A New Examination into Redness and Expertise: Career Path of Political Elites in China

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Introduction: Red and/or Expertise Elites?

In the empirical elite studies, the pattern of elite recruitment reflects not only the channels to access political power in a country, but also the political values and policy orientations of the regime (Seligman 1964; Putman 1976, 45-60; Czudnowski 1983, 243-255). As more information became accessible in the opaque political system, scholars have recently produced some empirical studies on the elite formation, configuration and transformation in China’s reform era. They mostly borrowed the concept of “New Class” defined by Dijla (1957, 37-69) in the Soviet-type system, and applied it to the China’s context since the late of 1970s, so as to discuss how the Chinese Communist Party (“CCP”) appointed, promoted and arranged those elite with red and expert credentials in the reform era.

In literature, there are three major approaches to explain the elite recruitment of China. The first approach is the elite replacement model, which presumed that the necessity for economic development and modernization has compelled the CCP to replace their revolutionary cadres with new bureaucratic technocrats (Lee 1991; Li and While 1988; 1990; 1998). Thus, the educational and professional credentials would become increasingly important over time, and even replace the political criteria as the primary determinants for elites’ upward mobility. The second approach, which can be summarized as the elite separation model, originated from “the Hungarian

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1 Please do not cite the draft without permission from the authors.
2 Based on this approach, Bachman (1992, 1048) suggested that the question about who would succeed Deng Xiaoping is not very important, since new leaders would actually share common features, such as higher-level education, pragmatism, limited revolutionary and historical experiences, and so forth.
model” proposed by Konrad and Szelényi (1979). They argued that the communist cadres would share political power with technocrats because the party needs their involvement to save the economy from depression. Therefore, elites in state socialism are divided into politically loyal cadres and highly educated professionals. This dual career path model was empirically proven in China (Walder 1995), and was also attributed to the different functions between the party and the government (Zang 2004; 2006). The third approach is the elite cultivation model, based on the party-sponsored mobility, proposed by Li and Walder (2001). They supposed that elites are selected from party members, but only those who joined the party in their youth were eventually chosen for promotion.\(^3\) In other words, the technocrats emerged in the reform era were also red elites, who joined the party at young age and were then purposely cultivated by the CCP for professional expertise. In sum, these approaches indeed demonstrate certain aspects for the rationale of elite selection in China. Yet from the perspectives of sociological mobility, previous literature rarely explains the empirical results in the context of China’s political regime. Besides, past studies focused on specific time of observation, rather than the continuity and change of elite configuration over time, which could reveal the dynamics of the CCP’s elite recruitment. This is because most of those empirical analyses utilized cross-sectional data and some employed survey data, hence could not systematically explore the continual career path of elites.

Filling the gap, this study illustrates the inner-logic of elite selection by the CCP, and conducts empirical tests through a longitudinal dataset, built on the top Chinese leaders within the party or the government during the reform era. Based on the perspective of regime evolution, this paper argues that the elite recruitment during China’s reform era has reflected the CCP’s motivation behind the adjustment of party line—the ultimate purpose of political survival. Economic modernization is basically a functional tool to serve the higher ends of one-party dictatorship. In such context, this paper proposes the concept of “Limited Renewal” to describe the characteristics of elite recruitment. Although the rise of technocrats and the routinization of elite replacement have drawn much academic attention, this paper finds that technocrats lacking political loyalty assessed and approved by the CCP would be frequently replaced over time, while those who with strong political credentials could be promoted faster and hold leading positions longer. The finding of a strong association between promotion and elites’ party-position experience not only reveals how the CCP institutionalized its political examination in elite selection, but also provides an observable indicator to estimate the career prospects of current elites.

\(^3\) In terms of party-sponsored mobility, Li and Walder (2001) stated that admissible elites who obtained party memberships in the early-career resemble a victory in a tournament, and have much more career advantages than those did so in the mid- or late-career.
The paper is organized into four sections. The first part provides the conceptual origin and the meaning of limited renewal to explain the characteristics of elite recruitment in the political context of China’s reform era. The second section is the research design consisted of data manipulation, measurement and methodology. The third section examines the characteristics of limited renewal—the pattern of elite composition for the renewal dimension and the determinants of elites’ political careers for the limited dimension. Based upon a series of empirical results, the last section draws conclusions and interprets the implications for China’s future political development.

Regime Nature and Elite Recruitment: Limited Renewal

Regime Evolution of the CCP in the Reform Era

Throughout Mao’s period, mass mobilization driven by the charismatic leadership had never been abandoned at all. The notion of “Continuous Revolution” indicated that China had been lying in the plight of class struggle since 1949 (Dittmer 1987). The twin goals of utopia and modernization, which originated from the Marxism-Leninism ideology, had dominated China in this period and shaped it into a Soviet-type regime (Friedrich 1969, 123-164; Lowenthal 1970, 33-116). However, under Deng Xiaoping’s aegis at the third plenary session of the 11th central committee in 1978, the CCP decided to abandon the doctrine of class struggle and to pursue economic modernization and openness policy. The economic reform led to numerous profound changes in China. Some labeled China as “Authoritarianism,” which features both the political monopoly and the economic transition (Pye 1990; Guo 2000; Nathan 2003); while others referred to “Post-totalitarianism” and emphasized the effects of communist legacy in institution and history (Johnson 1970; Linz 2000, 247-261). Overall, these studies precisely described the continuity of political autocracy as well as the change for economic modernization as the characteristics of the CCP during the reform era.

