



Changes in the Social Origins of China's Educated Elite, 1865-2014

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Who are the Chinese Educated Elite

- In China, they are students selected through objective exams
- In Late Imperial China (1368-1905): Civil Service Degree Holders
- Republican China (1911-1949): All University Graduates
- PRC China (1952-): Ministry of Education Elite (211) University Graduates
- We are in the process of building an individual-level data set that includes all imperial upper degree holders (*juren* and above), half of all Republican university graduates, all the undergraduate students from a number of PRC elite universities 1952-2000, and all 2007-2008 Independent Freshman Admission Applicants to PKU. This talk summarizes some of our initial findings from this preliminary 'big' data.

Republican University Student Records

- 184,000 surviving student records from 50 universities
- Of these 108,000 from 25 universities are accessible
- We have already entered 69,000 student records, including 13 universities in their entirety.

Most of these universities are in **Beijing**, Changsha, Fuzhou, **Guangzhou**, Hangzhou, Nanjing, and **Shanghai**, including: Chaoyang University, Tsinghua University, Beijing Medical University; National Hunan University, Hsiang-Ya Medical College; Fukien Christian University; National Sun Yat-sen University; National Chekiang University, Hangchow Christian College; Ginling College, Chiang-su College of Education, Soochow University; Utopia University, Shanghai University, Saint John's University, Aurora University, Chi Nan University, Soochow University Law School, Shanghai Law School, National Shanghai Institute of Business.

PRC University Student Records

Entered:

- Peking University 1952-55, 1972-87, 1989-99: 64,500 Undergraduates
- Suzhou University 1933-2003: 86,393 Undergraduates

In Progress:

- Central China Normal University 1949-2010
- Shanghai Jiaotong University
- Shanxi University 1949-2010

Four Periods and Four Different Elites

- Preliminary results already allow us to identify four distinct periods during the last 150 years of Chinese history, each with its own dominant social group in terms of family background
- 1865-1905: Public Official Families
- 1906-1952: Business Families
- 1953-1993: Farm and Factory Worker Families
- 1994-2014: Middle Class Families

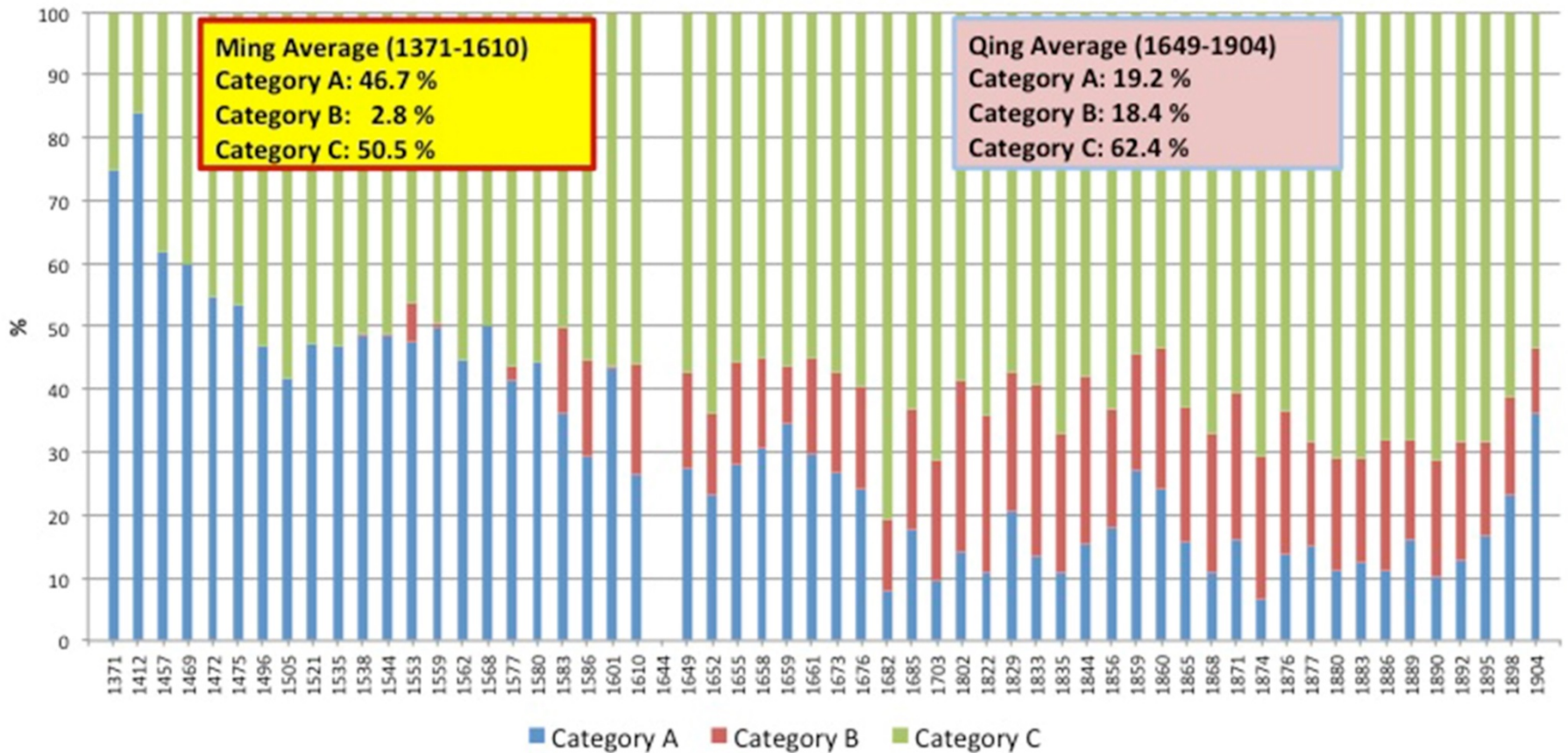
1865-1905: Children of Public Officials

官员子弟

- Ping-ti Ho. 1962. *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911*. New York: Basic Books, 107-108; 112-113
- From 1371 to 1904, 31 percent of degree holders came from families which for three preceding generations had failed to produce a single holder of even an elementary degree let alone any office or official title.
- 11.7 percent came from families that had produced one or more entry (shengyuan) degree but no holder of a higher degree or office.
- 57.3 percent came from families that during the three preceding generations had produced one or more holders of higher degrees (> shengyuan) or offices. More importantly for the purposes of this narrative, by the late nineteenth century these proportions of children of officials had increased to almost 70 percent.

