# The Impact of Class Labels on Life Chances in China[1]

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In 1950, China's new Communist government created hereditary family class labels intended to promote the advancement of households supportive of the Communist movement along with the economically disadvantaged and to penalize property owners and those associated with the old regime. Researchers have long suspected that the labels rewarded connections to the Communist movement more than the economically disadvantaged, while former middle- and upper-class households continued to enjoy certain advantages. The long-term impact of these labels has yet to be firmly established. The authors examine the factors affecting the initial assignment of class labels and their subsequent consequences for Communist Party membership and educational and occupational attainment. Using data from a 1996 national probability sample survey of China, the authors find that the class labels had a major impact on the life chances of individuals that persisted at least into the mid-1990s, although not always in the ways that were intended.

## INTRODUCTION

In the early 1950s the new government of the People's Republic of China assigned to each family a political class label (*jiating chushen*) on the basis of the relationship of the head of household to the "revolutionary struggle"

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when the Chinese Red Army and Communist Party seized control of China around 1949 and the family's source of income in the three years before 1949. Designed to consolidate political control and lay the foundations for a socialist society, these labels were enforced for three decades, during which they were a major feature of social and political life (Kraus 1977, 1981; Unger 1982, 1984; Parish 1984; Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden 1991; Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1992). They influenced students' educational and career strategies (Shirk 1982), shaped the choice of marriage partners (Croll 1984; Unger 1984), and became a subject of intense political debate during outpourings of popular dissent during the Hundred Flowers period of 1957 (Doolin 1964) and the Red Guard movement during the Cultural Revolution (White 1976; Chan, Rosen, and Unger 1980; Rosen 1982; Unger 1982; Andreas 2002).

China's practice of sorting its population into class categories was based on earlier Soviet practices. Although the categories were inspired by Marxist class analysis, they were in fact political statuses attached to entire families, passed down through generations (through the male line) and enforced by bureaucratic rules. The basic principle was to distinguish "proletarian" elements from "exploiters" and "class enemies." Those in the "proletarian" categories, assumed to be loyal to the regime, were to be given certain privileges and opportunities. Those in the "exploiter" categories, assumed to be hostile to the new regime, faced certain forms of discrimination and restricted opportunities.

These class labels were intended both to promote social justice and to consolidate Communist power. "Proletarian" categories were to be favored in admission to the Party, career advancement, and entry into higher education, because these were groups that had been denied opportunity in the old society. Individuals from "exploiter" households, who previously had enjoyed large advantages, were henceforth to face certain forms of discrimination. By favoring households that benefited from the revolution, new elites would form through the process of higher education, replacing the old elites who had lost status and power in the revolution. These new elites

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presumably would be more loyal than those from former exploiting households, who were assumed to be hostile to proletarian power (Fitzpatrick 1979). They were designated as class enemies and periodically abused in political campaigns as "enemies of the people."

These class categories were fixed by the classification of the male household head at the time of the Chinese Communist Party's "liberation" of a locality. Communist operatives assigned these identities to rural households during the course of land reform, on the basis of their investigation of landholding and individual political histories garnered during the visits of work teams to villages (Hinton 1966). Class categories were assigned to households on the basis of some combination of their economic status and the political activities of the male household head. In cities, individuals were told to report fully on their entire work histories, describing the positions they had held and the occupations of their parents. They also were instructed to report fully on their own and their parents' political histories. The information would be placed in individual dossiers as well as in the household registers that were created in urban areas (Cheng and Selden 1994). More thorough background checks were done on those who already were in positions of some authority or who were applying for Party membership.

As in the Soviet Union, China's effort to distinguish households as loyal ("proletarian") and enemy ("exploiter") was plagued with ambiguity (Fitzpatrick 1993). Large segments of the population could not readily be assigned to either "proletarian" or "exploiter" categories. In the countryside, the Chinese Communist Party adapted the Soviet categories of "poor," "middle," and "rich" peasant and added two more: "poor and lower-middle" and "landlord." This was necessary to cover the common situation of households that had access to land but not enough to support their families and to identify large landowners with commercial interests. The same was true of urban professionals, white-collar workers, teachers, and intellectuals. Because they were not engaged in material production, they were not exploited in Marxist terms, and they did not hire others or possess capital that made them "exploiters." Like self-sufficient family farmers labeled "middle peasants," the families of urban nonmanual workers were assigned politically ambiguous labels.

The system was also rife with contradictions. The first was the conflation of "class" with political affiliation. In the Soviet Union, membership in the Communist Party before the classification of the population in the 1920s made one "proletarian," regardless of the individual's family background or personal occupation before joining. This practice was adopted in China in the 1950s. People who joined the Party or the Red Army before their victory were considered "revolutionary," even if they had come from the educated professional class or prosperous "exploiter" households. The Communist Party of China attracted many patriotic students during the anti-

Japanese war, a period when high school and university education was largely limited to individuals from prosperous households. The Party itself was founded and led by the highly literate sons of prosperous rural families, and it attracted many individuals from similar backgrounds. The reverse relationship also held: no matter how humble one's origins, to have joined the Nationalist Party or army would have erased one's "proletarian" origins and would make one a class enemy. The same ambiguities evident in classifying occupations apply to these political categories. This was pronounced in cases when individuals defected from the Nationalist cause to join the Communists, which was common late in the civil war of 1946–49.

Another contradictory feature of these labels is that they were inherited. This means that individuals who grew up in households classified as "landlord" or "capitalist" would still be considered as such, even if their family's wealth had been expropriated before they were born and they grew up in dire poverty. The same applied to individuals whose fathers or grandfathers had been officials in the Nationalist Party or officers in Nationalist armies—even if they had no prior contact with these forebears after they had been executed or fled to Taiwan. But, revolutionary cadres and soldiers were assigned to leadership positions after the Party's victory, and many of them rose into important positions. This meant that their offspring were considered revolutionary even if they were raised in privileged households after the revolution.

The class labels were divided into three broad categories. "Good" or "Red" classes included both revolutionary and proletarian households.[2] They were presumed to be loyal to the Party and were to be shown preference in educational advancement, job assignment and promotions, and entry into the Party. "Ordinary" classes included a range of middling classes in both city and countryside.[3] They were presumed to be neutral, or wavering, in their loyalties to the revolution and were to receive neither preference nor penalties. The "bad" classes were classified as either "exploiting class" or "reactionary."[4]

These labels were enforced far more rigorously and for a much longer period of time in China than in the Soviet Union. In the latter country, they

[2] The "revolutionary" category was composed of pre-1949 Party members, Red Army soldiers, and "revolutionary martyrs" (families of deceased revolutionary Party members and soldiers); the "proletarian" category included the urban working class and poor and lower-middle peasants.

[3] Specifically, they were self-sufficient family farmers known as "middle" class peasants, along with urban clerks, white-collar workers, teachers, small shopkeepers, academics, and other professionals.

[4] This category was composed of landlords, rich peasants, and capitalists, along with members of the Nationalist Party or its armies. It also included individuals given labels such as "rightist," "bad element," or "counterrevolutionary" for political or criminal offenses.

were emphasized early in the Stalin era, especially in the Soviet Union's own cultural revolution of the late 1920s (Fitzpatrick 1978). In large part because of their ambiguities and contradictions, the Soviet Union abandoned these class categories as unworkable after only a few years, and they had largely disappeared by the mid-1930s (Fitzpatrick 2005, pp. 37–49). In China, however, the system was rigorously enforced from the 1950s until the end of the 1970s, when its use rapidly declined. Not until 1979 was the stigma attached to a range of "bad" class labels formally removed (Central Committee [1979*a*] 1993, 1979*b*). Class labels were not removed from household registers, however, and students who registered for middle school (junior high school) were still required to report their family's class label until 1987, when the practice was finally discontinued (Chen, Wang, and Yang 2017, p. 10). During the radical political campaigns of the Mao era, especially during the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76, the class labels were emphasized to an extreme degree.

The three-decade emphasis on enforcing these bureaucratic labels in a wide range of career events has long led observers of China to suspect that they had a major impact on life chances, especially in educational and career advancement and entry into the Communist Party, which formed the elite of the new party-state. Because of sharp limits on the availability of data, there always has been a high degree of uncertainty about what that impact actually was. The ambiguity and somewhat contradictory nature of the categories and their assignment to households have led some to wonder whether their impact might have been attenuated or that they might have had unintended consequences. Case studies based on government documents, interviews, and fragmentary statistics from local settings have suggested that politically connected households with "revolutionary" labels benefited far more than proletarian households, despite the fact that the latter were also considered red (e.g., Rosen 1982; Unger 1982; Andreas 2002). This would suggest that the "revolutionary" category became a de facto mechanism for Party patronage, as was charged by critics within China in the 1950s and 1960s (Doolin 1964; White 1976), while the "proletarian" labels were a mild form of affirmative action. This interpretation was reinforced by indications that individuals from middle-class and exploiting households nonetheless did relatively well in educational attainment well into the 1960s, despite the discrimination inherent in the rules, perhaps even better than individuals from proletarian households (Rosen 1982; Unger 1982; Andreas 2002).

Findings based on probability samples of the population were unknown until the 1990s. Only one prior study, based on the urban portion of the same data set as we examine in this article, has partially and indirectly addressed some of these questions. It employed class labels and other criteria (parental occupation and party membership) to construct several different types of "new elite" and "old elite" categories and compared the career out-

comes of individuals from these different elite households over time. It did not address questions about the net effects, both indirect and direct, of the class labels on a range of individual outcomes, including party membership and education. Our article is the first to directly model the multiple effects of class labels across generations with a multigeneration national probability sample.

Whatever the impact of class labels might have been during the period of their strong enforcement, a secondary question is whether they continued to have lingering consequences in the period after the policy was formally abandoned. In conjunction with the political liberalization and economic reforms that followed the Cultural Revolution, the use of class labels was rapidly curtailed after 1979 (Lee 1991). But the class labels were retained in individual dossiers and household registers, and local decision makers may have continued to discriminate informally against those from "exploiting" class backgrounds and politically stigmatized households according to prior practice. Habitual patterns of discrimination do not immediately disappear simply because of changes in laws. More important, the formal end of discrimination against individuals in stigmatized categories did not prohibit continuing favoritism toward individuals in the Red category. Even apart from continuing discrimination by authority figures, it is likely that the experience of one's family being labeled as "Revolutionary," and therefore as especially worthy, or as "Bad," and therefore as especially unworthy, affected self-conceptions in ways that influenced choices about whether to pursue various opportunities such as higher education, cadre positions, and Communist Party membership.[5] It would therefore be surprising to find that these deeply ingrained behavioral patterns, which were entrenched over three decades, would be sharply curtailed immediately after a shift in Party policy.