However, why the CCP top leader decided to adjust the party line in the late 1970s remains still far from clear. To put it further, Deng Xiaoping’s reform and openness policy, which determined the evolution path of the CCP, probably originated from two different trains of thought. Firstly, confronted with the economic depression after the Cultural Revolution, the adjustment of party line could be likely forced for

As Johnson mentioned (1970, 3), the fundamental change in communist countries included: (1) from a single strong leader toward collective leadership; (2) from a high reliance on terror to a median or low reliance; (3) from a centralized command economy to a semi-centralized managerial system and toward market socialism; (4) from a client state of the USSR toward independence as a national Communist state.
legitimacy maintenance (Zagoria 1984, 880-881). Secondly, to change the party line or not would depend on the turnover of top leaders; that is, what the incumbent leader preferred in regard to the political task and the policy priority. The distinction between the two motivations lies in the question whether the top leader is an autonomous initiator or a passive respondent.

In fact, Deng’s understanding of the CCP as a “ruling party” had been established even before the Cultural Revolution inflicted the economic depression as well as chaos in the society and the political system. In 1962, Deng Xiaoping firstly explained his view on “Constructing Ruling Party” (Zhizhengdang jianshe). He said, “In the past, our main mission was revolution and we succeeded. After our party came into power, we should shoulder the challenging task of construction and development, and guide our country onto the track of socialism.” (Deng 1994a, 303). Besides, during the rectification movement (Zheng dang) in 1983, Deng Xiaoping explicitly pointed out that the goal of party construction was “[to] become a militant Marxist party, a powerful central force leading the people throughout the country in their efforts to build a socialist society that is advanced materially and ethically” (Deng 1994b, 39). Obviously, Deng’s vision of the CCP’s role as a ruling party guiding the people throughout the country was rather different from that of Mao—a vanguard consisted of proletarian activists. Thus, Deng’s coming back to power after Mao brought in his active push for the change of party line, and the launch of economic reform in China. It could also be anticipated that such voluntary modification would not endanger the party’s dictatorship. As Dickson (1997; 2000) pointed out based on the organizational theory, the CCP’s adjustment could be defined as an “efficient adaptation”, rather than a “respondent adaptation.”

The adjustment of party line, driven by Deng’s understanding of priority, was the critical conjuncture in the evolution of the CCP since the late 1970s. The successors after Deng never substantially expand the reform to the political area, despite the dramatic switch from command economy to market economy. The teachings from the CPP top leaders, such as Deng Xiaoping’s “One central Task, Two basic Points”, Jiang Zemin’s “Three Represents”, and Hu Jintao’s “Harmonious Society”, mainly focus on different ways to improve the party’s governance and to broaden the party’s representation. In an interview with Washington Post in 2003, Wen Jiabao acknowledged that “without the guarantee of political reform, economic reform will not be successful.”5 However, up to now all the important institutional reforms in political system, such as mandatory retirement of government officials, the strengthening of the National People’s Congress, experiments in the rural

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5 The full text of the interview can be found at the website: http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentId=A6641-2003Nov22&notFound=true.
self-government, were all implemented in the 1980s and no further reforms afterwards. As a result, the core features of a Leninist party-state remain essentially unchanged in the political field of China.

This logic of political survival, as Pei (2006) noted, has consistently guided the way of the CCP development since the late 1970s, because the succeeding party leaders lack the strong personal authority needed to substantially change the direction of the party, which was fixed by Deng Xiaoping with revolutionary achievements (Dittmer 1978, 29-32; Dittmer 1995, 10-12; Dittmer and Wu 1995; 469-71; Tsou 2002, 131). Such overarching guidance from Deng Xiaoping not only set the tone for the reform and the restrictions on policies, but also constituted the “path dependency” for the evolution of the CCP. In other words, although the succeeding party leader can access the predominant power in personnel matters given the nature of communist party, they could not change the development track of the party. As Nathan (2008, 25-43) pointed out, what Chinese elites are really interested in is how to improve the quality of the party’s ruling so as to make the authoritarian system more efficient and sustainable. In sum, since the CCP was not forced to fundamentally change the party line or nature during the reform era, the scope and depth of its member adjustment and personnel arrangement would be constrained by the purpose of maintaining the CCP dictatorship.

A Proposed Concept: Limited Renewal

In the approach of elitism, Mosca (1939) and Pareto (1935) regarded the “elite renewal” as one crucial condition for a stable and effective rulership. Empirically speaking, this idea refers to the pattern of elite circulation, including the speed and scope of elite turnover (Higley and Lengyel 2000, 1-21). As discussed above, the evolution of the CCP is basically driven by the logic of political survival, whereas the adjustment like economic modernization serves as the means for the ends of one-party dictatorship. Thus, this paper argues that, during the reform era, the recruitment of political elites in China would reveal the characteristics of “Limited Renewal”—while the elite composition is renewed through the CCP’s selection based on leaders’ preference of policy priority, the scope and the speed of renewal would be limited within the core target of dictatorship maintenance.

The proposed concept of “Limited Renewal” would be substantiated by three empirical hypotheses about China’s elite recruitment in the reform era. First of all, the renewal phenomena in elite configuration, including the more diverse composition and more institutionalized turnover, have been reported by pervious studies. For the elite composition, the rise of technocrats has been noticed by studying the formation of specific elite groups, such as the Central Committee of the CCP (Li and White...
1988; 1990; 1998). It could be anticipated that the CCP would recruit more technocrats, even elites with specialists in other fields during the reform era than in the Cultural Revolution, due to the change of policy priority. However, compared to the explanation of Chinese technocracy, the renewal dimension emphasizes more specifically the CCP’s predominant power in personnel selection. Besides, in terms of elite turnover, after the 16th Party Congress of 2003, scholars paid much attention to the institutionalization of elite politics. Apart from the discussion of political succession from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao, they also examined the impacts of the institutional layering on elite recruitment since the early 1980s, such as age limits, term limits and term integrity (Lin 2004, 257-263; Wu 2004, 79-81). These new developments indeed project the renewal of the CCP in elite election during the reform era. The renewal dimension leads to the first hypothesis as below:

**Hypothesis 1:** The composition of Chinese political elites, which corresponds to the change of policy priority, would reveal much more diversity over time.

