Secure Jobs, Successful Kids?: The Role of Parents' "Iron Rice Bowl" Jobs in Determining Children's Educational Attainment

Abstract: In contemporary China, the "Iron Rice Bowl" (IRB) refers to lifelong positions retained in governments and public sectors after the employment system reforms, offering stable income and a series of other benefits. These positions have long been considered as evidence of labor market inequities. This paper examines the intergenerational impacts of these positions by analyzing the role of parents' IRB jobs on children's educational attainment. I find that a father's or mother's IRB job significantly influences the number of years of education their children receive. In rural areas, the father's IRB position plays a major role, whereas in urban areas, the mother's IRB also has a significant effect. After replacing the dependent variable and restricting the sample, I find that this effect remains robust. Moreover, through grouped regressions, I find that this effect is primarily present in less developed periods and regions. In other words, having parents with IRB jobs can partially offset the negative effects of educational or economic underdevelopment.

Keywords: Iron Rice Bowl; Dual-Track System; Educational Attainment; Intergenerational Impacts

1. Introduction

The term "Iron Rice Bowl" (IRB) has different meanings in different periods. On one hand, it refers to an employment system in China that has been abolished, in which

none of the employed people would face unemployment, and all of them had stable incomes. This system was abolished during the employment system reforms of the 1990s due to its inefficiency in labor allocation. On the other hand, IRB also refers to those positions that keep the characteristics of the pre-reform system even after the reforms. Most of these positions come from the government system and other public sectors (such as public universities, compulsory education systems, public hospitals, state-owned enterprises, etc.). The definition discussed in this paper is the latter one. The employers providing such occupations are often mentioned as "the System" ("Tizhi" in Chinese), a popular name to call "the public sectors". Those who get such a position is considered as "the insiders of the System" ("Tizhinei" in Chinese). These positions, no matter before or after the employment system reforms, are lifelong and are guaranteed by government subsidies to provide stable salaries and pensions. This is a product left over from history[1].

The present paper focuses on the intergenerational effects of this "historical legacy," that is, the impact of parents with an IRB job on their children's educational attainment.

[1] This system is also undergoing reforms. For instance, since the mid-1990s, the pension system reform has been trying to unify the management of people with and without the IRB. After entering the 21st century, the public sector has increasingly hired contract-based employees instead of offering lifetime positions. However, according to the registration data of some government departments in recent years, more and more university graduates still regard obtaining an IRB position as their career goal (source: Guangming Online). This trend has become more apparent after the widespread closures and layoffs caused by COVID-19, as the IRB positions could provide a sense of security and stable income that others could not during such periods.

There is already a large body of research focusing on the impact of parents' occupations or economic status on their children's education. Some found that parents' occupations (especially the father's occupation) can influence their children's choice of major or career, and people tend to choose majors similar to those of their parents (Hellerstein and Morrill, 2011; Corak and Piraino, 2011; Vleuten et al., 2018; Humlum et al., 2019; Bello and Morchio, 2022; Philipp, 2023). Other studies found an impact of parents' income or social status on their children's educational attainment. They found that parents with high-income or high social status can provide better educational and emotional resources for their children (Conger et al., 2000; Magnuson and Duncan, 2002; Bradbury et al., 2015; Duncan et al., 2017; Cooper and Stewart, 2021). Therefore, income and social status are positively correlated with children's educational achievement.

However, there has been no research focusing on the impact of parents' IRB positions on their children's educational attainment. In the data used in this paper, the variable IRB job is represented by "working in government agencies or public institutions". These positions have four important characteristics. First, once employed, these positions offer lifetime job security. Employees are not dismissed unless they violate the law or are absent from work for too long. Therefore, neither employee's performance nor the employer's profitability will lead to dismissal. Second, these positions ensure a relatively stable income, unaffected by macroeconomic changes or the employer's profitability. Although some employers (such as public universities and hospitals) need to be self-sufficient and no longer rely entirely on government funds to

pay employees, when profitability is poor, the government has the obligation to subsidize them to ensure that employees' salaries can be paid normally. Third, those who retire from these positions receive more generous and stable pensions. Forth, these employees may sometimes receive some other government-funded benefits, such as healthcare subsidies, children's education subsidies (or employer-sponsored schools or daycare services for employees' children), travel allowances, and housing subsidies. These subsidies vary across different historical periods or different places.

These four characteristics bring some other advantages. For example, due to the absence of the risk of dismissal, employees do not need to work overtime excessively to achieve high performance (considering the serious overtime issue in the Chinese workplace), thus having more time to spend with family, to relax, and to socialize. At the same time, working in the public sector with a stable income means higher social status and more social capital compared to employees in the private sector who face the risk of unemployment.

The advantages of these positions have varied over different periods. Before the labor market reforms, the "stability" of such positions was not seen as an advantage because all jobs were promised to be lifelong, with stable government-issued salaries and no significant wage differences among different positions or industries. The differences between IRB jobs and other jobs were mainly reflected by other benefits (such as free housing, free or cheap medical care, children's school or day care service for employees) and the social capital advantages arising from these benefits. After the reforms, with the increase in the incomes of private sector employees (although such

incomes are not as stable as in the public sector) and the progress of the market system, the benefits associated with IRB positions started to decline in comparison to the high-income advantages of private sector employees. However, the social capital advantage of IRB positions remained significant. From the mid-1990s, particularly after 2000, a large number of people experienced unemployment caused by economic fluctuations, and the sense of security and stability brought by the IRB became one of the key reasons why such positions are attractive.

This paper focuses on the impact of IRB positions on children's educational attainment, one reason is that IRB represents different advantages in different periods. This allows for an observation of how income stability, lifelong guaranteed positions, schools for employees' children, social capital, and other benefits, can affect children's development over a significant historical period. Using data related to IRB positions to study the impact of parents' occupations on children's development has another advantage: until the mid-1990s, the vast majority of jobs in China were still allocated by the governments (He et al., 2018). In the sample used for this study, more than half of the parents' occupations were obtained before this period (I will also select a subsample where all parents' occupations were government-assigned for robustness checks). Therefore, compared to other studies on the impact of parents' occupations or incomes on children's education, this paper can better avoid the problem of parents' self-selection of their jobs.

