
1. Reconfiguring China's class order after the 1949 Revolution¹

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After the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took national power in 1949, it radically reorganized Chinese society, creating a state socialist order with a system of class differentiation quite different from that of the past. Private ownership of property in the means of production, which had been the most important determinant of class position, was completely eliminated. Some forms of social inequality were greatly diminished, while others were augmented. This chapter will provide an overview of the new class order established by the CCP during its first 17 years in power, between 1949 and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. It should be noted, however, that this class order was hardly stable; it could not be because class hierarchies were anathema in Communist doctrine. Mao Zedong, in particular, was determined to continue leveling class differences, and these efforts took increasingly radical forms, culminating in the Cultural Revolution.

The chapter is composed of five main sections. In the first, I describe the basic social structure established by the CCP, which consisted of urban work units and rural production brigades. Inequality among these collectivities was a fundamental source of social differentiation, which was reinforced by strong restrictions on mobility. In the second section, I examine the types of resources that were critical in determining an individual's position within these collectivities, as well as access to the higher rungs of the social order. In the third section, I discuss the old and new elites that occupied the top echelons of Chinese society during this tumultuous period and their gradual convergence. In the fourth section, I consider the changing collective identities brought about by the radical restructuring of the class order and the propagation of the CCP's revolutionary narrative. In the fifth section, I recount the CCP's repeated class leveling campaigns and analyze their impact.

CLASS HIERARCHY BASED ON MEMBERSHIP IN PRODUCTION UNITS

In the new social order created by the CCP after 1949, virtually the entire population was turned into members of rural or urban production units. In the countryside, collectivization of agriculture turned village land into the common property of production brigades and turned villagers into brigade members. In cities, all workplaces – including government agencies, schools, and hospitals, as well as factories and other enterprises – were reorganized as work units, which were public property, managed by state and party cadres. Virtually all working-age urban residents were employed within the work unit system, and work units offered what amounted to permanent employment. Individuals were assigned to a work unit after graduating from school and usually remained in the same unit for their entire lives.

Rural production brigades were responsible for the welfare of their members, who were entitled to a share of the collective product, and they were largely responsible for maintaining village schools, medical clinics, and childcare centers, as these were gradually introduced. Urban work units were also responsible for the welfare needs of their members. In addition to wages, they provided pensions, health insurance, and, if possible, housing, cafeterias, medical clinics, childcare centers, schools for members' children, employee training centers that offered basic education and technical classes, and recreation and cultural facilities (such as theaters and libraries). After employees retired, they typically remained part of the work unit community and continued to live in their work unit apartment. Over time, members sought positions for their spouses and children, and it was common for young people to marry partners from the same unit. Vocational middle schools run by large work units often channeled employees' children into jobs in the same unit, and for a time state policies allowed a child to inherit a work unit position upon a parent's retirement.

Virtually permanent membership meant little mobility, and the movement of individuals was further controlled through the household registration (*hukou*) system and food rationing. Rural residents were members of their village production brigades, urban residents were members of their work units, and there was little movement among them.² It was very difficult for an individual to transfer to another unit, as this required the approval of both units and of the employee. It was also very difficult – and extremely rare – for an urban work unit to fire an employee, and rural production brigades could not kick out brigade members. Even if a

person was jailed for committing a crime, he or she often returned to the same production unit after being released.

Workers – including those in nominally collective enterprises³ – did not own the factories in which they worked, but they did own their jobs. They were lifetime members of their work units, which were responsible for providing for their welfare. What they possessed can be considered a type of *property use rights*, analogous in some ways to the property rights that existed in many places before the capitalist era, which recognized overlapping customary use rights, rather than individual ownership. The same was true of rural production brigades, where membership was even more durable, collective boundaries more clearly defined, and family and collective membership more consistently congruent.

Urban work units were part of a state-centered system in which the government took responsibility for employing all urban residents and providing for their welfare. The state supplied wages for all state employees, regardless of the work unit to which they were assigned. Basic wage rates were set by the state, and an individual kept the same occupational rank and wage rate even if he or she was transferred to another unit. The entire urban population was entitled to state-provided food rations. The state did not take the same kind of responsibility for rural residents – village production brigades were nominally autonomous economically and largely responsible for the welfare of their own members. In practice, however, the CCP kept production brigades on a tight leash, imposing production plans and quotas, and redistributing grain from more productive to less productive villages.

Marx had proclaimed that socialism would reunite labor with the means of production, and Communist parties inspired by his doctrine did exactly that after they came to power. Communist states that followed the Soviet model, including China, all built systems based on the principles of permanent job tenure and workplace provision of a wide range of welfare benefits. Among these systems, the Chinese model was at the extreme end in terms of the fixed nature of employment.

Inequality Among and Within Production Units

There was a distinct hierarchy of production units. In cities, the largest enterprises run by central ministries, especially those in priority industries, were much better endowed than smaller enterprises run by local authorities. This allowed the privileged work units to provide their members with better housing, schools, medical facilities, and so on than members of less favored units enjoyed. At the bottom of the urban

hierarchy were small collective enterprises created by street committees or parent factories largely for the purpose of employing housewives and young people who were unable to secure employment in state-owned work units. The urban population as a whole was better off than the rural population, whose consumption depended on the productive capacity of their village production brigades. Labor was tied to the means of production, and an individual's class position was determined in large part by the productive means to which he or she was tied.