However, the renewal phenomenon was not without constraints. For example, in the guideline of elite selection—“Four-ization of cadre” (Ganbu sihua), the most important standard is to make the ranks of cadres more revolutionary, which governs the other three rules of selecting cadres younger in age, better educated and professionally more competent. Furthermore, even though the retirement norms have been increasingly institutionalized over the past two decades, they did not apply to the highest level of leadership until the late 1990s. Obviously, the renewal dimension can not present the complete picture of elite recruitment in China’s reform era.

The reason is that the rationale of political survival still dominates the CCP and has shaped the scope and depth of the elite renewal in China. For the limited dimension, we can firstly anticipate that the CCP has different criteria between party and government positions. Given the principle of “Party-led government” (Yidang lingzheng), elites appointed for party positions would be consistently under review for much more political loyalty than their peers on other positions, while the technocrats would be mainly recruited to technical departments of the government for special tasks like economic or engineering construction (Zang 2004). These reasons, from the viewpoint of party-state system or based on the analysis of organizational mission, would cause differences in turnover between party cadres and government bureaucrats.

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6 For more discussion about China’s efforts to establish cadre retirement through norm building, see Manion (1993). Besides, for more discussion about institutionalization of Chinese elite politics, such as the definition, the process of power transfer and its consequences for political development, see Fewsmith (2003); Nathan (2003); Bo (2005); Zheng (2005).

7 For more discussion about Qiao Shi’s retirement in 1997, see Fewsmith (2001, 69-80).
The elite arrangement on party positions demands more stability and continuity than that of the government, so this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** The turnover of party positions would be lower than that of government positions, due to the requirement for political loyalty and stability.

Apart from the feature of turnover on positions, another aspect of the limited dimension is about the development of individual elites’ political careers. For elite promotion, the limited dimension indicates the irreplaceable importance of political credentials which contribute to elites’ career advancement from the viewpoint of human capital. Generally, political credentials can not be easily measured, but can be accessed by two different approaches. The first approach adopts an ascriptive definition, which presumes that the degree of loyalty depends on individual’s class background and social status. Variables such as the status of party membership and the timing of joining the CCP have been widely applied in previous studies. The second method focuses on the behavioral definition of loyalty, which refers to the actual attitudes or behavior displayed by individuals working in the party organizations (Walder 1990). Specifically, having departed form the revolutionary road, the moderate Chinese communist regime tends to recruit obedient, competence conformists, rather than ideological zealots. Thus, elites’ loyalty would be politically examined based on a conformist standard, and the further promotion could be regarded as the approval or past of such test.

According to the behavioral approach, this paper argues that the timing of the appointment to party position is the crucial factor determining elite’s promotion by the CCP. In essence, elites’ political careers in the hierarchy can be conceived as a series of contests, or “tournaments” for promotions level by level (Rosenbaum 1979). When elites compete with peers at each level, their professional capability and political loyalty are reviewed, compared and screened by the CCP. Meanwhile, the recruitment for higher level positions in the communist regime demands much more political loyal than that for lower level. As a result, those who were appointed to a leading party position would be considered by the CCP as more loyal and competent than others of the previous level and more qualified for promotion to the next level. Hence, under the fixed age limit for retirement, the earlier the elite obtains such appointment in his political career, the more competitive he becomes comparing to the peers at the previous level. On the contrary, those elites who could not be arranged to party positions would be unlikely to be advanced to the next level. Additionally, to step outside of the party-state context, leaders would understandably elevate the people they trust as soon as possible for power consolidation and policy implementation. The
timing of appointment could thus demonstrate the personal relations or ties between leaders and cadres: the earlier the appointment, the closer and more trustworthy the relationship. So the following hypothesis is more speculative:

*Hypothesis 3: Under the constant process of political screening, elites who are appointed to party positions earlier at certain level would be promoted faster to the next level.*

**Research Design**

**Data Building and Variables**

In order to examine the hypotheses of Limited Renewal, this study collects a longitudinal database on the top Chinese officials, who ever held provincial/ministerial level (Shengbu ji) or higher positions in the Chinese political hierarchy from March 1978 to March 2008 (including incumbents). Those political elites are constituted of the apex (leaders of central government and the CCP central organizations) and the immediately adjacent echelons (provincial governors and secretaries) in the political system. They were appointed and arranged by the CCP to serve as the major force to make and implement decision in China. It is worth mentioning that members of the Nation People’s Congress (“NPC”) and the Political Consultative Conferences are excluded because of their advisory roles.

There are three stages in the procedure of data building. In order to confirm the scope and quantity of top leaders this paper defines, we firstly recorded name lists by positions from A Dictionary of Official Staff of the PRC (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhiguanzhi*) and ascertained a total of 739 persons constituting the *nomenklatura* in China’s reform era. Secondly, we established and coded the demographic information and working experiences of these elites, mainly based upon A Dictionary of Organization History of the CCP (*Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*), and A Dictionary of Members of the central Committees of the CCP, 1921-2003 (*Zhongguo gongchandang lijie zhongyang weiyuan dacidian, 1921-2003*). After building and checking the database, we finally used other data sources to cross-examine the information in our database, and found no significant defects. The data are last updated in late-March 2008.

