

Party Recruitment of College Students in China

Gang GUO
Croft Assistant Professor
Political Science and International Studies
The University of Mississippi
University, MS 38677-1848
gg@olemiss.edu

2003-12-04

Abstract

Recruitment of young intellectuals such as college students has been an important part of the Chinese Communist Party's recruitment strategies for most of its history. Two of the college students that the Party recruited in 1940s and 1960s went on to become the Party's top leaders in 1990s and 2000s, and today's student Party members may well lead Chinese politics at various levels in future decades. This paper examines Party recruitment of college students in the reform era and highlights the impact of 1989. Since the 1990s the Party has stepped up its efforts at recruitment and ideological work on college students. Paradoxically the former is succeeding while the latter seems barely effective. Today's college students are striving to join the Party in large numbers, yet primarily out of a personal pragmatic concern for their future job searches and career advancement. Even student Party members do not have a strong commitment to the Party's sanctioned ideology.

Introduction

Chinese Communist Party (hereinafter “the Party”) members account for more than 1% of the world’s population. With 67 million card-carrying members and as the only political party to rule the 1.3 billion people on China’s mainland, the Party has become the largest and arguably the most powerful political party in the world. As the Party celebrated its 80th anniversary and its 16th National Congress in the new century, overseas reporters noticed the Party hasn’t lost its appeal to China’s younger generation, especially college students.¹ Why are some of China’s brightest youths flocking to this seemingly aging communist party? What does this trend imply for the Party’s future? This paper attempts to answer these questions by first putting them in the historical context of Party recruitment and higher education in China. Since 1989 the Party has greatly stepped up its efforts at recruitment and ideological work among college students, whose mixed success entails further examination in the latter part of this paper.

The main data source of this research is official and academic publications in China. It also draws on materials that the author collected during two periods of field research in China’s mainland, including local Party and government documents and interviews of Party cadres and students on university campuses. For the survey results reported in Chinese media, questions inevitably arise as to how reliable they are in tapping students’ real minds. Yet few questionnaires were formulated implicitly to have politically correct answers and students’ actual responses defy a conformist image. In this study they are also combined with other materials and statistics.

Historical Developments

Party Recruitment and Higher Education

The Party has been an elite-dominated Leninist party ever since it was founded in 1921. The theoretical basis for the Party’s claim to political power is that Party members comprise the most enlightened and the only section of society which knows what is in the best interest of the mass public. Almost all of the 50 or so founding members of the Party were young radical revolutionary intellectuals, as were most of the top Party leaders during its early years. The Party also laid special emphasis on recruiting intellectuals, including college students.² During the Anti-Japanese War (1937 - 1945) and the War of Liberation (1946 - 1949), the Party devoted painstaking efforts (the so-called “underground work”) to competing with the Kuomintang on university campuses to win the support of and to recruit college students.³ Jiang Zemin, the Party’s General Secretary from 1989 to 2002, was one of the college students who were secretly recruited in 1946.

¹ See e.g. Bill Smith, “China’s Communist Party Woos Student Idealists”, *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 2001-06-29, Clara Li, “Students Race to Join up for Elite Privileges”, in *South China Morning Post*, 2001-06-29, Cindy Sui, “China’s Youth Joining Communist Party to Polish Job Prospects”, *Agence France Presse*, 2001-07-01, and Erik Eckholm, “As China’s Economy Shines, The Party Line Loses Luster”, *New York Times*, 2002-11-05.

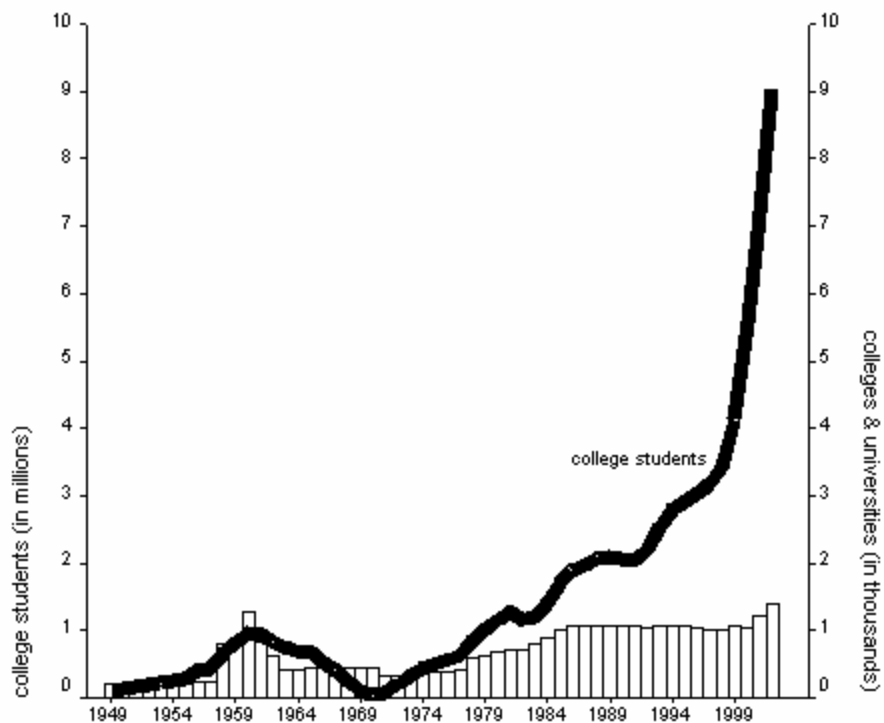
² Mao Zedong, “Daliang xishou zhishifenzi rudang” [Recruit Large Number of Intellectuals], in *Mao Zedong xuanji dier juan* [The Selected Works of Mao Zedong, Volume 2] (Beijing: People’s Press, 1991), p. 618.

³ See e.g. Jessie G. Lutz, “The Chinese Student Movement of 1945 – 1949”, in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol.31, no.1 (November 1971), pp. 89 - 110 and Hu Kuo-tai, “The Struggle Between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Part on Campus during the War of Resistance, 1937-45”, in *China Quarterly*, no.118 (June 1989), pp. 300 - 323.

However, in a predominantly agrarian society the Party had to rely mostly on peasants to fill its ranks before it gained national power in 1949. Even workers had never accounted for a large proportion of the members of this “proletarian vanguard” party except in 1923 – 1927.⁴ Previous research has also shown that educational credentials were not relevant in Party recruitment until after 1949.⁵ In fact, 69% of Party members were illiterate in 1949, which was not significantly lower than the national illiteracy rate of 80% at the time.

Since 1949, both the Party’s recruitment strategies and China’s higher education have been heavily influenced by the politics of the party-state. Figure 1 is an indication of the vicissitudes of China’s higher education in terms of the total numbers of college students and of colleges and universities in China’s mainland since 1949.