The state regulated the inequality among production units. The new Communist regime inherited tremendous disparities among regions and economic sectors, and, although it was committed to diminishing these disparities, not all of its policies had this result. On the one hand, it moved to reduce inequality by setting standard wage rates, providing basic urban welfare benefits, promoting the development of interior provinces, developing rural industry, building basic health and education services in the countryside, and redistributing grain to poorer rural areas. On the other hand, the state set prices so that agriculture subsidized industrial development, siphoning off resources from the countryside, it created new sectoral hierarchies by giving priority to favored industries (typically in heavy industrial sectors), and state support for social services varied greatly by sector.

While there was a great deal of inequality among production units, within each unit differences were relatively small. They were, however, still important. In urban work units, members were formally classified as either cadres or workers, and each category had a scale of wage ranks set by the government. Those classified as cadres included political and administrative leaders, management staff, and technical employees. Cadres were considered to be of special importance to the state, which paid particular attention to their appointment, promotion, transfer, training, and political education. Political and administrative cadres were almost invariably party members, which meant that they were expected to share the party's *esprit de corps*, follow its demanding ethical and political principles, and subject themselves to its organizational discipline. Party members were allowed to attend meetings and read documents to which non-members were not privy, and they were expected to take responsibility for the affairs of the work unit. Originally, the top ranking political and administrative leaders in all work units were revolutionary cadres (*geming ganbu*), that is, veterans of the Communist insurgency, while the top technical personnel were inherited from the old regime. Younger political and administrative cadres were typically demobilized military officers or party members recruited from the shop

floor, while younger technical cadres were typically graduates of universities and technical schools.

Workers – recruited from villages and from among urban middle school graduates – were not expected to be as involved in the affairs of the enterprise. Nevertheless, for ideological and political reasons during its first decades in power the Communist Party placed great emphasis on recruiting workers to join the party, and it encouraged them to be involved in factory affairs. Moreover, the boundary between workers and cadres was blurred by the promotion of large numbers of workers to cadre positions (*yigong daigan*) without giving them formal cadre status.

Wages were generally low, in part because the regime was determined to accumulate capital for reinvestment in industrial development, and the range of wages was remarkably compressed. A 1966 survey of 38 industrial enterprises, for instance, found that the average monthly base pay for the highest paid leader (typically the chief engineer, director, or party secretary) was 137 *yuan*, a little over twice the average pay for all employees (63 *yuan*), and less than four times the average lowest pay (37 *yuan*). Moreover, in many of the enterprises the highest paid employee was a skilled worker, rather than a leader.⁴ The party compelled cadres to participate regularly in manual labor (often one day a week) and to ‘eat, live, and work’ with the masses (*tongchi tongzhu tonglaodong*). Workers and cadres generally wore the same clothes, lived in the same apartment complexes, ate in the same cafeterias, and shared the same health clinics and other facilities. The size of apartments often differed by rank, but the differences were not great. The absence of private property in the means of production, together with low wage policies and harshly ascetic Communist ethics, prevented cadres from accumulating or displaying wealth.

Within rural production brigades, economic differences were even less pronounced. Brigade leaders were not paid state salaries; instead, like other villagers, they received ‘work points’ for a day’s labor, which entitled them to a share of village grain and a small cash disbursement. The same was true of most of the ‘barefoot doctors’, veterinarians, and village teachers, as well as the workers, technicians, and managers in small village factories. Under this system, the families of village leaders often fared worse economically than other families with greater numbers of able-bodied laborers. Above the village production brigades were rural communes, which were the lowest level of state administration. Commune staff, including cadres and workers in commune level rural factories, were state employees and ‘ate state grain’; their salaries and benefits provided more security and often a better standard of living. This was the highest level position to which a villager could ordinarily aspire.

CLASS HIERARCHY BASED ON POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

Individual assets were also very important in determining class position, because they helped decide the unit to which an individual was assigned and the position he or she occupied within the unit, as well as possibilities for transfer among units and promotion to higher rungs in the class order, that is, above the basic level production units. To discuss these individual assets, I will use a conceptual framework consisting of three types of capital – economic, cultural and political. In this framework, derived from concepts developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, economic capital refers to private property, cultural capital refers to educational credentials and knowledge, and political capital refers to membership and position in the ruling party as well as social connections derived from this membership.⁵

With the conversion of the means of production into public property, economic capital was eliminated. That is, access to advantageous class positions was no longer provided by private ownership of productive assets. As a result, the importance of political and cultural capital greatly increased. Advantageous positions – whether in rural communes, state-owned and collective factories, schools, hospitals, or government offices – were now defined as cadre posts, and access to them required academic and/or political credentials. Academic credentials were more important for obtaining positions as technical cadres, and political credentials were more important for obtaining positions as political or administrative cadres. All graduates of universities, colleges, and technical middle schools were guaranteed assignments as state cadres. Urban residents who entered the workforce after leaving middle or primary schools were usually assigned employment as state or collective workers, while rural residents returned to work in their production brigades. Party membership was generally required for promotion to positions of leadership above the most basic level.