The independent variables cover both the demographic background, such as

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8 The author compares the demographic information in our database with that of the Central Committee of the CCP, and there is no significant difference between the two datasets. For details of the Central Committee, see Li and White (1988; 1990; 1998; 2003), and Li (2001). Most personal credentials in our database could be found on the Chinese Political Elite Database, the website: http://ics.nccu.edu.tw/chinaleaders/index.htm (in Chinese).
gender, age and ethnicity, as well as the political and professional credentials (redness and expertise). Professional credentials are as intuitive as demographic variables because these variables, like educational level and specialized training, have been widely used in the comparative studies of elite formation. In terms of political credentials, we would follow the previous literature to employ the seniority of party membership. Beside, as mentioned above, the possession of and the timing of party-position appointment in elites’ career history would serve as an importantly behavioral measurement for political credentials.

**Methodology**

Elite status comes from the position one held. Thus I firstly base the analysis unit on the positions fall within the scope of this study—the provincial/ministerial level or higher. There are seven time points selected for observation: March 1978, July 1983, April 1988, March 1993, March 1998, March 2003, and March 2008. These are the times when the new ministries and commissions under the State Council were formed following each NPC in the reform era, from which the personnel arrangement for the administration can be obtained. Through the trend analyses across China’s reform era, I intend to present the continuity and change of elite composition over time as a test for Hypothesis 1.

Moreover, for the other research interest of this paper—elite turnover and promotion, I focus on individual career path to examine the determinants of elites’ political careers in China’s reform era. Methodologically speaking, cross-sectional data and conventional regression models will not be appropriate for our study because we need to make distinctions about certain career changes of elites, especially the time to be promoted to a higher post or depart from the provincial/ministerial level position. Accordingly, event-history analysis is applicable for this the purpose. Operationally speaking, event-history analysis defines “hazard rate” as an indicator for when the event occurs in the life history. Suppose $T$ as the time of event occurrence and a positive random variable, the hazard function is defined as the instantaneous event rate for an individual who has made it to time $t$ without experiencing the event. Mathematically, the hazard function is the conditional probability of an event occurring within a narrow window of time, between $t$ and $t + \Delta t$, given that there was no event occurred up to time $t$. The hazard function is

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9 As Zang (2006, 46) noted, such demographic and educational variables have been frequently used to identify leading figures in both capitalist and socialist countries.

10 Additionally, in the reform era each National Congress of the CCP was held half a year before the NPC. Hence, the time points we selected, based on the schedule of the NPC, should cover the personnel arrangement for both the party and the government positions during each administration.

11 Under event history analysis, the depend variable contains about: (1) the time a case entered a certain kind of state, for example holding a provincial-level post; (2) the time to later leave the state, if left; (3) the value of the next state entered (Petersen 1991, 271).
defined as:

$$h(t) = \lim_{\Delta t \to 0} \frac{\Pr(t < T \leq t + \Delta t | T > t)}{\Delta t}$$

In the functional specification, this paper applies the Cox proportional hazards model based on the semi-parametric feature of the hazard function. Before analyzing, we actually have no clue about the hazard function, so that parametric methods are usually arbitrary in specifying the shape of the probability distribution. Moreover, most researchers in social science focus less on the notion of time-dependency, but more on the relationship between the dependent variable and the covariates of theoretical interest (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004, 47). Therefore, the Cox model is the better choice. Simply stated, the Cox model estimates the variance of the hazard function in response to the change of covariates rather than the actual baseline hazard function. After positing the exponential link function, the hazard rate for the $i$th individual is:

$$h_i(t) = \exp(\beta' x_i) h_0(t), \quad \frac{h_i(t)}{h_0(t)} = \exp(\beta' x_i)$$

Where $h_0(t)$ is the baseline hazard function, $\beta' x_i$ are the covariates and regression coefficients. The biggest advantage of the Cox model is that we can compare different sets of covariates of theoretical interest given the same baseline hazard function. Accordingly, the hazard ratio of two hazards can be written as:

$$\frac{h_i(t)}{h_j(t)} = \exp[\beta(x_i - x_j)]$$

The research interest of this paper is to explore the timing and determinants of the promotion or departure events of China’s political elites in the reform era. Essentially, these are two competing events in an individual’s career life. In order to obtain more robust estimation, we set the hazard function for multiple events based on the cumulative incidence function as Gray (1988) advocated. The subhazard—the

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Here we define both the promotion and departure event of Chinese elites as “unrepeatable event” (Allison 1984, 14), because most elites who departed from leading positions actually “retired”, under the constraint of age limits. Besides, although time is always measured in discrete units, our database records the duration of working experiences as “continuous time.” For example, Xi Jinping worked as the Governor of Zhejiang Province from October 2002 to January 2003, and as the Secretary of Zhejiang Provincial Committee from November 2002 to March 2007. So the durations for these two working experiences are 0.25 and 3.33 years, respectively.

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timing of the event occurrence (promotion/departure), can be interpreted based on the joint probability of non-occurrence of event k up to time t and occurrence of other events (Pintilie 2006, 39-52):  

$$h_k(t) = \lim_{\Delta t \to 0} \frac{\Pr[t < T \leq t + \Delta t, C = k | T > t \text{ or } (T \leq t, C \neq k)]}{\Delta t} = \frac{f_k(t)}{1 - F_k(t)}$$  

Results

Patterns of Elite Composition in the Reform Era

To begin with, patterns of elite composition in China from 1978 to 2008 are presented in Table 1. As it shows, there are several noticeable trends in elite formation over time. In regard to demographic composition, the proportions of female and non-Han Chinese increased rather slowly over time, and the average age of the whole elite group rose during the period from 1978 to 1983 but declined after 1983. These patterns demonstrated that, despite the reform on cadre selection after the enactment of the 1982 CCP Constitution, the result are limited on the front of increasing female and ethnic representation. But on the other front, the policy for cadre rejuvenation has received significant results.