Figure 1: Higher Education in China’s Mainland 1949 - 2002⁶



In the 1950s, under the Party’s new agenda of reconstruction after decades of civil war, higher education gained new importance. From 1949 to 1960 total enrollment in the universities and colleges in China’s mainland steadily rose from 117,000 to 961,623. At the same time, the Party also emphasized the recruitment of intellectuals, including college students. Previous research on

⁴ *Beijing ribao* [Beijing Daily], 2002-10-21.

⁵ Bian Yanjie, Shu Xiaoling, and John R. Logan, “ Communist Party Membership and Regime Dynamics in China”, *Social Forces*, vol.79, no.3 (March 2001), p. 809.

⁶ Data source: Statistical Yearbook of the People’s Republic of China, 1992, 2001 and Liu Guang (ed.), *Xinzhongguo gaodeng jiaoyu dashiji* [Records of Major Events in New China’s Higher Education], (Changchun, Liaoning Province: Northeast Normal University Press, 1990).

Party recruitment has found large-scale induction of intellectuals into the Party in the 1950s.⁷ In 1956, 8.6% of college students were Party members. This proportion is higher than that for any other year except for the Cultural Revolution period. From 1962 to 1964, the proportion of Party members among college students dropped from 5.1% to 2.2%. That probably reflects the explosive increase (by 218% from 1957 to 1960) in college enrollment during the Great Leap Forward and the lag in the Party's recruitment work on campus. The decline doesn't seem universal, though, as in the mid-1960s Party members constituted 12.5% to 13% of undergraduates at Beijing's elite universities.⁸ Hu Jintao, the Party's General Secretary since 2002, was recruited while a student at Tsinghua University in 1964.

The Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976) had a devastating effect on both higher education and Party recruitment. During the peak years of the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1970), total enrollment in colleges and universities dropped dramatically from 533,766 to 48,000. College students turned into Red Guards and most universities stopped enrolling new students. In the whole 5-year period from 1966 to 1970, only 42,000 students entered college, compared with 164,212 college freshmen in 1965 alone. At the same time, Party recruitment also deemphasized educational credentials, as intellectuals became a suspect social class.⁹ Since the college entrance examination was abolished in 1966, universities accepted new students (the so-called "worker-peasant-soldier" college students) on recommendation by local work units or Party organizations. One of the consequences was that Party members accounted for an exceptionally high proportion of college students. In 1975, of the half million college students enrolled at the time, 26.5% were Party members.

The Party's New Recruitment Strategy in the Reform Era

Since the reforms started in the late 1970s, the Party has largely shifted its basis of legitimacy to economic performance. It has become vitally important for the Party to recruit talented people from all social classes or occupations in its "pursuit of a technocratic economic growth policy".¹⁰ These people "are now brought into the Party because they have the skills desired by party leaders to accomplish their new policy agenda".¹¹ "In general, post-Mao recruitment has reverted to the pattern of the mid-1950, except that recruitment now is less class-oriented and even more committed to including intellectuals".¹²

Table 1 indicates that people with college degrees are playing increasingly important roles in the Party, while their proportion of China's mainland population only increased from 1.39% in 1990 to 3.61% in 2000, according to the two respective national censuses.

⁷ Roberta Martin, *Party Recruitment in China: Patterns and Prospects, A Study of the Recruitment Campaign of 1954 - 56 and Its Impact on Party Expansion through 1980* (New York: Occasional Papers of the East Asian Institute, Columbia University, East Asian Institute, Columbia University, 1981).

⁸ Stanley Rosen, "The Chinese Communist Party and Chinese Society: Popular attitudes toward party membership and the party's image", *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no.24 (July 1990), p. 63.

⁹ Bian Yanjie, Shu Xiaoling, and John R. Logan, "Communist Party Membership and Regime Dynamics in China", *Social Forces*, vol.79, no.3 (March 2001), p. 811.

¹⁰ Gabriel Abraham Almond, G. Bingham Powell, Jr., and Robert J. Mundt, *Comparative Politics: A theoretical framework* (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1996), p. 184.

¹¹ Bruce J. Dickson, "Cooptation and Corporatism in China: The logic of party adaptation" in *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.115, no.4 (Winter 2000 - 01), p. 519.

¹² James Roger Townsend and Brantly Womack, *Politics in China* (Glenview, Illinois: The Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown Series in Comparative Politics. A Country Study. Scott, Foresman and Company, 1986), p. 299.

Table 1: Party Elites with College Degrees¹³

Year	Party Congress	% delegates with college degree	% Central Committee members with college degree
1987	13th	59.5%	73.3%
1992	14th	70.7%	83.4%
1997	15th	83.5%	92.4%
2002	16th	91.9%	98.6%

Table 2 shows that in China's power structure today, the higher up the power ladder, the higher the proportion of people with college degrees.

Table 2: Proportion with College Degrees at Power Levels

Power Level	People	% with College Degree	Source
Politburo Standing Committee	9	100	14
Central Committee	356	98.6	
Provincial Party & government leaders		96.8	15
Prefecture Party & government leaders		96.2	
County Party & government leaders		92.2	
Party National Congress delegates	2,114	91.9	16
Party and government cadres	41,130,000	51.5	17
Party members	66,941,000	24.2	18
Mainland population	1,265,830,000	3.6	19

Higher Education in Reform Era

Deng Xiaoping, the “general architect” of the reforms, told Party cadres on January 16, 1980: “There are large numbers of children in primary and secondary schools, but very few college and university students; on-campus college students number only one million. In the United States, 10 million out of its population of 220 million are college students, averaging one for every 22 persons. If our on-campus college students were to reach even two or three million, we would have a good number of trained, specialized personnel.”²⁰

Eight years after his speech, the number of college students on China's mainland reached 2 million, and it took another eight years for total enrollment to pass 3 million. This pace, however,

¹³ For 1987, Sun Benyao, Zou Aiguo, and He Ping (eds.), *Shisi da jishi* [Records of the 14th Congress] (Beijing: Central Party School Press, 1992), p. 79 and Wang Zhaozheng (ed.), *Cong shier da dao shisan da* [From 12th Congress to 13th Congress] (Beijing: Central Party School Press, 1989), p. 30. For others, *Zhongguo xinwen she* [China News Agency] 2002-11-14.

¹⁴ *Xinhua she* [Xinhua News Agency] 2002-11-14.

¹⁵ *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily] 2001-12-28.

¹⁶ *Xinhua she* [Xinhua News Agency] 2002-11-07.

¹⁷ *Fazhi ribao* [Legal Daily] 2001-06-14.

¹⁸ *Xinhua she* [Xinhua News Agency] 2003-06-30.