This article aims to assess, for the first time with data from a national probability sample of both urban and rural populations, the role of political class labels in educational and occupational attainment and the attainment of Party membership. We do this by estimating various logistic regression models, considering the relation of family class labels to each outcome without and then with controls for covariates. We also assess for each outcome

[5] There is some evidence from social psychological studies showing that high socioeconomic status (SES) individuals are more likely to exhibit a sense of entitlement than are lower SES individuals and that lower SES individuals tend to exhibit a reduced sense of personal control (Kraus, Piff, and Keltner 2009; Kraus et al. 2012; Piff 2014). There also is a well-developed literature on the relationship of SES to health that focuses on feelings of adequacy and subjugation as well as on autonomy and the lack of personal control (see, e.g., Marmot 2004; Wilkinson and Pickett 2009; Åberg Yngwe et al. 2012; Nobles, Weintraub, and Adler 2013; Walker et al. 2013; Bosma et al. 2015).

whether the impact of class labels differed in two periods (following Walder, Li, and Treiman 2000): from 1950 to 1978, which we label the "Mao period," and from 1979 to 1996, the year of the survey on which our analysis is based, which we label the "Reform period." We look for cross-period differences, in order to check for possible early changes in the period immediately after the shift in Party policy. We find few statistically significant differences between periods in the relationship between class backgrounds and the outcomes we study and hence do not present them in detail but only selectively comment as we describe our results. However, because of the possibility that the small sizes of our Red and Bad subsamples give us insufficient power to detect important differences, after our main analysis we show, in table 7 below, a descriptive comparison of selected outcomes in the two periods. As we will see, this table reveals no systematic differences between the two periods.

## DATA

The data for our analysis are from the survey Life Histories and Social Change in Contemporary China, a multistage stratified national probability sample of the population of China ages 20–69, conducted in 1996.[6] The total sample size is 6,090, stratified by urban versus rural residence (with the urban population sampled at three times the rate of the rural population) and also by the proportion of the population with at least a middle school education (see Treiman [1998] for details).[7] The response rate was very high, with completed interviews obtained from about 95% of contacted

[6] The primary sampling units were counties, or their urban equivalents, in all provinces except Tibet. Tibet's population is so small that in a probability-proportional-to-size multistage sample of the same size as ours it is unlikely that any Tibetan county would have been chosen. For all practical purposes this is a national sample. The secondary sampling units were townships or their urban equivalents. The tertiary sampling units were villages or urban neighborhoods. See Treiman (1998) for details. While in principle it would be desirable to further extend the period after class labels were formally abolished, to determine whether there was a gradual diminution of their influence, this is not possible given the paucity of available data. We know of only one recent national probability sample survey that included a question on family class origins, the 2012 wave of the Chinese Labor Dynamics Survey. Unfortunately, there are several problematic aspects of this survey that make it unsuitable, of which we mention the three most important. First, the questions regarding the father's and paternal grandfather's class origins produce inconsistent results, which should not occur given that class labels were inherited through the male line. Second, it is ambiguous as to whether the class variables refer to the father and grandfather of the head of household or the father and grandfather of the respondent. Third, there are separate family and individual questionnaires, each containing pertinent variables, but they cannot be matched in about 20% of the family cases.

[7] The data set and documentation are available at https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=hdl:1902.1/M889V1.

households (Treiman 1998, p. I.17).[8] The survey questionnaire includes extensive information on the respondents' educational, occupational, and political histories and their economic activities at the time of the survey and also similar, although less extensive, data for their parents and grandparents. We exploit this rich body of life history information in our analysis.

## Variables

Our focal variable is "class origin," and the remaining variables are employed either as control variables or as outcome variables. The basic definitions of the variables are given here; for more detail about definitions and coding decisions, see the appendix. All of the outcome variables studied here are based on information for specific points in time, that is, for specific years or ages. While we cannot definitively infer causal effects, we can at least get the correct temporal order of predictors and outcomes. We do this by lagging the predictor variables by one year relative to each outcome being studied. This makes it possible to treat the same variables as both determinants and outcomes, depending on the outcome being studied.

*Class origin*.—We use the four categories discussed above. To distinguish the "good" categories defined by political affiliation versus economic status, we label the politically defined revolutionary category as "Red" and the proletarian category as "Workers." These two categories were intended to be treated preferentially. They are distinguished from the "Middle" classes (urban white collar, professional, middle peasants), to be treated evenhandedly, and "Bad" classes (landlords and capitalists), who were to be penalized (see the appendix for more detail).

*Ancestral property*.—The survey included information on ownership of various kinds of property in 1948 by parents, paternal grandfathers, and maternal grandfathers and also whether in 1948 each of these ancestors rented out land to others or hired agricultural labor. "Don't know" responses were treated as negative (see the appendix for more detail).

*Ancestral occupation in 1948*.—The survey includes information on the 1948 occupation of the respondent's father, mother, and both paternal and maternal grandfather. For each of these variables, some respondents reported that the ancestor had no occupation in 1948; we retained such descriptions as a separate category (see the appendix for more detail).

[8] Within each village or neighborhood, samples of households were drawn systematically from lists of permanent resident households (the *hukou* lists) and from lists of temporary residents that all village/neighborhood-level units were required to keep beginning in late 1994 (Treiman 1998, p. I.4). We successfully interviewed individuals in 89% of the listed households; in 6% of households it was impossible to contact anyone; in 4% of households there was no eligible respondent or an eligible respondent was never available; in less than 1% of cases the interview was refused by a respondent.

*Education*.—Education is both as an outcome variable and a control variable for the other outcomes we study. When we study education as an outcome, we consider matriculation at each level of education, contingent on having matriculated at the previous level. We focus on matriculation rather than completion because matriculation may be dependent on class background, with those of Red class origin being particularly advantaged and those of Bad class origin being particularly disadvantaged, whereas graduation after having achieved admission is much more a matter of personal effort. For several levels of education, we treat alternative types of schools as competing risks: whether one matriculates at an ordinary or an elite junior high school; whether one matriculates at a vocational, ordinary academic, or elite academic high school; and whether one matriculates at a specialized institute or university at the tertiary level.[9] We regard those who have matriculated at one type of school at a given level to be no longer at risk of matriculating at another type of school at the same level.[10]

*Occupation*.—Occupation appears as an outcome variable and, for admission into the Party, as a control variable. When we consider occupation as an outcome, we follow Walder et al. (2000), who treat cadres (middle- or high-level management personnel) and professionals as the elite segment of the Chinese occupational structure and regard entry into such occupations as competing risks.[11] When occupational position is a control variable, we lag it by one year relative to the outcome, becoming a Party member, and expand the classification to include information on the respondent's nonwork activity in the prior year.[12]

*Communist Party membership*.—In China, Party membership opens up the opportunity for career advancement into elite positions. In our data, only 14% of men and 4% of women are members.

[9] "Junior high school" and "lower middle school" are synonyms, as are "high school," "senior high school," and "upper middle school." An "elite" secondary school is either one that was designated as a "key point" (i.e., "magnet") school by city governments or one that was attached to a university. A "specialized institute" was a postsecondary training program to prepare personnel for a government ministry or industrial sector (e.g., railways, metallurgy, foreign language). Specialized institutes typically had two- or three-year programs, whereas universities typically required four years.

[10] In China one rarely moved between different types of schools at the same level, but in our data 11% of those who completed academic high school subsequently entered a vocational high school. We ignore this exception, which includes about 2% of the total population.

[11] Only about 10% (109/1,103) of those who ever held either professional or cadre positions also held the other type of position.

[12] We distinguish between cadre, professional, and other occupations when occupation is the dependent variable but add the categories "waiting for work," "in school," "other activity," and a residual category, "NA/DK" (not applicable/don't know), when occupation is a control variable, to avoid having to deal with missing data.

*Parental Party membership*.—Given both the importance of political loyalty and the importance of personal connections (*guanxi*) in China, having parents in the Party should strongly improve one's life chances. Since parental Party membership is correlated with political class label, it is necessary to control for the effect of parental Party membership to ensure that any effect of class does not simply reflect the association in the previous generation.[13] We treat parental Party membership as a dichotomy, scored 1 if either parent became a member of the Communist Party before the measured outcome.

*Parents' education*.—As additional controls, we have two measures of parental education: the sum of the years of school completed by the father and mother of the respondent and the difference in their years of schooling. This parameterization of parental education has the advantage of not splitting the effects of the two parents. There is a main effect associated with the sum of parental education, and an additional effect—which usually is neither significant nor interesting—associated with the difference in the education of the father and mother.[14] Although until recently women often had no schooling (80% of mothers of those in our sample who became eligible to begin primary school during the Mao period), we think it important to take account of mother's education since it is well known that even low levels of mother's education result in strong behavioral changes in developing nations (Frankenberg and Mason 1995; Song and Burgard 2011).

*Father's and mother's occupational position*.—In research throughout the world it has been shown that parental occupation is an important determinant of socioeconomic outcomes (Ganzeboom, Luijkx, and Treiman 1989; Treiman and Yip 1989; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Breen 2004). However, due mainly to China's household registration (*hukou*) system, the association appears to be much weaker in China than in many other nations (Wu and Treiman 2007). In each of our analyses we include two typologies, respectively for father's and mother's occupational position, in the year before the age at risk.[15] In each case we distinguish between managerial (cadre),

[13] In our survey, 79% of the fathers of those of Red class origin were Communist Party members, compared to 13%, 9%, and 3% of fathers for those of Working, Middle, and Bad class origin. The corresponding percentages for mothers were 26%, 2%, 2%, and <.5%.