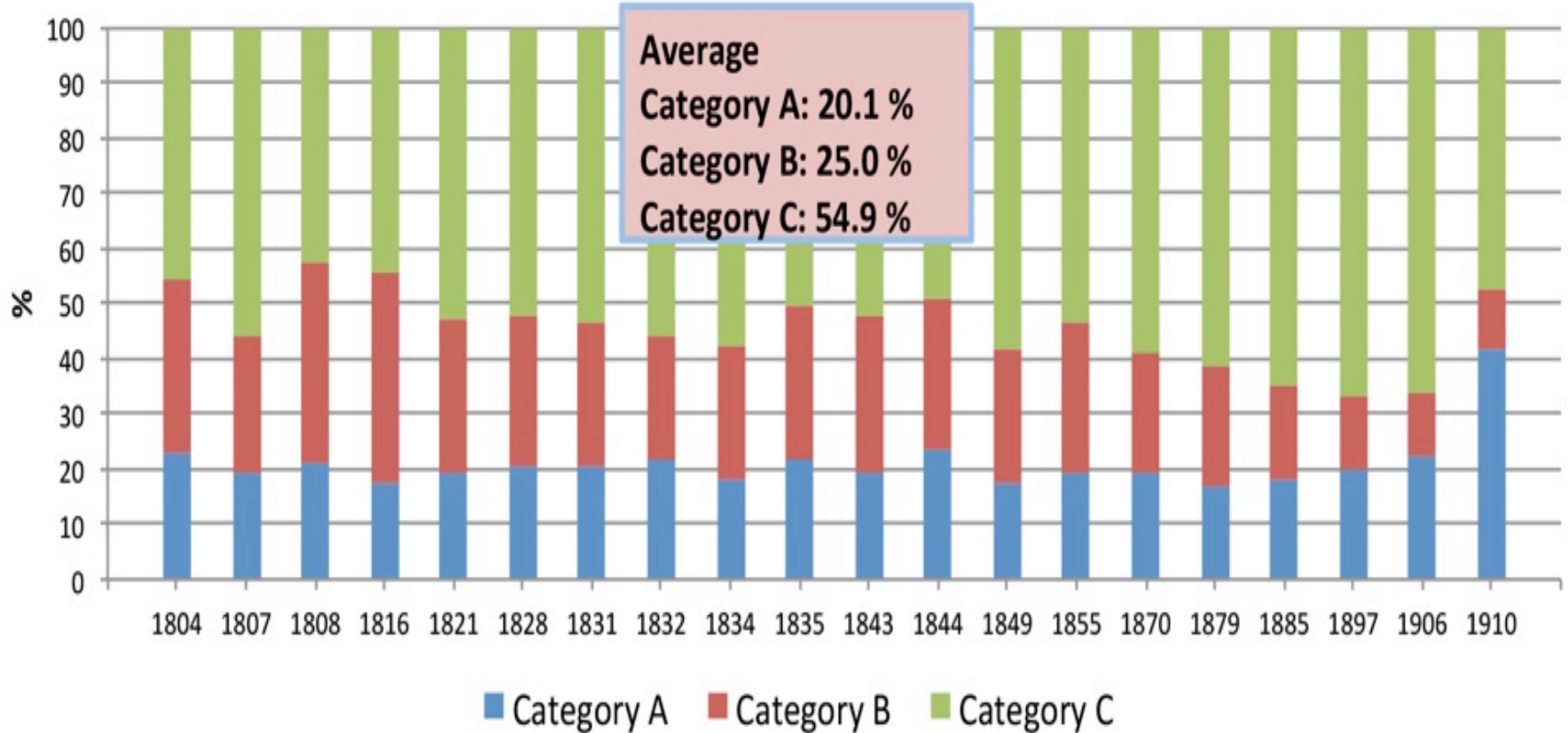
Jinshi Social Origins in Late Imperial China

Social Composition of *Jinshi*, 1371-1904



Juren and Gongsheng Social Origins in the Late Qing Period

Social Composition of *Juren and Gongsheng*, 1804-1910



1906-1952: Children of Businessmen

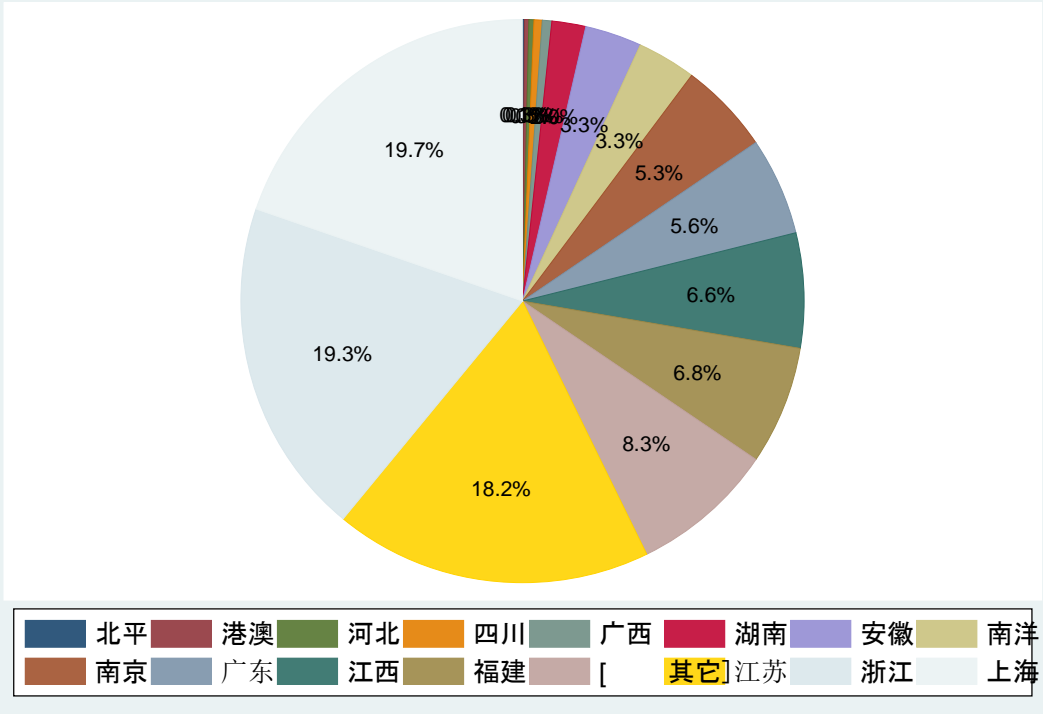
商人子弟

Parental Occupation	University type							
	Public		Private		Missionary		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Army	754	3.0	61	1.0	57	0.8	872	2.3
Civil Servant	2,956	11.7	930	14.9	440	6.3	4,326	11.3
Farmer	5,074	20.1	402	6.4	165	2.4	5,641	14.7
Merchant	9,516	37.7	3,380	54.2	4,720	68.1	17,616	45.9
Office	21	0.1	93	1.5	25	0.4	139	0.4
Professional	6,201	24.6	1,292	20.7	1,463	21.1	8,956	23.3
Manual Worker	731	2.9	78	1.3	61	0.9	870	2.3
Total	25,253	100	6,236	100	6,931	100	38,420	100

Note: Included are Utopia University (大同大学), Shanghai University (沪江大学), Saint John's University (圣约翰大学), Chi Nan University (暨南大学), Law School of Soochow University (东吴大学法学院), Municipal Shanghai Institute of Industry (市立上海工业专科学校), National Sun Yat-sen University (国立中山大学), National Chekiang University (国立浙江大学), Hangchow Christian College (之江大学), Private Chaoyang University (私立朝阳大学), National Tsinghua University (国立清华大学), Fukien Christian University (协和学院), National Hunan University (国立湖南大学) and Shanghai Institute of Business (上海商学院). We excluded 27252 individuals who are missing parental occupation.