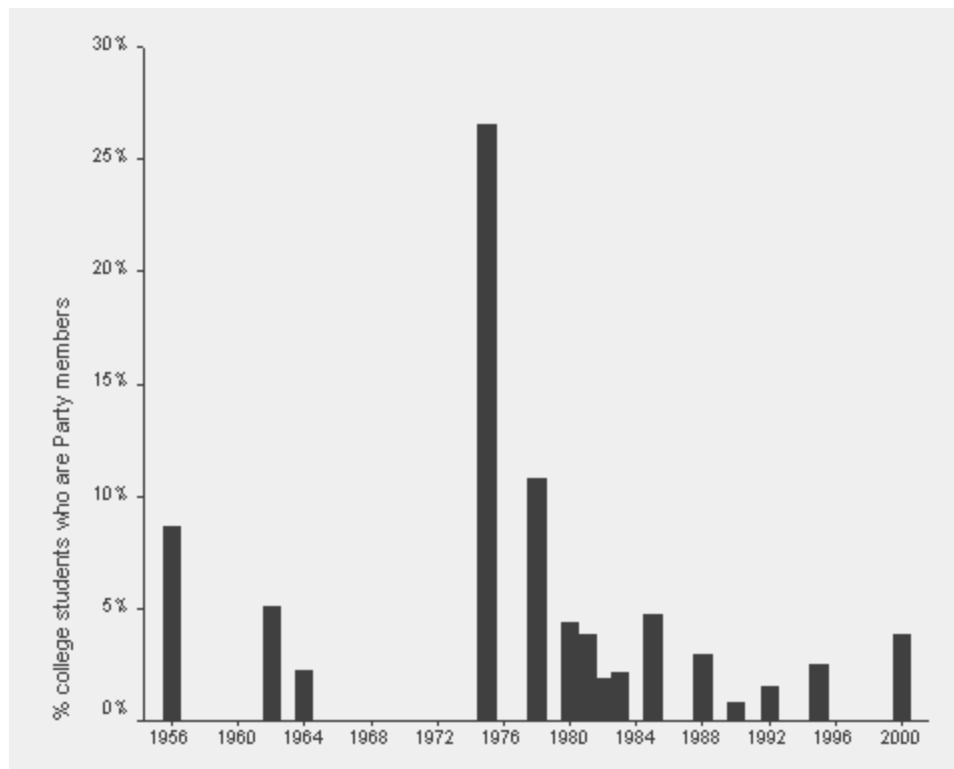
¹⁹ China national census of 2000.

²⁰ Deng Xiaoping, “Muqian de xingshi he women de renwu” [The Current Situation and the Tasks Before Us], in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan dier juan* [The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, Volume 2] (Beijing: People's Press, 1993), p. 262.

pales in comparison with the growth in enrollment since 1999, when the Party center decided to greatly enlarge college enrollment. In 2002 alone, 3.21 million students entered college and total enrollment in colleges and universities became 9.03 million, according to the State Statistical Bureau. This figure yet doesn't include the 1,200 "minban" [run by local people] institutions of higher education, which had a total enrollment of 1.5 million in 2000.²¹

Recruitment of College Students in the 1980s

Figure 2: Proportion of Party Members among College Students²²



In contrast with the mushrooming growth of college enrollment, in the reform era the proportion of Party members among college students had two long declines in the 1980s, increased steadily in the 1990s, but has never surpassed 5% or regained the pre-Cultural Revolution high (see Figure 2). From 1978 to 1982, those students who were screened by the newly reinstated college entrance examination gradually replaced the "worker-peasant-soldier" college students on campus, and the proportion of college students who were Party members plummeted from 10.8% to 1.9%. After a brief surge from 1983 to 1985 (which shall be discussed below) the proportion of Party members among college students continued to decline from 4.7% (1985) to 2.9% (1988) and further to less than 1% in 1989.²³ Table 3 shows the decline from 1984 to 1988 in the proportion of Party members among college students in Zhejiang province.

²¹ *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily] 2000-03-09, p. 6.

²² Data source: *Zhongguo shehui tongji ziliao* [China Social Statistics] (1985), p. 169 and (1994), p. 171 and *Huadong xinwen* [East China News] (2001-07-01), p. 3.

²³ *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily] 1996-06-28, p. 5.

Table 3: Party Members among College Students in Zhejiang²⁴

Year	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Proportion	3.58%	3.11%	3.05%	3.02%	2.65%

To explain those declines in the 1980s, two questions need to be answered. Did the Party lose appeal to college students in the 1980s? Or was the Party not interested in recruiting college students? Previous research has extensively discussed the first question.²⁵ College students felt generally disillusioned with the Party due to the Cultural Revolution and to corruption. Growing social plurality and Western influence further shifted their values away from officially sanctioned ideological system. In a 1988 survey of 3,751 students at 18 universities in Shanghai, 87% of the students were not interested in courses on Marxist theories. Less than 5% expressed interest. In the same survey, 59% of the respondents thought that their friends who were Party members or applicants “actually use the ‘Party ticket’ as capital for future benefits”, rather than believing in Communism or thinking the Party is good.²⁶ College students’ general disillusion with the Party was also apparent in a survey of 150 students at 14 departments in a Shanghai university prior to the student movement of 1989. It showed that 46.2% believed the Party’s crooked work style (*buzheng zhifeng*, or corruption) will abort the reforms. 93.8% thought Gorbachev’s reform measures were “creative”, “worth appreciation”, or “can be used for reference (*jiejian*)”.²⁷

Another indication of the students’ lack of interest in the Party was the decreasing proportion of students who submitted applications to join the Party. Table 4 shows the downward trend before 1989 in the percentage of applicants among students at two universities in Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province.

Table 4: % Applicants among Students at 2 Universities²⁸

School \ Year	1985	1986	1987	1988
Hangzhou College of Electronics Industry	7.81%	5.06%	4.3%	2.8%
Zhejiang Agricultural University		34.6%	24.2%	22.2%

As to the second question, from the above discussion of the Party’s new technocratic recruitment strategy and the growth of higher education, apparently the Party never lost interest in college students. Yet at the implementation stage, basic-level Party workers and political workers are those immediately responsible for recruiting students. In general, ideological and political work was not given priority by Party leaders in the late 1980s. Reformist Party leaders

²⁴ Bai Tongping and Wang Zhengyao (eds.), *Tan xuesheng dangjian gongzuo* [On Party-building Work among Students], (Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province: Zhejiang University Press, 1989), p. 98.

²⁵ see e.g. Bai Tongping and Wang Zhengyao (eds.), *Tan xuesheng dangjian gongzuo* [On Party-building Work among Students], (Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province: Zhejiang University Press, 1989), pp. 99 - 101, and Stanley Rosen, “The Chinese Communist Party and Chinese Society: Popular attitudes toward party membership and the party’s image”, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no.24 (July 1990), pp. 62 - 67.

²⁶ Zhao Yicheng, “Jiazhi de chongtu” [Conflict of Values], in *Shanghai daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* [Journal of Shanghai University (Social Science Edition)], no.2 (1988), p. 35.

²⁷ Sun Jiaming and Lin Jianhong, “Daxuesheng zhengzhi shehuihua: Xianzhuang, wenti ji duice” [College Students’ Political Socialization: Current status, problems, and strategies], in *Shehui Kexue* [Social Sciences], no.12 (1989), pp. 54 - 55.