[Table 1 is about here]

As for individuals’ political credentials, the average age of party entry gradually rose from 20.3 in 1978 to 24.7 in 2008, displaying the lower degree of redness over time. Nevertheless, the CCP still recruits cadres who obtained the Party membership in early adulthood. Furthermore, the working experience in the Party, one ruling variable of this study, is counted here from the first party position at the vice-ministerial level (Fu Shengbu ji), after being promoted from a position at the provincial/ministerial level. For those veteran cadres who were purged during the Culture Revolution but were invited back to work in the government or party, their pre-reform party-position experience would be reset to zero in our measurement. Since 1978, the proportion of elites’ with working experience in the Party increased from 14.3 to 50.3 percent—a very impressive change. Even though the reset treatment of veteran cadres’ pre-reform experience probably pushed down such proportion at

13 The statistical software applied by this paper is R. More details about the cmprsk package could be accessed from the website: http://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/cmprsk/index.html.

14 The party positions at the vice-ministerial-level can be classified into four categories: Deputy Heads of Departments, Deputy Heads of Institutions under Central Committee, Deputy Secretary and Standing Member of Provincial/Municipal/Regional Committee, Standing Member of Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.
the onset of our observation, but when all the invited-back veteran cadres departed or retired from their positions after the mid 1990s, the proportion of elites with party-position experiences still continued to increase. It means that the importance of party experience strengthened over time for elites appointed to the provincial/ministerial positions. In sum, these descriptive trends of political credentials haven’t shown any sign of decline or treat, as the CCP has institutionalized a series of political criteria for cadre assessment and advancement in rank.

Speaking of professional credentials, the results in Table 1 also demonstrate various enhancement of educational background for political elites in the reform era. Over a half of them assumed provincial/ministerial positions after the mid 1980s hold at least undergraduate level degrees. Besides, after the mid 1980s, the distribution of academic majors was increasingly biased towards natural sciences and technical engineering, which provide the specialties applicable to the economic modernization and construction. Then, the proportions of other majors such as social sciences and law, humanities, were constantly low during this period, but started to pick up after the late 1990s. These trends in professional credentials do not perfectly match with the description of China’s technocracy by previous literature.\(^{15}\) Based on the distribution of elites’ academic majors, the percentage of technocrats didn’t sustain a continual increase, and began to decrease after the late 1990s thus gave room for elites with background in social sciences. In fact, this changing pattern of educational credential reflects how the CCP leaders carried out the party line by improving governance so as to make the authoritarian system more efficient. Therefore, the rise of technocrats was not necessarily a naturally occurring phenomenon, but based on the needs of the CCP, which is the essential motivation behind the renewal of political elites in China. As the policy priority shifted to Hu Jintao’s “Harmonious Society”, which emphasizes the balance of regional development and the narrowing of poverty gap, the demands for experts in social sciences overtook that for technocrats in 2003. According to the concept of limit renewal, these changing trends in elite recruitment all demonstrated the principle of “elite renewal”, albeit the substance changes with different policy targets in different period. Indeed, the CCP leaders assigned different kinds of experts to carry out different policies; hence over time, the composition of political elites would reveal increasing diversities apart from political credentials, as specified in Hypothesis 1.

**Political Careers of China’s Elites: Promotion and Departure**

Despite the open-minded elite renewal in China’s reform era, certain degrees

\(^{15}\) Technocrats are those in power who have college degrees in engineering and other applied sciences and have working experiences in factories, industrial bureaus and economic planning agencies (Li and While 2000, 37).
of limitation have been reserved for elite advancement so as to guarantee the stability of one-party dictatorship by the CCP. The examination of loyalty in political credentials still dominates elites’ further career development after they have been appointed for specific functions based on their expertise. To analyze the influence of political credentials on elites’ political career, this paper applies the competing risk approach of event-history analysis. We can expect two different career paths for elites in my observations—either rise to power on the top-leadership level, or depart and retire from the provincial/ministerial level. The focus here is that the career layering of Chinese elites in the reform era, so that those elites who had been advanced to the top-leadership level before 1978 were excluded from our examination (39 persons).

Before clarifying the determinants, I firstly provide the descriptive information for elites’ political career in China’s reform era. The cumulative incidence function (“CIF”) represents the cumulative probability of the occurrence of one event, which would increase over time as the probability for individuals who have experienced this event accumulates. As Figure 1 shows, about one half of elites in the promotion event are appointed to the top-leadership level within 5 years after they assumed a leading position at the provincial/ministerial level (the cumulative probability of promotion event is 0.079, while the median of the probability of is 0.08). Besides, over a half of elites in the departure event left their positions within 7.5 years (the cumulative probability of departure event is 0.566, while the median of the probability of is 0.42). These findings show that the career development of most Chinese elites in the reform era could be determined and arranged within a range about 5 or 7.5 years, and the CIFs of both events rarely increase after 10 years. Therefore, given the 5-year term of leading positions plus the age limitation for retirement, which is 60 at the provincial/ministerial level, elites’ performance on their first provincial/ministerial positions is crucial for their further career advancement.