These critical credentials were distributed by two systems – one academic (the country's hierarchy of schools) and one political (the CCP's recruitment apparatus).

Academic and Political Credentialing Systems

The CCP inherited the academic credentialing system from the old regime, but the new regime reorganized it from top to bottom. Following the Soviet model, the system was centralized and rationalized, given a

more technical orientation, and greatly expanded. Private schools were taken over by the state, all schools were folded into a national administrative hierarchy, and a nationally coordinated examination system was established to regulate admission at all levels. In the fourth grade of primary school, students took exams that determined who among them would continue on to the fifth grade (senior primary school), and those who succeeded faced further examination hurdles to enter junior middle school, senior middle school, and college. The school system was shaped like a pyramid, with very few places at the upper levels (Chen 1981; Unger 1982; Cleverly 1985; Hayhoe 1996; Pepper 1996). Although the new regime greatly increased access to education by rapidly expanding the school system, especially at the basic level, competition to get into higher level schools was fierce. On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, almost all children finished junior primary school (third grade), but only about 36 percent finished senior primary school, 10 percent finished junior middle school, 3 percent finished senior middle school, and 1 percent attended college (Andreas 2004: 18). The education system continued to distribute knowledge and academic credentials very unevenly. Indeed, most children – especially in the countryside – were excluded after a few years of schooling. Although the system was much more open to children from working class and peasant families than it had been in the past, it remained a powerful instrument of class differentiation that continued to facilitate elite reproduction.

Unlike the academic credentialing system, the political credentialing system was the CCP's own creation. It was composed of an increasingly selective hierarchy of organizations that included, in ascending order, the Young Pioneers, the Communist Youth League, and the Communist Party. The credentials distributed by this system – membership and leadership positions in the Youth League and the party – were required to win certain jobs and promotions in the state bureaucracy, making them a very tangible form of political capital. Less tangible, but just as important, were the personal networks derived from association with the ruling party.

The political credentialing system was also characterized by intense competition. Although by the early 1960s almost all school children were invited to join the Young Pioneers, only about 20 percent of the eligible age group were members of the Youth League, and about 5 percent of adults were party members.⁶ Youth League and party recruitment was concentrated in higher level schools and the military, which served as elite training centers.

In recruiting new members, the political criteria considered by party and league branches were divided into two categories. The first, political

performance (*zhengzhi biaoqian*), was based on individual achievement, while the second, family background (*jiating beijing*), was ascriptive. Political performance was the most important criterion, and an individual was evaluated in terms of three main elements: ideological commitment, collectivist ethics, and compliance with the leadership of the party organization. Aspiring members were encouraged to diligently study Marxism–Leninism and to demonstrate through their actions their commitment to the Communist ideals of hard work, selflessness, and a willingness to serve the people (*wei renmin fuwu*).⁷

The other major consideration in recruitment – family background – involved two sets of categories: class origin (*jieji chushen*) and political background (*zhengzhi beijing*). All families were assigned a class origin designation according to the CCP's taxonomy of classes (for a list of the general categories see Table 1.1). These designations were based on the status of the family head between 1946 and 1949, and were inherited patrilineally during the first three decades after the 1949 Revolution.⁸ Along with class origin, the political history of an individual was evaluated, and those determined to have committed counterrevolutionary or criminal offenses faced discrimination, as did members of their families.⁹ Class line (*jieji luxian*) policies used these designations to give preference in political recruitment (as well as in school admissions and job appointments) to members of working class, poor and lower middle peasant, and revolutionary cadre, soldier, and martyr families. The overwhelming majority of the Chinese population belonged to these categories, and most of the rest had middling designations – such as middle peasant, small entrepreneur, professional, or white collar employee – which did not provide advantages, but also did not present great handicaps. For members of the small minority of families deemed to be part of the former exploiting classes (capitalists, landlords, and rich peasants), or associated with counterrevolution, however, class line discrimination could be severe (White, G. 1976: 2; Kraus 1981: 20–26; White, L. 1984: 143–4; Wang 1995: 25–33).

OLD AND NEW ELITES

After 1949, the top echelons of Chinese society were occupied by two very distinct groups – a new elite composed of the 'revolutionary cadres' of the Communist Party and an old elite composed of the country's wealthy and educated classes. Although there was overlap between the two groups, on the whole they were of very different origins and had very distinct cultures and values.

The Communist cadres who took charge of Chinese society after 1949 were young, but many of them already had years of administrative experience in rural Communist base areas populated by millions of people. The great majority of this formidable corps of battle-tested cadres were from the countryside. Although the CCP was founded by intellectuals, during two decades of armed insurrection in the countryside it became a party of peasants. Its ranks were filled by poor villagers who took up arms in the anti-Japanese and civil wars, and even most of its leaders were of rural origin and had relatively little education. In 1949, 80 percent of the party's membership were of peasant origin, and the great majority were illiterate or had only a grade school education (Townsend 1970: 303; Lee 1991: 45). Although many of the top Communist leaders were born into elite families and had joined the party while studying at university, even at the highest levels of the party a far greater number had come from more humble village origins and had risen to leadership positions by demonstrating their organizing abilities and military prowess.