²⁸ Bai Tongping and Wang Zhengyao (eds.), *Tan xuesheng dangjian gongzuo* [On Party-building Work among Students], (Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province: Zhejiang University Press, 1989), p. 97.

Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang were not known for their enthusiasm in ideological and political work. Looking back at the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping regretted in 1989 that “in the past 10 years our biggest mistake was in the aspect of education; ideological and political education of the youth was not adequately grasped”.²⁹ A Party Secretary at a university in Jiangsu province recollected that in 1985 - 1989,

Some schools proposed that the Party’s activities be amateur, Party cadres positions be held concurrently, Party work be voluntary, and the Party’s function be weakened. That was widely introduced as a model. It occurred in many schools of higher education that the Party leadership lost authority, Marxism-Leninism lost effect, the ideological front lost control, and political workers lost their whereabouts.³⁰

The low prestige and morale of the Party workers can also be exemplified by the following case. A college in Shanghai selected 18 graduates as Party workers on campus. By 1989 17 of them had already changed professions or gone abroad and only one was left.³¹

Another problem was that throughout the 1980s Party recruiters on campus were receiving mixed and inconsistent messages from above. From 1983 to 1985, Party organizations at all levels paid special attention to recruiting intellectuals,³² including college students. Some required that “every class have Party members, every junior and senior class have a Party branch, and every freshman and sophomore grade have a Party branch”. Some required that 15% of college students be Party members. Yet as the Party was losing appeal to college students, this high tide of recruitment of college students inevitably led to the inclusion of students who didn’t “always align with the Party center”. Especially after the student movement of 1986, Party organizations started to emphasize stricter requirements and higher standards in screening out prospective Party members from among college students, which contributed to a visible decline in Party recruitment.³³

The Impact of 1989

The political “turmoil” in the spring of 1989 fully exposed the unprecedented low influence and authority of the Party among college students. Party members constituted a historically low proportion (less than 1%) of college students in 1989. After a major re-registration campaign, the Party counted only 16 thousand Party members among the 2 million college students in 1990.³⁴ That proportion (0.8%) is probably even lower than before 1949, when the Party was still

²⁹ Deng Xiaoping, “Zhongguo buyunxu luan” [China Must not be Disordered], in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan disan juan* [The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, Volume 3] (Beijing: People’s Press, 1993), p. 287.

³⁰ Zhu Yongping, “Jianguo yilai gaoxiao dangjian gongzuo de lishi yange yu qishi” [The Historical Development and Insights of Party-building Work in Institutions of Higher Education since the Founding of PRC], in *Chongqing yudian xueyuan xuebao (sheke ban)* [Journal of Chongqing College of Post and Telecommunications (Social Science Edition)], vol.1, no.3 (2000), p. 54.

³¹ Shao Chen, “Guanyu gaodeng xuexiao dangzuzhi zhuangkuang de diaocha yu sikao” [Investigation and Thoughts on the Status of Party Organizations at Institutions of Higher Education], in Chinese Communist Party Central Organization Department Research Office (ed.), *1989 zuzhi gongzuo yanjiu wenxuan* [Selected Works on Organization Work in 1989] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1990), p. 147.

³² Zhou Heling (ed.), *Jiedu kunhuo: Shanghai dangjian shencengci wenti yanjiu neibu wengao* [Explaining Confusions: Internal manuscripts on study of deeper issues in Shanghai’s Party-Building] (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong University Press, 2002), p. 18.

³³ Bai Tongping and Wang Zhengyao (eds.), *Tan xuesheng dangjian gongzuo* [On Party-building Work among Students], (Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province: Zhejiang University Press, 1989), p. 99.

³⁴ *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily] 1995-06-28, p. 5.

“underground” on most campuses. Unsurprisingly the few student Party members had hardly any impact or even visibility during the student movement. To make things worse, “at the crucial moment fewer Party members in schools of higher education behaved well than at normal times and some Party members even had a negative effect”,³⁵ as suggested by the result of an investigation of universities and colleges in Shanghai and Zhejiang province. A university in Shanghai estimated that only 20% of the 1,044 Party members on campus (including teachers and students) “could perform their functions (*zuoyong*)” in contributing to stopping the “turmoil”. 10% even functioned very badly”.³⁶

Therefore, the events of 1989 also served as a wake-up call to the Party and Party organizations on campus. In the aftermath of 1989, recruitment of college students has taken on new significance, as one Party recruiter understands,

The international communist movement is currently encountering temporary frustrations; socialist development is at a low tide; international enemy forces strive to practice comprehensively the strategy of “peaceful transition” with respect to socialist countries. Especially in this serious situation, Party organizations at institutions of higher education should actively strive to recruit college students and strengthen and enlarge the ranks of Party members among students. This contributes not only to the struggle against “peaceful transition” but also to the fostering and development of student cadre ranks, thus stabilizing the situation at institutions of higher education.³⁷

In April 1990, the Party’s Central Organization Department, Central Propaganda Department, and the Party group at the State Commission of Education convened the First National Conference on Party-Building Work in Institutions of Higher Education. This National Conference has been convened almost every year since then, and the latest (12th) Conference was held on October 29, 2003. Recruitment of university students is only part of the Party-building work at institutions of higher education, yet the attention and emphasis on it at the nearly annual national conferences is a major departure from the 1980s. For example, Li Lanqing, then a Politburo member and vice-premier, stressed at the 1995 Conference:

To train and to bring up millions of builders of and successors to the socialist cause is a major issue that concerns the whole Party. The people of ability trained by institutions of higher education have a direct bearing on the look of China in the 21st century. ... The task of Party building should be an important criterion in the evaluation of the academic quality and level of institutions of higher education.³⁸

³⁵ Shao Chen, “Guanyu gaodeng xuexiao dangzuzhi zhuangkuang de diaocha yu sikao” [Investigation and Thoughts on the Status of Party Organizations at Institutions of Higher Education], in Chinese Communist Party Central Organization Department Research Office (ed.), *1989 Zuzhi Gongzuo Yanjiu Wenxuan* [Selected Works on Organization Work in 1989] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1990), p. 150.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Xiang Yangjie, “Jianchi biao zhun, buduan zhuangda xuesheng dangyuan duiwu” [Adhere to Standard and Continuously Enlarge Party Ranks among Students], in Liu Ke (ed.), *Shanghai gaoxiao dangde jianshe* [Party-Building in Institutions of Higher Education in Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong University Press, 1991), p. 240. Even though “peaceful transition” has all but disappeared from official rhetoric in recent years, similar argument to the above can still be seen (e.g. Bao Yongping, “Nuli goujian gaoxiao xuesheng dangjian gongzuo de xin geju” [Strive to Construct a New Situation in Party-building Work among Students at Institutions of Higher Education], *Gaojiao luntan* [Higher Education Forum], no.6, December 2002, p. 103.

³⁸ *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily] 1995-07-14, p. 4.

