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Introduction

BEFORE GRADUATING from Cambridge, Ashley Fang received multiple job offers.[1] Two of them seemed especially attractive. She could move to Switzerland and embark on a career at one of the largest commodity-producing firms in the world, or she could go to the top-ranked business school in Europe. Either option put her expected income at about $100,000 upon entering the labor force. After thinking long and hard about which option would most quickly lead her to her imagined ideal life, Ashley decided to take the offer in Switzerland. One year later, feeling fed up with living in Zurich, which she called "a tiny European town," she joined a Japanese company and moved to its branch office in Singapore. Ashley was earning significantly more than in her previous job. She also paid lower taxes in Singapore, and the company offered better benefits compared to her colleagues working at the headquarters in Japan. When asked about her future plans, Ashley paused and brushed her shoulder-length hair aside. She then crossed her arms and said that she could stay at her current company and move her way up or transfer to another company for higher income. "Alternatively," she added with a confident smile, "an MBA in the U.S., Harvard or Wharton, is also possible."

The same year Ashley completed her studies at Cambridge, Xiangzu Liu graduated from a top-ranked department at Nanjing University, halfway across the world. During his senior year, Xiangzu debated his options after graduation. He received a few offers from companies (thanks to the tight connection between his department and the industry) and was admitted to two top-ranked PhD programs in China. After some consideration, Xiangzu decided to pursue a graduate degree in hopes of starting his own company in the future. He decided to go to graduate school in Beijing for networking purposes and immediately became an important member in his advisor's client-sponsored projects. After setting up his LinkedIn account, he was soon offered a consulting position and began working for an American company that invested billions of U.S. dollars in China. Xiangzu is tall, dark, and sturdy, carries himself with an air of confidence, and speaks in a sophisticated, firm tone that

distinguishes him from most young adults. At the age of twenty-four, although officially a PhD student, he earns within the top 10 percent of incomes in urban China, is frequently involved in business meetings and conversations involving trade secrets, and drives a new black Audi to school. Eager to learn more about the international market, he plans to apply for a one-year exchange program in the United States before graduation.

Ashley and Xiangzu belong to a new generation of global elites. Like many of their similarly elite peers,[2] they graduated from top universities around the world, work at large international corporations, and often aspire to build their own financial empires. This group of young adults grew up wealthy, received a world-class education, live comfortably, and are expected to lead luxurious lifestyles. Elite youth who were born and raised in China in particular have attracted much attention as the country has established itself as the largest economy in the world. Depictions of these elite youth dazzled Western audiences in movies such as *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) and TV shows like *Ultra Rich Asian Girls* (2014–15). Their arrival on U.S. campuses boosted luxury car sales, and the tuition they pay sustained private schools in Europe.[3] The growing interest in the new generation of elite Chinese reflects the phenomenon that global wealth is shifting to China. The country has become one of the largest holders of U.S. debt and home to the second largest number of billionaires in the world.[4] Four of the ten richest self-made billionaires under the age of forty are Chinese, while only three are American.[5] Mainland Chinese buyers are purchasing businesses in the United States and Europe, including GE Appliances and Volvo.[6] These consumers, armed with cash, are also widely considered to have driven up real estate prices despite sluggish economies around the world.[7] A growing body of literature discusses China's eminent rise to power, and books such as *When China Rules the World* have become global best sellers.[8] Furthermore, news headlines such as "The Giant Chinese Companies Shaping the World's Industries" and "China's Campaign to Dominate the Global Economy" hint that China and the country's elites will direct the global economy in the near future.

Simultaneously, China is using its newfound wealth to exert influence in areas such as media, technology, and education. While news outlets in the West are experiencing budget cuts, China's state-run media continue to raise their game by offering competitive salaries in global locations such as London and New York.[9] China's rapid technological advancements have allowed the country to catch up and compete with the United States for dominance in artificial intelligence.[10] Higher education is booming in China, whereas the number of tenure-track faculty in the United States declined after the economic crash of 2008.[11] Chinese universities now compete with their American counterparts for faculty, the former often advertising their state-of-the-art

facilities and offering salaries higher than U.S. averages.[12] Additionally, Chinese universities are winning the international ranking competition: according to the 2021 *Times Higher Education* rankings, Tsinghua University (one of the two top universities in China) is not only the top-ranked university in Asia but also in the top twenty in the world.