The old elite classes were greatly weakened during the first years after the 1949 Revolution as the new regime systematically confiscated their productive property through land reform and the nationalization of private enterprises. Stripped of their property, the old elites were also vilified politically as members of the exploiting classes, and the connections some had enjoyed with the vanquished Nationalist regime, which had provided distinct advantages in the past, now became severe handicaps. The old rural elites were largely marginalized and converted into social pariahs. The fate of the urban elites was not as dire because the CCP could not dispense with their expertise. The new government offered nominal compensation and management positions to entrepreneurs who cooperated, and the great majority of the managerial, professional, and technical staff in government offices, economic enterprises, schools, and other institutions remained in their posts. Although the old elites had been deprived of their property and were in a weak position politically, they retained other assets that were highly valuable in a country that was largely illiterate – their education and expertise.

As the CCP took control of urban institutions, newly arrived Communist cadres were charged with supervising incumbent managers and specialists. In the parlance of the party, Reds were supervising experts. Under this Red-over-expert power structure, incumbent managers and specialists in enterprises, government offices, schools, and other institutions were relegated to subordinate technical positions. Over time, this structure was reinforced and reproduced because the CCP also distrusted

new university graduates, who were largely from old elite families, and it preferred to promote workers to positions of power.

Thus, the Communist victory created a situation in which two very different groups coexisted uncomfortably at the top of the post-revolutionary social order.¹⁰ In addition to having very distinct origins, cultures, and values, they relied on different types of class resources. The new elite, largely made up of peasant revolutionaries, had political capital, but little cultural capital, while the old elite, largely composed of members of the dispossessed propertied classes, had cultural capital, but little political capital. Practical considerations dictated cooperation, but the first decades of Communist rule were marked by sharp conflict between the two groups. Nevertheless, as families on both sides strived to reproduce their elite status, the two groups began to converge.

Reproduction and Convergence of Elites

In 1949, at the beginning of the Communist era, the new and old elites made up exceedingly small portions of the Chinese population. One way to gauge the size of both groups is to use the class categories employed by the new regime. The figures presented in Table 1.1 estimate the distribution of the population across these categories.¹¹

Membership in these classes was based on the status of the family head during the period immediately before the 1949 Revolution. Three of the categories directly corresponded to the new political elite: revolutionary cadres, revolutionary soldiers, and descendants of revolutionary martyrs; together they made up slightly less than 1 percent of the population. Two categories – landlords and rich peasants – can be described as old rural elites, and three categories – capitalists, white collar employees, and independent professionals – can be described as old urban elites. The old rural elite categories made up 4.3 percent, and the old urban elite categories made up 1.4 percent of the country's population. A sense of the size of the old and new elites can also be conveyed by the number of people who were party members or held a college degree. In 1949, out of an adult population of nearly 400 000 000, there were fewer than 5 000 000 party members and fewer than 185 000 college graduates.¹²

If each of the two elites was tiny, the number of people who could claim to be part of both groups – intellectuals who had joined the underground Communist Party – was infinitesimal. Most of this group had been recruited as students by underground party organizations in middle schools and universities. Over time, however, the number of people who occupied this intersection grew steadily, augmented by the

Table 1.1 Class origin categories as proportions of the population

'Class line' status	Category	Percentage of survey respondents
Laboring	Revolutionary cadre, soldier, or martyr	0.9
	Worker or poor/ordinary urban resident	5.1
	Poor or lower middle peasant	76.8
Other	White collar employee or independent professional	1.2
	Upper middle peasant or small entrepreneur	11.5
Exploiting	Capitalist	0.2
	Landlord	2.3
	Rich peasant	2.0

Note: Data in this table were derived from a national probability sample survey of over 6000 urban and rural residents conducted in 1996 (Treiman and Walder 1996).

Red experts produced in China's elite schools. Most of these Red experts had their origins in one or the other of the elite groups, but a growing number were also recruited from below.

The academic and political credentialing systems provided mechanisms for elite families to reproduce their advantageous status; children of the new political and the old educated elites were much more likely to win credentials than were children of workers and peasants. There was, however, nothing automatic about elite reproduction. Elite families – both old and new – could retain their advantageous social positions across generations only by means of strategy and diligence. Their children had to succeed in arduous competitions for academic or political credentials, and success was by no means guaranteed, because both credentialing systems required individual achievement. Well-endowed parents, however, could provide substantial advantages.

On the one hand, old elite families were well positioned to reproduce their class position through the academic credentialing system. Educated parents could pass on to their children critical advantages in relation to the education system (pride, motivation, social connections, and knowledge about how to get ahead in school) and could also convey knowledge invaluable in the academic competition. Children from old elite families continued to make up the majority of students at China's top universities and they were in a better position than their parents to embrace the expectations and opportunities presented by the new regime.