Using the data of Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS), I find that having an IRB job indeed has a positive effect on children's education attainment. However, this

effect is different for different genders of parents. For rural residents, having an IRB father can improve one's education, while having an IRB mother can not. For urban residents, having an IRB mother helps even more than having an IRB father in enhancing one's educational achievement. Moreover, I find that females are more sensitive to fathers' IRB than males. Furthermore, I divided the sample according to different birth cohorts. I find that the effect of parents' IRB is mainly on those who were born in 1960s and 1970s. But if I further divide the samples born in 1980s and 1990s into rural and urban subsamples, I find that the impact of parents' IRB on children's educational attainment is significant for rural residents, and not significant for urban ones, indicating that the development of the education system and the improvement of marketization may weaken the privileges brought by having an IRB parent.

One contribution of this paper lies in its focus on the potential intergenerational impact that may arise from the "dual-track system" still existing in China's labor market. The "dual-track system" refers to the fact that although more and more employers have begun to hire non-permanent, contract-based employees since the beginning of the 21st century, a large number of public sectors still have many IRB employees who enjoy much more benefits in terms of positions, salaries, medical care, pensions and so forth, compared to those without IRB but are doing the same work (Wang, 2023). This disparity is considered as an important obstacle to the fair operation of the labor market. Some studies have discussed the current situations and consequences of the dual-track system. They found that such a system hinders employment and income equity (Feng et al., 2020), and increases the employees' switching costs (Luan et al., 2023). Research

also found that the sense of security and stability is even more attractive to employees than high salaries, and a large proportion of people are willing to give up a portion of their monthly income to obtain this stability (Bao et al., 2023). However, there is no research on the intergenerational effects of the dual-track system. By examining the intergenerational effects, particularly how it influences children's educational attainment, the present paper allows for a deeper understanding of the long-term consequences of the dual-track system on social and economic equity.

Second, this paper contributes to the literature on the impact of parents' occupations on their children's educational attainment. Existing research has found that parents' occupations can influence their children's education through economic conditions and social status. People with better economic conditions and higher social status can provide children with more access to education resources and greater emotional support (Becker and Tomes, 1986; Taubman, 1989; Conger et al., 2010; Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2013; Bradbury et al., 2015; Duncan et al., 2017; Cooper and Stewart, 2021), which can positively influence their children's educational achievements (White and Keith, 1990; Furstenberg and Kiernan, 2001; Perry-Jenkins et al, 2007; Cooper and Stewart, 2021). As mentioned earlier, IRB jobs have advantages in terms of salary, housing, pension, and education opportunities for children. These advantages vary over different periods. For example, in this paper, I find a significant positive correlation between the parents' having IRB jobs and the educational attainment of those born in the 1960s and 1970s. During those people's childhood, their parents did not have significant advantages in terms of salary or lifelong guarantees for

the position, compared to other occupations, but they enjoyed more benefits in terms of children's schools for employees and travel allowances. For those born in the 1980s and 1990s, this positive correlation only appears in rural areas. As income gaps widened and income fluctuations in private enterprises increased due to the reform and opening-up, and as educational opportunities became increasingly equitable, the stable salary and social capital advantages of IRB jobs may have become the key factors influencing children's education.

Third, it is related to the strand of literature about gender differences in factors influencing children' education or occupation. Studies have found that the influences of fathers' and mothers' careers are different, in which fathers' influence is often much greater than mothers' (Lo Bello and Morchio, 2020; Lo Bello and Morchio, 2022). Furthermore, the effects are different on different genders of children. Some studies have found that parents have a greater influence on their same-gender children (Kohlberg, 1966; Bandura, 1977; Hellerstein and Morrill, 2011; Vleuten et al., 2018). The present paper explores the differences in the impact of IRB jobs held by parents of different genders, in different time periods, with different Hukou types (urban or rural), on the educational attainment of their children of different genders.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 briefly reviews the related literature. Section 3 introduces the history of China's IRB positions. Section 4 presents the methodology by introducing the empirical framework, as well as describing the data and variables. Section 5 discusses the estimation results and checks the robustness of the

results. Section 6 examines the heterogeneity of effects across different groups. Section 7 concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Impacts of Parents' Occupation on Children's Development

Children tend to choose their parents' majors or occupations, not only because parents' occupation preferences can be transmitted intergenerationally, but also because parents can provide occupation- or major-specific resources for their children who choose the same occupation or major (Hellerstein and Morrill, 2011; Long and Ferrie, 2013; Lo Bello and Bristol, 2022). Meanwhile, the influence of parents on children differs depending on the gender of parents. Most literature suggests that fathers' occupation or major has a greater impact than mothers', since in many samples most mothers are housewives without professions (Lo Bello and Morchio, 2020; Lo Bello and Morchio, 2022). Furthermore, parents' impacts vary based on the gender of the children. Some studies have found that parents have a greater influence on children of the same gender (Hellerstein and Morrill, 2011; Vleuten et al., 2018).

Parents' occupations may also affect their children's education level through economic conditions and social status. Families with better economic conditions and higher social status can provide children with more access to education resources (Becker and Tomes, 1986; Taubman, 1989; Conger et al., 2010; Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2013; Duncan et al., 2017). Moreover, such families tend to have better mental states, parenting styles, and family relationships, thus having a positive impact on children's

educational achievements (White and Keith, 1990; Furstenberg and Kiernan, 2001; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2007; Cooper and Stewart, 2021).