Theory goes that the new generation of elite youth in China often are the unintended agents who help with the country's plot to conquer the world.[13] While these speculations are unproven, Chinese adolescent elites are establishing themselves as among the best and brightest in the world. Chinese students outperform other students in international competitions such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in science and math.[14] According to the PISA report, even disadvantaged students in China perform better than the comparably underprivileged students in other OECD countries. In anecdotal discussions among faculty, Chinese students are applying for American graduate programs at ever higher numbers and with GRE scores higher than those of native English-speaking applicants. These generally high-performing Chinese students are going global at an unprecedented rate. Chinese students are the largest group of internationals and account for about one-third of foreign students at American, Canadian, and Australian campuses. U.K. government statistics show that the number of Chinese students is greater than the sum of those from the next top five sending countries combined.[15] Some receiving countries, such as the United States, have tightened immigration policies and steadily decreased the number of student visas issued.[16] Yet, when they were asked, the drop in visa quotas was not a concern to many Chinese students, who reported having unhindered plans to study and later work in the United States.[17]

There are ample indicators suggesting that China's elite youth are en route to dominating the global economy. How exactly are they doing that? How do affluent, privileged students, like Ashley and Xiangzu, acquire elite status not just within their country but internationally? This book identifies the largely hidden but important process through which elite adolescents reproduce elite status in the face of global competition. Specifically, the examples of elite youth from China highlight the need to examine status reproduction from an international perspective. The elite are typically perceived as a small group who are influential in their home country.[18] However, as societies become increasingly interconnected, resources and people flow much more frequently across borders. In a globalized era, elites travel between continents, reside in different countries, and accumulate social and financial resources wherever they go. Despite their different nationalities, elites build relationships with each other as they share the same campuses, take the same internships, and work with one another. Considering these intertwined pathways, the new

elites are no longer a small group influential within the borders of their own country. Instead, they have become an association of diverse nationals who pursue similar lifestyles, careers, and goals largely unhindered by political or national boundaries. How elite Chinese youth join the new generation of global elites thus sheds light on status reproduction more generally.

Data for this book come from long-term ethnography and interviews with socioeconomically elite students in Beijing, along with their parents and teachers. I followed twenty-eight elite students for over seven years (2012–19), beginning when they were in eleventh and twelfth grades. I document their trajectories as they go through important transitions in life—graduating high school and college and entering graduate school or the labor force in China, the United States, Europe, and elsewhere.

I propose that elite Chinese youth are systematically successful in the competition for global elite status by becoming "study gods" (*xueshen*), a term they use to describe exceptionally high-performing students. Studying, however, is not the identifying behavior that characterizes study gods. Study gods are "godlike" in that they effortlessly and hence supernaturally excel in school, while other students, "studyholics" (*xueba*) included, study nonstop. Being a study god does not mean being the most popular kid on campus, nor does it highlight one's wealthy family background. It is related to neither physical attractiveness nor athletic talents.[19] Instead, it means that the student has elevated status in school and is believed by peers to be innately superior. When interacting with peers, study gods occupy the center of attention; when interacting with adults, they enjoy teachers' pampering and parents' indulgence. Importantly, the making of study gods is fundamentally an elite status reproduction process. Because study gods are defined by (effortless) academic achievement, qualification is contingent on top academic performance. The threat of downward mobility is thus imminent, as a study god can fall short of glory at any time by "underperforming" on exams. In this respect, parental assistance that helps raise children's test scores comes to play an important role in the creation and sustainment of study gods.

