so seemingly orthodox regarding the standards enforced in the administrative path, so pragmatic regarding the professional path?

Outcomes do not reflect only the Party's preferences; these preferences are enforced under potentially severe constraints. One constraint is the available supply of candidates for elite positions who have the desired credentials. This, in turn, is a function both of the numbers of people who possess the desired credentials and the preferences of individuals with such credentials about their own careers. Put simply, if the Party faces a severe shortage of highly educated candidates, and if these individuals show a marked preference for one kind of elite position over another, the resulting career patterns will be very different than if there were no shortages of educated personnel and educated personnel were equally interested in both types of elite positions.

To a considerable extent, China's differentiated career paths may be the result of a severe shortage of well-educated people, something exacerbated by Mao era educa-

tional policies (Unger 1982). The shortage of college-educated personnel may have made them more valuable, more "elitist," and more politically unpalatable to a guerrilla-dominated party, and this in turn may have led to the later political backlash against them. Whereas just 5.9 percent of those born before 1960 in our sample had completed a regular college degree, 19.1 percent of the pre-1960 cohorts of a comparable Russian sample had done so (Treiman 1994).

How would this shortage result in such distinct career paths? Let us make two minimal assumptions about the Party's personnel aims: First, that the Party wants to control decision-making; second, that it wants scarce college graduates to be allocated to positions where they are most needed. This would dictate the imposition of party membership as a minimal criterion for holding an elite cadre position, and the enforcement of educational standards for elite professional positions. But why *not* enforce higher educational standards in the cadre path as well? Precisely because of the severe shortage of the college educated. Our equations for the Mao period show that there were not even enough college-educated personnel to fill the higher professional positions, which explains why, in the early years, a high school education was such a strong predictor of an elite profession. Instead, scarce college graduates were placed into professional positions where they were managed by party members with high school educations and leadership skills. Higher educational standards simply could not be imposed until the supply of mature college graduates with party memberships increased. Why not enforce political standards for the professional career? Again, because the already severe shortage of college graduates would have been made even worse by imposing an additional political standard. Demands for politically loyal professionals likewise had to be postponed until the supply of college graduates with party memberships increased, permitting selection based on party membership without sacrificing educational standards.

To the extent that China's dual career paths are the result of severe shortages of college-educated personnel, we should observe markedly different patterns in those

state socialist regimes that did not suffer from such shortages, or that suffered from them only in the early years. If a state socialist regime attains an adequate supply of college graduates, and if it exhibits a preference toward college graduates in party recruitment, the constraints that we have hypothesized as crucial in the Chinese case will not exist in other settings. The Party can select college graduates for top administrative positions from a large pool of party members with higher degrees, while it can select party members preferentially for top professional posts from among the large pool of college graduates. The result would be career paths into two types of elites that require largely the same kinds of credentials—both political and educational. This is the kind of pattern that we associate with the arguments of Konrád and Szelényi's early work. Replications of the present study with similar data from Russia and the more developed of the Soviet republics and East European regimes would help us to understand more clearly whether China's pattern is a distinctive outcome of a severe shortage of college graduates exacerbated by Mao era educational policies, or whether it is a generic outcome of state socialist institutions.¹⁹

Another constraint that may have led to two distinct and enduring career paths in China is that the college educated may have learned to avoid the Party and leadership positions that imposed political obligations and exposed them to political suspicion. That is, during the Mao era, college graduates may have developed an aversion to party membership and a strong preference for elite professional positions. If the demand for the college educated far exceeds the supply, those with a college degree would have little incentive to compete for scarce professional positions by striving to obtain an additional political credential. Once they have entered the professional elite, they may resist recruitment into the Party or promotion into leadership posts. This would further restrict the supply of educated candidates for admin-

¹⁹ Survey data sets suitable for these comparative and historical questions are now available for Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and Slovakia (Treiman 1994).

istrative posts and of party members for high professional posts, and would reinforce the sharply divergent career paths we observed.

While interview evidence indicates that such preferences existed (Shirk 1982), our survey data cannot directly gauge their effects. Statistical associations between credentials and elite occupations are the joint outcome of individual and Party preferences. Individuals compete for elite positions, and Party officials select from among the candidates. But if college graduates choose to compete only for one kind of elite position, do not attempt to enter the Party, choose not to aspire to leadership positions, and resist encouragement from their superiors to do so, the Party is left with a narrowed pool of candidates. We cannot determine which parts of the association are the result of candidates' subjective choices and which are the result of decisions of officials who screen candidates.