Which credentials determine the promotion of Chinese elites in the reform era? What the model in event-history analysis estimates is the hazard rate of event. To put it further, during the career life of elites at the provincial/ministerial level, positive coefficients in the promotion event indicate the increase of advancement opportunity,

16 The positions on the top-leadership level are listed below: Member of the Political Bureau of the CCP, Member of the Secretariat of the CCP, Secretary of the Standing Member of Central Commission for Discipline Inspection the CCP, President/Vice-President of the People’s Republic of China, Premier/Vice-Premier of State Council, and State Councilor.

17 Those elites lack the working experience at the provincial level during the reform era, but assumed top-leadership level positions in the party or the government.

18 In other words, all CIFs equal to 0 if the time for observation does not start, and CIFs can be finally calculated as the sum of the probabilities over all events if time of observation ended.
while negative coefficients in the departure event represent the decrease of opportunity in retaining leading positions. Two competing risks regressions are conducted to examine the influence of different variables in elites’ credential. With results listed in Table 2, I firstly set up Model 1 based upon only the professional credentials to illustrate the explanation of Chinese technocracy, and then I add in the political credentials and demographic background in Model 2 to completely the test for career determinants across all the variables.

As the results from Model 1 shows the professional credentials, including educational level and academic major would significantly decrease the hazard rate of the departure event. Besides, the negative coefficients in the promotion event seem to indicate that, as the literature on technocracy advocated, the professional credentials raise elites’ opportunity to be appointed to the top-leadership level positions. However, after we controlled other variables, only the postgraduate, a dummy variable of educational level, could significantly decrease the hazard rate of the departure event. The contribution of professional credentials to elites’ career advancement would be mostly replaced by their demographic background and political credentials. For example, age has a significant and consistent effect in the career development of Chinese elites: younger officials would be advanced faster in the promotion event, or would hold leading positions longer than the elders. It means that the seniority is not concerned by the CCP on elite appointment because of the age limits for retirement at various levels in the reform era. In regard to political credentials, age of party entry does not significantly impact on the political career of Chinese elites. As Table 1 shows above, the variance of party standing is rare over time, which means that the seniority of party membership is not the main credential or criterion in the elite selection and assessment for further advancement, but something analogous to membership or admission in political hierarchy for those provincial/ministerial cadres and bureaucrats.

[Table 2 is about here]

This study argues that the timing of holding party position is an observable indicator for differentiating the political career of Chinese elites. As mentioned, elite who gains the party-position appointment earlier should be more competitive than others, because the earlier obtainment of party-experience implies the quicker pass of political screening and assessment. Accordingly, considering a 5 year term for leading positions, I employ four dummy variables to capture the timing of party experience, including holding party positions as the first post on the provincial/ministerial level, holding party positions for 0-2.5 years, 2.5-5 years, as well as 5 years and above, and
then set the elites without working experience on party positions as the reference group.\textsuperscript{19} The result shows that, elites who could hold party positions within 2.5 years would be promoted onto the top-leadership level significantly faster, as Hypothesis 3 suggested. The hazard rates of the promotion event for these two groups are 3 and 5.37 times higher than those for cadres lacking party-position experiences ($\exp(1.10) = 3.00$, $\exp(1.68) = 5.37$). Besides, in the departure event, the hazard rates for elites whose timing of holding party position are 0, 0-2.5 years, 2.5-5 years, 5 years and above would be respectively 0.512 ($\exp(-0.67)$), 0.289 ($\exp(-1.24)$), 0.427 ($\exp(-0.85)$) and 0.391 ($\exp(-0.94)$) times higher than those who are without experiences on party positions. These patterns in the departure event exhibit a meaningful outcome, which is that elites assumed party positions would be less likely to depart from leading posts than those appointed to government positions no matter when they obtained the approval. In other words, the results from the departure event advocate that the turnover of party positions would be lower than that of government positions, as Hypothesis 2 proposed.

\textbf{Another Aspect of Limit Renewal: Tests for Factionalism}

The findings above exhibit the characteristics of elite recruitment in China’s reform era, during which the CCP absorbed members with diverse expertise, such as technocrats, for the change of policy priority to economic development, yet at the same time controlled the promotion through the examination of political loyalty to ensure the maintenance of one-party dictatorship. Besides, this pattern of elite recruitment and promotion remained consistent under the logic of political survival during the reform era, because the successors lack the personal authority to make any fundamental change of the party doctrine.\textsuperscript{20}

In addition to the interpretation via the perspectives of regime nature and survival logic, the political dimension of limited renewal, if observed for certain time period, would also reflect a political network between the top leader and his followers. This network has been addressed by the previous literature as factionalism in China’s elite politics. Scholars usually focus on certain elite groups and find out any connections among them through the comparison and categorization of elites’ background, such as school ties, blood ties, peer ties and so on.\textsuperscript{21} However, while

\textsuperscript{19} The leading party positions at the provincial/ministerial level include three categories: Heads of Departments and Institutions under Central Committee, Secretary of Provincial/Municipal/Regional Committee and Deputy Secretary of Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.

\textsuperscript{20} It is worth mentioning that I examined the periodic patterns of elite advancement, by way of specifying the promotion/departure within the separate Deng, Jiang and Hu’s periods. The result shows that the determinants did not change significantly and all of them displayed the same degree and direction of effects during the each period. In other word, China’s elite recruitment during the reform era is consistent based on individual credentials.

\textsuperscript{21} For more discussion on various ties in Chinese politics, see Li (2002) for “Shanghai gang”; Li and
these studies revealed certain trends under specific leadership, they remain at subjective speculation with arbitrary selection of elite credentials in identifying personal relationship.