On the other hand, new elite families were well positioned to reproduce their advantageous class positions through the political credentialing system. Revolutionary cadres could pass on to their children pride in their revolutionary heritage and motivation to follow in their parents' footsteps, as well as political connections and knowledge about how to get ahead in the political recruitment system. Class line policies greatly benefited the new elite, while hurting the old elite.

Although elite reproduction was most readily accomplished *within* the cultural or the political field, the academic and political credentialing systems also facilitated what Bourdieu called 'capital conversion', that is, using capital accumulated in one field to obtain access to capital in another. The two systems were intricately intertwined, and the links between them became mechanisms for capital conversion. These links fostered the reproduction of both elites and also enabled the gradual convergence of the two.

On the one hand, possession of political capital provided several advantages in winning academic credentials. First, in considering the applications of candidates who passed the entrance examinations, college recruiters took into account reports compiled by middle school teachers that summed up an applicant's political performance and family origin. Second, Communist authorities established a variety of special schools for adult party members and cadres as well as primary and middle schools that catered to children of Communist officials and military officers. On the other hand, possession of cultural capital also provided advantages in winning political credentials. The most important advantage was that elite schools became a focal point of political recruitment. Moreover, recruitment into the Young Pioneers, the Communist Youth League, and the Communist Party was based on not only political but also cultural criteria. Students could not expect to go far in the political competition if they fell behind in their studies. 'Examination grades are not only the standard for measuring the degree of academic accomplishment', declared a 1962 document prepared by the Ministry of Education, adding, 'Through grades we can also discern the student's political character' (Taylor 1981: 132).

Despite sharp tensions between the old and new elites, the two groups were gradually converging as children of intellectuals joined the Youth League and the party, and children of revolutionary cadres gained educational credentials. Students who succeeded in becoming both Red and expert acquired assets that would distinguish them not only from the masses but also from their own parents.

CLASS STRUCTURE AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

The sweeping structural changes brought about by the Communist regime after 1949 together with its grand narratives about the revolution and socialist construction gave rise to radical shifts in collective identities. There were many sources of collective identity, allowing for a range of combinations. Some of these pre-dated the 1949 Revolution but were altered under new conditions, while others were new and could not have existed in the past.

Among the most important bases for collective identity were the class (*jieji*) designations assigned to all individuals according to their status in the years immediately preceding the 1949 Revolution and inherited patrilineally. These were based loosely on Marxist economic class categories, and in popular use they were mixed together with political categories (such as counterrevolutionary), and both were imbued with revolutionary meanings. Because they figured prominently in CCP narratives and were important in winning opportunities for study and work, these categories became important markers identifying individuals and families. Those who were stuck with labels associated with the old order – landlords, rich peasants, capitalists, counterrevolutionaries, etc. – sought to escape the ignominy and discrimination that came with their designations, as difficult as this was to accomplish. On the other end of the spectrum, the families of revolutionary cadres and martyrs wore their designations as a badge of honor. Workers and peasants were also celebrated as protagonists of the revolution and socialist construction, and members of these classes enjoyed a social status much more dignified and admirable than they had in the old society. These broad identities, therefore, were embraced by those who enjoyed ‘good’ class designations, and they clearly inspired at least sentimental solidarity.

Another narrower source of collective identity was the rural production brigades and urban work units established in the 1950s. Villages – the existing communities on which production teams were based – had always been central to rural identities, and the collective sensibility of village residents was now reinforced by collective labor and shared economic fortunes. For city dwellers, in contrast, workplaces had previously occupied a more transient and less definitive place in their identities. Now workplaces were permanent communities and, along with their material wellbeing, individuals’ identities were inexorably tied to the work unit to which a person belonged. Membership entailed degrees of local pride mediated by rankings in industrial and geographical hierarchies.

The two groups that possessed what came closest to class consciousness, however, were the old and new elites that uneasily coexisted at the top echelons of Chinese society. In 1949, when Communist cadres first entered China's cities and took charge of urban institutions, the two groups had little in common. The new elite, the often rough-hewn revolutionaries who by dint of collective sacrifice had seized possession of the state, lived in a world of intense ideological commitment, strict discipline, and dedication to the party's vision of the future. They had years earlier been inducted into the ardent political culture of the revolutionary Communist movement, which was now being converted into a culture of state cadres. The old elite were equally proud, but on different grounds. Despite the confiscation of their property and recurring assaults by the new regime, they continued to enjoy a collective self-confidence earned through generations in the top realms of society. Inhabiting a world of cultural refinement, they possessed not only certified technical and literary expertise, but also worldliness, intellectual sophistication, and cultural preferences and manners of speaking, dress, and behavior that marked their status.

Over the course of the next two decades, the vast social gap that separated the two groups was narrowed. The earliest movement toward convergence took place as peasant cadres gained educational credentials through crash training courses and educated elites began to join the party. Despite their new diplomas, however, peasant cadres remained out of place in the refined world of the urban educated classes, and the relatively small number of urban elites who succeeded, through great diligence, in joining the CCP found that their new party cards could never make them revolutionaries or completely dispel the White aura they had acquired through service to the old regime. Among the generations that came of age before 1949, the only individuals who were genuinely at home in both the Communist and the educated elite worlds were the relative handful of intellectuals who had joined the Communist insurgency.