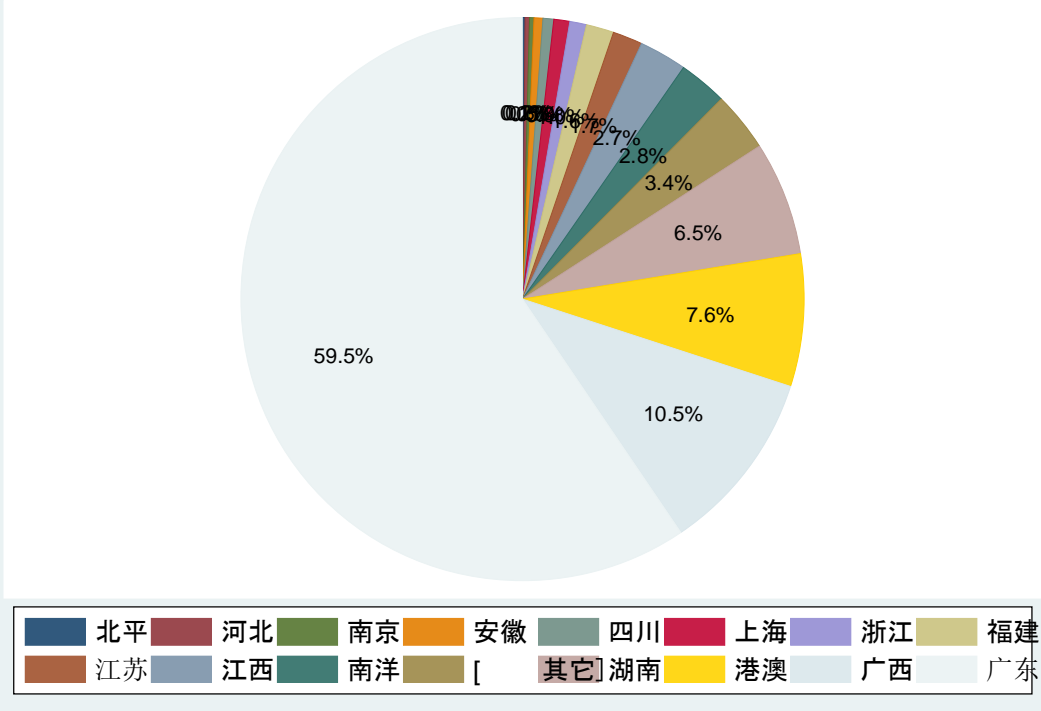
Source of National University Students:

暨南大学



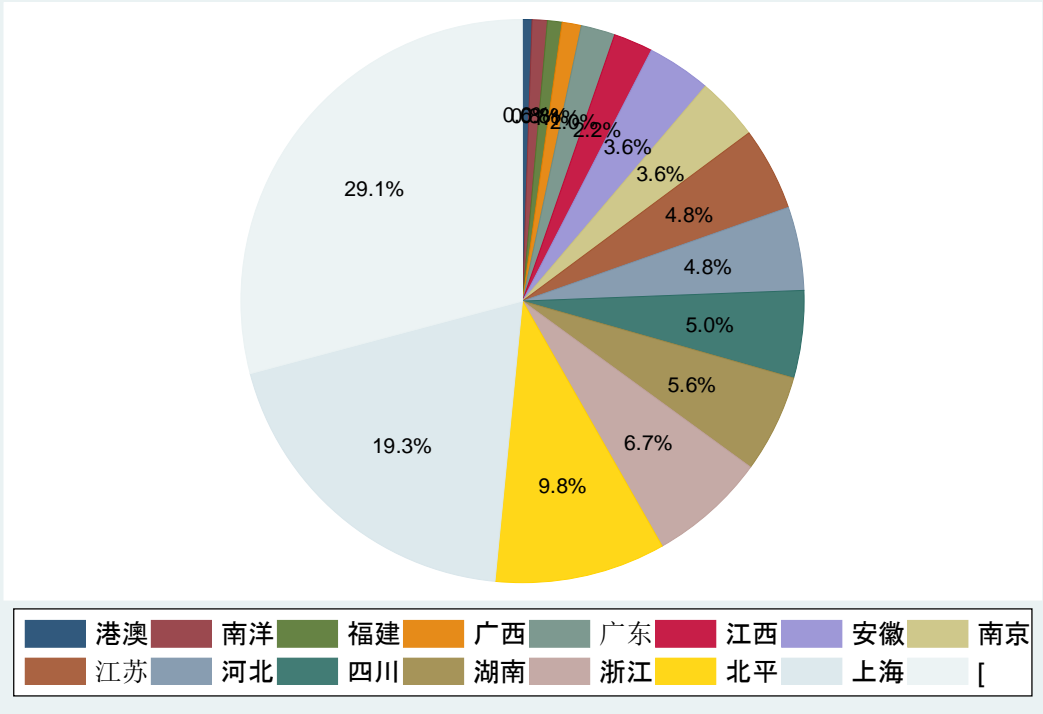
Source of National University Students:

中山大学



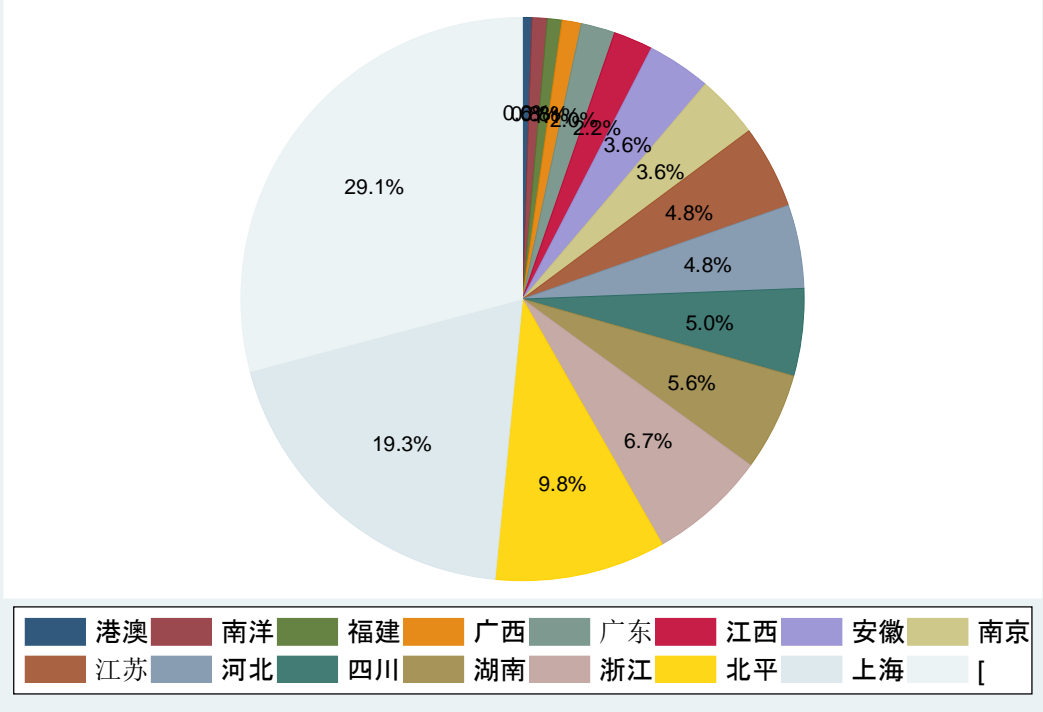
Source of National University Students:

清华大学



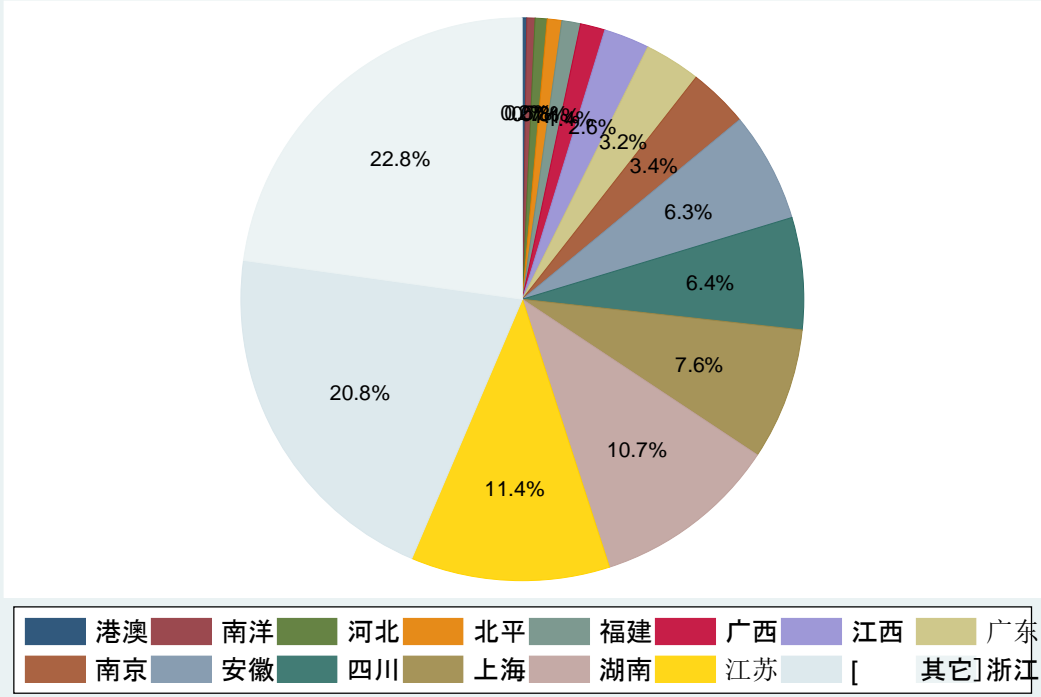
Source of National University Students:

清华大学



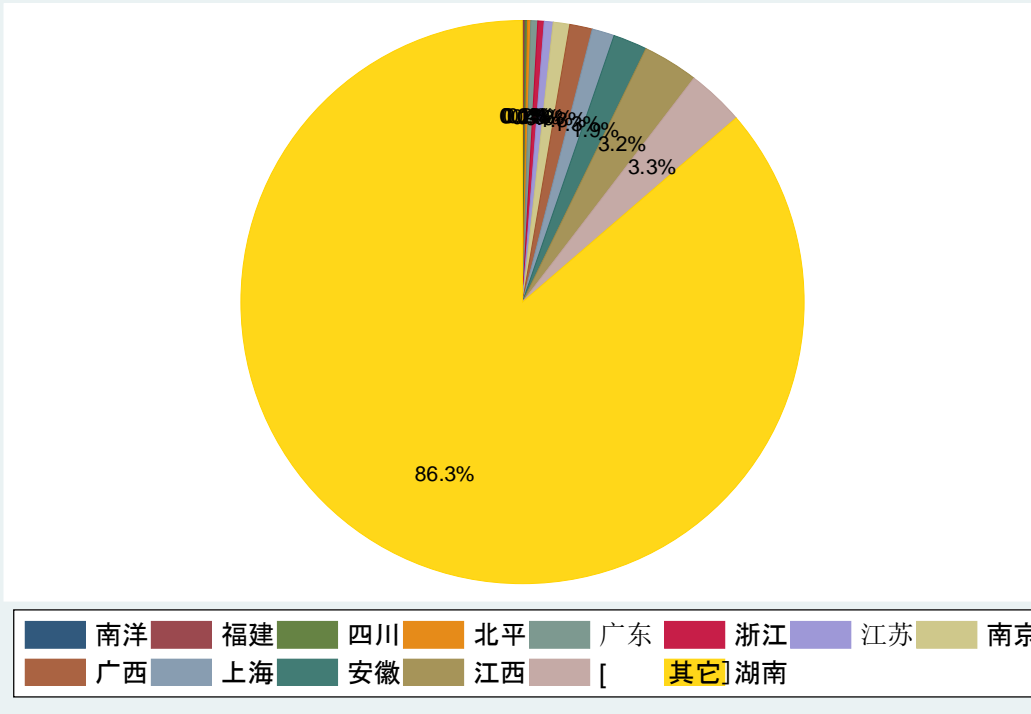
Source of National University Students:

浙江大学

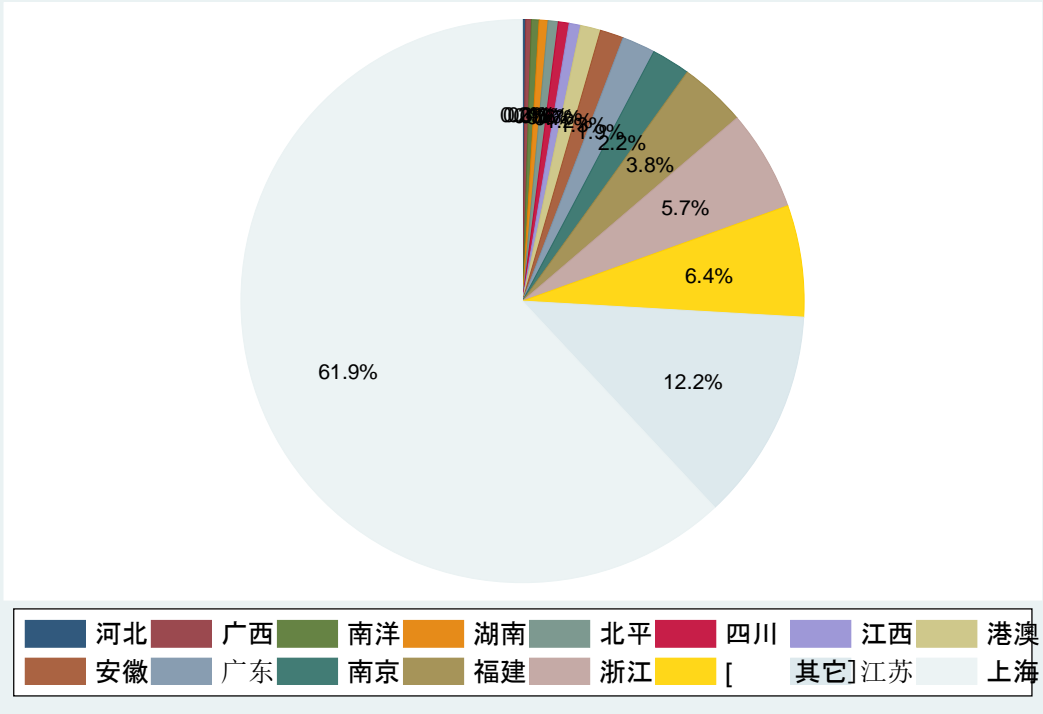


Source of National University Students:

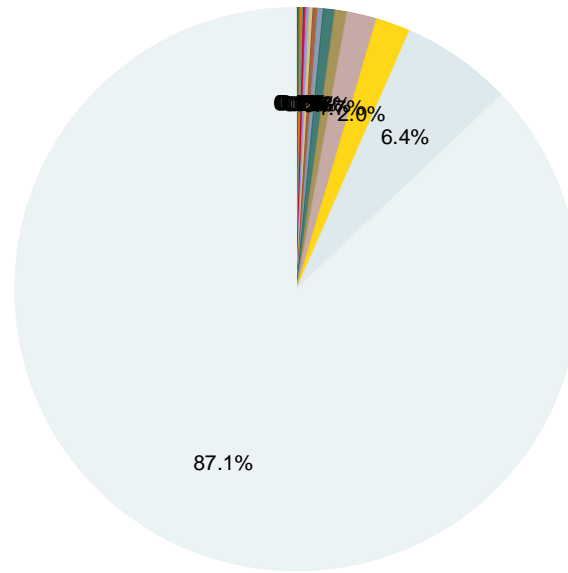
湖南大学



Source of University Students in Shanghai: Missionary



Source of University Students in Shanghai: Private



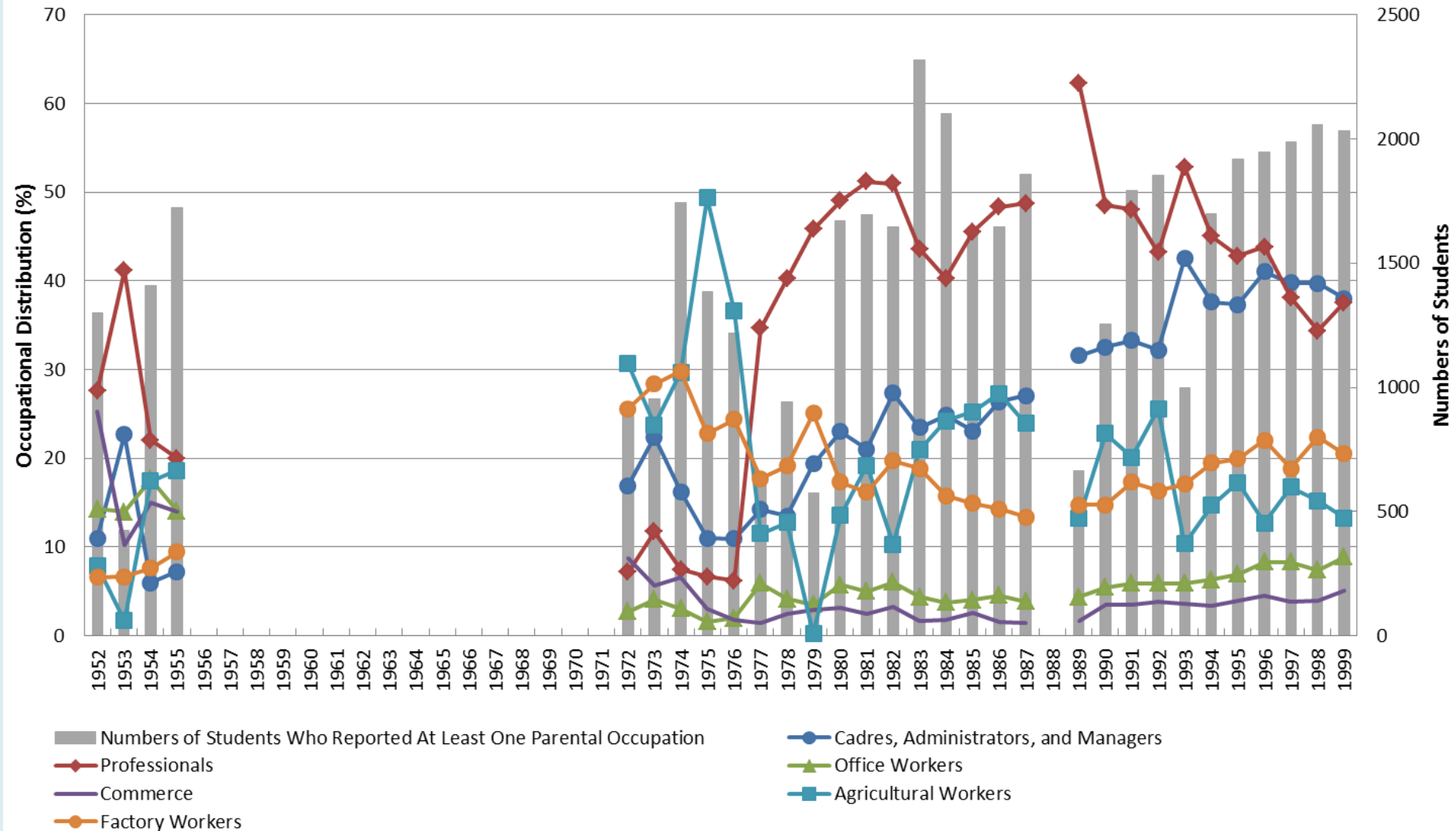
- 河北
- 广东
- 四川
- 广西
- 南洋
- 湖南
- 北平
- 福建
- 江西
- 安徽
- 港澳
- 南京
- 浙江
- [
- 其它
- 江苏
- 上海