In the chapters ahead, I report the findings for the young adults whom I followed. I show that by the end of high school these young men and women have learned an assortment of skills that compose a recognizable repertoire of behaviors expedient to the reproduction of elite status in global society. They have come to appreciate and navigate the status hierarchy, expect differential treatment by peers and superiors according to status differences, and draw on external parental assistance when they encounter obstacles that potentially harm their status reproduction goals. These experiences in school and at home during high school shape the young elites' long-term trajectory in meaningful

ways. The students carry over these understandings and polish these skills in American (and European) campuses. They apply the lessons they learned in high school as they enter graduate school or the labor force. Those who had an intimate understanding of the school status system are able to develop strategies that allow them to stay at the top or at the very least avoid falling to the bottom. The skills used for daily interactions with peers and teachers are later applied to navigate workplace relationships with colleagues and authority figures. Family members also play a key role at critical moments. When in school, parents help their children overcome bumps on the road, oftentimes by offering backup plans with global insight that adolescents cannot foresee. After graduation, their elite parents continue to provide safety nets in case the child's career ambitions are unfruitful.

Like their counterparts from other countries, the elite Chinese students in this study are a global-oriented bunch. All must deal extensively with other global elites through attending college or graduate school abroad, participating in exchange programs, or working at international corporations. Not all of them obtain equally lucrative positions upon graduation. Many choose to embark on careers in the financial world, while a few express passions in fields such as environmental protection, technology, or academia. However, even the futures envisioned by those who are less successful are considered enviable by average students in China and elsewhere. Although what students do in high school does not necessarily determine their future outcomes, as I will show, the students who became study gods were able to polish the skills relevant to elite status reproduction and therefore perform better than peers who had not been as academically successful. The skills that the study gods acquired in high school thus appear to be valuable and privileged in occupational settings across societies.

The elite of the twenty-first century are internationally oriented and well-off by Western standards. The Chinese elite youth in this study are both a cause and product of increased inequality in China, where the gap between the rich and the poor is among the widest in the world.[20] Such a context means that the stakes are greater, as those who experience downward mobility are less likely to regain elite status. Considering China's global influence, becoming elite in China implies becoming elite on a global scale. Increased inequality at the national and international levels also suggests heightened levels of status anxiety, prompting elite parents to heavily invest in children's education as a way to safeguard their future.[21] Keeping in mind these broader social trends, this book is not simply about the elite Chinese youth who are "good at" the "game" of life but about a group of young adults who are trying to establish themselves as the new global elite.[22]

Elite Education and the Game of Status Reproduction

Teenagers have many goals and dreams to keep alive. Some have specific ambitions such as becoming musicians, lawyers, doctors, actors, or undercover agents. Others may have a vague idea for a career or simply want to have a good life. The futures that they envision, however, are not fantasies but encompass career aspirations that take root in daily life and are constantly negotiated or compromised. For example, a child may decide what she wants to do by observing the lifestyles in her family and community. Children might also change or reevaluate their goals through daily interactions with peers and teachers, whose opinions of and expectations for them shape their self-expectations and career aspirations. In brief, ideas about what to expect in adulthood are critically related to one's socioeconomic background.[23] Because children's family backgrounds, personal and demographic characteristics, and the people they meet will critically shape their outcomes, and because these influences take place and carry meaning throughout adolescence, status transmission across generations is largely successful.[24] Status reproduction is often easily observed in many societies. This phenomenon is partially reflected in the age-old saying "like father, like son." The Chinese saying "dragons beget dragons, phoenixes beget phoenixes, and the children of mice make holes" also directly refers to the same phenomenon. In many societies, including in China, children of the elite become the future elite, children of the middle class stay middle class, and working-class children stay working class.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, status reproduction is like a card game in which the players are families who compete for the grand prize of high status.[25] Each player is dealt a hand of cards, and each must strategize to maximize the chances of winning. However, from the get-go, the players do not stand on equal ground. They likely have vastly different cards, with a few players dealt winning hands and many stuck with losing cards. They also differ in their skills, as some deploy more strategies than others, whereas a few might have no strategy at all. Finally, despite sitting at the same table, the players are not equally knowledgeable of the rules. Some are familiar with the myriad special rules and wild cards, but others might be oblivious.