This paper would identify two objective factors to observe political networks in China. Firstly, given the retirement age limit, a top leader would appoint and promote his close followers as soon as possible, so as to consolidate his own power. By doing so, the promoted followers could hold leading positions longer than their peers at the same level who are older in age due to the slower promotion, thus better and longer support their political patron. Therefore, within the same level of political hierarchy, the younger age of elites may be regarded as an indicator of their close relationship with leaders to some extent. Besides, another meaningful indicator is the timing to hold party positions. As mentioned above, the consideration of keeping one-party dictatorship demands the political screening in elite promotion. Accordingly, the approval of political loyalty is conducted through the promotion to a leading party position. Since the top leader works as the core decision-maker, the appointment and promotion of cadres in the system, especially for crucial positions, would overlap with his personal preferences and networks. The resulted personnel arrangement is usually a mixture of political screening and factions. It could be expected that, the top leader would appoint those cadres he trusts on party positions, not only as his deputies to control the party machine, but also to prepare them for further advancement through the acquirement of party-position experience. Therefore, the timing of holding party position may be another meaningful factor to explain the elite advancement in China via the approach of factionalism.

Before the empirical analysis, I firstly identify the Shanghai gang during Jiang’s period and Tuanpai during Hu’s period as the major political factions in China. In term of coding, I follow the definition by Ding to identify members of Shanghai gang as those who had Shanghai experiences for at least five years, from either living or schooling, and were promoted by Jiang Zemin (Ding 2002, 167). These Shanghai gang’s elites totaled 17 persons. Tuanpai cadres are those elites who had assumed leading positions of the Communist Youth League (“CYL”) at the deputy director level (Fuji ji) or above, after the CYL was reconstructed in 1973 (Kou 2007, 60-61). It should be noted that the political network should be regarded as a mixture of personal secretaries, school ties, and blood ties. 

22 By definition, Shanghai gang includes Zhu Rongji, Wu Bangguo, Huang Ju, Chen Liangyu, Xu Kuangdi, Han Zheng, Han Zhubin, Ceng Qinghong, Zhang Wenkang, Hua Jianmin, Zhao Qizheng, Chen Zhili, Xu Guangchun, Zhang Huixin, Dai Xianglong, Meng Jianzhu and Wang Huning.

23 By definition, they are Wang Sanyun, Wang Lequan, Ling Jihua, Wu Aiying, Song Xiuyan, Li Chengyu, Li Zhilun, Li Keqiang, Li Zhangjiang, Li Haifeng, Li Yuanchao, Li Dezhu, Li Xueju, Du Qinglin, Wang Yang, Zhou Qiang, Meng Xuenong, Ji Yunshi, Jiang Daming, Liu Binjie, Sun Ying, Sun Jiazheng, Li Zhanshu, Qin Guanrong, Yuan Chunqing, Ma Qizhi, Zhang Fusen, Zhang Weiqing,
continuous variable not a dummy variable. However, the purpose of analysis here is not to systematically explore the consequences of faction, but to examine whether it overlaps with individual credentials in influencing the career development of elites. Furthermore, the factions during Deng’s period were not studied, because back then, due to the disputes between Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun, the personnel arrangement did not reflect a single leader’s will and network, but was a compromise of the two. Accordingly, Table 3 demonstrates the positive effects of factionalism on political career of Chinese elites. It has been proved that elites who belong to Shanghai gang or Tuanpai would be promoted faster to the top-leadership level and stay longer on leading positions, in comparison with elites without these two ties. The results correspond with the common assumption of factionalism in China.

[Table 3 is about here]

Could these influences of political networks be substituted by individual credentials? Table 4 provides parts of supporting evidence after adding a series of variables. After other variables are controlled, the result shows that the dummy variable of Tuanpai no long exert a significant influence for both the promotion and departure events. Compared to Table 3, this result reveals that the influence of Tuanpai factor on the career development could be replaced by individual credentials. However, the tie of Shanghai gang still positively and significantly contributes to the promotion of Chinese elites after other individual credentials have been considered. Even so, the influences of Shanghai gang on the promotion and departure events still decrease, from 1.77 and -1.81 to 1.62 and -1.52 respectively. Totally speaking, these results exhibit individual credentials, such as age and the timing of holding party position, could explain the career advancement of Tuanpai elites during Hu’s period, but not so much for elites in the Shanghai gang during Jiang’s period.

[Table 4 is about here]

Why could not the model specified based on individual credentials cover the factional influence of Shanghai gang? Two possible reasons are proposed. The first is the institutional bias within the CYL. Even though many Tuanpai elites were appointed during Hu’s period, the CYL, essentially speaking, was constructed as a school for cadre training and cultivation. In comparison, the promotion of elites with Shanghai experiences is much more unique and personalized under Jiang’s leadership.

Especially, the institutional set up of the CYL resembles that of the government and the CCP in terms of cadre selection and promotion. The cadres at different level of the CYL are subject to certain selection standards, such as the age and term limits, full-time training requirement and so on. Therefore, Tuanpai elites, who went through and survived similar promotion criteria, would become more competitive than others at the same level of government and party positions. Besides, the second reason differentiates Tuanpai from Shanghai fraction relates to the stage of institutionalization in China’s elite recruitment. Although the norms of elite turnover and assessment began to institutionalize since the amendment to the CCP Constitution in 1982, the age limit to positions at the top–leadership level was not implemented until Qiao Shi’s quit in 1997. In other words, Jiang Zemin was not forced to promote younger elites during his term given the immature norms of retirement. By contrast, Hu Jintao was under much bigger pressure to replenish young blood so as to comply with the full-fledged rule of mandatory retirement for top elites reached 70. In sum, individual credentials, particularly the age and the timing of party–position appointment, should be the observable determinants to predict the career development of incumbents at the provincial/ ministerial level.