1953-1993: Proletariat Children

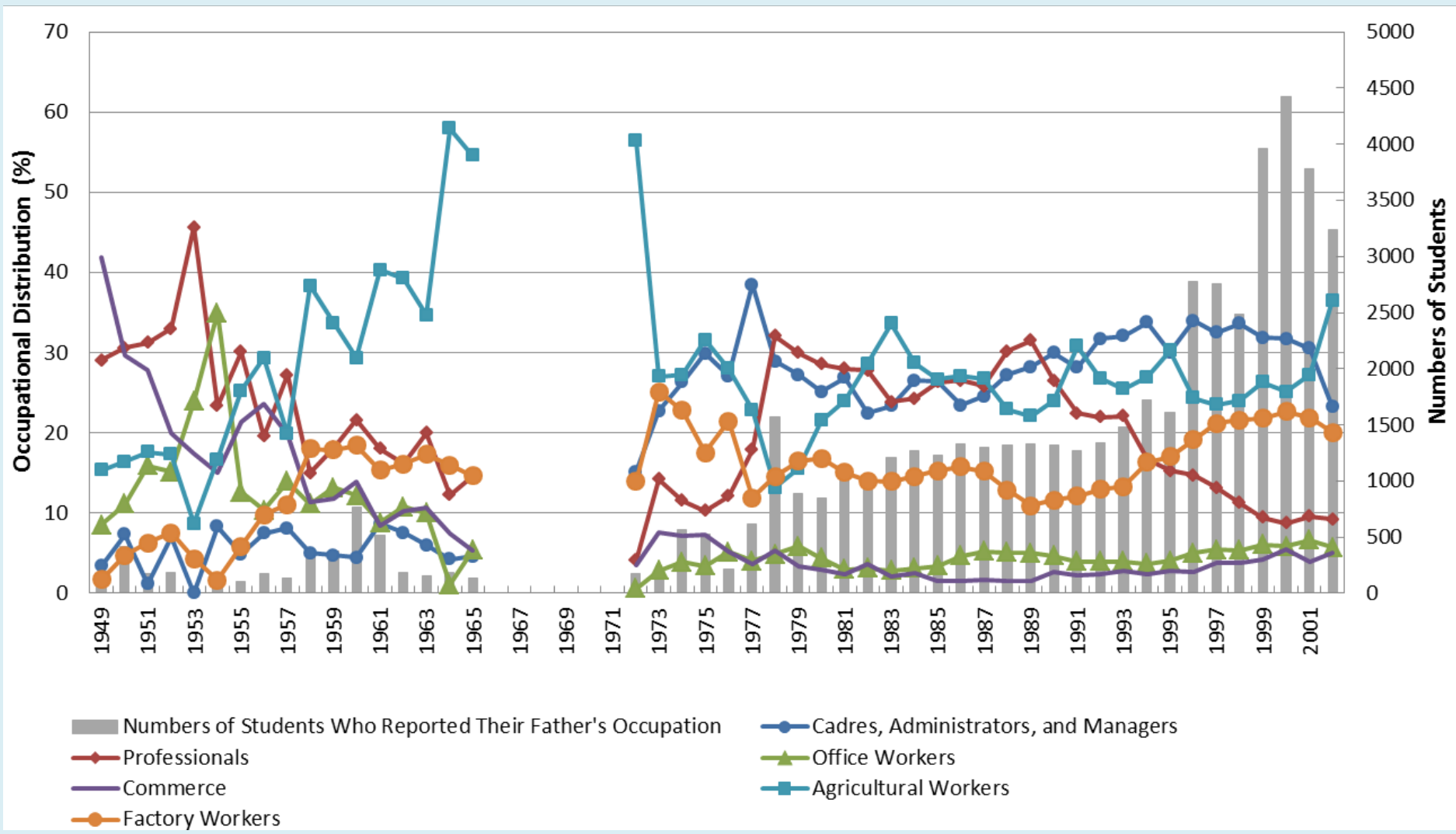
无产子弟

- Liang Chen, Zhang Hao, Li Lan, Ruan Danqing, Cameron Campbell, Lee, James. 2013. *Silent revolution: the social origins of Peking University and Soochow University undergraduates, 1949-2002* (无声的革命: 北京大学、苏州大学的学生社会来源 1949-2002). Beijing Joint Publishing.

At PKU 35 to 70 percent of all students came from Farm and Factory families



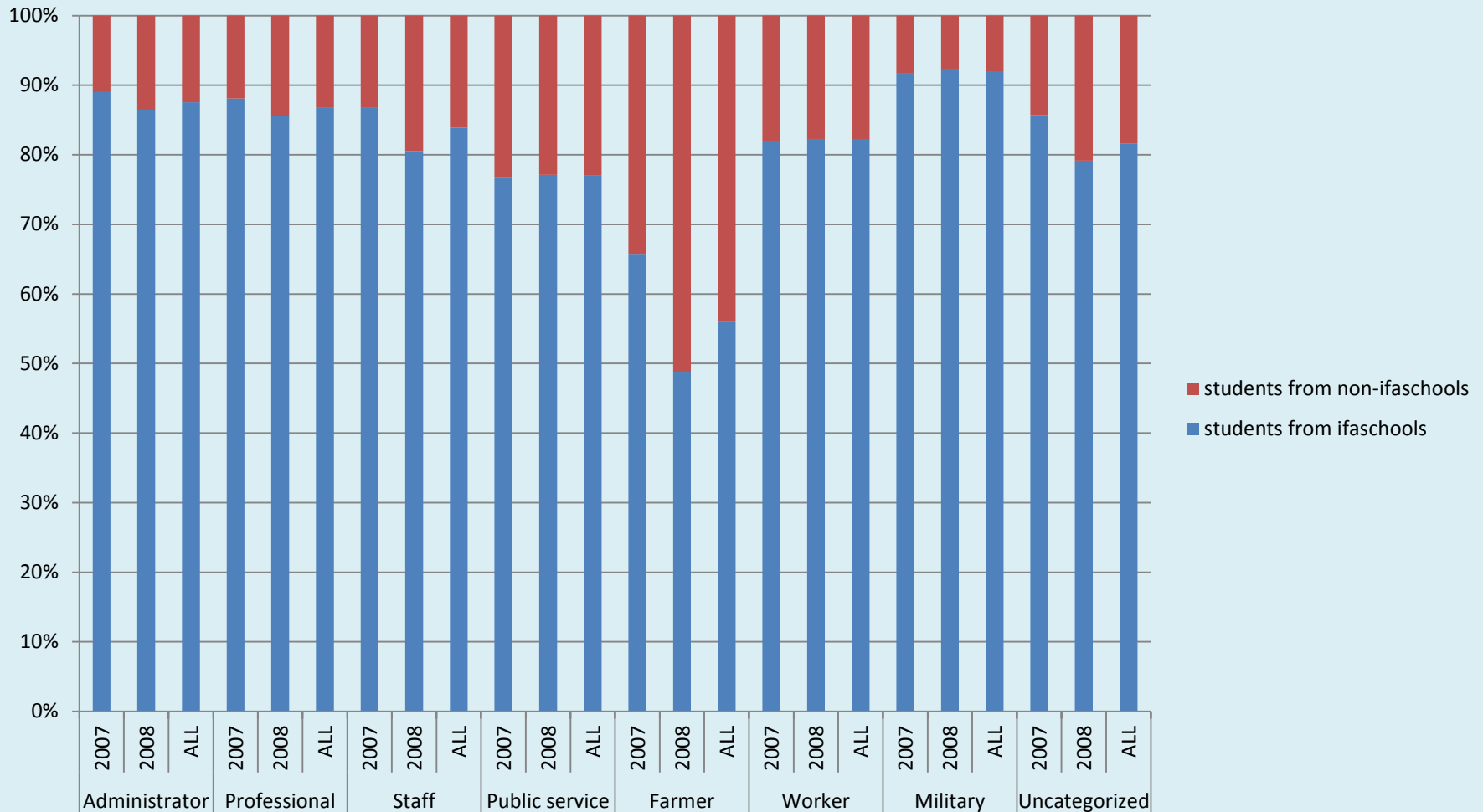
At SZU 50 to 70 percent of all students came from Farm and Factory families