It was among the next generation, those who came of age after 1949, that a new elite identity was forged that combined political and cultural capital – that of the Red experts. Unlike most of their parents, young people who succeeded in both the academic and the political credentialing systems under the new order were fully socialized into both the Communist and the educated elite worlds. They comfortably occupied the space at the intersection of these worlds, which the CCP – after its center of gravity had shifted from remote villages to urban offices – had provided with powerful institutional foundations. They had excelled in school and had also fully embraced Communist ideology, and their

experiences and achievements had given them a sense of pride and purpose. They possessed not only a set of valuable credentials that gave them common interests, but also the perspectives and values imbued by the education system and the Youth League and party organizations. This new generation of Red experts, thus, shared a similar set of world views, cultural dispositions, and self-conceptions that set them apart not only from the rest of society but also from their parents. From among their ranks would emerge the new class of technocrats that would take the reins of society in the post-Mao reform era.

In the early 1960s, however, the freshly minted Red experts were too young to wield power, and their nascent class consciousness was embryonic and fragile. In the future they would set the tone for the country, but first they would have to survive the Cultural Revolution, in which both the political and the educated elites would come under harsh attack, reigniting the long-standing tensions between the two and fragmenting the fledgling generation of Red experts.

CLASS LEVELING

As noted above, during the first decades of Communist power, the new class order that was emerging was never stabilized or consolidated. Instead, Mao and other party leaders, animated by an ideology hostile to class hierarchies, continued to shake up Chinese society with new campaigns designed to level existing class differences. At first leveling efforts were concentrated in the economic field, but these were then extended to the cultural field, and eventually to the political field, resulting in years of social turmoil.

Economic Leveling

Economic leveling, the quintessential element of the Communist program, involved the confiscation and redistribution of private property. This was accomplished through a series of mass political movements that began in the countryside with land reform (1946–1953), a violent campaign in which Communist cadres mobilized poor peasants to humiliate, beat, and often kill landlords. Landlords and rich peasants were not only dispossessed of their land and often their homes but also reduced to social pariahs. The subsequent collectivization drive was less violent, but the result was more profound, eliminating private ownership of land altogether (Hinton 1966; Friedman et al. 1991). In urban areas, the state took over large enterprises, and small enterprises were combined

into cooperatives in the mid-1950s. The process was largely peaceful, but fundamentally coercive. Communist cadres mobilized workers against their employers in a series of campaigns to combat tax evasion, corruption, and counterrevolutionary activities, establishing Communist control within each enterprise and paving the way for state appropriation (Gardner 1969; Vogel 1969; Brugger 1976; Lieberthal 1980). As a result of these campaigns, private property in the means of production no longer existed.

Cultural Leveling

In 1957, having virtually eliminated economic capital, the CCP turned its attention to cultural capital, with the intention of further undercutting the advantages of the old elites. Subsequent political campaigns, including the Anti-Rightist Movement (1957), the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961), the Socialist Education Movement (1963–1966), all featured concerted efforts to undermine cultural capital. These efforts were also based on Marxist doctrine, which called not only for eliminating private property in the means of production, but also for eliminating the distinction between mental and manual labor. In Marx's grand historical narrative, this distinction arose in early human societies as they first divided into classes, and it would have to be overcome before a socialist society could advance to communism.

During the Great Leap Forward, the CCP carried out what it called a 'revolution in education', the main goals of which were: (1) to redistribute educational opportunities, inhibiting the reproduction of the educated elite and dispersing education across the population; and (2) to alter the nature of education and of occupational divisions so as to eliminate the distinction between mental and manual labor. The school system, especially in rural areas, was vastly expanded, class line policies were implemented in a stricter fashion, and teaching was reformed to integrate theory and practice, combine studies with manual labor, and stress practical learning. These policies were partially reversed following the traumatic collapse of the Great Leap Forward, but Mao revived the radical agenda in 1964.

Cultural leveling was also extended to factories and other work units. The party organization in China's industrial workplaces, typically led by revolutionary cadres of peasant origin and largely composed of members recruited from the ranks of the workers, had gradually consolidated its control inside factories over the previous few years, subordinating the incumbent owners, managers, and technicians to party leadership. This Red-over-expert structure was militantly reinforced during the 1957

Anti-Rightist Movement, when experts who had challenged the power and prerogatives of the party – in industrial enterprises and government offices, as well as in schools – were harshly rebuffed. The party's position was expressed sharply in an article from this period published in the academic journal *Study*, which criticized arguments that 'politics cannot lead technology', 'non-experts cannot lead experts', 'from now on technology will decide everything in the production struggle', and 'technical intellectuals must educate the party'. These arguments, the author wrote, reflected 'reactionary technocratic ideas', with the term 'technocratic' rendered in Chinese as *gongchengshi zhuanzheng*, or 'dictatorship of engineers' (Jiang 1957: 12).