Besides the annual national conference, the Party also issued a “Chinese Communist Party Regulations on Basic Level Organization Work in Ordinary Institutions of Higher Education” [*Zhongguo Gongchandang putong gaodeng xuexiao jiceng zuzhi gongzuo tiaoli*] and a “Basic Standards of Party-Building Work in Ordinary Institutions of Higher Education” [*Putong gaodeng xuexiao dangjian gongzuo jiben biaoqun*] in 1996 and 1998, respectively. The latter stipulates that “recruitment work shall have plans, stress the main points, and pay special attention to recruiting Party members from excellent students and young teachers” in Article 16.

The impact of 1989 on the Party’s recruitment work is multifaceted, and the next section shall discuss the micro level mechanisms of Party recruitment among college students. The Party’s efforts and emphasis at various levels on recruiting college students since 1989 contrast with the 1980s and have been the main driving force in boosting the proportion of Party members on campus. However, college students do not seem to have been effectively influenced by the Party’s ideological and political work and to have become any more receptive to the Party’s sanctioned ideals or values. On the other hand, pragmatic concerns about future job searches and career advancement, raised especially by the dramatic increase in college enrollment and thus in the competitiveness of the job market, seem to play a growing role in attracting young students to the Party since the 1990s.

Explaining the Rise

Since 1989, the rise in the number and proportion of college students who are Party members has been quite significant. In 1990, 16,000, or 0.81% of all undergraduate students were Party members and in 2000, 209,000, or 3.83% of all undergraduate students were Party members.

In practice, the general aggregate pattern of Party recruitment is largely determined by the Party, not by self-initiated actions taken by individual students. First of all, the whole recruitment process begins with the local Party organization obtaining a quota and/or guidelines for recruiting new members from the upper level. The number of new Party members recruited from the student body each year is set down by Party committees at various levels in their 5-year plans. Without the increase in the recruitment quota, it is hard to imagine a significant rise in the number and proportion of student Party members. The Party’s induction of large numbers of college students also has an encouraging effect on the substantial number of students who balk at the difficulty of joining. When asked “why don’t you ask to join the Party?” 19.4% of the 940 students surveyed at China University of Mining answered “even if I apply I won’t be able to join the Party in college”.³⁹

After a major re-registration campaign in the aftermath of 1989, Party recruitment among college students “went back to the normal track” in 1991. Universities and colleges generally increased greatly the number of college students to recruit in their 8th 5-year plan (1991 - 1995), the 9th (1996 - 2000), and the 10th (2001 - 2005). The 8th 5-year plan was still influenced by the post-1989 emphasis on stricter standards and on screening out politically unreliable elements. After the abovementioned speech by Li Lanqing in 1995 the growth in Party recruitment of college students was especially remarkable. As the Party organizations at lower levels have responded to the Party’s new call to recruit students, the number and proportion of Party members at universities and colleges have been rising continuously since the 1990s.

³⁹ Duan Xinxing, Chi Zhongjun, and Gu Jianguo, “Daxuesheng sixiang diode zhuangkuang de diaocha fenxi” [Survey and Analysis of University Students’ Ideological and Moral Status], *Zhongguo qingnian zhengzhi xueyuan xuebao* [Journal of China College of Youth Politics] no. 2, 1998, p. 12.

Figure 3: Student Party Members at Beijing University 1990 - 2000⁴⁰

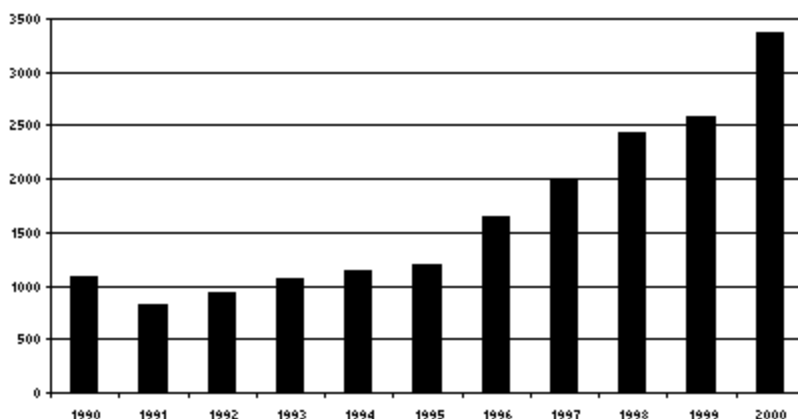


Figure 3 shows the growth in the number of Party members among students at Beijing University each year from 1990 to 2000. Although the slow pace before 1995 may partially be attributed to the corresponding slow pace in the growth of enrollment, the intensity of Party recruitment among students after 1995 is quite significant. The situation at other universities is similar. The Ocean University in Qingdao recruited 77, 103, and 149 Party members from among students in 1991, 1992, and 1993, respectively, whereas in 1996 and 1997 the numbers were 212 and 317, respectively.⁴¹ The Party committee at Liaoning University adopted the goal in its 8th 5-year plan in 1991 of recruiting between 650 and 700 Party members (including both teachers and students) from 1991 through 1995, averaging about 130 to 140 a year. In 1996, they greatly raised the quota in the 9th 5-year plan to induct between 440 and 460 students into the Party every year. The Party committee at Xi'an University of Electronics Technology set as its goal in its 9th 5-year plan and 10th 5-year plan that the proportion of Party members among students reach 12% by 2000 and 15% by 2005. At the end of 2001, Guangdong Province in the 10th 5-year plan set the goal that 10% of college students and 30% of graduate students be Party members by 2005.⁴²

Application and the Party's Work

The recruitment process formally starts with a student submitting a written application to join the Party. Part of the Party's routine work among college students is to enlarge the pool of applicants through contacting and propaganda. The Party's ideological and political work among college students was greatly boosted after 1989. In 1990, the Party promulgated "Detailed Regulations on Recruitment of Party Members" [*Zhongguo Gongchandang fazhan dangyuan gongzuo xize*], which starts by stipulating that "basic level organizations shall regard the recruitment of advanced elements with communist consciousness to the Party as regular and important work" (Article 2). Later on it states more explicitly:

Article 5: Party organizations shall, through the propaganda of the Party's political stand and in-depth and elaborate ideological and political work, enhance

⁴⁰ Data source: *Guangming ribao* [Guangming Daily] 2001-06-06.

⁴¹ *Qingdao ribao* [Qingdao Daily] 1999-07-02.

⁴² *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* [China Education Daily] 2001-12-26, p. 1.

the non-Party masses' understanding of the Party and constantly enlarge the ranks of activists who apply to join the Party.

In 1996, the Party promulgated the "Chinese Communist Party Regulations on Basic Level Organization Work in Ordinary Institutions of Higher Education" [*Zhongguo Gongchandang putong gaodeng xuexiao jiceng zuzhi gongzuo tiaoli*]. Article 14 explicitly lists "to understand and analyze the ideological conditions and to carry out well targeted ideological and political work" as Party branches' important duty.