2.2 Determinants of Education Attainments

The educational level of parents has always been recognized as an important factor influencing their children's education. Holding economic conditions and social status equal, parents' educational level can influence children through various channels such as parents' beliefs and attitudes toward education, willingness to invest in their children's education, parenting skills, cultural capital, and so forth (Harb and El-Shaarawi, 2007; Harris and Goodall, 2008; Chohan and Khan, 2010; Ermisch and Pronzato, 2010; Idris et al., 2020). Moreover, parents' education can even have a spillover effect on their children's classmates (Walsh, 2008; Haraldsvik and Bonesrønning, 2014; Fruehwirth and Gagete-Miranda, 2019). Furthermore, a person's health status, religions, distance from school, transportation conditions, school quality, tuition fees or textbook costs are all among the factors that may affect a person's educational achievements (Aturupane, 2013; Liu, 2023; Hopson et al., 2024). Therefore, many public policies prioritize subsidizing education costs, constructing schools in areas with limited access to transportation, enhancing school infrastructure, providing comprehensive teacher training, and implementing other initiatives to improve educational equity and quality.

2.3 The History of IRB and the Effects of Losing an IRB Position

Some literature reviews the background and history of IRB positions (Fung, 2001; Brødsgaard et al., 2014), as well as the history, current situation, and influencing factors of China's labor system reform (Ding, 2000; Xia, 2020; Chen, 2023). There are also some that focus on the impact of losing an IRB position in the labor system reform. Losing an IRB job may reduce the access to information communication technology (Li et al., 2021), affect family relationships (Whyte, 2003), trigger higher savings rates (He, 2018), and lead to an increase in depressive symptoms in later life (Luo et al., 2023). Kong et al. (2018) studied the intergenerational impact of losing an IRB job (as well as the possibility of losing it), and found that just this possibility alone can lead to weight gain in the offspring (Kong et al., 2018). Most of these impacts are caused by a decrease in economic security.

3. A Brief History of China's IRB Positions

In China, the so-called "iron rice bowl" positions, also known as "in-system" or "public sector" positions, refer to the jobs provided by the government or public sectors such as education, scientific research, health care, and culture.

3.1 *During the Era of the Centrally Planned Economy (1949-1978)*

After the establishment of People's Republic of China, the country implemented a planned economy system, and the central government controlled most social resources and economic activities. All employees were enjoying fixed and stable salaries and benefits, and having lifelong job guarantees, which formed the embryonic form of the IRB positions.

3.2 The Initial Stage of Reform and Opening Up (1978-1990s)

After the reform and opening up, China began to transition towards a market economy, but the government still maintained control over public sectors such as education, healthcare, and some of scientific research. To adapt to the new economic situation, public institutions underwent several reforms, with some transforming into state-owned enterprises and becoming self-sufficient. Meanwhile, some still belonged to public institutions. The employees of these two types of employers still keep their status of "the insiders of the system", i.e., they still have an IRB job, which provide them with high stability and many benefits.

3.3 The Modernization Period (since 2000)

With the further development of the market economy, the government has further promoted the reform of public institutions. In order to improve employees' work efficiency, many positions have been gradually eliminated. During this period, public institutions and state-owned enterprises still have a certain number of quotas for IRB positions each year. These quotas remain the goal of many people as they provide a relatively stable career development path and social security.

4 Methodology

The data used in this paper comes from the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS). It is a public database contributed by the Department of Sociology of Renmin University of China. As the earliest national, comprehensive, and continuous social survey project

in China, CGSS has been conducting annual household surveys on more than 10,000 households in nearly 500 communities (villages/neighborhoods) in 31 provinces of mainland China since 2003. This survey covers various aspects such as occupation, education, values, social attitudes, public service satisfaction, health, basic family and personal information.

The sampling designs of CGSS usually include multi-stage random sampling to ensure the representativeness of the sample. In the first stage, cities and rural areas are randomly selected from various provinces in China. In the second stage, communities are selected from the selected cities and rural areas. In the third stage, households are selected from the selected communities for household surveys (interviews).

This paper adopts the most recent three waves of data, released in 2021, 2018, and 2017, respectively. In CGSS, each wave of the survey selects households through random sampling, rather than following up on households surveyed in the previous wave, thus the data used in this paper is a pooled cross-sectional data. I select people between 22 and 65 years old, as 22 is the typical age when most Chinese with a college degree graduate. Considering the availability of variables, the combined database contains a total of 22,415 observations. Among them, there are 11,341 females and 11,074 males. 14,193 individuals are from rural areas, while the rest are from urban areas. Figure 1 compares the differences of educational attainments among different birth cohorts of my sample. Those born in the 1990s have 4.77 more years of education that those born in the 1960s, on average.

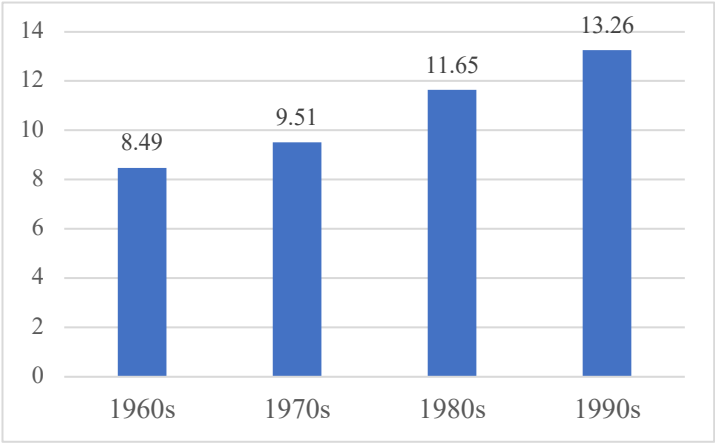


Figure 1. Educational attainments of different birth cohorts.
Data source: China General Social Survey (2017, 2018, 2021).

Figure 2 shows the comparisons between those who have parents with IRB and those who do not. It is shown that those who have a parent with IRB have much more years of education. However, this is only a simple comparison without controlling any factors that may affect such a relationship. For example, parents with higher education levels are more likely to hold an IRB position. As a result, it is possible that parental education, rather than the IRB position itself, is the true determinant of their children's higher educational attainment.