Communist leaders pursued cultural leveling not only because they remained committed to the Marxist doctrine of eliminating class distinctions, but also because they deeply distrusted the old elites and were determined to prevent them from maintaining and reproducing their class advantages. This distrust was shared by a good part of the party leadership and membership. The willingness of Communist cadres to carry out radical redistribution policies in the cultural field was reinforced by the fact that the overwhelming majority – who were poorly educated peasant revolutionaries – had few personal assets at stake. They took the same kind of class struggle approach in the cultural field that they had taken in the economic field, mobilizing the disadvantaged against the advantaged. The concentration of education in the hands of the old privileged classes was seen as no more morally justified than the concentration of property. After a brief respite in the early 1960s, cultural leveling efforts were forcefully resumed during the Socialist Education Movement (1963–1966) and would reach a crescendo during the Cultural Revolution.

Political Leveling

Compared to the economic and cultural fields, class leveling in the political field was a much more complicated endeavor. Political leveling entailed dispersing political power, that is, enhancing the decision-making power of the masses at the expense of the leaders. While economic and cultural leveling had been directed at the old elites, the targets of political leveling were none other than the new Communist elite. In the economic and cultural fields, Communist cadres saw themselves as leading the workers and peasants in a struggle against the old elite classes to capture enemy territory and redistribute enemy resources. Under this banner, as the CCP reorganized villages, factories, and schools into production brigades and work units, it endeavored to

concentrate power within each unit in the hands of a party committee (diminishing the power of old elites, including incumbent managers and technical staff). This ended up greatly enhancing the importance of political capital as a mechanism of stratification, and party cadres could hardly be expected to play a vanguard role in any effort to disperse their own power. Nevertheless, Mao made the power exercised by cadres a target of increasingly harsh political campaigns.

Although Marxist doctrine, as received by the CCP, called for victorious revolutionaries to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat, this was supposed to include democratic participation by the workers and peasants, especially in the workplace, and 'democratic supervision' of cadres by the masses became a prominent slogan. The new Chinese regime conspicuously advertised the idea of 'democratic management' of production brigades and work units, and local party leaders genuinely sought to involve workers and peasants in managing their own affairs at the basic level. In practice, however, they had little interest in actually dispersing political power. The initiative behind leveling campaigns in the political field came from Mao, who became increasingly concerned that party cadres were abusing their power, seeking privileges, and becoming estranged from the masses.

In successive campaigns against corruption and bureaucratism (*guan-liao zhuyi*), including the Three Antis Movement (1951–1952), the 1957 Party Rectification, and the Socialist Education Movement (1963–1966), Mao attempted to employ the masses to monitor Communist cadres. Outside party work teams were sent to villages, factories, and schools to mobilize peasants, workers, and students to criticize local leaders for bureaucratic behavior – isolation from the masses, abuse of power, commandism, and suppression of criticism from below. Like the leveling movements in the cultural field, these campaigns became longer and more disruptive over time. By the mid-1960s, at the height of the Socialist Education Movement, Mao was using very harsh language to refer to officials of his own party. 'The class of bureaucrats', he wrote,

is a class sharply opposed to the working class and poor and lower-middle peasants. These leaders who take the capitalist road have become, or are becoming, the capitalists who suck the workers' blood. How can they sufficiently understand the necessity of socialist revolution? They are the targets of our struggle and the targets of the revolution. (Mao 1996: 265–6)

By 1966, this line of thinking would lead Mao to mobilize workers, peasants, and students to attack virtually the entire strata of Communist officials.

CLASS DIFFERENTIATION AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY ON THE EVE OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

By the mid-1960s, a new class order – based on greatly altered social structures and sources of collective identity – had begun to emerge in China, but it was still very much in flux. Inequality had been substantially reduced in critical ways. Private wealth – long the main determinant of class position – had been virtually eliminated, income differences were greatly compressed, and the costs of basic welfare, health, and education services were assumed by the state and collective entities. Moreover, the CCP's severely ascetic ethics and harsh campaigns against corruption discouraged displays of economic privilege. Economic inequality, however, had hardly disappeared. In this chapter, I have examined the sources of this inequality from two angles.

I first looked at the basic fabric of the new class order, which was composed of urban work units and rural production brigades. Because these units provided very unequal rewards for their members, the differences among them were an important source of social inequality. This inequality reflected a hierarchy of places that had existed before the CCP came to power, in which urban was superior to rural, large cities were superior to small, and the coast was superior to the interior. The Communist program made some adjustments to this hierarchy, but did not alter it in any fundamental way. The establishment of work units and production brigades as virtually permanent communities did, however, make the hierarchy of places more rigid and mobility among them more difficult; as a result, this hierarchy became an even more pronounced element of social inequality.