[14] It is easy to show that the coefficients for mother's and father's education can be recovered from the coefficients for the sum and difference in parental education. If $\beta_1$ is the coefficient for the sum of parents' education and $\beta_2$ is the coefficient for the difference in parents' education (father minus mother), then the coefficient for father's education is just $(\beta_1 + \beta_2)$ and the coefficient for mother's education is $(\beta_1 - \beta_2)$. We are indebted to the late James Morgan (personal communication) for pointing out this parameterization to us.

[15] We do not, in fact, have data on the exact years. Rather, we exploit the fact that father's and mother's occupation was recorded for the year the respondent was age 14 and for

professional, and other occupations and, to avoid the problem of missing data, treat as a separate category those with no occupation and those for whom we have no information. Cadre and professional occupations have been shown to have distinct recruitment paths (Walder 1995; Walder et al. 2000; Li and Walder 2001). We do not distinguish other occupational categories because, except for elite positions, there was little difference in socioeconomic outcomes associated with parents' occupational position.

*Male* (male = 1, female = 0).—In China, more than many other nations, power was mainly in the hands of men, and this strongly limited opportunities for women during the Mao era, despite wide participation in the labor force (Stacey 1983). This still was substantially true in 1996.

*Period*.—The appropriate representation of period effects is a vexing question when dealing with cross-sectional data since for such data age and period are perfectly correlated. This is not much of an issue for outcomes, such as education, that tend to occur at specific points in the life cycle. But it is problematic for outcomes that are spread out over the life cycle such as joining the Communist Party and attaining cadre or professional positions. In the present case, as noted above, we would like to compare those at risk during the Mao (1950–78) and Reform (1979–96) periods. However, if we assign the Reform period to all those who have not yet achieved a specific outcome by 1979, we are in effect comparing "slow trackers" from the Mao period with a more representative set of younger respondents from the Reform period since "fast trackers" from the Mao period will already have achieved the outcome. Our approach, which takes us only part of the way to a fully satisfactory solution, is to compare cohorts rather than periods—that is, to define the Mao period as pertaining to those who became at risk between 1950 and 1978 and to define the Reform period as pertaining to those who became at risk between 1979 and 1996. For Communist Party membership and achievement of a cadre or professional occupation, we regard risk as beginning at age 18; for school matriculation, we define risk as beginning at age 7 for primary school, age 13 for junior high school, age 16 for senior high school, and age 19 for tertiary education.

The reason this solution is only partly satisfactory is that for Communist Party membership and attainment of a cadre occupation, our observations are more severely censored for the Reform cohort than for the Mao cohort, given that the oldest respondent in the Reform cohort was age 35. In our data, the median age of Party joining for those who had become Party members by the date of the survey was 26, and the 90th percentile was 41. For

several specific years: 1948, 1963, 1970, 1979, and 1989. When the age at risk was greater than 14, we use the parental occupation when the respondent was 14. When the age at risk was 14 or earlier, we use the parental occupation for the latest year before when the respondent was age 14.

cadre occupations the median was 30, and the 90th percentile was 43. By contrast, for professionals the median was 20, and the 90th percentile was 29. For educational attainment, only tertiary matriculation was censored since for each lower level the 90th percentile of the age at matriculation was below 20, the minimum age of respondents. For tertiary matriculation the median was 20, and the 90th percentile was 32. It should be noted that there is nothing distinctive about our survey. All cross-sectional surveys suffer the same difficulty, which renders cross-cohort comparisons problematic for any variable that is not essentially realized by the minimum age of respondents. The problematic nature of our cross-cohort comparisons is another reason for not making too much of them but focusing on the overall results.

## THE DETERMINANTS OF CLASS LABELS

As we have noted, nominally class labels reflect the objective position of the head of the family in the years just before 1949. However, because of the inherent ambiguities and contradictions in the classification scheme, the local officials who initially assigned class labels to households could exercise a certain amount of discretion.[16] In addition, individuals had a clear incentive to present their occupational histories and family assets in a manner that would give them the most favorable possible class label. If their biographies and the accounting of family assets were not rigorously verified, the labels may not have reflected actual circumstances.

In addition to possible inaccuracies in the initial assignment of labels, the combination of economic and political designations in determining the Red and Bad categories introduced both ambiguity and heterogeneity into these groups. The "revolutionary" label (which we designate as Red) could include individuals who participated in the Communist Party or Red Army but who were in fact from relatively prosperous households. If not for their participation in revolutionary organizations, these individuals would have been given a much less desirable class label. Similarly, the Bad class category could include individuals who were from less prosperous households but who were placed in the Bad category because of their membership in Nationalist Party organizations, collaboration with Japanese occupiers, or criminal activity immediately before Liberation. The heterogeneity within both the Red and Bad categories needs to be kept in mind when we interpret the effects of these categories.

[16] Another, well documented, example of the classification of an entire population by local bureaucrats was the assignment of South Africans to one of four race categories (White, Asian, Coloured, or Black) in 1952. In the South African case, the classification was of individuals, not families, with the result that many people found themselves in categories different from their siblings' or parents' (Watson 1970; Thompson 1990, p. 190).

TABLE 1
PROPERTY OWNERSHIP OF PARENTS OR GRANDFATHER IN 1948, BY CLASS LABEL: CHINESE ADULTS AGES 20–69 IN 1996 (%)

| | CLASS LABEL | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Red | Working | Middle | Bad | TOTAL |
| Own home | 76.0 | 77.1 | 89.6 | 92.4 | 79.0 |
| Own buildings* | 7.3 | 3.0 | 8.0 | 24.5 | 4.4 |
| Own land | 42.4 | 45.6 | 70.9 | 85.8 | 49.8 |
| Hire farm labor | 6.2 | 2.3 | 10.1 | 37.5 | 4.5 |
| Rent out land | 4.7 | 1.2 | 4.3 | 26.4 | 2.5 |
| Own business | 15.3 | 6.4 | 15.1 | 23.8 | 8.1 |
| Class origin | 1.5 | 83.7 | 11.2 | 3.6 | 100.0 |
| *N* (unweighted) | 144 | 4,976 | 734 | 201 | 6,055 |

NOTE.—All percentages are based on weighted data.
* Other than home.

We start by assessing the relationship between family property ownership in 1948 and the class label assigned.[17] Table 1 shows the percentage of those in each of the four class categories whose families owned various kinds of property or were "exploiters" because they rented out land or hired agricultural labor. Specifically, we count as an owner/exploiter all those for whom at least one of their parents, paternal grandfather, or maternal grandfather owned/exploited each kind of property in 1948.[18] The extremely small proportion of nonresponses to the class origin question (about 0.5%) is a very strong indication of the continuing salience of class labels in 1996, the year of the survey.

Table 1 is an "inflow" table. Rather than showing the conditional probability of each class label given one's owner/exploiter status, the table shows the conditional probability of each owner/exploiter status given one's class

[17] There is some imprecision in assessing the linkage between socioeconomic position and class labels because we did not ask (nor is it certain that our respondents would have been able to tell us) precisely to which family member a class label had been assigned and because we did not collect sufficient information on fathers and grandfathers—the most important omissions being rural vs. urban residence in 1948 and adequate data on military service in 1948.

[18] All "don't know" responses were treated as negative. No more than about 1% of respondents claimed not to know about the property owned by their parents, fewer than 5% responded "don't know" regarding paternal grandfathers' property, and fewer than 6% regarding maternal grandfathers' property. "Not applicable" responses, mainly due to the parent/grandparent dying before 1948, were treated as negative responses. Thus, the denominator for each percentage in the table is 6,055; the only excluded cases are the 3 for which both grandfathers were born after 1930 and the 32 for which the respondent could not be assigned a class label: 12 blank responses, 2 refusals, 9 "don't know" responses, and 9 "other" responses that could not be recoded. We treated the 91 respondents who indicated "other" and volunteered "poor/ordinary urban resident" as members of the Working class.

TABLE 2
OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF FATHER OR GRANDFATHER IN 1948, BY CLASS LABEL: CHINESE ADULTS AGES 20–69 IN 1996 (%)

| | CLASS LABEL | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Red | Working | Middle | Bad | TOTAL |
| Professional-technical | 9.0 | 1.9 | 6.1 | 9.2 | 2.7 |
| Cadre | 4.4 | .5 | .4 | 3.1 | .6 |
| Clerical | 3.3 | .3 | .5 | .7 | .4 |
| Sales | 6.0 | 2.7 | 10.1 | 9.5 | 3.8 |
| Service | .5 | 1.5 | 1.7 | .2 | 1.4 |
| Agriculture | 40.3 | 81.0 | 67.9 | 67.2 | 78.4 |
| Manual | 7.1 | 9.4 | 11.0 | 7.3 | 9.5 |
| National Party official | .5 | .3 | .3 | 1.2 | .3 |
| Communist Party official | 4.4 | .4 | .3 | .1 | .4 |
| Military | 24.6 | 2.0 | 1.7 | 1.4 | 2.3 |
| Total | 100.1 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 99.9 | 99.8 |
| *N* (unweighted) | 136 | 4,713 | 699 | 181 | 5,729 |

NOTE.—See text for details on which ancestor's occupation was used.

label. The utility of an inflow table is to show the social origins of those assigned to each class. Consider first those assigned Red class labels. Some evidence that Red classes were disproportionately drawn from the urban elite is that in 1948 they were less likely to own either a home or land than were Middle or Bad class members but were differentiated from Working class members by their substantially greater probability of owning buildings other than their residence and of owning a business and also of hiring farm labor and renting out land. By contrast, Bad class members were more likely than members of any other class to own each type of property and were much more likely to hire farm labor or rent out land, which indicates that, despite the inclusion of households in this category for political or criminal activity, Bad class labels were allocated mainly to rural elites. Still, as one would expect on the basis of the construction of the categories, there is no tight correspondence between property ownership/exploitation and class membership.