**Conclusion and Discussion**

Patterns of elite recruitment provide information about the political process and institution in communist countries. In this study, we provide a concept of limited renewal, constructed based on the perspective of regime revolution, to describe the characteristics of elite recruitment in China’s reform era. Specifically, the CCP did not fundamentally abandon its communist feature of one party dictatorship, but only modified the party line by redefining its policy priority from class struggle to economic construction. This logic of political survival constrains any adjustment of elite recruitment and promotion corresponding to reform policies, so as not to endanger the ruling of the CCP.

Through a longitudinal dataset on the top Chinese leaders, this paper has conducted a systematic examination on the elite composition over time and the determinants of elites’ career advancement, to illustrate the characteristics of limited renewal in China’s elite recruitment and promotion during the reform era. Substantially, the empirical results demonstrate that the composition of Chinese political elites has renewed over time with younger average age, higher educational level and more diverse academic background. However, behind the more open and diverse criteria of elite recruitment, the screening of political loyalty—institutionalized as the appointment of party-position, still functions as the
critical determinant for elites’ career advancement. Elites who obtained party-position experience would be more likely to be promoted, and those who assumed a leading party-position earlier would be promoted faster. In the meanwhile, the speed of turnover on party positions is lower than that for government positions given the request for political stability. These features of the limited dimension represent how the logic of political survival drives the CCP’s elite recruitment during the reform era, even up to the present.

This paper specifically focuses on the limited aspect of elite promotion, because this issue has not been systematically addressed in the empirical elite studies. These empirical findings built upon the perspective of regime evolution have important implications for understanding the process of China’s political development. Firstly, although the limited renewal is only applied to describe the elite recruitment in this paper, the controlling influence of the survival logic could be identified in some other policy areas for political experiment (Shidian), such as the permanent tenure in office and the direct election for party representatives of the CCP. These experiments of inner-party democracy mark the CCP’s dual purposes in political reform: avoiding the development of a competitive multi-party system on the one hand, yet claiming the legitimacy of gradualism from the economic success on the other hand. Consistent with the logic of political survival, a substantial reform in China’s political regime remains untouched so far.

Second, the circulation of political elites, including their interaction, conflicts and settlement, is one critical dimension to evaluate the likelihood of democratization for communist countries. For previous empirical elite studies, the key feature in the democratic transition has been that the technocrats on important positions prevailed in both capitalist and socialist countries, due to the convertibility of their professional credentials (I. Szelényi and S. Szelényi 1995). However, this paper provides the evidence that the CCP has generalized and institutionalized the party-position experience as the channel for political screening and the prerequisite for elite promotion. As a result, a certain level of political loyalty has been preserved for cadres, including technocrats, who excelled in peer competition at different levels of their political career. In the meanwhile, a certain degree of elite cohesion among incumbents seems to be maintained based upon their acknowledgement of the current game rules and their similar interests in power. Of course, the limitations of this paper, such as the boundary of limited renewal as well as the empirical study of elite subgroups and elites at other levels, remain to be further explored.
References


that Didn’t Happen.” *China Quarterly* 173: 1-16.


Table 1

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<td>5.1</td>
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<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.6</td>
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<td>132</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>151</td>
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</table>

Note: Age of party entry = year joined party – birth year. For those who are not the CCP member, the timing is set to the year when they were appointed to a leading position at the ministerial level. Actually, only two persons who are not the CCP members could assume the leading position at the ministerial level since the late 1970s: Chen Zhu (Minister of Health, since 2007) and Wan Gang (Minister of Science and Technology, since 2007).
Figure 1
Cumulative Incidence Function of Promotion and Departure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (Year)</th>
<th>2.5</th>
<th>5.0</th>
<th>7.5</th>
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<th>12.5</th>
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<th>Total(%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>0.141</td>
<td>0.151</td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>93(16.0%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Departure</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>0.373</td>
<td>0.566</td>
<td>0.705</td>
<td>0.784</td>
<td>0.821</td>
<td>489(84.0%)</td>
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### Table 2

Competing risks regression for the career developments of Chinese elites

<table>
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<td></td>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Departure</td>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Departure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.70</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.43</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>0.02***</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.01***</td>
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</table>

**Political credentials**

- Age of party entry: -0.02, 0.02
- First position: 1.10, 0.27***, -0.67, 0.12***
- 0-2.5 years: 1.68, 0.36***, -1.24, 0.27***
- 2.5-5 years: 0.68, 0.40, -0.85, 0.17***
- 5 years and above: 0.80, 0.44, -0.94, 0.22***

**Professional credentials**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Major in S.S./L./H.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>0.10***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
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</table>

Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$ (Two-tailed Test).
### Table 3
Competing risks regressions: Associations between career developments and factions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factions</th>
<th>Promotion</th>
<th>Departure</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>s.e.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai gang</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuanpai</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.35*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (persons)</td>
<td>700</td>
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</table>

Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$ (Two-tailed Test).

### Table 4
Competing risks regression: explanation of factionalism

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<th></th>
<th>Promotion</th>
<th>Departure</th>
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<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
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<td>0.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age of party entry</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First position</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-2.5 years</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>0.35***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5-5 years</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years and above</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional credentials</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major in N.S./T.E./E.F.M.</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major in S.S./L./H.</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai gang</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuanpai</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (persons)</td>
<td>695</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$ (Two-tailed Test).