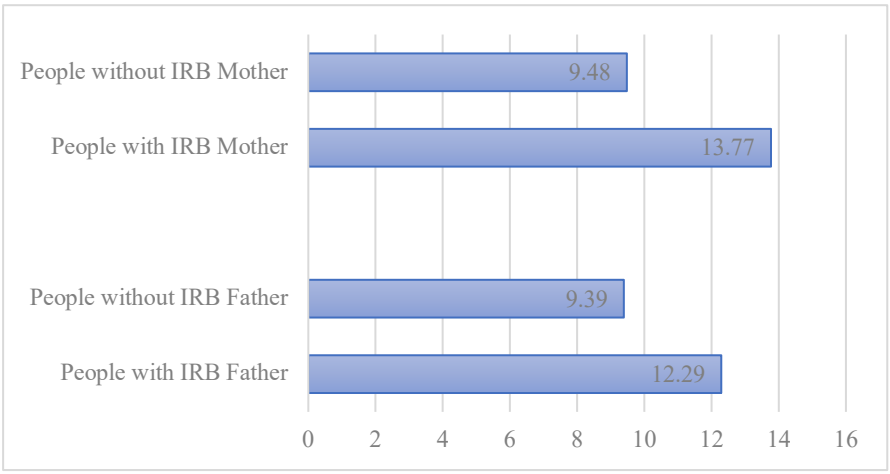


Figure 2. Comparison of the average years of education between those who have a parent with IRB and those who do not.
Data source: China General Social Survey (2017, 2018, 2021).

Thus, to explore whether the relationship between having IRB parents and people's educational attainment is sensitive to other influencing factors, I regress educational attainment on whether a person has an IRB father or mother, while controlling for a series of other variables. The specification of regression is as follows:

$$Edu_i = \alpha + \beta_1 IRBF_i + \beta_2 IRBM_i + \delta_1 EduF_i + \delta_2 EduM_i + \gamma X_i + u_{p(i)} + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where subscript i indicates an individual, p indicates a province. Edu_i is the educational attainment of individual i, measured by the years of education the person obtained[2]. $IRBF_i$ and $IRBM_i$ are dummy variables that take the value of 1 if individual i has an IRB father or mother, respectively, and take the value of 0 otherwise. The variable for parents with an IRB job is represented by whether the respondent's father/mother worked in the governments or public sectors when the respondent was 14 years old. $EduF_i$ and $EduM_i$ represent father's and mother's years of education,

[2] Represented by the total years of education obtained by respondent i. It is from the question "Up to now, which one of the following is your highest educational level?" categories to choose under this question include: no education, literacy class, elementary school, middle school, vocational high school, regular high school, technical secondary school, technical school, adult college diploma, formal college diploma, bachelor's degree (adult), bachelor's degree (formal), graduate degree or higher. I paired each category with the number of years required to complete it in China, and use this number of years as the explained variable. Specifically, no education = 0, literacy class = 3, elementary school = 6, middle school = 9, high school (regular high school, vocational high school, technical secondary school, technical school) = 12, college diploma (including adult college diploma and formal college diploma) = 15, bachelor's degree = 16, graduate degree or higher = 18.

respectively; X_i is a vector of demographic variables (gender, age, ethnic group[3], Hukou type[4], sibling size); $u_{p(i)}$ represents the province-fixed effects, and ε_i is the disturbance term. I control for region fixed effects due to the possibility that provinces with a higher level of economic development are able to provide more IRB positions, and those regions have richer education resources for the next generation, which affects people's educational attainment. CGSS provides two levels of region variables: province level and community level. The province-level fixed effects are controlled in the present paper, because there is a lack of variations if I control for the community-level fixed effects.

Summary statistics are shown in Table 1, which shows that the average age of the sample is 46 years old, and the average years of education is 9.68 years, slightly higher than the duration of China's compulsory education (9 years). However, the average years of fathers' and mothers' education are significantly less than that of the respondents, which is 5.45 years and 3.77 years, respectively.

[3] A dummy variable which is 0 if the person is Han, and 1 for non-Han (ethnic minorities).

[4] The Household Registration System (Hukou system) in China, which classifies citizens into rural (agricultural) or urban (non-agricultural) categories. This classification determines access to various social services and benefits, influencing where individuals can live and work within the country. Here Hukou type is a dummy variable which is 0 for urban residents and 1 for rural residents.

Table 1. Summary Statistics of Variables

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Edu_i	22,415	9.681	4.496	0	17
$IRBF_i$	22,415	0.101	0.302	0	1
$IRBM_i$	22,415	0.048	0.213	0	1
$EduF_i$	22,415	5.449	4.653	0	17
$EduM_i$	22,415	3.773	4.42	0	17
$Gender$ (female=1)	22,415	0.543	0.498	0	1
Age	22,415	46.044	12.291	22	65
$Ethnic$ (minority=1)	22,415	0.075	0.264	0	1
$Hukou$ (rural=1)	22,415	0.65	0.477	0	1
$Sibsize$	22,415	0.28	1.079	0	10

Notes: Edu_i – years of education of respondent i; $IRBF_i$ – whether respondent i's father had an IRB job when respondent i was 14 years old; $IRBM_i$ – whether respondent i's mother had an IRB job when respondent i was 14 years old; $EduF_i$ – the total years of education of respondent i's father; $EduM_i$ – the total years of education of respondent i's mother; $Gender$ – the gender of respondent i; Age – the age of respondent i; $Ethnic$ – whether respondent i is Han or ethnic minority; $Hukou$ – whether respondent i was an urban or rural residents when they was 14 years old; $Sibsize$ – number of respondent i's siblings when interviewed.

