

Revolution modernizes education: The dynamic consequences of state building

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Abstract

The 1911 Revolution was the first democratic revolution in Chinese history. It overthrew the monarchical rule and established the first republican government in China. This paper examines how the 1911 democratic revolution and the establishment of a republic modernized China's education system. Using a difference-in-difference approach, I find that counties supporting the revolution through violence between 1911 and 1912 had, on average, 0.28 more middle schools, 49 more middle school students, 4 more higher primary schools, and 200 more students enrolled in higher primary schools than non-participating counties within a few years after the revolution. Counties with a stronger revolutionary organization presence before 1911 also saw higher enrollment in Western-style schools. Furthermore, I find that the expansion of modern education changed the distribution of power within the country: counties that supported revolution and had more modern educational facilities produced more national-level government and military elites ten and twenty years later.

A key identification concern of this paper is that modern schools themselves may have contributed to the rise of revolutionaries. I address this concern using the number of imperial soldiers stationed in each county as an instrumental variable. I also examine how the expansion of modern education contributed to the formation of a new generation of Chinese political elites with modern educational backgrounds after the revolution. By collecting birthplace and position data from a government elite name book (short biographies) and the alumni records of the Republic of China Military Academy, I investigate how the scale and quality of modern education—measured by the number of modern schools and the student-teacher ratio—influenced the likelihood of a county producing a provincial or national level political elite. My preliminary findings suggest that counties that supported the revolution and had more modern educational facilities produced more national-level government and military elites ten and twenty years later. To address concerns that omitted socioeconomic

factors may affect both modern education and the appointment of government officials, I use the number of temples as an instrumental variable for modern schools and student enrollment, as the republic appropriated Buddhist and Taoist temples as sites for modern schools.