

Class origin, family culture, and intergenerational correlation of education in rural China

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Objective

This paper examines the influence of **family class origin (*jiating chengfen*)** on the intergenerational correlation of education in rural China.

* *Chengfen*: The political label designated at the period of land reform (late 1940s-early 1950s) and hung on every family and its member up to the 1970s.

Background: rural Hungary

> 'interrupted embourgeoisement' in rural Hungary
(Szelényi 1988)

The old rural bourgeoisie and other entrepreneurial families (especially 'kulaks' and 'middle peasants') could exploit the new market opportunities of the mixed economy after the 1980s by placing their family resources (education, occupational skills, and so on) in the educational and politicoeconomic systems under the socialist regime.

Background: rural China?

>Class origin mattered very much in the Maoist era.

“Weren’t landlord children inferior because they’d been born into bad-class households?” (a sent-down youth in a Guangdong village, 1968) (Chan et al. 1984, p.165)

>The Party announced to abolish class origin in 1979.
Had it really become irrelevant after the 1980s?

“Offspring of the former landlord, rich peasant may be more likely to be well off now” (a local official in Gansu, 2006) (author’s interview, August 11 2006)

Design and subjects

1. Design: Cross-sectional study using rural households survey (reference year 2002)

2. Subjects: Three generations to be studied
 - (1) First generation (grandfather)
Fathers of male heads of household
 - (2) Second generation (father)
Current male heads of household
 - (3) Third generation (children)
Resident and non-resident children (age 16-18)

Outcome measures and estimation methods

>We concentrate on **education** today.

(we will introduce a little bit about the influence of class origin on current generation's **wealth and income**)

Outcome measures [methods]:

1. (**2nd generation**) Male heads of household's years of education completed [OLS regression]
2. (**3rd generation**) Dummy variable for whether children aged 16-18 have achieved or achieving 10 years or more schooling (i. e. whether they have continued education beyond junior high school level) [probit estimation].

Data (the 2002 CHIP survey)

A nationally representative cross-sectional survey of rural households conducted the Chinese Household Income Project (CHIP)