As for the possible self-selection problem (i.e., parents' characteristics determine their access to IRB jobs, which simultaneously affect their children's education), as aforementioned, before the mid-1990s, most of the jobs in China were allocated by the government. That is, individuals who were seeking a job submitted applications at the local labor departments. Most allocations were not related to personal characteristics, but to the current job vacancy situations. Therefore, parents' personality, cognitive ability, and other qualities have little to do with whether they are allocated to IRB jobs. If Chinese workers start working at 18 years old, the parents of the respondents of the last birth cohorts in my sample started working in the mid-1990s, when the allocation system still dominated.

One issue that needs to be discussed is that working in governments or public institutions does not necessarily mean that employees have an IRB position. As mentioned earlier, after the employment system reform, government agencies and public institutions employ both IRB and contract-based employees. However, contract-based employees were not common in government agencies and public institutions until the mid-2000s. In the sample used in the present paper, the parents of the respondents were working during 1966 – 2013 when the respondents were 14 years old. During most of these years, working in government agencies or public institutions was almost equivalent to having an IRB job. In the subsequent robustness test, I will limit the sample to those who got 14 years old before the mid-2000s.

Another factor that may affect the reliability of my estimation results lies in the implementation of the job allocation process, which may be influenced by interpersonal relationships. That is, the respondents' parents may have obtained preferred jobs through bribery or other means. As a result, job allocation is not completely exogeneous for them. This is more common among people with low educational backgrounds, because the labor departments were more strictly responsible for graduates from high school or above. Therefore, in the subsequent robustness test, I will limit the sample to those with high school (or secondary vocational school, vocational school, technical school) and university graduates.

One more issue that needs to be discussed is about the definition of IRB jobs. The proxy variable of the key explanatory variable selected in this paper comes from the question "What was the type of your father's (mother's) employer when you were 14

years old?" The answer choices include government, enterprise, public institution, social organization, self-employed, and military. However, as mentioned earlier, since the mid-1990s, some public institutions have been restructured into state-owned enterprises. Therefore, respondents whose parents worked for those public institutions that were later restructured into enterprises may choose "enterprise" rather than "public institution" as the answer to this question, which may bias the regression results. Fortunately, there is another question in the questionnaire: What was the ownership of your father's (mother's) employer when you were 14 years old? The answer choices include state-owned, collectively owned, privately owned, Hong Kong/Macao/ Taiwan funded, and foreign-funded. State-owned employers include not only government agencies and public institutions, but also some state-owned enterprises which were restructured from public institutions. Therefore, in the robustness test, I will use the answer "state-owned" to this question as a variable to measure whether the parents have an IRB job, as a replacement of the explanatory variable in the baseline regressions. In fact, this variable is not perfect either, as working in a state-owned enterprise does not necessarily mean having an IRB position. However, it can help to ensure the robustness of my conclusions to a certain extent.

As discussed in the literature review, for different genders of children, the effect of parents' having an IRB job on education may be different. Moreover, during the studenthood of the respondent of my sample, there is a large gap between rural and urban areas in economics development, educational resources, and marketization. These differences may lead to a discrepancy of the effect of parents' IRB job on children's

development between rural and urban residents. Therefore, in the section of heterogeneity analysis, I will explore such differences by regressing on different gender or Hukou groups.

China once experienced a decade of special period, known as the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), during which the economy faced unique challenges. During this period, significant changes occurred in the education system. For instance, college entrance examination (Gaokao) was suspended, and admission to college was no longer based on academic performance but instead on how much their parents support for the central policies[5]. The college entrance examination was officially reinstated in 1977. In the following year (1978), China began to implement reform and opening-up policies. In 1986, China started to gradually implement the Compulsory Education Law nationwide (beginning the nine-year compulsory education system). In 1999, China's higher education began to expand its enrollment on a large scale. In subsequent heterogeneity analysis, I will conduct separate estimations for different birth cohorts to observe how the impact of parents' IRB positions on their children's education vary across different cohorts and explore possible explanations in the context of different historical backgrounds.

5 Results

5.1 Baseline Regressions

[5] It is hard to determine whether or not a family is unconditionally supporting the central policies. Thus, Chinese Renqing (interpersonal connections) played an important role during this period.

Table 2 reports the baseline results. The directions of coefficients are all consistent with the existing research: women's educational level is lower than men's, being ethnic minorities is negatively correlated to educational attainment, the rural residents get less education than urban residents, and the older the people, the less years of education the obtain (the earlier the individual was born, the less average educational resources they had). In addition, the more education the parents have, the higher the children's educational attainment. Among the two variables of parents' education, the father's educational level has a greater impact than the mother's.

Having an IRB father can increase the years of education of his child by about 0.41 to 0.47 years on average, while having an IRB mother does not have a significant effect. On the one hand, in traditional Chinese society, fathers are often regarded as the main economic supporter and decision maker of the family, and the father's occupation and economic status may have a more direct impact on the allocation of family resources and investment in children's education. On the other hand, the father's IRB job may bring broader social networks and higher social capital, which can be transformed into resources beneficial to children's education. This finding is consistent with previous findings that on average, the father's job has a greater impact on children's development than the mother's (Lo Bello and Morchio, 2022).

Table 2. Results of Baseline Regressions

Variable	(1)	(2)
$IRBF_i$	0.415***	0.468***
	(0.086)	(0.09)
$IRBM_i$	0.101	-0.007
	(0.121)	(0.129)
$EduF_i$	0.194***	0.179***
	(0.007)	(0.008)
$EduM_i$	0.161***	0.13***
	(0.008)	(0.008)
$Gender$ (female=1)	-1.081***	-1.155***
	(0.045)	(0.048)
Age	-0.091***	-0.096***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
$Ethnic$ (minority=1)	-0.56***	-0.714***
	(0.085)	(0.096)
$Hukou$ (rural=1)	-2.763***	-2.536***
	(0.053)	(0.058)
$Sibsize$	-0.012	0.003
	(0.021)	(0.201)
Province fixed effects	No	Yes
Obs	22,415	19,100
Adj R^2	0.445	0.463

Notes: Robust standard errors are in parentheses; *, **, and *** indicate significance at 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Columns (1) and (2) report the estimation results with and without province fixed effects, respectively.