Since the 1990s Party organizations at universities and colleges have greatly stepped up their efforts at ideological and political work. The immediate impact of 1989 on Party organizations' work can be exemplified by Guangxi University. In 1989 there were no study groups of Marxism-Leninism or Mao Zedong's works, while in 1991 there were 51 and 72, respectively.⁴³ The organization department of the Party committee at Beijing Institute of Technology stipulates in a document that "a Party class attended by all the students should be the first class in freshmen orientation". The Party committee at Xi'an University of Electronics Technology established a department of freshmen work in 1988 specifically for training and education of the freshmen class. The School of Social Administration at Guangxi University organizes all students to study the Party Constitution. Almost every student at the school has a copy of the Party Constitution, and by 2000, 342, or 72% of the students had applied to join the Party.

Party organizations at all levels tend to regard the increase in applications to join the Party as an achievement in the Party's ideological and political work, although the growth can be attributed to other factors, as shall be discussed below. The Party committee at Dalian University of Foreign Languages boasts in a document that "under the education and guidance by Party organizations and teachers at all levels and driven by student Party members, the mass of young students submitted many applications". At Liaoning Normal University, 97% of students have applied to join the Party after "several years of hard work" by Party workers on campus.⁴⁴

Ideological and Political Work

How effective is the Party's ideological and political work among college students? Earlier research has indicated the Party's work was generally unsuccessful⁴⁵. More recent survey results reported in Chinese journals imply that college students in the 1990s are no more receptive to ideological and political work than their counterparts in the 1980s. They do not identify any more with the Party's values than their 1980s counterpart, either. Even Party workers are not optimistic. A survey in Guangxi University suggested that only 2% of political workers were optimistic regarding the prospect of student work, while 27% chose "hard to say" and 34% were "not very optimistic".⁴⁶

On the part of the students, the picture seems even gloomier. Only 15.8% of the respondents considered the Party's "ideological, educational, and administrative" work as "easy to accept" in

⁴³ Liu Huizhen, "Daxuesheng sixiang zhuangkuang de diaocha yu sikao" [Investigation and Thoughts on College Students' Ideological Conditions], in *Guangxi daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* [Journal of Guangxi University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)], no.5 (1992), p. 119.

⁴⁴ *Liaoning ribao* [Liaoning Daily] 1999-07-02.

⁴⁵ Stanley Rosen, "The Effect of Post-4 June Re-Education Campaigns on Chinese Students", *China Quarterly*, no.134 (June 1993), p. 331.

⁴⁶ Luo Zonghuo, "Jiaqiang xuesheng sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu gongzuo duiwu de jianshe [Strengthen Building the Ranks of Workers on Students' Ideological and Political Education], in *Guangxi daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* [Journal of Guangxi University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)], vol.44, no.5 (1992), p. 122.

a survey of 946 college students in Qinghai province. 70% chose “hard to accept” and 14.3% “expressed antipathy” to the Party’s ideological work.⁴⁷ In the same survey, almost an identical proportion (11%) of respondents acknowledged one of the Party’s core values, “serve the people”, as in another survey that was conducted 13 years ago on a different university campus.⁴⁸ At Jilin University, a 2002 survey of 1700 students indicates that 47% are averse to the “theory study” organized by university authorities.⁴⁹

Given their low interest in ideological and political work, it is hardly surprising that university students nowadays are no more enthusiastic about the Party’s sanctioned theories than their counterparts in the 1980s.⁵⁰ In a survey at Yangzhou University in 2002, 51.5% of the students chose the following statement on Marxism: “dialectic materialism and historical materialism are somewhat scientific, yet theories such as scientific communism are somewhat hollow and idealistic”. Another 9.1% thought Marxism “doesn’t have strong practicality and is just an idealistic philosophy”.⁵¹

Admittedly, during the reform era the Party’s own practice has never demonstrated a strong commitment to Marxist orthodox theories, yet even for the Party’s newly sanctioned theories in the 1990s college students don’t show solid support. When asked about their opinion on the inclusion of General Secretary Jiang Zemin’s “three represents” theory in the Party constitution at the Party’s 16th National Congress, more than half (50.26%) of the 378 students surveyed at Nanchang Institute of Aeronautical Technology chose “not necessary”, “hard to say”, or “not concerned”.⁵²

Interest and Motives in Joining the Party

Even though the Party’s ideological and political work doesn’t win the hearts and minds of college students, the young intellectuals’ interest in joining the Party has obviously risen. For example, Shenyang University conducted a survey of 1028 undergraduate students in 2002 and compared the results with a 1995 survey at the same university. In the 1995 survey only 32.38% chose “actively create conditions and strive to join” when asked about their attitude toward joining the Party, while 46.88% chose that in the 2002 survey. The proportion choosing “don’t

⁴⁷ Li Jianning, Deng Wei, and Lai Ping, “Dui qinghai gaoxiao daxuesheng sixiang zhengzhi suzhi de diaocha yu sikao” [Survey and Considerations on Ideological and Political Quality of College Students in Qinghai’s Institutions of Higher Education], in *Qinghai shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* [Journal of Qinghai Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)], vol.86, no.3 (2000), p. 101.

⁴⁸ Stanley Rosen, “The Chinese Communist Party and Chinese Society: Popular attitudes toward party membership and the party’s image”, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no.24 (July 1990), p. 64 and Li Jianning, Deng Wei, and Lai Ping, “Dui qinghai gaoxiao daxuesheng sixiang zhengzhi suzhi de diaocha yu sikao” [Survey and Considerations on Ideological and Political Quality of College Students in Qinghai’s Institutions of Higher Education], in *Qinghai shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* [Journal of Qinghai Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)], vol.86, no.3 (2000), p. 99.

⁴⁹ Li Yunhe and Zhao Fei, “Jilin daxue xuesheng xinshiji sixiang fazhan qushi yanjiu” [Study of Jilin University Students’ Ideological Development Trend in New Century], in *Xiandai jiaoyu kexue* [Modern Education Science], vol.161, no.9, (2002), p. 56.

⁵⁰ Zhao Yicheng, “Jiazhi de chongtu” [Conflict of Values], in *Shanghai daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* [Journal of Shanghai University (Social Science Edition)], no.2 (1988), p. 35.

⁵¹ Li Zhihong, “Guanyu gaoxiao xuesheng rudang dongji zhuangkuang diaocha yanjiu” [A Survey Study on Students’ Motives to Join the Party at Institutions of Higher Education], in *Lianyungang shifan gaodeng zhuanke xuexiao xiaobao* [Journal of Lianyungang Teachers College], no.4 (December 2002), p. 6.