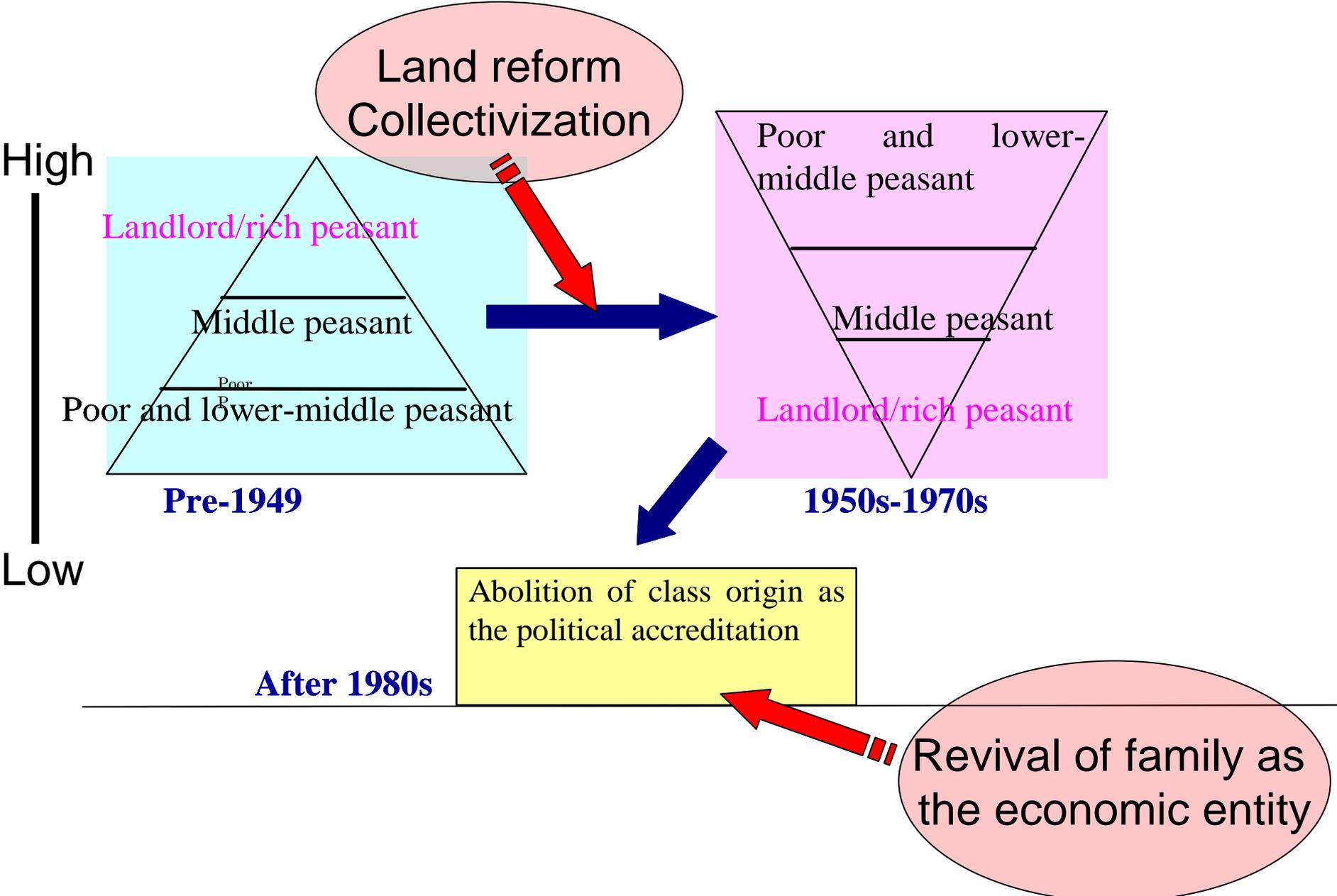
Reference year: 2002

Size: total 9200 households in 22 provinces

Sampling frame: subsample of the official annual household survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

See for detail: [Gustafsson, Li, and Sicular \(2007, forthcoming\)](#)