The elites are like a group of privileged players in the game of status reproduction. They are dealt exceptionally good cards, which is the amount of economic, social, and cultural resources at their disposal. The elites are typically strategic players. For instance, elite and affluent parents practice intensive child rearing that increases their children's chances of success. These parenting practices include "concerted cultivation," which involves a high degree of time management and interaction with agents in powerful positions, usually teachers and school personnel.[26] These parents adopt a "by-any-means approach"

to problem solving to deal with troubles that arise in their children's schooling, and they inevitably resolve the issues by negotiating with teachers and school administrators.[27] And while some elite parents do not insert themselves into their children's daily schedules, they nonetheless practice strategies that their less-resourceful competitors cannot when they perceive their children to be in trouble.[28] Most importantly, the elites are familiar with the rules. In fact, they are the group that sets up the rules and runs the game.[29] After all, among the many cultural repertoires, the elites decide on the benefits that a particular taste ascribes to its beholder. Unsurprisingly, they assign higher value to the ones they themselves already have.[30]

The futures that children and adolescents envision require educational degrees and certificates. Elites competing for status reproduction often use education as a key means to transmit privilege, and they develop the necessary skills to succeed while in school. Literature on stratification considers education an important predictor of future outcomes.[31] As societies increasingly value credentials, educational attainment itself often becomes a prerequisite or signal of status.[32] The schooling process trains elite youth to compete for global status. During high school, elite adolescents must cultivate class-based cultural taste, develop the ability to skillfully utilize knowledge, exhibit a relaxed attitude when interacting with superiors and inferiors, and dissociate from markers of nonelite status.[33] After entering college, these elite youth continue to refine the marks of elitism and form networks with similarly elite alumni.[34] Upon college graduation, these youth enjoy higher chances of finding employment with influential corporations and more access to power.[35] Considering its importance and the degree to which it shapes individual outcomes, education is arguably the most important means by which elite adolescents achieve future socioeconomically elite status. In other words, the decades of schooling form a valuable time in which elite students familiarize themselves with the rules of the game of status reproduction.

Having exceptional familiarity with the underlying rules of status reproduction is one reason why elites are so successful in pursuing status reproduction. Yet the scope of status competition through education is changing: historically, these elites were competing just domestically, whereas foreign degree holders have now joined the competition. The numbers of actors and institutions involved also seem to be increasing. This change in the setting and participants suggests that while education remains critically important, the specific rules of elite status competition at a global level may be somewhat vague. After all, elites from different countries do not share an identical understanding of the rules that govern such competition. For example, selection takes place as early as fourth grade in Germany and as late as twelfth grade in the United States. In other words, elite German youth are groomed for elite

pathways earlier than their American counterparts.[36] Elites in each country also emphasize and reward different types of individual talent. In countries that teach only one foreign language, elites may consider multilingual ability an important asset for global competition. By comparison, multilingualism may have a different meaning for elites in Luxembourg, where schools train students to be fluent in at least three languages. The outcomes of success in each education system have also become difficult to compare. It is unclear whether an elite American boarding school, a British public school, or a Chinese international school offers students more status advantage. Similarly, it is difficult to determine which school, be it an Ivy League college, Oxbridge, one of the *grandes écoles*, or *Qingbei*, offers better employment prospects for its graduates.[37]

When the process, timing, and criteria that determine educational success vary by country, the guidelines that govern status competition at a global scale are often unclear even for elites.[38] However, upholding a common set of rules is a prerequisite for players who desire to participate in any game. What, then, are the rules that the global elites set up when competing for status reproduction? What must they learn to compete for elite status against their opponents across the world? In this study, choosing and getting into the ideal college, whether in China, the United States, or the United Kingdom, was a major life event for the elite students. The families in China saw college as the first step that determined whether or not a child would become a future elite. Students in school openly predicted that study gods such as Ashley would not only go to a top university but also be successful in any future endeavor. Teachers even routinely encouraged them to think of themselves as the possible future prime minister of China. The elite students learned that internationally recognized educational success was the kind of success that bestowed the top rewards. Ashley received college admission offers from Cambridge and Carnegie Mellon. While the two universities were equally selective, her decision to attend the former was a calculated choice based on the perception that Cambridge had greater international prestige than Carnegie Mellon. Xiangzu's decision to pursue a PhD despite receiving a full-time consultant position at a multimillion-dollar American company was a deliberate plan made with an eye on future international entrepreneurial ambitions.