As mentioned before, IRB employees not only enjoy the stable income which is not influenced by the economic situation or personal performance (though the salary may not necessarily be higher than those without an IRB job) and the sense of security brought by the lifelong position, but also a variety of benefits that may change over time. These benefits can include schools provided by the employer for employees' children, educational subsidies, rent-free or low-rent housing, free medical care for themselves

and their children (or substantial medical subsidies), higher social capital, more family time to spend with children, and progressive educational and gender attitudes fostered by the work environment. It is difficult to distinguish the effect of each of these possible benefits. But I will go as deep as possible by adding more variables into regressions, conducting regressions on different genders, household registration status, and birth cohorts, and by connecting these estimation results to the historical and regional backgrounds.

5.2 Robustness checks

5.2.1 Limiting the Sample

First, I limit the sample to individuals aged 36 to 65. For this age group, if their parents worked in government agencies or public institutions when they were 14 years old, they must have an IRB. Results are shown in columns (1) and (2) of Table 3, the influence of having a father with an IRB job is still significant, and the magnitude of the effect has not changed much compared with Table 2.

Second, I limit the sample to individuals whose fathers' educational level is high school or above (including secondary vocational schools, technical schools, etc.). Such individuals are less influenced by interpersonal factors in the job allocation process, because the allocation process is more transparent for these groups. As indicated by columns (3) and (4) of Table 3, the impact of having a father with an IRB job is still significant, and the impact of the mother also becomes significant. Comparisons between columns (1)-(2) and columns (3)-(4) show that with a father who has obtained

high school or higher education level, the negative effects of being a female, an ethnic minority, or a rural resident are much smaller than those whose father's educational level is lower.

5.2.2 Replacing the Key Explanatory Variable

In this subsection, I replace the outcome variable with another binary variable, which indicates whether the father's or mother's employer was state-owned when the respondent was 14 years old. When this variable takes the value of 1, it means that the parents worked in a state-owned sector (including governments, public sectors and state-owned enterprises). Results are reported in columns (5) and (6) of Table 3, the coefficients for having a father with an IRB job are still significant, and their magnitude is similar to that in the baseline regressions.

Table 3. Results of Robustness Checks

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
$IRBF_i$	0.505***	0.564***	0.285**	0.386***	0.573***	0.424***
	(0.099)	(0.105)	(0.114)	(0.123)	(0.078)	(0.083)
$IRBM_i$	0.124	0.0246	0.451***	0.434***	0.255***	0.115
	(0.151)	(0.163)	(0.145)	(0.155)	(0.098)	(0.106)
$EduF_i$	0.195***	0.183***	0.111***	0.107***	0.192***	0.182***
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.007)	(0.008)
$EduM_i$	0.157***	0.125***	0.137***	0.113***	0.154***	0.127***
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.008)	(0.009)
$Gender$ (female=1)	-1.419***	-1.496***	-0.373***	-0.381***	-1.085***	-1.159***
	(0.053)	(0.057)	(0.095)	(0.102)	(0.045)	(0.048)
Age	-0.077***	-0.082***	-0.093***	-0.096***	-0.0933***	-0.096***
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.002)	(0.002)
$Ethnic$ (minority=1)	-0.546***	-0.733***	-0.374*	-0.326	-0.551***	-0.703***
	(0.101)	(0.114)	(0.198)	(0.219)	(0.085)	(0.096)
$Hukou$ (rural=1)	-3.103***	-2.822***	-2.285***	-2.068***	-2.635***	-2.477***
	(0.062)	(0.069)	(0.113)	(0.125)	(0.055)	(0.060)
$Sibsize$	-0.011	-0.001	-0.0383	-0.003	-0.014	0.002
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.061)	(0.062)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Province fixed effects	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Obs	16,749	14,327	3,356	2,854	22,411	19,100
Adj R^2	0.505	0.404	0.351	0.378	0.446	0.463

Notes: Robust standard errors are in parentheses; *, **, and *** indicate significance at 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Columns (1) and (2) present the regression results when the sample is restricted to individuals aged between 36 and 65. Columns (3) and (4) present the results for those whose fathers' educational level is high school or above. Columns (5) and (6) report the results with the alternative dependent variable. Among the six columns, results in columns (1), (3) and (5) are obtained without including the province specific variables, while those in columns (2), (4) and (6) have considered the province fixed effects.

5.3 A Possible Channel: Social Status and Administrative Power

Here I consider two possible mediating variables: self-rated social status and the administrative rank of the father. Both of these factors are affected by whether the father has an IRB job, and both influence the social resources of the family. The higher the social status or the administrative rank, the more adequate resources in terms of social

connections. Among them, self-rated social status is derived from the question "What level do you think your family was at when you were 14 years old?", with a higher score indicating a higher social status. The administrative rank of the father is derived from the question "What was the administrative rank of your father when you were 14 years old, if he had an administrative position?" I set this variable as a binary variable, with 1 indicating that the administrative rank is equal to or higher than section chief level ("Ke-ji level", the lowest administrative position in China's administrative system), and 0 indicating lower than that. The IRB job of the father may influence the education of the children through its influence on the family's social status and the father's administrative rank. The regression results are shown in Table 4. Considering the difference in sample size after accounting for administrative levels and family social status compared to the sample size in the baseline regressions in Table 2, I conducted new regressions based on equation (1) using the updated samples. The results are presented in Table 4, where they are compared with the results after including the mediating variables. It indicates that these two variables indeed work as mediating factors in the relationship between the IRB job and children's education, but the influence of the IRB job on children's education does not stem solely from them.