If we examine changes from the Mao to post-Mao periods in the results reported above, however, we can infer that such preferences do exist and that they may affect party recruitment and career patterns. For example, the fundamental change in the Party's attitude toward intellectuals after 1977 has resulted in relatively modest increases in the recruitment of college graduates. Table 4 shows that the recruitment the college educated has increased, but this increase is small. Professionals, virtually excluded from the Party in the Mao period, no longer are discriminated against in joining the Party, but they still do not join the Party at significantly higher rates than the average for otherwise comparable people in nonelite occupations. The Party has opened its doors, but China's college-educated professionals have not crowded the entrance.

CHANGE AFTER MAO: THE IMPACT OF MARKETS?

The rising impact of college education in both career paths after Mao, and the falling returns to party membership in the administrative path, fit the predictions of some analysts of China's market transition (Nee 1989). Our analysis suggests, however, that we should exercise caution in attributing these changes to the recent transformation of

China's economy. If our conjectures are correct—that the causes of China's two distinct career paths were a shortage of college-educated personnel and an aversion among intellectuals to party membership—the same changes would have occurred in the absence of market reform because the supply of college graduates increased and the political discrimination against intellectuals ended. The hazard ratios for high school and college education for the professional path, for example, show a monotonic rise in the ratio for college education and a corresponding drop in the ratio for high school. In the Mao period, when there was an extreme shortage of educated personnel, the sharpest distinction in the odds of becoming a professional was between those with primary education and those with a secondary education. However, as the supply of the college educated rises increased, standards increased as well, and the advantage of the high school-educated declined while the advantage of the college educated increased. It is therefore unclear to what extent the post-Mao pattern in urban careers was a result of educational growth, a shift from Mao era to more generic state socialist policies, or the emergence of a market economy. Here again we see the fundamental importance of historical research on social mobility. A comparative and historical understanding of the past is an essential prerequisite for understanding the forces that create change in the present.

CONCLUSIONS

Restating our findings in the broad terms that originally inspired this line of questioning some 50 years ago, we find that in China the enforcement of meritocratic principles has not been permitted to interfere with principles of party loyalty—and vice versa. The regime has created two segmented "markets" for elites in which educational credentials are paramount for the attainment of elite professions while political credentials are paramount for the attainment of elite administrative positions. Party membership has never been a criterion for the attainment of professional positions, and a college education did not become a criterion for administrative positions until the post-Mao period (for those who had not already followed the profes-

sional path). These dual career paths were formed during the Mao era and they survive in somewhat altered form today. This has permitted the Chinese Communist Party to operate as a political machine, allocating decision-making positions to its own members without imposing the same preferences on the professional positions so central to the operation of an urban industrial economy. What were once referred to as “the dictates of modernization” have indeed taken hold, even in a regime that struggled against such “dictates” throughout the Mao period. But during Mao’s lifetime, and even afterward, they have done so primarily within an occupational niche established by the Party. This hybrid mobility regime conforms only partially to the projections of the early postwar period, and it may be what Moore (1954) had in mind when he referred to a mixed meritocratic and traditional regime.

Has China’s revolutionary regime evolved in a meritocratic direction of the kind predicted so often in the 1950s and 1960s? Yes—despite the anti-intellectual policies of the Mao period, this pattern was well entrenched at the outset of the regime, but only for careers that lead to professional positions. No—despite the emphasis on higher education in the professional path, educational standards are not paramount for key decision-making positions in government, industry, and other organizations. Has the ruling party continued to operate as a political machine that allocates positions based on particularistic political standards? Clearly yes, when it comes to positions that will exercise decision-making authority, but evidently not when it comes to the elite professions.

These career patterns and their changes through time are artifacts of the workings of distinctive political and economic institutions over the past half century. Not until recently have we been in a position to answer long-standing sociological questions about their impact. Yet our analysis of China has served to make more urgent the need for research into comparative and historical questions about the analogous patterns of change in the varied regimes of the former Soviet bloc. Whether China’s distinct career paths are a generic outcome of the workings of state socialist institutions or whether they are a distinctive outcome of Mao era politics

and a severe shortage of college graduates (or both) are questions that can only be pursued via comparison with the historical record of other state socialist regimes.

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