⁵² Sun Yixian, “Guanyu bufen daxuesheng dui zhaokai shiliu da sixiang zhuangkuang de diaocha baogao” [Survey Report on Some Students’ Ideological Condition toward 16th Party Congress], in *Nanchang hangkong gongye xueyuan xuebao* [Journal of Nanchang Institute of Aeronautical Technology], vol.4, no.2 (June 2002), p. 16.

want to join or not interested” declined from 32% to 18%.⁵³ At Beijing Petroleum University two graduate students surveyed 260 undergraduate students in 2001 and found that 72% “strive to join the Party while a student”.⁵⁴ Surveys at other universities produced similar results, such as 67.53%,⁵⁵ 71.6%,⁵⁶ 73.1%,⁵⁷ and 80.4%.⁵⁸

Another indication of the students’ rising interest in joining the Party is the growing number and proportion of applicants among them, which contrasts sharply with the situation in the late 1980s (see e.g. Table 4). In a survey of 883 students at 40 universities and colleges in 16 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions conducted from August 1998 to February 1999, 41.7% were applicants or Party members, almost double the proportion (21.3%) in a 1992 survey.⁵⁹ At Nankai University, one of the best universities in Tianjin, only 4% of the students were applicants in 1989 whereas by 1997 the proportion had risen to 23%.⁶⁰ At Nantong Medical College applicants constituted 18% of the student body in the early 1990s, while in 1999 39% of the students were applicants.⁶¹ Nationally, nearly a third of all college students were applicants in 2000.⁶² For Henan Province that proportion was 40% in 1997,⁶³ while in Beijing it was “generally over 50%”.⁶⁴

More and more college students are interested in joining the Party, yet their motivations remain dubious. According to a Party worker’s “observations during work, most of the students who ask to join the Party have incorrect utilitarian or follow-the-general-trend motives”.⁶⁵ Table

⁵³ Feng Fengjie, “Xinshiqi daxuesheng sixiang guannian de wenjuan diaocha yu fenxi” [Survey and Analysis of University Students’ Ideology in the New Era], in *Shenyang nongye daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* [Journal of Shenyang Agricultural University (Social Sciences)], vol.4, no.2 (June 2002), p. 111.

⁵⁴ Feng Aiqiu and Xiang Long, “Daxuesheng sixiang zhuangkuang diaocha yu fenxi” [Survey and Analysis of University Students’ Ideological and Political Conditions], in *Heilongjiang nongken shizhuan xuebao* [Journal of Heilongjiang Nongken Normal College], vol.59, no.1 (2002), p. 6.

⁵⁵ Wang Jinsong, Zhang Yalan, Su Rui, Pang Xiaohong, and Zhou Chunfang, “Dangdai daxuesheng zhengzhi jiazhi quxiang ji duice sikao” [Contemporary University Students’ Political Values Orientation and Thoughts on Strategies], in *Gansu shehui kexue* [Gansu Social Sciences], no.6 (2002), p. 150.

⁵⁶ Chen Xiaohui and Chen Xingjun, “Shilun jiaqiang daxuesheng rudang dongji jiaoyu” [On Strengthening Education of Motives to Join the Party among University Students], *Yanan jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* [Journal of Yanan College of Education], vol.36, no.2 (2002), p. 5.

⁵⁷ Guo Xu, Yi Qingyong, and Xu Xuehong, “Wenshi lei daxuesheng sixiang daode xianzhuang diaocha yu sikao” [Survey and Consideration on the Current Ideological and Moral Status of University Students in Arts], in *Dalian daxue xuebao* [Journal of Dalian University], vol.23, no.1 (February 2002), p. 88.

⁵⁸ Fu Hongmei, “Shifan yuanxiao nu daxuesheng sixiang daode xianzhuang yu jiaoyu duice” [Current Ideological and Moral Status and Educational Strategies of Female Students at Teachers’ Colleges], in *Lingling shifan gaodeng zhuanke xuexiao xiaobao* [Journal of Lingling Teachers College], vol.23, no.2 (April 2002), p. 118.

⁵⁹ Li Zhidong, “Dangdai daxuesheng zhengzhiguan, daodeguan, jiazhiguan diaocha yanjiu” [Investigation and Study of Contemporary University Students’ Political Views, Ethics, and Values], in *Guangxi shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* [Journal of Guangxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)], vol.38, no.3 (July 2002), p. 52.

⁶⁰ *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily] 1997-06-19, p. 5.

⁶¹ Wang Xiaotian and Wu Jing, “Tan gaoxiao xuesheng dangjian gongzuo” [On Party-building Work of Students at Institutions of Higher Education], in *Nantong gongxueyuan xuebao* [Journal of Nantong Institute of Technology], vol.17, no.1 (March 2001), p. 79.

⁶² *Huadong xinwen* [East China News] 2001-07-01, p. 3.

⁶³ *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily] 1997-06-26, p. 5

⁶⁴ *Guangming ribao* [Guangming Daily] 2001-06-20.

⁶⁵ Zhang Ying, “Yinshilidao, jiaqiang he gaijin gaoxiao xuesheng dangjian gongzuo” [Adroitly Guide Action According to Circumstances to Strengthen and to Improve Party-building Work among Students at Institutions of Higher Education], in *Minjiang zhiye daxue xuebao* [Journal of Minjiang Professional University], no.2 (2002), p. 39.

5 shows the motives for joining the Party according to a 2001 survey of 2724 students at 11 institutions of higher education in Zhejiang province.

Table 5: College Students' Motives to Join the Party⁶⁶

Motives	Proportion
Political belief and pursuit	13.19%
To make it easier to find a job in future	44.16%
To obtain political capital	20.12%
To prove my own ability in school	11.12%
To follow the general trend or others	10.07%

Surveys conducted at other schools also substantiate that in reality college students' personal pragmatic considerations are the main driving force behind the "join-Party craze" on campus. A 2001 survey of 977 students at Dalian University of Science and Technology revealed that the 3 most popular primary motives for joining the Party among Party members and applicants were "to promote one's own advancement" (64%), "to contribute more to others and society" (13%), and "to change the Party's current condition and let it play a better leadership role" (8%). "Belief in communism" was a distant 4th choice (4%).⁶⁷ In another interesting survey of 431 female undergraduate students at 3 teachers' colleges, 71.2% listed "a good job", "a good future", or "to project one's own ability better" when asked about their reason to (try to) join the Party. Only 8.2% chose "belief in communism".⁶⁸ Similarly in the survey of 300 undergraduate students conducted by Hu and Li⁶⁹ only 10.3% chose "belief in communism" as the motive to join the Party while 54.3% chose "to enrich one's own life and to realize one's own worth". Indeed, two college teachers lamented that to some applicants "obtaining a 'Party ticket' is no different from passing a test to get a certificate of computer or foreign language skills".⁷⁰

Interestingly, student Party members' self-reported motives are different from those observed by non-Party students, who see Party members' motivations as less grandiose and more pragmatic and personal. Table 6 lists motives in joining the Party as reported by 60 Party members on the mandatory one-year probation period and as observed by 55 non-Party students at a university in Hubei province.