Table 4. Mediating Effects of Father's Administrative Rank and Family Social Status

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
$IRBF_i$	0.422***	0.336***	0.460***	0.404***
	0.097	0.100	0.092	0.092
Father's administrative rank		0.118***		
		0.033		
Social status				0.157***
				0.014
Other variables controlled	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Province-fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Obs	17,036	17,036	17,971	17,971
Adj R^2	0.452	0.452	0.452	0.455

Notes: Robust standard errors are in parentheses; *, **, and *** indicate significance at 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Column (1) and column (3) present the results based on equation (1). Column (2) and (4) present the results considering the mediating variables (father's administrative rank and social status, respectively). The results reported in the columns (1) and (2) are based on the subsample contains father's administrative rank, while those in columns (3) and (4) are obtained using another subsample which contains the family's social status.

6 Heterogeneity

6.1 Gender and Hukou Type

I divided the sample into four groups: urban females, rural females, urban males, and rural males. The regression results are shown in Table 4[6].

[6] There may be a problem caused by insufficient variation in provinces with too few IRB positions, this may affect the reliability of the results. Thus, I also performed regressions without controlling for province fixed effects. The results are very similar. In addition, I replace the dependent variable in the way introduced in the robustness checks and this do not change the findings in this subsection.

Table 5. Regression Results of Different Groups

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Urban Females	Rural Females	Urban Males	Rural Males
$IRBF_i$	0.241*	1.080***	0.069	0.876***
	(0.148)	(0.216)	(0.147)	(0.208)
$IRBM_i$	0.339*	-0.036	0.469***	0.095
	(0.192)	(0.473)	(0.181)	(0.508)
$EduF_i$	0.195***	0.169***	0.166***	0.169***
	(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.017)	(0.014)
$EduM_i$	0.092***	0.212***	0.065***	0.161***
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Age	-0.087***	-0.137***	-0.067***	-0.063***
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)
$Ethnic$ (minority=1)	0.007	-1.214***	0.147	-0.710***
	(0.234)	(0.160)	(0.237)	(0.170)
$Sibsize$	0.008	-0.018	-0.098*	0.010
	(0.050)	(0.037)	(0.058)	(0.037)
Province fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Obs	3,404	6,931	3,156	5,609
Adj R^2	0.364	0.412	0.291	0.272

Notes: Robust standard errors are in parentheses; *, **, and *** indicate significance at 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

Table 5 shows several interesting findings. First, regardless of whether in urban or rural areas, fathers' IRB positions have a significantly greater impact on daughters compared to sons. The impacts of father's or mother's education are different between sons and daughters, too. Higher parental education levels have a more positive impact on daughters than on sons, and this is consistent with many studies (Thomas, 1990; Buchmann and DiPrete, 2006). In traditional Chinese culture, males are supposed to have social responsibilities and have been the primary focus of family investment. Consequently, the educational attainment of boys is less sensitive to their parents' education levels and occupations. The higher the parents' education level, the more

likely they are to shift their expectations for their daughters from family roles to carrer and societal roles, and invest more educational resources in girls than those parents with less education (Nguyen and Le, 2022; Chen et al., 2024). Similarly, IRB employees, especially IRB fathers, with their stable incomes, job security, and social resources, are more likely to invest in their daughters' education. Another possible explanation is that government agencies and public sectors, compared to private sectors, employ more female employees and offer more gender-equal salaries. This could reinforce the impression of female's social roles among male employees, making these males willing to provide more educational resources for their daughters. To confirm this hypothesis, I regress respondents' gender attitudes on the aforementioned explanatory variables and respondents' years of education. The results show that individuals with fathers in IRB positions, controlling for the parents' and their own years of education, are more likely to agree that women should have social roles, rather than just serving the family[7].

Secondly, in rural areas, only fathers' IRB jobs play a role in their children's education, while in urban areas, mothers' IRB jobs are also helpful, and sometimes even more helpful than fathers', regardless of whether the respondents are male or female. This may be related to the differences in who makes decisions on education in families between urban and rural areas. Urban women may have more decision-making power than rural women in family investment decisions, especially those involving children's education (Dyson and Moore, 1983; Bradshaw, 2013; Shrestha et al., 2020). Moreover,

[7] The variable used here is from the question: "Do you agree that 'men should prioritize their careers, while women should prioritize their families'?" The regression results are available upon request.

urban areas have more comprehensive social services and support systems, which allow mothers to balance their careers and family responsibilities more effectively. This enables mothers to convert their work resources and social capital into support for their children's education more efficiently.

Third, the fathers' IRB position has a greater impact on children's education in rural areas than in urban ones. On one hand, stable income sources, as well as educational and medical subsidies, may play a more critical role in rural families' decision-making on their children's education compared to urban families. Moreover, economic benefits can reduce the impact of unexpected family events (such as serious illness of family members) on children's education in rural areas where the healthcare system is relatively weak, providing children with psychological security. On the other hand, the social capital accumulated by working in the government and public sectors can play a more important role in relatively closed rural areas where education policies are less effectively implemented and legal protections are weaker. China is a society of interpersonal relationships (as known as Renqing or Guanxi), the role of interpersonal relationships is often more important in rural areas. In addition, in certain periods, the IRB jobs provided schools for the children of employees. This was particularly important for rural children, where schools were relatively scarce, and transportation was less convenient.

Other variables also exhibit something worth discussion. For example, the negative impact of age on educational attainment is particularly large for rural women. This suggests that macro factors such as economic development, improvements in the

education system, and the progress of legal system over time have had the greatest impact on rural women's education among the four groups. In modern China, the trend towards equalizing education across urban and rural areas and between genders is quite obvious. Moreover, the negative impact of being an ethnic minority is only significant in rural areas. Furthermore, the intergenerational influence of women's education is most substantial for rural women among the four groups.

6.2 Different Birth Cohorts

In this subsection, I divided the sample into four birth cohorts: the 1960s (1960-1969), the 1970s (1970-1979), the 1980s (1980-1989), and the 1990s (1990-1999). As shown in Table 6, having a father with an IRB job has a significant impact on the education level of those born in the 1960s and 1970s. To investigate the reasons for this result, we can consider the economic characteristics and education policies of each period.