As scholars have pointed out, students of privilege choose prestigious institutions to effectively compete against other comparatively privileged students or to attain an even higher level of education in order to compete.[39] In the cases of Ashley, Xiangzu, and many others, their educational decisions were deliberate and made in light of the rules governing elite status reproduction. By immersing themselves in the playing field and winning the education competition against peers around the world, the children of elites learn to

develop the skills that will facilitate their pursuit of global elite status. In due course, the rules governing an education-based status reproduction competition emerge.

The Adolescent Elites from China

Elite Chinese adolescents seem to be successfully engaging in the global competition for status as they attain educational success. These affluent, high-performing students then embark on careers that put them in high income brackets. They appear to be able to carry out their career plans regardless of the impact of international policies. In 2018, President Donald Trump revised the STEM visa program to shorten the time Chinese students are allowed to stay in the United States after graduating. However, many Chinese students remained confident and reported unaltered plans for their future.[40] With their achievements in international competitions, predicted future success, and high level of confidence, the adolescent elites from China are formidable global competitors, so much so that teenagers from developing countries often cannot compete. These Chinese students know the rules for status competition and are determined to carry through their education strategies with the resources at their disposal. Most important of all, they intend to reproduce their parents' elite status not (or not only) in China but worldwide.

Considering that these socioeconomically elite teenagers from China are highly competitive and largely successful in their endeavors, surprisingly little is known about the process through which they achieve global elite status. The elite youth from China have only recently come into the limelight. China's economic reforms in the 1980s led to the rise of a group of new socioeconomic elites who achieved high status through educational success.[41] Like in many other countries, in China education plays a crucial role in determining elite status in the postreform era. One's level of education has become a strong predictor of entry into the political and economic elite.[42] With parents who achieved upward mobility through educational success and who expect that their children's admission to top colleges will be their first step toward future elite status, the students in this study are among the first generation to have grown up in a stable, revolution-free communist China. They are the first generation of Chinese in recent history who are pursuing educational success not merely for the goal of upward mobility but also to reproduce their parents' status and to carry on the privilege they have enjoyed since their youth. Additionally, the participants in this study represent the educational experiences of the upper end of the social spectrum in an increasingly unequal Chinese society, where the gap between the top earners and the rest has grown considerably and where academic competition is among the fiercest in the world.[43]

Elite parents in China attained their status through academic competition and continue to engage in this competition as they support their children's journey to success. This process creates successive generations of elites who are familiar with deploying education as a vehicle for achieving high status, who have experience, and who are skilled at playing the game.

Using intense academic competition as the primary means of obtaining socioeconomic domination has had its benefits and unintended consequences. On the one hand, the Chinese teenagers in this study were born in the 1990s under the one-child policy, which was enacted with the hope of constructing a new generation that would become the vanguards of China's modernization.[44] In a sense, these teenagers are carrying out the government's plans. They have obtained tertiary education at top institutions around the world and have paychecks that put them at the top 20 percent of earners in the developed countries in which they work. On the other hand, as I show in this book, some of them are entitled and expect differential treatment by peers and authorities. At the same time, and not surprisingly, they are under very high levels of pressure. Even though their parents are able to "buy them the sky," as the title of Xinran Xue's book suggests,[45] these adolescents often have higher levels of fear and anxiety in general than their peers in Western countries.[46] The most common cause of suicide in high school and college is perceived academic underperformance.[47] In this book, I show in vivid detail how the next generation of elites from China is equipped with the tools to engage in international competition. I see the micro-interactions between students and adults as intertwined dynamics that come together in the process of elite status formation. Through up-close analysis, I suggest that the new generation of global elites skillfully employ their tangible and intangible resources to compete for status against others in an era of increased globalization.

This Study

Elite students do a lot of work to realize their dreams, often with high levels of parental support and resources from others around them.[48] When I embarked on this study, I was interested in understanding this process. By choosing to focus on student experiences instead of the perspectives of schools or parents, I hoped to capture the students' own understanding of status competition in global society. My approach meant moving beyond national borders to examine how highly privileged students struggle for dominance against competitors from a myriad of countries.