I then looked at the assets – political and cultural capital – that played a critical role in determining an individual's position within these units as well as access to positions at higher levels in the state administration. The abolition of economic capital in the 1950s had greatly enhanced the importance of political and cultural capital. The first now became the mainstay of the old elite, composed largely of the dispossessed propertied classes, while the second became the mainstay of the new elite, composed largely of former peasant revolutionaries. The academic and political credentialing systems, which allocated cultural and political capital respectively, provided entrance – through intense competition – into the upper strata made up of state cadres (political, administrative, and technical). Although both credentialing systems were now open to increasing numbers of young people, only a relatively small number won

the highest credentials, and the competition allowed for effective strategies of social reproduction by elite families, old and new. Despite sharp tensions between the two groups, they were gradually converging, as children of intellectuals joined the Youth League and the party, and children of revolutionary cadres gained elite educational credentials. This convergence presaged the later consolidation of a technocratic order presided over by a new dominant class composed of Red experts (Andreas 2009: 213–47).

The consolidation of a new class order, however, was disrupted by increasingly radical class leveling campaigns, all initiated by Mao. After the elimination of economic capital, Mao shifted his attention to cultural capital, with the intent of further undermining the class position of the old elites. He also targeted – in a more tentative fashion – political capital, which underpinned the social position of the new Communist elite. In 1966, he would launch a new movement that attacked with unprecedented ferocity both cultural and political capital and both the old and new elites (Andreas 2009: 87–132).

NOTES

1. Parts of this chapter have been adapted from several chapters of Andreas (2009) and Andreas (2012).
2. For contrasting analyses about the purposes and consequences of China's household registration system, see Cheng and Selden (1994) and Han (1999).
3. Collective enterprises were administered by parent enterprises or local government units and were not actually the property of their employees.
4. The 38 enterprises ranged from small factories with several hundred employees to huge firms with over 100 000 employees; most had several thousand employees. The reported wage rates apparently did not include the lower 'apprentice' rates paid to new hires. Base pay did not include bonuses, but bonuses made up only a small part of compensation, on average about 6 percent of enterprise wage funds. See Richman (1969: 798–806).
5. For an overview of his tripartite framework, see Bourdieu (1986); for more elaborate discussions of the cultural dimension of class differentiation in France, see Bourdieu (1984) and Bourdieu (1989). When Bourdieu (1998: 14–18) briefly discussed the class structure of socialist East Germany, he stressed the central importance of party membership, which he treated as a political form of social capital. My adaptation of Bourdieu's framework is similar to that developed by Konrad and Szelenyi (1991) and Eyal et al. (1998) to analyze changes in class structures during the transitions to and from socialism in Eastern Europe. Sun (2002) also used this type of tripartite framework to develop an insightful analysis of class transformation in post-Mao China. Bourdieu's definition of class is broader than that employed by Weber, who limited class to market position (Weber 1978: 926–40), and it is also broader than that employed by many Marxists, who define class largely as property ownership. It is compatible, however, with Marx's broader definition of class as position in the relations of production. In discussing pre-capitalist societies, Marx emphasized that a

- person's class position was determined largely by his or her social position (membership in a village community, for instance) and possession of skills, while private ownership of property played a less important role (Marx 1973: 491–502).
6. Estimates of the proportion of the population aged 15–25 that belonged to the Youth League are cited in Leader (1974: 701). In 1965 there were approximately 18 million party members (Lee 1991: 17) out of an adult population of about 376 million (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Population Research Center 1985: 602–03; data are from the 1964 census). Party and league members made up a higher proportion of the urban population, and in some factories one-fifth of employees belonged to the party.
 7. Shirk (1982) wrote that the CCP strived to select young people of good moral character because, like other ideological revolutionary movements, it was seeking to create a 'virtuocracy'.
 8. The class origin system grew out of the land reform campaign, in which each rural family was assigned a class designation as part of investigations that preceded property redistribution; the system was later extended to urban areas.
 9. Although class origin and political background were formally differentiated (official forms typically distinguished between the two), in the popular consciousness and in practice the two categories were often conflated. This practical conflation has often been repeated in scholarly discourse.
 10. Chamberlain (1972) and Wang (1995) documented the situation of 'dual elites' in Tianjin, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Wuhan.
 11. Data in this table were derived from a national probability sample survey of over 6000 urban and rural residents conducted in 1996. Respondents were asked to select one of 15 'family origin' categories. The categories included three categories – 'Rightist', 'bad element', and 'counterrevolutionary' – that were used to designate political status, together with 12 categories used to designate class status. Because almost all Rightists were intellectuals, I combined the two individuals in the 'Rightist' category with the 'white collar and independent professionals' category. I placed a handful of individuals who selected the 'bad element' or 'counterrevolutionary' categories or who failed to select any of the categories into a residual group. I included only respondents who were born before 1957, because individuals who came of age in the post-Mao era, after the family origin system was abandoned, were not as likely to be aware of their family's designation. The survey is described in Treiman and Walder (1996). This table is adapted from one that appears in Andreas (2009: 63).
 12. Schurmann (1968: 129) cited a figure of 4 448 080 party members as of October 1949. Gu (1984: 141) cited the total number of graduates from Chinese institutions of higher education from the time the first one was established in the nineteenth century until 1949. Some of these graduates had certainly already died by 1949.

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