This is particularly clear when we consider the occupational origins of those with each class label. Table 2 shows the occupation in 1948 of the parent (almost always the father) if it was available and otherwise for one of the grandfathers.[19] This table is informative in several ways. First, there is sub-

[19] The occupational categories shown in table 2 are derived from the father's occupation if he was born before 1930 (and therefore was at least 18 years old in 1948) and had an occupation. If neither condition held, information for the mother's occupation in 1948 was substituted if she satisfied the same conditions. If neither parent satisfied these conditions, information on the paternal grandfather's occupation in 1948 was used, provided he satisfied the two conditions, and otherwise information on the maternal grandfather's

stantial overlap between categories, although the Red class is more distinctive than are the other groups.[20] Also, despite the assumption that the Bad class was reserved for rich peasants and landlords, about a third of Bad class members in both generations had a nonagricultural origin. Second, consistent with the idea that the Red class was disproportionately drawn from the urban elite (in addition to the military), the 1948 occupations of ancestors of Red class people were much more likely to be in the cadre and clerical sectors and much less likely to be in the agricultural sector than those of any other class category; they also were more likely, together with those of Bad class origin, to be professionals. Finally, the Red class was drawn disproportionately from the military.[21]

We have here presented inflow tables—showing the social origin of each class category—because such tables make the differences between classes clearer than would outflow tables, given that about three-quarters of the population in both the parents' and grandparents' generation were peasants in 1948, and nearly an additional 10% were urban workers. However, a multinomial logit analysis predicting class labels from grandfather's or father's 1948 occupation and property ownership, not shown here, leads to essentially the same conclusions regarding the link between class labels and objective SES: the Red class was disproportionately drawn from the Red Army and urban white-collar employees, while the Bad class was disproportionately made up of prosperous rural elites with more land than they could farm with household labor.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF CLASS LABELS

Given the dramatic changes in Chinese society over the past 50 years, it is not entirely obvious how, and how heavily, these class labels affected life chances. Certainly, we would expect that their effect was most pronounced

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occupation was used. Three cases were omitted because both grandparents were born after 1930; 32 cases were omitted because there was no information on the family class label; and 326 additional cases were omitted because information on the 1948 occupation was not available for either parent or either grandfather. The table thus includes 5,729 cases, of which 66% were for the parents' generation and 34% for the grandparents' generation.

[20] This assertion is based on a comparison of the index of dissimilarity ($\Delta$) between pairs of categories. They are, in order from Red to Bad (i.e., Red-Working, Red-Middle, . . . Middle-Bad), .44, .37, .32, .14, .18, .07.

[21] Table 2 understates the military origins of the Red class because we asked about military service for parents but not for grandfathers. The consequence is that almost no grandfathers are identified as having been in the military in 1948 (7% of fathers' fathers and 3% of mothers' fathers) compared to 60% of fathers. The true proportion of grandfathers in the military in 1948 is surely less than 60% since grandfathers were on average older in 1948 than were fathers, but it is likely to be substantially higher than the 7% observed for fathers' fathers.

during the Mao era, a time of orthodox Communism and very strong intervention in local life by the state. However, there were fluctuations in the radicalism of state policy even within the Mao era. The emphasis on class labels in educational and career advancement was most pronounced during the Great Leap Forward of 1958–60 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76, but other periods, particularly the early 1960s, were notable for the de-emphasis of class labels and a more lenient treatment of those in the middle classes (Unger 1982). In addition, the Cultural Revolution involved extensive purges of the party-state elite, the vast majority of whom would have had Red labels (Walder 2015, pp. 266–67). An earlier study limited to the urban population in this survey found that the advantages enjoyed by Red households were attenuated during the Cultural Revolution decade (Walder and Hu 2009). Given these policy fluctuations, it is something of an open question what the net impact of the labels would have been during the entire Mao era for China as a whole.

During the subsequent reform era, political criteria for advancement were de-emphasized in favor of merit (Lu and Treiman 2008). Previous publications based on the urban portion of this data set have documented the declining impact of Party membership and the increasing impact of higher education in attaining elite occupations in the post-Mao era, but they did not consider the impact of class labels (Walder et al. 2000; Li and Walder 2001). The stigma of class cannot have disappeared overnight. It was undoubtedly true that people continued to be identified by their class labels, especially in villages and small towns where everyone knew everyone else. It is quite possible that differences in life chances associated with class labels persisted, especially in rural areas.

There are also indications, based on an analysis of the urban population in this data set, that the political liberalization of the post-Mao era somewhat paradoxically benefited the Red households (Walder and Hu 2009). Walder and Hu found that the advantages to Red households, suppressed during the Cultural Revolution, rebounded in the following period because the persecution of veteran Party officials and their offspring, characteristic of the Cultural Revolution, was largely reversed as part of the political liberalization. For the population as a whole, therefore, it also remains an open question what the enduring legacy of these class categories would be.

## Models

The main concern of our analysis is to explore the impact of class origin on various socioeconomic outcomes. Detailed results for educational attainment, Party membership, and occupational attainment are presented here. Because of space limitations, we only briefly summarize additional results for family income, military service, the conversion of rural to urban house-

hold registration, and being sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution.[22] For all the analyses presented here we have time-specific measures. For cadre or professional positions and Communist Party membership, we estimate discrete-time hazard-rate models. That is, we estimate the effect of class category and various control variables on the odds of becoming a member of the Communist Party in a given year, given that one has not yet become a Party member. Similarly, we estimate the odds of becoming a cadre or a professional in a given year, given that one has not achieved either position in a previous year. For achievement of specific education levels, we fix outcomes in time and exploit the availability of time-specific measurements.

We expect that class labels affected subsequent outcomes, in both the parents' and the respondent's generation. But as we know, in China as elsewhere, there is a certain amount of inter- and intragenerational continuity in aspects of advantage (Deng and Treiman 1997; Walder et al. 2000; Li and Walder 2001; Wu and Treiman 2007; Lu and Treiman 2008; Walder and Hu 2009; Wu 2010*a*, 2010*b*). Thus, we expect each outcome to be affected both by the individual's class label and by prior characteristics, including parental and grandparental status attributes.[23]

In our analyses of each outcome, we estimate three separate models. The first (model 1) includes as a predictor variable, in addition to class labels, only 1948 family property ownership; a second (model 2) adds parental characteristics when the respondent was a child, around age 14; and a third (model 3) adds respondent's prior outcomes.[24] This means that the same variables may appear both as an outcome variable and, lagged by a year, as a determinant of another outcome. For example, having a cadre occupation may increase the odds of subsequently becoming a member of the Communist Party, and being a member of the Party may increase the odds of subsequently gaining a cadre occupation. In all three models for each outcome, we treat age and gender as "concomitant" variables; that is, we treat them as control variables but not as intervening between class origins and outcomes. We do this for gender in order to take account of the fact

[22] Full results have been posted in the working paper series of the California Center for Population Research (http://papers.ccpr.ucla.edu/index.php/pwp).

[23] It would be desirable to first study the effect of class labels on each parental outcome before studying effects on respondents, but our data are not a probability sample of parents.

[24] For the education models, the additional variables are the type of previous schooling. For the other two outcomes, the additional variables include lagged measures of the respondent's highest level of schooling, whether ever sent down to the countryside, occupation, and specifically military service, Communist Party membership, and size of place of residence. Of course, Communist Party membership is excluded as a predictor of Communist Party membership as an outcome, and occupation is excluded as a predictor of occupation as an outcome.

that males are favored with respect to each advantageous outcome and for age—which because of the way the models are specified serves as a stand-in for birth cohort—to take account of the fact that the likelihood of many outcomes varied over time because of China's rapid economic development after 1978.[25]

Contrasts between the coefficients in the three models allow us to assess whether the effect of class labels is direct or whether it is indirect, the consequence of class-label differences in advantage with respect to important determinants of each of the outcomes—1948 family property in model 1; additionally, parents' characteristics in model 2; and, in model 3, also the respondent's own prior achievements. We would expect that insofar as there are class differences, most would be indirect. Moreover, we would expect the size of the direct class effect to decline in successive models because class labels should exert their effect first on the achievements of parents and then on the early achievements of respondents. Thus, that class labels have any direct effect at all in model 3—which, as we will see, is often the case—is highly significant and indeed rather surprising.[26]

## Comparing Coefficients across Models

All of our outcomes—educational level, Party membership, and occupation—are dichotomies or polytomies, necessitating the estimation of logistic or allied models. However, for such models it is not legitimate to directly compare the size of corresponding coefficients in nested models since the coefficients are rescaled as additional variables are introduced (Winship and Mare 1983).[27] Several solutions to this problem have been proposed, the most attractive of which was introduced by Karlson et al. (2012) and elaborated by Breen, Karlson, and Holm (2013, 2018). The central feature of the method, implemented for Stata as the khb command (Kohler and Karlson 2010; Kohler, Karlson, and Holm 2011), is that it permits separation of changes in key coefficients—here, those associated with class origin—due to the confounding effects of other variables from those that are artifacts of rescaling. The former is what we care about—to what extent class-origin dif-

[25] Although males are advantaged relative to females, there is no particular reason to expect the relationship between class origins and socioeconomic outcomes to differ by gender.

[26] There is some ambiguity for the oldest respondents about the temporal relationship between the outcomes we study and the assignment of class labels. To take this into account, we exclude from the analysis of each outcome those few that occurred before 1950, which avoids the possibility that the outcome itself was a determinant of the class label assigned to the household.

[27] This may not be well known. Karlson, Holm, and Breen (2012, p. 291) note that the problem "may be known by most sociologists specializing in quantitative methods but the sociological literature is replete with examples in which the naïve comparison is made and interpreted as though it reflected pure confounding."

ferences in outcomes are mediated by class differences in other variables.[28] Thus, our basic strategy is to derive our estimates using the khb procedure. Although the survey is based on a multistage probability sample that optimally would be analyzed using survey estimation methods, which are available in Stata, the khb command does not fully permit this. The method does permit the specification of weights and a cluster option but not to correct for stratification or more than one level of clustering. However, since stratification generally leads to smaller standard errors, it is likely that our significance tests are conservative. We correct for clustering at the lowest level, the village or urban neighborhood, because there is more internal homogeneity at this level than at the township or county level.