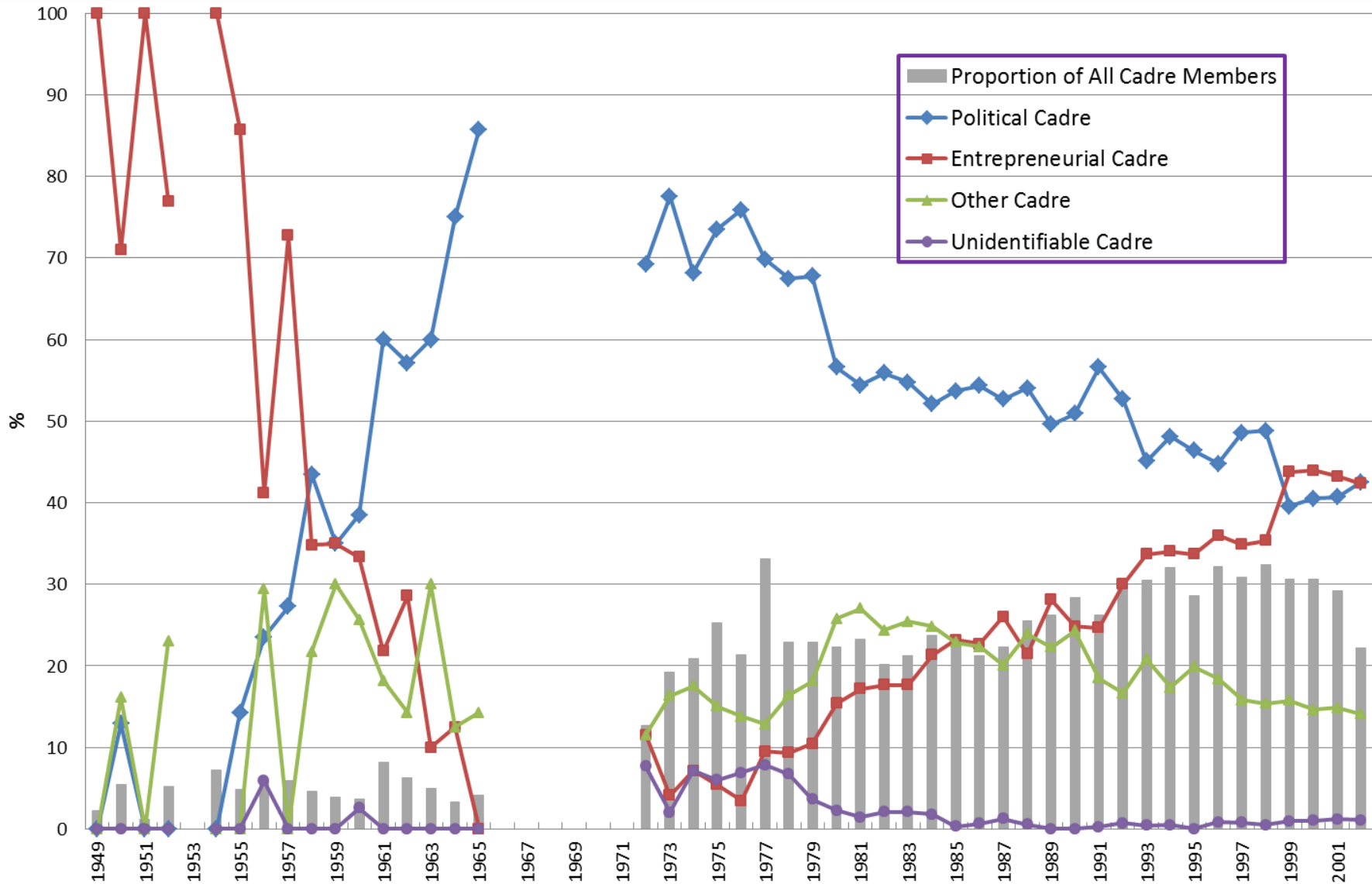
1994-2014: Middle Class Children 有产子弟

- **Limin Liu**, Bettina Sonnenberg, Xiwei Wu, Wolfgang Wagner, Ulrich Trautwein. 2012. “The Impact of Independent Freshman Admission on Educational Inequality in Chinese Elite Higher Education” Manuscript.

Family Background of non-Gaokao Exam (IFAS) Students at PKU



SZU Cadre Families



Educational Inequality in the Twenty-first Century

- At PKU and SZU, the proportion and number of students from business families, the 'entrepreneurial cadre' parents in slide 18, have increased significantly
- The proportion and number of students from farm families at PKU and SZU have declined,
- This decline, however, reflects the overall decline of farmers in China as a proportion of the occupational population as a whole, especially in such previously farm family heavy provinces as Jiangsu, Shandong, and Zhejiang
- Meanwhile, the proportion and number of PKU and SZU students from factory families have increased

Educational Expansion and Educational Inequality in China

- The changing social background of elite Chinese students also reflects the changing definition of 'knowledge' by the State from Confucian Education to Western Liberal Professional Education to Science/Engineering Education to current Global Education
- These different definitions of knowledge and access to such knowledge by the State tilt the playing field towards different groups of students
- At the same time, because of the objective and theoretically 'open' nature of the Chinese examination/admission system, a Silent Revolution in China's elite composition continues to today

From Homogeneity to Heterogeneity

- China's educated elite has evolved from a relatively thin homogeneous veneer of national elite 'gentry' to a heterogeneous group of merchants and professionals, proletariats, and urban 'middle class.'
- 1865-1905: 60-70 percent are children of officials
- 1906-1952: 60-90 percent are children of businessmen
- 1953-1993: 50-70 percent are proletariat children
- 1994-2014: 50-75 percent are from middle class families

Four Social Revolutions ?

- The extent to which each new social elite group implies a social revolution depends on the extent to which each group is distinct from its predecessor.
- Preliminary analysis suggests that while there inevitably was some overlap there were and are also many 'new' families due at least partially to changes in the examination criteria, in access to education, and in the selectivity of the admission process.

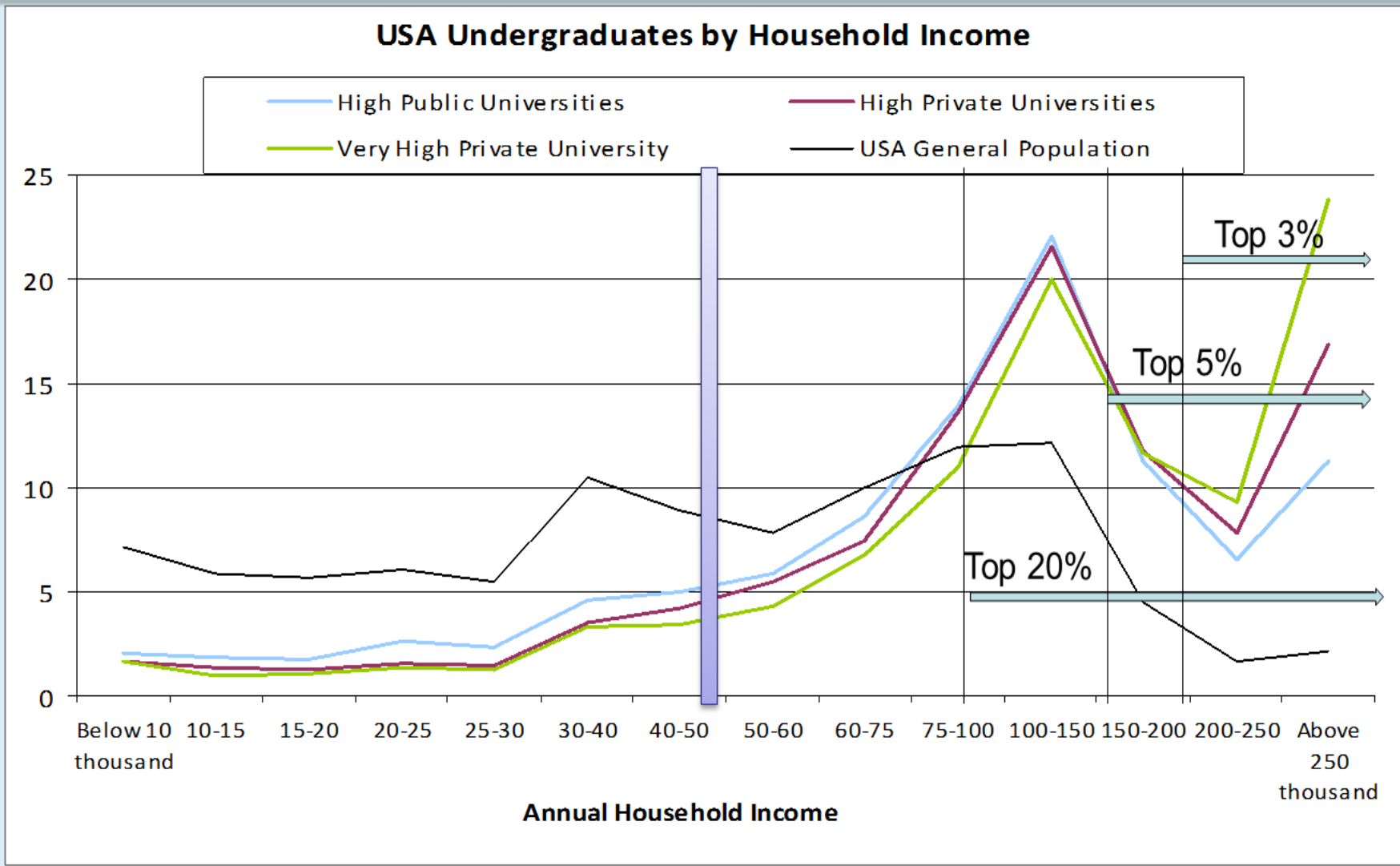
New 20th and 21st Century Chinese Elites