Studies of elites are rare. To my knowledge, this project is the first that follows socioeconomically elite students over time. This book is based on observation and interviews with elite Chinese students over seven years, from 2012

to 2019. (The methodological appendix details how the study was conducted.) I interviewed twenty-eight students who attended five high schools ranked in the top ten (out of almost three hundred high schools) in Beijing. To better understand the influence and expectations of adults, I also interviewed the students' teachers and parents. Two of the five schools agreed to classroom observations and allowed me to freely talk to students. The two schools that became the primary sites of fieldwork are Pinnacle, a historically prestigious high school established in the Qing dynasty, and Capital, a new school that rose to prominence in the twenty-first century. I conducted intensive participant observation with eight Pinnacle and Capital students. I followed each student ten to fifteen hours a day for five days. When on campus I sat through classes, studied, and shared meals with them. Outside the classroom, the students and I hung out in the city, at movies, or in theme parks. I also waited for them or accompanied them to test sites on National College Examination days. Through these activities, I became acquainted with many of their classmates and schoolmates.

Although visiting the homes of the elite is difficult, I was able to carry out home observations with four of the eight key informants I shadowed. I visited three boys' families, each between one to three times, three to seven hours per visit. I stayed with a girl's family for four days. I wanted the parents and children to ignore me and carry out their daily activities during these visits. While my presence was acknowledged, I was able to somewhat slip into the background when the parents and students were focused on chores or studies. I sat on the living room floor when observing family life and rode in the back of the car when accompanying them to test sites and restaurants. As I discuss in the methodological appendix, students' and families' acceptance of me increased my confidence that the interactions I observed were routine.

It has been seven years since I began my fieldwork. In 2012, these students were in the eleventh and twelfth grades, at the high point of exam pressure and knee-deep in college applications. By 2019, they had graduated college and become young adults who were in the workforce or in graduate school. I kept in touch with all twenty-eight students through online messages and texts on WeChat, Renren, and Facebook. I visited each student twice on average after they graduated from high school and met up with those who happened to be living closer to me, in Philadelphia, almost annually. The students reported that participation in this research was enjoyable. They were visibly delighted to see me and were happy to keep in touch after they completed high school. Seven years after high school, the girls still hugged me and took selfies and locked arms with me when we walked together. The boys greeted me with smiles and often carried my backpack or took me on walking tours. Some of them offered to let me stay at their apartments for future visits. All of them still

called me "big sister" (*jiejie*) as they used to do in high school. These interactions assured me that the young adults I once accompanied to class—now members of the global elite—continued to accept my presence and were willing to share with me a glimpse of their world.

Organization of the Book

In order to answer whether and how the new generation of elites from China might dominate the global economy, one must first understand whom these people are. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the new generation of elite Chinese. I examine the experiences of these youth within the context of rising social inequality. I situate this study against the backdrop of a growing number of international students from China studying in Western countries. Chinese students' craze for going abroad for tertiary (and secondary) education reflects their common perception that receiving a top, global education is a secure pathway to success. This phenomenon suggests that they believe that they must acquire the necessary skills in top schools in order to guarantee their future high status and to be deservingly elite at a global level. Consequently, the schooling process becomes a critical period during which the next generation of elites in China learn about the rules of global status competition and train for status warfare.

The following chapters examine the ways in which elite Chinese students are equipped to pursue status reproduction. In school, these students develop an intricate knowledge of the status system and how to skillfully navigate the social hierarchy. They understand that building positive relationships with peers and teachers heavily depends on their positions in the status system. Furthermore, the importance of obtaining high status is driven home to the adolescents by parental involvement in their education, especially at times of educational crisis. Borrowing the card game metaphor to portray status reproduction, chapter 2 describes the rules of the game and elite students' familiarity with them. The students possessed an intricate knowledge of the qualifications that bestow status in school. Specifically, they used test scores and perceived diligence to set up a clear status system with four groups: study gods, studyholics, underachievers, and losers.[49] Drawing on ethnographic data from Pinnacle and Capital, I show that students in different status positions navigated the status system in different ways. Students who later went to Western universities found their understanding of the status system unchallenged throughout college. Consequently, they continued to uphold a status system determined by test scores (or GPAs) and considered themselves as having top status in American universities. Students who went to Chinese universities soon realized that they were lower performing than their nonelite classmates, who came from populous and hence more competitive provinces and "study

all day long." After a few test defeats, the elite students quickly changed the rules by setting up a new status system, such as one that values knowing how to "have fun" over test sores, in which they had top status.