Apart from solving the technical problem of rescaling, the khb command has the attractive feature of producing a decomposition of total effects into direct effects and indirect effects operating through the covariates in the model.[29] These are the coefficients shown in tables 3 and 4. Note that these coefficients can be interpreted as the effects of class origin on latent or underlying dependent variables (for a technical explication, see Breen et al. 2018, pp. 39–43). We can think of such variables as indicating the propensity that an outcome occurs, for example, the likelihood of joining the Communist Party, rather than a true dichotomy. But this is, in fact, how we usually interpret coefficients associated with logistic regression and similar procedures involving limited dependent variables. The practical implication is that the coefficients usually will not be identical to those derived from conventional logistic regression, even when no controls are included in the model. Note also that for occupational outcomes and Communist Party membership we estimate discrete-time hazard-rate models. It sometimes is claimed that in such models the standard errors are biased given the nonindependence of the observations for each individual. However, Allison (1995, p. 223) argues that this is not a problem for the kinds of models estimated here because the conditional probability of an event at time T can be factored into the likelihoods of the preceding times, and these likelihoods are independent.

We study several socioeconomic outcomes: matriculation at successive levels of education, with distinctions between types of schools at each level; the attainment of Communist Party membership; and the attainment of a professional or cadre position. As noted earlier, for each analysis we restrict

[28] The intuition underlying the khb method is explicated in Kohler et al. (2011, pp. 422–24). Basically it involves regressing the outcome variable on the class categories plus the residuals from the regressions of the other predictor variables on the class categories, which are uncorrelated with the class categories.

[29] The khb command labels direct effects "full" and indirect effects "diff" (and, also, total effects as "reduced"). Breen et al. (2013) use the nomenclature we use here. See their table 3.

TABLE 3

DECOMPOSITION OF EFFECTS OF CLASS LABELS ON LEVELS OF EDUCATION INTO DIRECT AND INDIRECT COMPONENTS: CHINESE ADULTS 1996

| | RED | | | MIDDLE | | | BAD | | | RATIO OF RED TO BAD | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
| Primary ($N$ = 5,366): | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 25.39 | 165.7 | | 2.07 | 2.32 | | 2.91 | 3.02 | | 8.72 | 54.96 | |
| | (.00) | (.00) | ... | (.00) | (.00) | ... | (.00) | (.00) | ... | (.00) | (.00) | ... |
| Direct | 25.23 | 14.15 | | 2.02 | 1.58 | | 2.75 | 2.23 | | 9.16 | 6.34 | |
| | (.00) | (.00) | ... | (.00) | (.03) | ... | (.00) | (.04) | ... | (.00) | (.03) | ... |
| Indirect | 1.01 | 11.71 | | 1.03 | 1.47 | | 1.06 | 1.35 | | .95 | 8.67 | |
| | (.62) | (.00) | ... | (.55) | (.13) | ... | (.55) | (.24) | ... | (.55) | (.00) | ... |
| Junior high ($N$ = 3,933): | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ordinary: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 2.40 | 6.06 | | 1.00 | 1.06 | | .67 | .60 | | 3.56 | 10.06 | |
| | (.02) | (.00) | ... | (.98) | (.73) | ... | (.10) | (.05) | ... | (.01) | (.00) | ... |
| Direct | 2.38 | .66 | | .98 | .84 | | .62 | .61 | | 3.80 | 1.08 | |
| | (.02) | (.23) | ... | (.88) | (.29) | ... | (.06) | (.07) | ... | (.00) | (.86) | ... |
| Indirect | 1.01 | 9.15 | | 1.03 | 1.26 | | 1.08 | .98 | | .94 | 9.29 | |
| | (.54) | (.00) | ... | (.35) | (.31) | ... | (.33) | (.95) | ... | (.34) | (.00) | ... |
| Key point: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 8.82 | 22.07 | | 1.19 | 1.23 | | 1.11 | 1.06 | | 7.95 | 20.78 | |
| | (.00) | (.00) | ... | (.49) | (.44) | ... | (.81) | (.90) | ... | (.00) | (.00) | ... |
| Direct | 8.55 | 1.39 | | 1.07 | .78 | | .83 | .84 | | 10.25 | 1.64 | |
| | (.00) | (.42) | ... | (.79) | (.33) | ... | (.68) | (.73) | ... | (.00) | (.43) | ... |
| Indirect | 1.03 | 15.93 | | 1.12 | 1.56 | | 1.33 | 1.26 | | .78 | 12.67 | |
| | (.45) | (.00) | ... | (.08) | (.09) | ... | (.03) | (.44) | ... | (.05) | (.00) | ... |
| Senior high ($N$ = 2,768): | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Vocational: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 2.94 | 3.65 | 3.65 | 1.13 | 1.12 | 1.11 | 1.50 | 1.42 | 1.43 | 1.95 | 2.56 | 2.56 |
| | (.01) | (.00) | (.00) | (.55) | (.60) | (.61) | (.32) | (.47) | (.46) | (.26) | (.15) | (.15) |
| Direct | 2.86 | .70 | .70 | 1.03 | .83 | .82 | 1.20 | .94 | .95 | 2.29 | .74 | .74 |
| | (.01) | (.36) | (.27) | (.90) | (.38) | (.38) | (.66) | (.90) | (.91) | (.17) | (.65) | (.64) |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Indirect | 1.03 | 5.22 | 5.23 | 1.10 | 1.35 | 1.35 | 1.25 | 1.52 | 1.51 | .85 | 3.44 | 3.47 |
| | (.46) | (.00) | (.00) | (.11) | (.10) | (.10) | (.07) | (.06) | (.07) | (.15) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Academic: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 5.24 | 6.08 | 5.15 | .98 | 1.00 | .99 | .74 | .75 | .73 | 7.08 | 8.16 | 7.05 |
| | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.88) | (.99) | (.97) | (.31) | (.33) | (.30) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Direct | 5.06 | 1.54 | 1.56 | .89 | .77 | .76 | .57 | .54 | .55 | 8.88 | 2.87 | 2.85 |
| | (.00) | (.09) | (.09) | (.49) | (.10) | (.08) | (.07) | (.05) | (.06) | (.00) | (.01) | (.01) |
| Indirect | 1.04 | 3.95 | 3.30 | 1.10 | 1.30 | 1.31 | 1.30 | 1.39 | 1.34 | .80 | 2.84 | 2.47 |
| | (.42) | (.00) | (.00) | (.07) | (.12) | (.15) | (.01) | (.10) | (.17) | (.02) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Key point: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 10.89 | 13.28 | 11.77 | 1.49 | 1.43 | 1.54 | .67 | .67 | .51 | 16.29 | 19.87 | 23.18 |
| | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.11) | (.15) | (.12) | (.43) | (.42) | (.26) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Direct | 10.27 | 2.40 | 1.76 | 1.27 | .94 | 1.06 | .43 | .37 | .28 | 23.93 | 6.50 | 6.35 |
| | (.00) | (.01) | (.13) | (.35) | (.80) | (.84) | (.12) | (.06) | (.04) | (.00) | (.00) | (.01) |
| Indirect | 1.07 | 5.52 | 6.68 | 1.17 | 1.53 | 1.46 | 1.56 | 1.81 | 1.83 | .68 | 3.06 | 3.65 |
| | (.42) | (.00) | (.00) | (.07) | (.06) | (.16) | (.00) | (.03) | (.05) | (.02) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Tertiary ($N$ = 1,267): | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Specialized institute: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 3.05 | 3.28 | 3.42 | 1.82 | 1.89 | 1.94 | 1.36 | 1.39 | 1.47 | 2.25 | 2.36 | 2.32 |
| | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.01) | (.01) | (.01) | (.50) | (.45) | (.38) | (.12) | (.09) | (.10) |
| Direct | 3.03 | 1.37 | 1.14 | 1.77 | 1.45 | 1.52 | 1.23 | .76 | .96 | 2.47 | 1.81 | 1.18 |
| | (.00) | (.26) | (.64) | (.02) | (.12) | (.08) | (.68) | (.57) | (.94) | (.10) | (.27) | (.76) |
| Indirect | 1.01 | 2.40 | 3.01 | 1.03 | 1.31 | 1.28 | 1.11 | 1.84 | 1.53 | .91 | 1.30 | 1.97 |
| | (.68) | (.00) | (.00) | (.49) | (.15) | (.34) | (.45) | (.01) | (.16) | (.46) | (.40) | (.12) |
| University: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 4.34 | 4.18 | 5.04 | 2.21 | 2.29 | 2.24 | 2.07 | 1.97 | 1.42 | 2.10 | 2.12 | 3.53 |
| | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.01) | (.00) | (.01) | (.17) | (.24) | (.59) | (.20) | (.22) | (.08) |
| Direct | 4.28 | 1.15 | .73 | 2.12 | 1.68 | 1.83 | 1.73 | 1.02 | 1.31 | 2.47 | 1.12 | .56 |
| | (.00) | (.74) | (.41) | (.02) | (.10) | (.07) | (.38) | (.97) | (.72) | (.14) | (.87) | (.46) |
| Indirect | 1.01 | 3.64 | 6.90 | 1.05 | 1.37 | 1.22 | 1.20 | 1.92 | 1.09 | .85 | 1.90 | 6.35 |
| | (.67) | (.00) | (.00) | (.47) | (.29) | (.75) | (.43) | (.07) | (.90) | (.43) | (.21) | (.07) |

NOTE.—$N$'s are unweighted and represent the number at risk. Contributions to odds ratios, with $p$-values in parentheses. Where model 3 is not estimated, it is because the level of education precedes respondent's own characteristics available in the survey. The models for lower-middle, upper-middle, and tertiary matriculation are all competing risk models.