- The merchant families who emerged in Republican China were largely from east China, and distinct from the National Civil Service Families elsewhere.
- Almost none of the proletariat families to emerge in PRC China were connected to the Republican Merchant families
- Moreover, while some of the new Chinese Middle Class evolved out of the educated PRC proletariat elite, many are not.

Similarity in Difference

- According to Piketty 2013/2014, inequality is a distinctive and increasingly salient feature of the Capitalist World
- However, while rising wealth and income inequality are also distinctive features of Chinese society today, the expansion of economic opportunity in China combined with relatively open access to elite education creates opportunities for non-elites to achieve elite careers domestically and increasingly globally, creating in turn a larger and more diverse group of elites than elsewhere
- In that sense, Chinese society differs not just from period to period over the last 150 years, but from much of global society, as exemplified by the USA, today

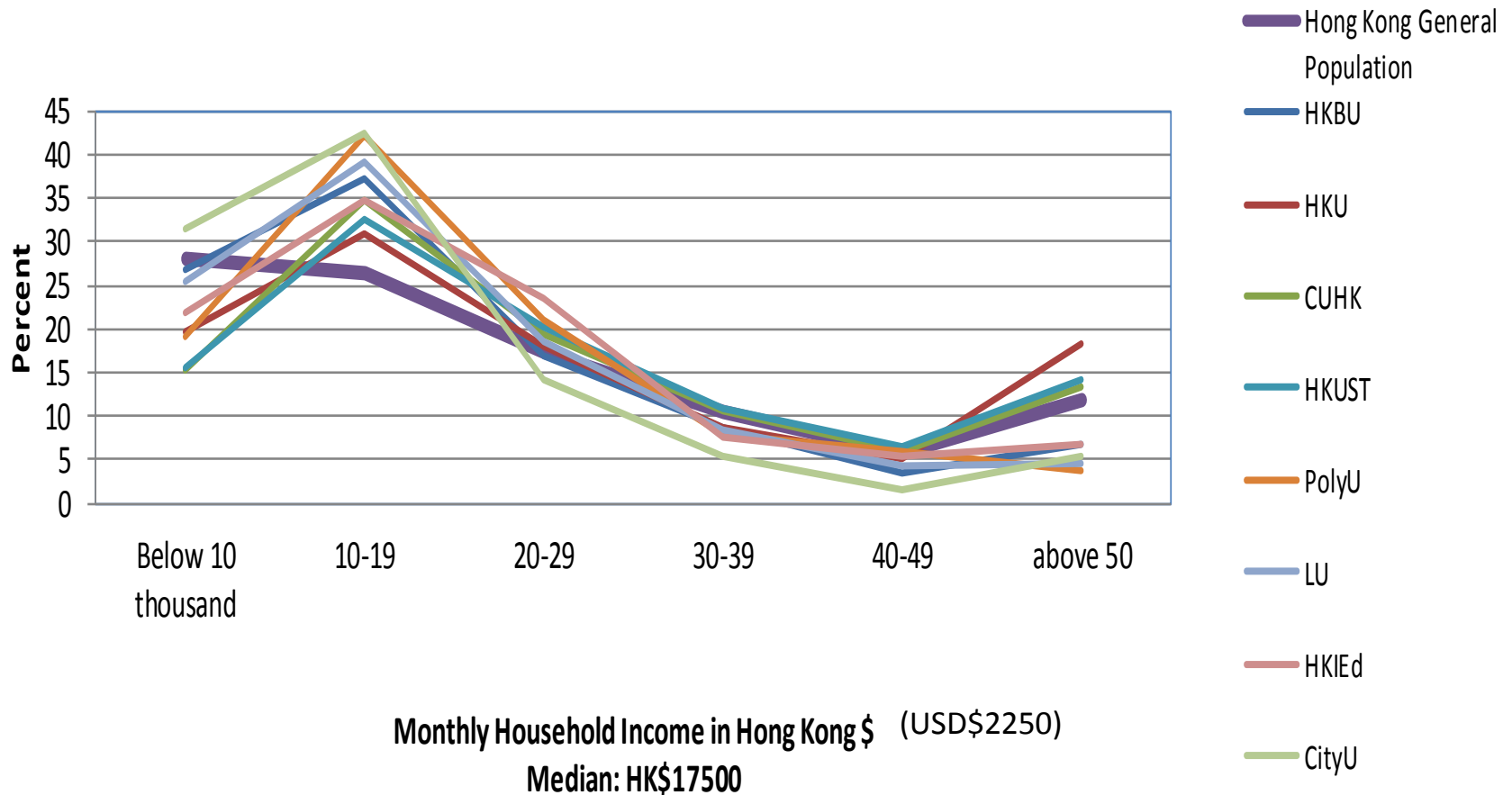
In the USA Students from the Top Five Percent of the Income Distribution Comprise 50 Percent of the Elite University Student Population



Source: Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, et al., 2009 with minor changes.

In Hong Kong, Half of All University Students Come From the Bottom Half of the Income Distribution

Hong Kong Undergraduates by Household Income, 2008-2009



Difference in Similarity

- In most countries, elite society especially politically active elites are generally stable, homogeneous, and from a small population.
- In China, because of the historical process we have just reviewed elite society is comparatively heterogeneous, changing, and from a comparatively larger population.
- In different periods during the last 150 years, the educated elites rotated between 士, 农, 工, and 商. The result is an unusual combination of difference in similarity.