Table 6. Regression Results of Different Birth Cohorts[8]

	1	2	3	4
Variable	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
$IRBF_i$	0.407**	0.497***	0.268	-0.012
	(0.171)	(0.18)	(0.192)	(0.211)
$IRBM_i$	0.385	0.011	0.03	-0.046
	(0.273)	(0.273)	(0.238)	(0.240)
$EduF_i$	0.182***	0.200***	0.146***	0.190***
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.021)
$EduM_i$	0.123***	0.132***	0.146***	0.168***
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.020)
$Gender$ (female=1)	-1.504***	-1.072***	-0.248**	0.149
	(0.092)	(0.099)	(0.097)	(0.110)
Age	0.0631***	-0.104***	-0.079***	-0.015
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.017)
$Ethnic$ (minority=1)	-0.458**	-0.886***	-0.988***	-0.296
	(0.183)	(0.195)	(0.192)	(0.219)
$Hukou$ (rural=1)	-2.702***	-2.633***	-2.493***	-0.751***
	(0.113)	(0.118)	(0.113)	(0.132)
$Sibsize$	0.013	-0.020	-0.074	-0.027
	(0.036)	(0.048)	(0.075)	(0.133)
Province fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Obs	5,249	4,375	3,840	2,749
Adj R^2	0.342	0.403	0.397	0.247

Notes: Robust standard errors are in parentheses; *, **, and *** indicate significance at 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

First, in 1986, China began to implement the nine-year compulsory education, a system that was perfected by the mid-to-late 1990s. During this period, other education policies also began to mature, making education fairer and more transparent. This reduced the relative advantages brought by parents' IRB jobs, especially those related to education resources, such as children's schools for employees, or education subsidies.

Secondly, China's public universities expanded enrollment on a large scale in the

[8] Here I also use "whether the father's or mother's employer was state-owned when the respondent was 14 years old" as the dependent variable. The results are similar.

late 1990s, thus ending the era when only a few people could attend university. Therefore, since this period, the advantages brought by parents with IRB jobs have become less significant.

Thirdly, in 1990s, China's economic market oriented reform progressed rapidly, and the number of private enterprises and foreign-funded enterprises increased significantly, with a substantial increase in their employees' income. Therefore, the "stable income" advantage of IRB jobs was no longer obvious compared with the high income of private and foreign-funded enterprises. Meanwhile, educational resources (such as extracurricular books, stationery, and private tutors) were also marketized on a large scale, so educational resources became more like something that could be purchased with money rather than exchanged through social connections or other social capital.

Comparing the impact on those born in the 1960s and 1970s reveals that the influence of having a father with an IRB job was less significant for those who grew up during the Cultural Revolution (1960s) than for those born in the 1970s. This indicates that the influence of IRB jobs does not entirely stem from the special university enrollment policies of Cultural Revolution, which is a particular historical period.

Furthermore, I categorized people from different birth cohorts into rural and urban groups and found (regression results are available upon request) that even for the 1980s and 1990s cohorts, the influence of having a father with an IRB job is significant for rural residents. This demonstrates that in rural areas, where the enforcement of education policies, availability of educational resources, and transportation conditions are

relatively poor, children's educational attainment is more sensitive to whether their father has an IRB position.

It should be noted that the large-scale layoffs of public sectors in the employment system reform officially started in the middle and late 1990s. Before this period, all jobs were promised as lifetime employments. Therefore, the people born in the 1960s and 1970s, regardless of whether or not their fathers worked in the public sector, all believed that no one would lose their jobs. Therefore, during this period, the role of IRB jobs in children's education is unlikely to be related to the job security provided by lifetime employment.

7 Concluding Remarks

This paper is trying to link parents' IRB job with their children's educational attainment for the first time. It finds that parents' IRB position has a significant impact on their children's educational level. This effect is different between urban and rural residents. In urban areas, a mother's IRB job positively affects her children's education, while in rural areas, only fathers' IRB job has such an impact. The underlying reason may be that urban mothers have greater decision-making power and influence over their children's education. Moreover, this paper also finds the influence of fathers' IRB positions is much greater in rural areas than in urban areas. This may be related to the relatively lower levels of economic development, educational resources, and transportation conditions in rural areas.

The benefits of an IRB position are multifaceted. As aforementioned, it not only

signifies more stable jobs and incomes (though not necessarily high), schools for employees' children, medical and educational subsidies, but also potentially brings extensive social networks, more egalitarian gender views, and a higher emphasis on education. Our current data cannot specifically identify which of these benefits play the most significant role. However, comparisons across different birth cohorts show that the influence of parents' IRB job is primarily concentrated among those born in the 1960s and 1970s, when China had a low level of legalization, scarce educational resources, and the nine-year compulsory education had not yet been popularized. For those born in the 1980s and 1990s, the impact of parents' IRB position remains significant in relatively underdeveloped rural areas. These results suggest that the social capital and benefits associated with the IRB job can partially offset the adverse effects of lower legal institutionalization and inadequate educational resources in these areas. They also indicate that as economic development progresses and educational resources become more abundant, the impact of the IRB job on children's education may diminish.

The findings of this paper have several important implications for policymakers. First, lower the cost of education in underdeveloped areas, such as expanding educational resources and enhancing legal frameworks, are crucial for educational equity. Specifically, providing more policy support for girls, particularly the girls in disadvantaged regions, is essential for improving female education. Second, offering more vocational training and employment support for mothers, helping them obtain stable jobs, and implementing more flexible work arrangements and childcare support policies can enhance mothers' influence on their children's education by enabling them

to balance work and family responsibilities better. Third, the inequalities brought about by having or not having an IRB job can be transmitted intergenerationally. Labor market inequalities can affect the educational attainment of the next generation. Therefore, gradually eliminating the disparities between the public and private sectors and achieving true equal pay for equal work is vital for ensuring equity for future generations.

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