TABLE 4

DECOMPOSITION OF EFFECTS OF CLASS LABELS ON SELECTED OUTCOMES INTO DIRECT AND INDIRECT COMPONENTS: CHINESE ADULTS 1996

| | RED | | | MIDDLE | | | BAD | | | RATIO OF RED TO BAD | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
| Joined Communist Party: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 3.50 | 3.73 | 3.68 | 1.16 | 1.13 | 1.12 | .44 | .41 | .39 | 7.89 | 9.17 | 9.40 |
| | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.34) | (.43) | (.51) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Direct | 3.49 | 1.23 | 1.25 | 1.14 | 1.06 | .96 | .43 | .39 | .36 | 8.05 | 3.12 | 3.51 |
| | (.00) | (.44) | (.43) | (.41) | (.70) | (.80) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Indirect | 1.00 | 3.03 | 2.95 | 1.01 | 1.06 | 1.17 | 1.02 | 1.03 | 1.10 | .98 | 2.94 | 2.68 |
| | (.79) | (.00) | (.00) | (.78) | (.56) | (.31) | (.78) | (.79) | (.59) | (.78) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Cadre occupation: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 7.35 | 7.59 | 7.79 | 1.33 | 1.29 | 1.32 | .67 | .61 | .75 | 10.98 | 12.44 | 10.35 |
| | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.21) | (.24) | (.20) | (.31) | (.18) | (.50) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Direct | 7.08 | 2.33 | 1.80 | 1.15 | 1.00 | .86 | .48 | .41 | .40 | 14.81 | 5.71 | 4.53 |
| | (.00) | (.01) | (.04) | (.58) | (.99) | (.51) | (.09) | (.02) | (.04) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Indirect | 1.04 | 3.26 | 4.34 | 1.16 | 1.30 | 1.53 | 1.40 | 1.50 | 1.90 | .74 | 2.18 | 2.28 |
| | (.47) | (.00) | (.00) | (.06) | (.21) | (.10) | (.02) | (.08) | (.03) | (.03) | (.01) | (.03) |
| Professional occupation: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 4.43 | 2.93 | 6.16 | 2.30 | 2.10 | 2.45 | 1.18 | 1.15 | 1.73 | 3.74 | 2.54 | 3.56 |
| | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) | (.45) | (.50) | (.04) | (.00) | (.00) | (.00) |
| Direct | 4.36 | .73 | .71 | 2.16 | 1.73 | 1.31 | 1.02 | .93 | .62 | 4.26 | .78 | 1.14 |
| | (.00) | (.19) | (.16) | (.00) | (.00) | (.04) | (.92) | (.26) | (.06) | (.00) | (.43) | (.70) |
| Indirect | 1.02 | 4.03 | 8.70 | 1.07 | 1.21 | 1.86 | 1.16 | 1.24 | 2.79 | .88 | 3.25 | 3.12 |
| | (48) | (.00) | (.00) | (.10) | (.39) | (.09) | (.06) | (.35) | (.01) | (.07) | (.00) | (.02) |

NOTE.—Contributions to odds ratios, with *p*-values in parentheses.

the sample to those who were at risk in 1950 or later, because family class labels were widely introduced in 1950. This restriction is most important for our analysis of entry into the Communist Party. Were we to include those who joined the Party before 1950, we would artificially inflate the association between class membership and Party joining since one of the criteria for Red class assignment was pre-1950 Party membership.

As indicated in the introduction, an important question is whether the legacy of class labels continued beyond their formal abolition in 1979. Despite the difficulties discussed when we defined the period variable, we attempted to explore this question by including interactions between periods (Reform vs. Mao) and the class categories. Since interaction terms cannot be handled in khb models (Breen et al. 2013, pp. 180–81), we estimated conventional logistic regression models, which revealed significant interactions only for junior high and tertiary education. If these results are taken seriously, they indicate that for the most part the effects of class labels on socioeconomic outcomes—Party membership and educational and occupational attainment—were essentially the same during the Mao and Reform periods.[30] This is an important finding. However, given the small number of people with Red and Bad class origins in our sample, it is possible that we simply lack the statistical power to detect differences. Given this, in table 7 below, we present percentages achieving selected outcomes separately by period.

Table 5 shows the percentage distribution of matriculation at each type of school conditional on completion of the previous level, while table 6 shows corresponding percentage distributions for Party membership and occupational attainment. These tables make immediately clear that overall those of Red class origin were advantaged and those of Bad class origin were disadvantaged. Tables 3 and 4 show the odds of each outcome propensity relative to the odds for those of Working class origin and also the odds for those of Red class origin relative to the odds for those of Bad class origin, with various controls. Table 3 shows the coefficients for educational matriculation and table 4 shows the coefficients for Party membership and occupational outcomes. In each case the total effect is shown together with a decomposition into direct and indirect effects, where these coefficients are estimated using the khb method discussed above.[31] We do not show the contribution of each of the variables that together produce the indirect effect—this would be a very large number of coefficients—but comment on them as appropriate in the course of our discussion of direct and indirect effects.

[30] The analysis of interaction effects for logistic and allied outcomes is a very unsettled issue in the statistical literature (see Allison [1999] and the subsequent literature; e.g., Williams 2009). A second reason for being cautious about our results is the differential censoring of the Mao and Reform cohorts discussed above.

[31] Note that because of the rescaling inherent in the khb procedure, the odds ratio for each total effect typically varies across models.

TABLE 5
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL MATRICULATION, CONDITIONAL ON BEING AT RISK (Having Completed the Previous Level)

| | CLASS LABEL | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Red | Working | Middle | Bad | TOTAL |
| Primary matriculation: | | | | | |
| No | .9 | 23.2 | 15.2 | 11.7 | 21.6 |
| Yes | 99.1 | 76.8 | 84.8 | 88.3 | 78.4 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| *N* | 138 | 4,478 | 602 | 148 | 5,366 |
| Junior high matriculation: | | | | | |
| No | 10.2 | 25.2 | 27.0 | 36.2 | 25.5 |
| Ordinary | 65.6 | 68.0 | 65.4 | 55.0 | 67.1 |
| Key point | 24.2 | 6.8 | 7.6 | 8.8 | 7.4 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| *N* | 135 | 3,150 | 520 | 128 | 3,933 |
| Senior high matriculation: | | | | | |
| No | 21.1 | 58.5 | 55.6 | 57.8 | 56.9 |
| Vocational | 10.3 | 10.3 | 12.0 | 18.5 | 10.8 |
| Academic | 46.2 | 25.3 | 24.1 | 19.7 | 25.7 |
| Key point | 22.5 | 5.9 | 8.3 | 3.9 | 6.7 |
| Total | 100.1 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 99.9 | 100.1 |
| *N* | 124 | 2,179 | 385 | 80 | 2,768 |
| Tertiary matriculation: | | | | | |
| No | 52.8 | 79.3 | 67.2 | 71.9 | 75.6 |
| Specialized institute | 29.8 | 14.2 | 20.0 | 14.6 | 16.0 |
| University | 17.3 | 6.5 | 12.8 | 13.6 | 8.3 |
| Total | 99.9 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.1 | 99.9 |
| *N* | 95 | 929 | 204 | 39 | 1,267 |

NOTE.—*N*'s are unweighted; percentages are based on weighted data. Respondents achieving the outcome before 1950 and those missing data on any of the variables analyzed for each outcome in table 3 are excluded.

## Educational Attainment

Table 5 shows that those of Red class origin were advantaged at every level of educational attainment. They were most likely to enter primary school; to enter junior high school and especially elite junior high school; to enter senior high school and especially academic senior high school and most especially elite academic senior high school; and to enter both nonuniversity and university tertiary institutions. On the whole, those of Bad class origin were the most disadvantaged. The exceptions are that they were more likely to get at least some primary education than were those of Middle and especially Working class origin; they were about as likely to enter senior high school as all but those of Red class origin (contingent on completion of junior high school), but were more likely to matriculate in vocational schools

TABLE 6
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTIONS OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP AND OCCUPATIONAL OUTCOMES, BY CLASS LABEL

| | CLASS LABEL | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Red | Working | Middle | Bad | TOTAL |
| Ever joined Communist Party: | | | | | |
| % | 20.2 | 8.7 | 12.0 | 5.8 | 9.2 |
| *N* at risk | 141 | 4,875 | 724 | 197 | 5,937 |
| Occupational position (ever) (%): | | | | | |
| Cadre | 12.5 | 2.5 | 3.5 | 2.4 | 2.8 |
| Professional | 28.9 | 8.9 | 18.5 | 11.9 | 10.4 |
| Other | 58.6 | 88.6 | 78.0 | 85.6 | 86.8 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 99.9 | 100.0 |
| *N* at risk | 143 | 4,890 | 727 | 197 | 5,957 |

NOTE.—Achieving cadre and professional occupations are treated as competing risks. Thus, anyone who achieves either occupation is treated as no longer at risk for the other occupation. See text for further discussion.

and less likely to enroll in academic or elite schools than were those of any other class origin; and they were more likely to enter tertiary education than were those of Working class origin—they were about equally likely to enter a professional institute but more likely to enter university.

Recall that matriculation at each level of schooling is contingent on completing the previous level. It is well known that the effect of social origins tends to decline with successive levels of schooling (Mare 1980, 1981; Shavit and Blossfeld 1993), largely because at each transition only the "brightest and most ambitious" of those from disadvantaged origins are able to make the transition (Treiman and Yamaguchi 1993, p. 230), which means that those from disadvantaged origins tend to be successively more highly selected than those from more advantaged origins. Given this, it is striking that class origins continue to be influential even at advanced levels of schooling.[32]

For the three models discussed above, table 3 shows the odds of those of each class origin matriculating at each level of education relative to those of

[32] As noted above, for two levels of schooling—junior high and tertiary—there are significant differences across periods. However, for tertiary matriculation the sample sizes, especially for those of Bad class origins, are too small to produce stable results (but see table 7). Thus, we restrict our comments to junior high matriculation. First, during the Mao period not all those of Red class origin were able to enter junior high, but during the Reform period not a single person of Red class origin experienced this fate, although substantial fractions of those from other origins did. Second, the strong disadvantage among those of Bad class origin disappeared in the Reform period, and they became somewhat more likely than those of Middle class and especially Working class origin to gain admission to elite schools. In sum, the Red class advantage continued during the Reform period, but the Bad class disadvantage weakened.

Working class origin and also shows a decomposition of these odds ratios into direct and indirect effects. The table also shows the ratio of the odds for those of Red and Bad class origin. Note that (within the limits of rounding error) the product of the direct and indirect effects equals the total effect. The point of focusing on matriculation rather than on completion of each level is that it is matriculation that was subject to political and other influences. At each level above primary we carried out a competing-risk analysis by estimating a multinomial logit equation.