Chapters 3 through 5 examine how the new generation of elites learn the sets of status-based behaviors through interpersonal relationships. Chapter 3 focuses on peer interactions. The elites often must maintain relationships with competitors who are equally, less, or more elite. The students in this study seem to have perfected the skills in cultivating peer relationships during high school. Through daily interactions and close friendship ties with low-status peers, high-status students maintained their distinction while neutralizing status inequality. Simultaneously, the low-status students learned to rationalize and sustain the hierarchy after consistently losing to their high-status peers. The result was genuine admiration of the dominant by the subordinate and mutual support of the status system regardless of one's status. In other words, by interacting with classmates of different abilities, the elite Chinese students prepared themselves for future interactions with colleagues and collaborators who have varying levels of abilities and positions in a company.[50]

Another important relationship that elites must cultivate is with authority figures. Chapter 4 turns to student interactions with teachers. Patterns of student-teacher interaction systematically differed by student performance in high school. While teachers often demanded respect (especially in a Confucian culture), the study gods could disregard, ignore, and actively defy teachers because they knew that teachers had vested interests in producing high performers. In comparison, the low performers who understood that teachers did not reap rewards from their performance became quiet and obedient. Follow-up visits with students after college showed that student descriptions of their relationships with company supervisors sometimes paralleled the relationships they had had with teachers in high school. Consequently, just as the elite students expected differential treatment from teachers in school based on their academic performance, they anticipated that employers would favor those with high employee performance.

Chapter 5 explores the process through which parents groom their children in the pursuit of global elite status. I show that parents drive home the importance of status to their children. Parents became external supporters of the student status system in school by forming patterns of parent-child interaction that reflected the child's status in school. Parents of study gods gave unconditional support and granted considerable freedom to their children. By contrast, the low-performing children were subject to heightened levels of parental supervision that led to a sense of constraint. While all parents cared for their only child, the divergent displays of parental support and interaction patterns contributed to a growing sense of freedom or constraint depending on the child's

status in school. Consequently, the top-performing elite students who were study gods expected maximum family support and were highly assertive, while the others did not and were not.

Chapter 6 focuses on the importance of crisis management as part of elite status reproduction. While parents were able to intervene in their children's college applications and exam preparation, they typically took a back seat and let their children lead. However, the overall lack of involvement did not mean they were completely hands-off. In chapter 6, I present evidence that parents were heavily involved as soon as they sensed that their child's college outcome was at risk. Parents were not involved in their children's job hunt but they would be if the children had trouble navigating the job market. In due course, the parents led by example and drove home to their children the necessity of having backup plans. While no students made use of their parents' backup plans when transitioning to the job market, they reported that their parents were more than ready to step forward when needed. Importantly, many students made backup plans for themselves and implemented those strategies when necessary.

In the concluding chapter I revisit the general question of how the new generation of elite Chinese might come to dominate global society. I point out differences in elite education between China and the United States as well as the important ways that their schooling process did *not* prepare them for elite status in the future. For example, they are likely limited by their overall lack of engagement in extracurricular activities, anti-Asian sentiments, and the bamboo ceiling. Overall, I identify crucial skills that elite Chinese youth acquire as they try to become study gods and the rewards these skills reap as they compete for global elitism.

Combined with two appendices, the chapters further existing understanding of elites in an era of increased globalization. Chinese students are arriving at the United States and other Western countries in larger numbers and at earlier ages. These elite students often stay for jobs on Wall Street, with major consulting firms, and for companies such as Amazon, Google, and Facebook. In fact, the students in this study who are working in the United States have starting salaries that put them at the top 5 to 20 percent of earners in the United States, the United Kingdom, Singapore, and Hong Kong. These youth are not trained within their national borders. Western universities, corporations, and countries all contribute to the rise of the global elite from China. This book broadens prevailing conversations about how the Chinese prepare their younger generations for an increasingly competitive world and offers a cautionary tale for other countries that are also struggling for global dominance.

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