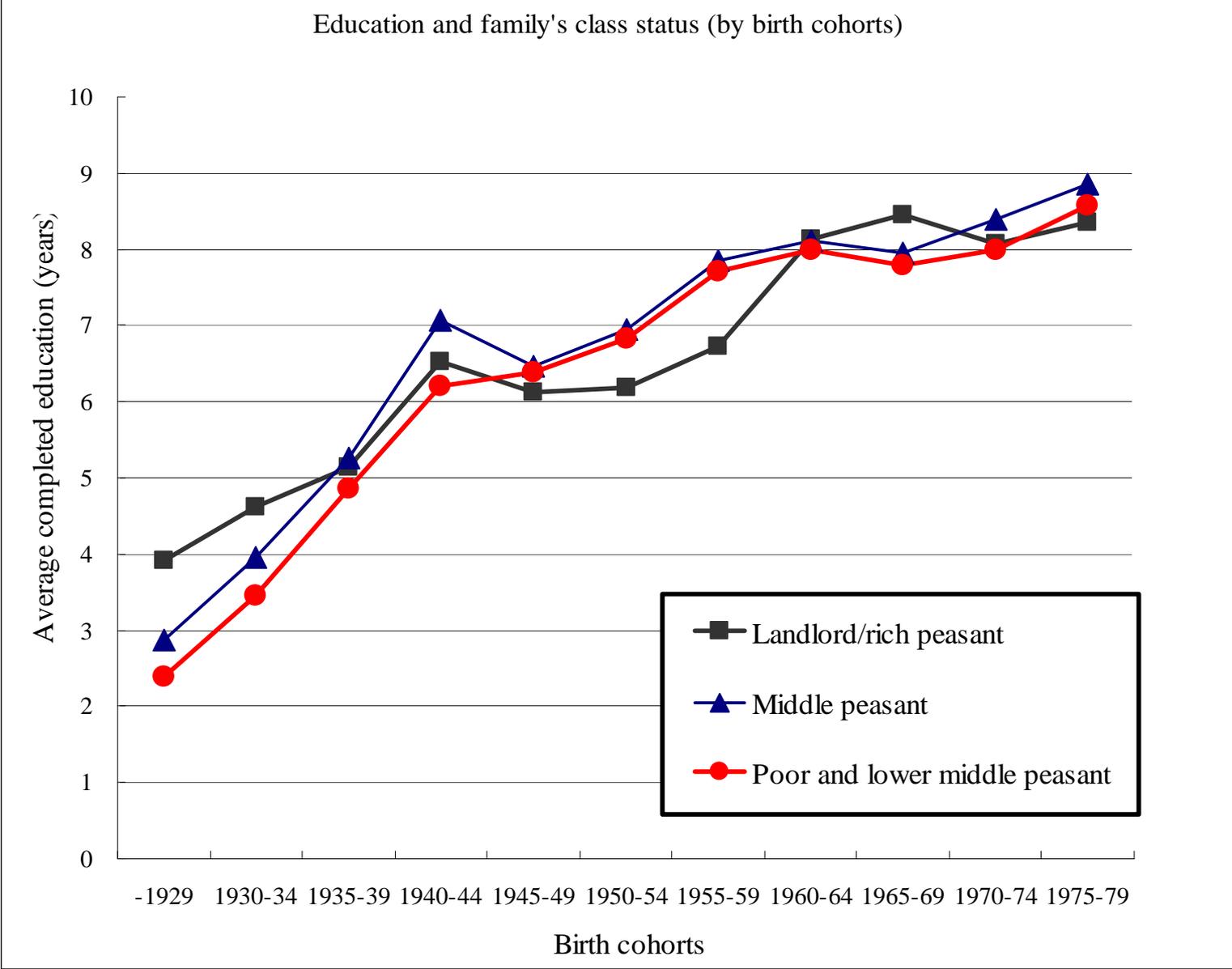
Family class origin and Socio-political hierarchy Figure 2



Distribution of class origin in our working data (Table 1)

Landlord/rich peasant families	6.4%
Middle peasant families	19.8%
Poor and lower-middle peasant families	73.8%
N=number of household with male heads of household	100.0% (N=8821)

Basic finding Average completed education of current male household members (Figure 3)



Determinants of male heads of household's educational level (2nd generation)

Dependent var. Male heads of household's years of education

Independent var. (1) class origin; (2) father's years of education; (3) heads of household's birth cohorts; (4) interaction terms of class origin and birth cohorts

>Four birth cohorts (Table 2)

Thresholds: age 12 age 15

Political conditions at these thresholds

(1) Pre-Maoist cohort (2) Mid-Maoist cohort

(3) Late-Maoist cohort (4) Post-reform cohort

Birth cohorts of current heads of household (Table 2)

Threshold age:

age 12 (transition from primary to junior high level)

age 15 (transition from junior high to upper level)

<i>Cohorts</i>	Birth year	Year at age 12	Year at age 15	Distribution of observations (%)
Pre-Maoist	up to 1944	-1956	-1959	14.7
Mid-Maoist	1945-1959	1957-1971	1960-1974	46.7
Late-Maoist	1960-1965	1972-1977	1975-1980	19.7
Post-reform	1966-	1978-	1981-	18.9

Possible bias: selective rural-urban migration?

>Permanent rural-urban migration with changing *hukou* status (household registration status).