We begin with primary matriculation. Model 1 shows us that those of Red class origin had far greater odds of entering primary school than did those of Working class origin and that this was not simply an artifact of the former group's modest advantage with respect to family property ownership in 1948. Even in model 2, which takes account of parental socioeconomic advantage, the direct Red class advantage remains very large—the direct odds of primary matriculation were about 14 times as large for those of Red class origin as for those of Working class origin. Interestingly, with respect to primary matriculation, those of Bad class origin also were advantaged, and their advantage, too, was largely direct, even taking account of socioeconomic differences in the parental generation (model 2). However, both the direct advantage of class label and the indirect advantage through parental SES were far larger for the Red class than for the Bad class, as we see in the right-hand panel.

Among those who completed primary school, class differences in the likelihood of matriculation at an ordinary junior high school became smaller than for primary matriculation but also more in line with our expectations: those of Red class origin were strongly advantaged and those of Bad class origin were strongly disadvantaged relative to those of Working class origin. The disadvantage of those of Bad class origin remains when parental SES is controlled, but the direct advantage of those of Red class origin disappears entirely, replaced by a very strong indirect effect resulting from their SES advantage as children, particularly their urban registration and father's Communist Party membership (not shown).

A similar but much stronger pattern holds with respect to Red class matriculation at an elite (key point) school: the strong direct effect disappears once account is taken of parental SES (especially the same two variables plus parental education), but the overall advantage of Red class origin increases very substantially. By contrast there is no significant disadvantage in elite matriculation experienced by those of Bad class origin, with or without controls for parental SES. Presumably, those clever enough to merit enrollment in elite schools, as demonstrated by their performance in primary school, were not denied admission because of their class origin.

Those who complete junior high school may either leave school or enter one of three types of high schools: vocational, academic, or elite. Those of

Red class origins are advantaged in the likelihood of matriculating at all three types of school but particularly academic and most particularly elite high schools, advantages that are mainly due to their parents' education and their fathers' Communist Party membership. By contrast, those of Bad class origin are not significantly disadvantaged with respect to vocational matriculation—indeed, they may be advantaged, although our sample size does not have enough power to produce significant coefficients. They are, however, significantly and strongly disadvantaged with respect to academic and elite matriculation, although to some extent their direct disadvantage is offset by their advantageous SES relative to those of Working class origin. Those of Bad class origin who matriculate in academic or elite schools tend to have better educated parents and to be more likely to be from families that held property in 1948. The combination of Red class advantage and Bad class disadvantage means that those of Red class origin were about seven times as likely to matriculate in academic high schools and about 23 times as likely to matriculate in elite high schools as were those of Bad class origin after taking account of SES differences and their previous schooling.

As suggested by table 5, those of Red class origin were strongly advantaged in entering both types of tertiary education. However, the Red class advantage was not direct but rather was due to their advantage with respect to SES, particularly parental education, and the respondent's graduation from an elite high school and, for university, father's Communist Party membership. However, in contrast to lower levels of education, those of Middle class origin also were advantaged, due mainly to a positive direct effect, reinforced by a positive (but not significant) indirect effect. Those of Bad class origin were neither disadvantaged nor significantly advantaged. It seems that those of Bad class origins who were able to overcome their political handicap and complete high school suffered no further handicap with respect to university admission.

What is striking about these results is that, in contrast to the pattern observed in the United States and other developed nations (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993), various forms of advantage—political blessing or stigma on the one hand and resulting socioeconomic advantage on the other—continued to influence educational opportunity through successive levels of the educational system, although in a generally weakened way. An obvious comparative task would be to study the same sorts of outcomes in other societies in which political loyalty was important.[33]

[33] The questions are not identical, but the 1993 six-nation survey, Social Stratification in Eastern Europe after 1989, could be used to carry out a similar analysis, since that survey includes a range of comparable measures. The data set and documentation can be obtained from https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=hdl:1902.1/M653V1.

## Communist Party Membership

Before considering occupational attainment, we consider the effect of class origin on the odds of joining the Communist Party. The Party has dominated the political and social life of China to the present day, and Party membership has long been both a symbol of success and a resource that enhances prospects for future advancement (Walder 1995; Walder et al. 2000; Bian, Shu, and Logan 2001). Only a minority of the population was allowed to join the Party—in our data 9.2% of the sample are Party members. Moreover, those who became members of the Party early in their adult lives were identified for sponsorship for subsequent advancement into higher positions (Li and Walder 2001).

Given the role of the Party, we would expect that those from Red class origin were more likely to be admitted. Li and Walder (2001) have shown that this is the case for the urban sample, but we here consider all of China, both urban and rural. Also, Li and Walder did not distinguish other class categories. At the other extreme, we would expect those from Bad class origin to have been less likely to be admitted into the Party. These expectations are confirmed in table 6: 20% of those of Red class origin ever joined the Party compared to only 6% of those of Bad class origin, with the percentages for the other groups falling in between.[34]

From table 4 we see that the Red class advantage and Bad class disadvantage shown in table 6 held but that the much greater likelihood that those of Red class origin joined the Party relative to any other class was due mainly to the cumulative advantage of socioeconomic origins and previous achievements. By contrast, those of Bad class origin had no particular SES disadvantage but a very strong direct disadvantage. That is, Bad class origin itself inhibited admission to the Communist Party.

## Occupational Attainment

As we see in table 6, those of Red class origin had a very strong advantage with respect to the attainment of cadre and professional positions, but those of Bad class origin were not particularly disadvantaged relative to those from Working class origins. Those of Middle class origin were more likely to attain such positions than were those of Working or Bad class origin, perhaps because many of their parents had such occupations themselves and there is a well-known tendency to inherit the same class of occupation as one's parents, although no longer exactly the same occupation.

[34] In China, in contrast to Eastern Europe, almost no one left or was forced out of the Party after initially joining.

In table 4 we show coefficients for a competing-risk model of the odds of attaining either a cadre or a professional position, with those who attain either type of occupation treated as no longer at risk of attaining the other type (consistent with the findings of Walder et al. [2000]). There is a strong Red class advantage in attaining a cadre position, which holds for all three models: they were more than seven times more likely to secure cadre positions than were those of Working class origin. But, as expected, the direct benefit of Red class origin declined as additional mediating variables were introduced. Still, even considering family SES and the respondent's own educational attainment, Party membership, sent-down experience, and the size of place lived, all lagged a year (model 3), the direct effect of Red class origin remained strong and significant: the odds of gaining a cadre position are nearly twice as large for those of Red class origin as for those of Working class origin.

By contrast, the odds of obtaining a cadre position were much lower for those of Bad class origin than for those of Working class origin, and the Bad class disadvantage was direct since the indirect effects favored those of Bad class origin. The direct Bad class disadvantage continued to hold for all three models as successive mediating factors were introduced. Thus, despite gaining a cumulative advantage over those of Working class origin with respect to parental SES and their own previous achievements, mainly education, those of Bad class origin were substantially excluded from cadre positions.

The findings are different for professional positions. Here the direct Red class advantage was much weaker and effectively disappeared in the presence of mediating factors (models 2 and 3). Red class origin individuals were strongly advantaged over Working class origin individuals, but this was entirely due to their cumulative prior advantages; indeed, their direct advantage turned into a disadvantage, although not a significant one. Those of Bad class origin also were advantaged in much the same way, but to a much smaller extent, and their socioeconomic advantage offset a direct disadvantage that only appeared in model 3. Strikingly, those of both Red and Bad class origin were less likely to obtain professional positions than were those of Working class origin with comparable SES background and prior achievement but with different class labels, but perhaps for different reasons—the propensity for those of Red class origin to become cadres, which did not hold for those of Bad class origin.

## Other Outcomes

In additional analyses, not shown here but available (see n. 22), we find that class labels had a significant impact on several other outcomes. Red households had the highest incomes of any group in 1996, and Working class

households by far the lowest incomes. The significantly higher incomes of Middle and Bad class households suggests the role of family socialization across generations and echoes findings from Eastern Europe (Szelenyi 1988; Hanley and Treiman 2004). Red class individuals were much more likely to serve in the military, and Bad class individuals much less likely. Those from Red class origins had clear advantages in shifting their household registration from rural to urban status, an important determinant of standard of living in China to the present day (Cheng and Selden 1997; Wu and Treiman 2004, 2007; Chan and Buckingham 2008; Treiman 2012; Zhang and Treiman 2013). Regarding the likelihood that one would be "sent down" to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution (Bernstein 1977; Zhou and Hou 1999; Bonnin 2013), those from Red classes were sent down at the same rates as those from proletarian households, but Bad class individuals were sent down at much higher rates than all others.

## More on Period Differences

As noted earlier, the small sizes of the Red and Bad subsamples suggests the need for caution in interpreting the lack of statistically significant interactions between class origins and period as evidence of no period effects rather than as no evidence of period effects.[35] Accordingly, we show in table 7 descriptive results corresponding to those in table 6 but divided by period. We also show the percentage of those from each class origin gaining senior high school matriculation, also divided by period. We do this rather than producing period-specific results corresponding to those in table 5 in order to minimize the size of table 7.

These results show no systematic or substantial diminution in the effect of class origins on socioeconomic attainment in the Reform period compared to the Mao period, which is consistent with the very limited evidence of statistically significant period-class origin interactions discussed earlier. To be sure, it could well be that the major source of class origin differences shifted from direct effects to those that arose from cumulative differences in socioeconomic resources and constraints. Note that the levels of Party membership and attainment of cadre or professional positions were smaller during the Reform period, which is to be expected given that respondents were younger and that, as we noted earlier, these outcomes were spread out over the life course.[36] Of course, the percentage matriculating in senior high

[35] We are grateful to one of the *AJS* reviewers for emphasizing this point.

[36] We explored the possibility of restricting the Mao period sample to age 35, to match the Reform period sample, and also the further possibility of comparing age-specific outcomes in the two periods but decided that such computations hardly would be more compelling than what we have presented.

TABLE 7
Percentage Distributions of Educational Attainment (Upper Middle Matriculation), Communist Party Membership, and Occupational Outcomes, by Class Label and Cohort

| | Class Label | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Red | Working | Middle | Bad | Total |
| Matriculated at senior high school (not conditioned on previous educational attainment):* | | | | | |
| Mao cohort: | | | | | |
| % | 57.3 | 14.0 | 21.9 | 14.7 | 15.5 |
| *N* at risk | 73 | 2,866 | 454 | 132 | 3,525 |
| Reform cohort: | | | | | |
| % | 73.2 | 20.6 | 21.8 | 12.1 | 21.6 |
| *N* at risk | 68 | 1,701 | 193 | 47 | 2,009 |
| Ever joined Communist Party:† | | | | | |
| Mao cohort: | | | | | |
| % | 32.1 | 12.1 | 14.6 | 6.2 | 12.4 |
| *N* at risk | 64 | 2,738 | 446 | 135 | 3,383 |
| Reform cohort: | | | | | |
| % | 11.9 | 3.1 | 3.9 | 3.7 | 3.4 |
| *N* at risk | 77 | 1,961 | 224 | 51 | 2,313 |
| Occupational position (ever):† | | | | | |
| Mao cohort: | | | | | |
| Cadre | 13.9 | 2.9 | 2.8 | 3.7 | 3.1 |
| Professional | 37.3 | 9.6 | 20.2 | 10.1 | 11.2 |
| *N* at risk | 64 | 2,744 | 446 | 135 | 3,389 |
| Reform cohort | | | | | |
| Cadre | 7.3 | .8 | 2.0 | .0 | 1.1 |
| Professional | 26.3 | 7.4 | 9.9 | 6.0 | 8.1 |
| *N* at risk | 77 | 1,962 | 225 | 51 | 2,315 |

Note.—*N*'s are unweighted. Achieving cadre and professional occupations are treated as competing risks.

* The Mao cohort consists of those who reached age 16 in 1950 or later but before 1979. The Reform cohort reached age 16 between 1979 and 1992.

† The Mao cohort consists of those who reached age 18 in 1950 or later but before 1979. The Reform cohort consists of those who reached age 18 between 1979 and 1994.

school was substantially higher in the Reform period because of the marked expansion of education and the fact that senior high school matriculation typically occurred before respondents from both the Mao and Reform cohorts entered the sample.

There are two striking results. First, no one of Bad class origin became a cadre during the reform period. This may simply be a reflection of the sampling variability associated with the small sample of Bad class origin people in both periods, but it certainly provides no evidence of a relaxation of the exclusion of the Bad class from leadership positions in the Party or government. Second, the rate of high school matriculation increased substantially for those of Red and Working class origin but not at all for those of

Middle and Bad class origin, again suggesting no reduction in the role of political loyalty as a criterion for admission to advanced education.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this article we have shown that those of Red class origin were greatly advantaged in educational attainment, career advancement, and acceptance into the Communist Party, and we found similarly large advantages in other outcomes not presented here. The continuing legacy of Bad class origin was not so striking but still held with respect to those outcomes that required loyalty to the state or party, especially the attainment of cadre occupations and Communist Party membership. It is clear that class origins continued to matter for much of the two decades after their use was formally abolished. We see remarkable continuity extending across several generations. In our survey, conducted in 1996, only about 4% of respondents were adults in 1948, 61% had fathers who were adults in 1948, and 35% had only grandfathers who were adults in 1948. Thus, for nearly two-thirds of the sample we have a legacy that extends across two generations, and for about a third of the sample it extends across three generations.

To a substantial extent the effect of class origin is indirect, resulting from the effect of class on the advantages and disadvantages felt by grandparents and parents and by respondents at the beginning of their adult lives. But for many outcomes strong direct effects persisted, especially for those of Bad Class origin. For those of Red class origin, direct and indirect effects were in general both positive, in the sense that they increased the odds of the outcomes we studied. But for those of Bad class origin they often were contradictory, with indirect effects often increasing the odds of advantageous outcomes but direct effects decreasing the odds.

What does this pattern tell us? The direct effects are straightforward. Those of Red class origin were favored by the regime—the leadership of which was much like themselves—while those of Bad class origin were punished. But the indirect effects are perhaps more interesting. For those of Red class origin there is nothing particularly remarkable, because the increasing advantage simply reflects the combination of cumulative socioeconomic advantage, favorable treatment by gatekeepers to privileged positions, and the sense of entitlement that develops in those who are privileged from childhood. For those of Bad class origin, however, the often positive indirect effects suggest that despite hardship and humiliation Bad class families were able to sustain the motivations and skills that had made them successful enough in 1948 to be singled out for labeling and punishment by the new regime.

This echoes repeated findings that point to the role of family and kin groups in transmitting status across generations, sometimes over long historical periods. Campbell and Lee (2011), for example, found considerable continuity in social status for kin groups in one Chinese province spanning from the 19th well into the 20th century. Sato and Li (2007) attributed continuities in educational attainment among former exploiting households in rural China to family cultures that emphasized educational attainment. Chen et al. (2015) found considerable continuity in family educational attainment in China between 1930 and 1985. Fan (2016) attributed high levels of intergenerational income correlation in contemporary China to mechanisms associated with family social capital, in particular the propensity to invest in education. Thus, for as long as half a century and often across two or three generations, Bad class families were able to seize whatever opportunities came their way and attenuate the strong disadvantages that were enforced by the class label system. The outcomes observed here are especially impressive when it is recalled that not all Bad class labels fell on those who were privileged before Liberation. As we noted earlier, the Bad class was quite heterogeneous, including as well those of modest origins who were associated with Nationalist Party organizations, collaborated with Japanese occupiers, or engaged in criminal activity immediately before Liberation.

Similar kinship-based mechanisms have been observed in many other settings. Pre–Communist era entrepreneurial elites in Eastern Europe were able to take advantage of economic opportunities more quickly when their collectivist economies began to liberalize (Szelenyi 1988; Hanley and Treiman 2004). Similarly, kinship networks are widely viewed as facilitating entrepreneurial success across generations among certain immigrant groups in a variety of global settings (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990). Thus, apart from what we have learned about one aspect of the history of modern China, this analysis contributes to a growing literature on the intergenerational transmission of status that goes beyond associations with parental education and income to consider the broader and more enduring impact of kinship structures and family cultures over generations.

Finally, there are two aspects to our findings that may not immediately be apparent. First, in some ways, our analysis is a tale of two elites. The long revolutionary conflict that culminated in the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 marked the downfall of an old elite based on property ownership, a group that not only suffered from the expropriation of their property but in the following decades found their decline reinforced by the stigma of Bad class political labels. They were replaced by a new revolutionary elite that formed out of service to the Red Army and Communist Party but whose origins were not from the poorest classes that they

claimed to represent. They were predominantly from urban white-collar occupations that in many respects resembled the groups labeled as Middle class. Thus, their advantages were substantially due to relatively high levels3 of parental education and occupational attainment, and their family members' life chances were further boosted across generations by their designation in the Red household category.

Yet in another sense the extent to which the life chances of the poorest Chinese were boosted by their designation as a "good" class is obscured by the focus of our analysis, which treats the Working class as a contrast category. Further, the substantial improvements in life chances that some of them enjoyed have been swamped by the large numbers of others whose benefit from this kind of "good" class label was much more modest. Before the revolution, China's rural and urban poor had few if any educational opportunities, and rates of illiteracy remained high. High school education was the near exclusive province of the groups later classified as Middle or Bad class, and university education was almost exclusively enjoyed by students from the most prosperous professional and propertied households (Lang 1946). While those in the Working class category continued to lag behind other households in a great many respects, there should be little doubt that educational and career opportunities improved considerably for many. The striking ways in which those in the much smaller Middle and Bad class categories were able in some respects to overcome the disabilities enforced by their class labels should not blind us to this shift in China's structure of opportunity. To gauge the extent of such improvements, and the extent to which class labels improved the life chances of the Good class above and beyond the structural mobility induced by the socialist transformation, economic growth, and the expansion of the educational system, is a topic for another paper.

## APPENDIX

### Further Information on the Coding of Variables

*Class origin*.—These class categories were derived from direct responses to a question in the questionnaire: "Your family origin [*jiating chushen*] is. . . ." The categories were (1) Revolutionary cadre, (2) Revolutionary soldier, (3) Revolutionary martyr, (4) Worker, (5) Poor or middle peasant, (6) Middle peasant, small businessman, (7) Ordinary staff or independent occupation, (8) Capitalist, (9) Rightist, (10) Rich peasant, (11) Bad element, (12) Landlord, (13) Counterrevolutionary, (14) Other (specify). During data preparation a category, "Poor/ordinary urban resident," was added by recoding "Other (specify)" responses. We recoded 1–3 to Red, 4–5 and "Poor/ordinary urban resident" to Working, 6–7 to Middle, and 8–13 to Bad. Red and Bad

labels were rare. About 84% of the 1996 population claimed Working class origin, and an additional 11% claimed Middle class origin. Only 1.5% claimed Red class origin, and 3.6% claimed Bad class origin.

*Ancestral property*.—For each kind of property or "exploitation" we created a variable scored 1 if there was a positive response with respect to any ancestor (parents, paternal grandfather, or maternal grandfather) and scored 0 otherwise. In this way we created a set of family property ownership/exploitation variables in 1948. We then summed these for use as a predictor variable, creating a scale ranging from 0 to 6. Although 4.6% of the sample (278 people) was age 18 or older in 1948, no information about the respondent's property in 1948 was collected in the survey. However, the oldest respondents were only age 21 in 1948, which makes it unlikely that their family class position was affected by their own property rather than their parents' property. The same point applies to the ancestral occupation in 1948.

*Ancestral occupation in 1948*.—We coded the father's occupation if it was reported; then the mother's occupation, if the father's occupation was not reported and the mother's occupation was reported; then the paternal grandfather's occupation; then the maternal grandfather's occupation. In each case, we excluded those who were less than 18 years old in 1948. In all, there were three respondents for whom both grandfathers were less than 18 in 1948. In about 4% of cases we have no information about the occupation of either parent or grandfather.

One other point warrants comment. Unfortunately, the occupational information collected for parents and grandfathers was not identical. In particular, there is no way to identify grandparents serving in the military in 1948 or who were rentiers in 1948. The latter omission probably is unimportant, given that only two of the fathers for whom we have a report on the source of income were identified as rentiers. But the lack of information regarding military service is more consequential, given that about a quarter of those from Red class origins had fathers who served in the military in 1948 and probably many grandfathers did as well. The best we can do is to identify grandfathers who were Communist Party officials in 1948 (and also Nationalist Party officials) and to identify fathers serving in the military in 1948. Even here the coding was not straightforward but required the combination of several variables.

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