1. long-lasting strict restriction on permanent rural–urban migration

2. no strong evidence of class-based selective migration

*percentage of landlord/rich peasant in permanent R-U migrants (calculated from urban samples of CHIP data)

Overall: 6.3% 1949-1979: 5.2% 1966-1975: 2.8%
1980 and after: 7.6%

Dependent variable: Male heads of household's years of education

<i>Independent variable</i>	(1)	(2) with interaction terms
Landlord/rich peasant origin	-0.069 (0.65)	0.630 (2.73)***
Middle peasant origin	0.140 (2.15)**	0.586 (3.68)***
Father's years of education	0.100 (7.11)***	0.101 (7.15)***
Mid-Maoist cohort	1.141 (15.27)***	1.357 (15.29)***
Late-Maoist cohort	2.187 (25.05)***	2.357 (23.16)***
Postreform cohort	2.114 (23.47)***	2.244 (21.35)***
Landlord/rich peasant × Mid-Maoist cohort		-1.293 (4.69)***
Landlord/rich peasant × Late-Maoist cohort		-0.586 (1.70)*
Landlord/rich peasant × Postreform cohort		-0.121 (0.37)
Middle peasant × Mid-Maoist cohort		-0.543 (2.98)***
Middle peasant × Late-Maoist cohort		-0.530 (2.46)**
Middle peasant × Postreform cohort		-0.492 (2.27)**

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Table 4

Educational level of male heads of household

Dependent variable:

Male heads of household's years of education

Determinants of male heads of household's educational level **Findings**

1. Both father's education and family class origin are significant
2. The effects of family class origin vary across historical periods.
 - > Landlord/rich peasant families: a sharp drop in the mid-Maoist cohort and then a rebound in the post-reform cohort.
 - > **degree of drop-rebound:** correlates with the degree of class-based discrimination?
how to measure the degree of discrimination

Social environment and educational level of landlord/rich peasant families (Table 5)

- >village type (*surname structure*) as a proxy of the *density of kinship relations* within the community
- >hypothesis: class-based discrimination could be mitigated where there are dense kinship relationships across families of different class origins

Non-multisurname village villages where families with the most commonly occurring surname (*daxing*) comprise more than half of the total number of families.

Multisurname village other villages

Table 5 Class origin and education in the mid-Maoist and Post-reform cohorts (by social environment)

Social environment		Families living in Multisurname villages		Families living in Non-multisurname villages	
cohort	Birth	(1) Mid-Maoist cohort	(2) Postreform cohort	(3) Mid-Maoist cohort	(4) Postreform cohort
	<i>Independent variables</i>				
Landlord/rich peasant origin		-0.703 (3.37)***	0.841 (3.22)***	-0.542 (1.93)*	-0.001 (0.02)
Middle peasant origin		-0.015 (0.12)	0.173 (1.01)	0.083 (0.49)	-0.023 (0.09)
Father's years of education		0.089 (2.93)***	0.106 (3.70)***	0.138 (3.42)***	0.133 (2.84)***
County dummies		YES	YES	YES	YES
Constant		8.490 (17.59)***	8.173 (11.31)***	7.509 (12.65)***	10.408 (6.73)***

Social environment and educational level of landlord/rich peasant families **Finding**

1. **multisurname village** sharp drop & rebound
non-multisurname village weaker drop & rebound
2. a proportional rebound against the degree of discrimination...but it is not necessarily natural that discrimination causes a 'rebound'
 - >a common reaction of oppressed people is 'resignation' rather than 'rebound' (Sen 1992).
 - >our inference: the class-based discrimination did not last long enough to make the oppressed group become accustomed to it.

Determinants of current younger generation's educational level (3rd generation)

Dependent var. Dummy variable for whether children aged 16-18 have achieved or achieving 10 years or more schooling (i. e. whether they have continued education beyond junior high school level)

Independent var.

- (1) family class origin
 - (2) parent's years of education
 - (3) father's Communist Party membership, birth cohorts
 - (4) per capita family wealth (2002)
 - (5) sectoral structure of county GDP
- and children's gender and age dummies

Possible bias: censored data?

1. Children attending schools out-of-home

>Data covers nonresident children.

2. early marriage of low-educated children (mostly girls)

>No serious censoring because we concentrate on children aged 16-18.

>Thus we employ ordinary probit, not censored probit (see [Holmes 2003](#))

Table 7
Educational
level of
children
aged 16-18

**Dependent var.
(dummy)**

1 if currently
attending
school or
already
completed 10
years or more
education

Otherwise 0

	(1)	Marginal effect dy/dx
<i>Independent variables</i>		
Class origin and other family characteristics		
Landlord/rich peasant origin	0.278 (2.45)**	0.102
Middle peasant origin	0.129 (1.78)*	0.049
Father's years of education	0.050 (3.87)***	0.019
Mother's years of education	0.044 (4.27)***	0.017
Father's Communist Party membership	0.214 (2.89)***	0.081
Father born up to 1953	0.170 (2.28)**	0.064
Father born 1960 and after	0.006 (0.11)	0.003
Per capita family wealth	0.019 (4.27)***	0.007
Regional characteristics		
Sectoral structure of county GDP	0.098 (3.07)***	0.037

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Determinants of educational level of children aged 16-18

Findings

1. Positive influences of parent's education, family wealth, party membership, and level of regional economic development (sectoral structure of GDP)
2. After controlling these factors, class origin still matters
 - *children of landlord/rich peasant families are more likely to continue schooling beyond junior high school level.
 - *middle peasant origin also has a positive effect
 - > another evidence [Table 8](#)

Table 8 Parent's wish for son's educational attainment

*asked heads of household who have sons age 9-12

<i>I want my son to continue schooling to.....</i>	Landlord/ rich peasant	Middle peasant	Poor and lower- middle peasant	Total
senior high or above level	89%	90%	80%	83%
junior high	11%	10%	20%	17%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

further finding: class origin and current family wealth

After controlling for individual/family characteristics, the offspring of landlord/rich peasant families and middle peasant families in 2002 are more likely to have higher family wealth than their poor and lower-middle peasant counterparts.

Per capita family wealth of families with heads of household who are mature adult (age 35-59) (2002, County grand mean=100.0)

Birth cohort of heads of household	Landlord/rich peasant	Middle peasant	Poor and lower-middle peasant
Born up to 1954	98.0	108.2	99.9
Born in 1955-1967	109.3	101.5	97.4

Sato, Hiroshi and Li, Shi (2007) Revolution and family in rural China: Does family class origin influence current family wealth?, mimeo.

Conclusion: role of family as a cultural institution

children of middle peasant, as well as landlord/rich peasant...

1. Although institutional change after 1949 destroyed the physical capital stocks of well-off families, invisible family **cultural capital** was preserved throughout the Maoist era and has begun again to play a role in current rural society.
2. A class-specific, **education-oriented family culture** has been shaped as a mixture of, firstly, family cultural capital inherited from the pre-Maoist era, and, secondly, the intergenerational cultural rebound against class-based discrimination.

Implications

1. Comparative economic transition

Hungary and China: similar phenomenon but different backgrounds (Szelényi 1988)

2. China study

long-term continuity of rural family

(Campbell and Lee 2003; 2006)

Campbell, Cameron and Lee, James. 2006 “Was there a revolution? stratification over the very long term in Liaoning, China, 1749-2005,” paper presented at the annual conference of ASA, 2006.

Their conclusion reads:

“Economic leveling through the redistribution of wealth or active discrimination in the assignment of occupations and official positions may have little effect on the transmission of attitudes and orientations within families”

Implications (cont)

3. Comparative study on social discrimination:
family vs. state-led discrimination

(Fang and Norman 2006)

reaction of oppressed social group:

'resignation' or 'rebound' (Sen 1992)

Thank you