⁶⁶ Gong Huixiang, Wang Zhiqiang, and Shen Wenhua, "Zhejiang gaoxiao xuesheng sixiang daode zhuangkuang de diaocha yu fenxi" [Survey and Analysis of Students' Ideological and Moral Status at Institutions of Higher Education in Zhejiang], in *Dangdai qingnian yanjiu* [Contemporary Youth Study], no.5 (2002), p. 20.

⁶⁷ Chen Xiaohui and Chen Xingjun, "Shilun jiaqiang daxuesheng rudang dongji jiaoyu" [On Strengthening Education of Motives to Join the Party among University Students], *Yan'an jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* [Journal of Yan'an College of Education], vol.36, no.2 (2002), p. 5.

⁶⁸ Fu Hongmei, "Shifan yuanxiao nu daxuesheng sixiang daode xianzhuang yu jiaoyu duice" [Current Ideological and Moral Status and Educational Strategies of Female Students at Teachers' Colleges], in *Lingling shifan gaodeng zhuanke xuexiao xiaobao* [Journal of Lingling Teachers College], vol.23, no.2 (April 2002), p. 118.

⁶⁹ Hu Wenhua and Li Zhimin, "Dangdai daxuesheng zhengzhiguan diaocha fenxi" [Survey and Analysis of Contemporary College Students' Political Views], in *Harbin daxue xuebao* [Journal of Harbin University], vol.23, no.2 (February 2002), p. 103.

⁷⁰ Chen Xiaohui and Chen Xingjun, "Shilun jiaqiang daxuesheng rudang dongji jiaoyu" [On Strengthening Education of Motives to Join the Party among University Students], *Yan'an jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* [Journal of Yan'an College of Education], vol.36, no.2 (2002), p. 6.

Table 6: Self-Reported and Observed Motives in Joining the Party⁷¹

Motives	Probationary Party members ⁷²	Non-Party students
To struggle for communism and to serve the people	51.7%	10.9%
To contribute to building socialist modern state	70.0%	14.5%
To temper and enhance self	60.0%	21.8%
To serve classmates better	41.7%	25.5%
To accumulate “capital” for future job searching	13.3%	25.5%
Others	5.0%	1.8%

Concerns about Job Market

Apparently the main reason why most of the students flock to the Party is personal pragmatic concerns instead of ideological belief. Party membership is a most important political credential in contemporary China’s mainland. Walder analyzed a 1986 survey in Tianjin and found that when combined with the educational credential of a college degree, Party membership “leads to administrative posts with high prestige, considerable authority and clear material privileges”.⁷³

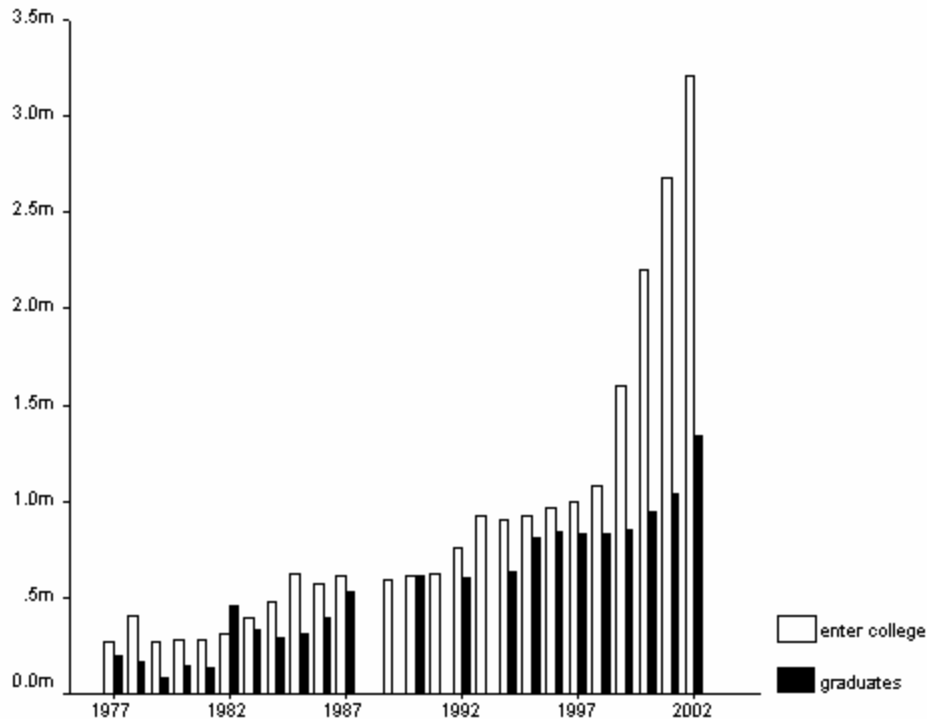
Figure 4: Supply of College Graduates 1977 - 2002⁷⁴

⁷¹ Wang Hongbo, Yan Wanchun, and Xiang Yizhi, “Daxuesheng yubei dangyuan sixiang zhengzhi zhuangkuang diaocha fenxi” [Survey and Analysis of Ideological and Political Situation of Probationary Party Members among University Students], in *Qingnian yanjiu* [Youth Study], no.4 (2002), p. 44 and p. 46.

⁷² The questionnaire for probationary Party members allows them to choose more than one options, and so the proportions don’t add up to 100%.

⁷³ Andrew G. Walder, “Career Mobility and the Communist Political Order”, in *American Sociological Review*, vol.60 (June 1995), p. 309.

⁷⁴ Data source: Liu Guang (ed.), *Xinzhongguo gaodeng jiaoyu dashiji* [Records of Major Events in New China’s Higher Education], (Changchun, Liaoning Province: Northeast Normal University Press, 1990).



From the 1980s to the 1990s, the job market for college graduates changed fundamentally (see Figure 4). In 1986 the ratio of social demand to the supply of college graduates was 3 to 1, which virtually guaranteed a good job for every college student. However, as enrollment in universities and colleges continued to rise the ratio dropped to 0.9 in 1990.⁷⁵ In the 1990s and 2000s, the job market for college graduates has become more and more competitive, as the personnel demand from the booming economy hasn't yet caught up with the fast growth in the number of graduates. The situation has been made even more serious by the government decision in 1997 to stop "assigning" jobs to college graduates and in 1999 to drastically increase college enrollment so that 15% of the college-age population will receive higher education by 2010.⁷⁶ Since 1999 the number of students entering college has grown by about 0.5 million a year, which does not bode well for graduates who go on the job market after 2003.

In the increasingly competitive job market, Party membership has become a decisive edge, not only for positions in government agencies and state-owned enterprises, but also for private and foreign firms in some cases. To prospective government employers, Party membership is a sure indication of a student's political reliability. To other employers, Party membership can suggest desirable qualities too, such as organizational and communication skills, teamwork spirit, capability to get things done, etc. A survey of 1,637 prospective employers of college graduates conducted by Wuhan University in 2000 shows that "political quality" is the third most popular quality (after "enterprising spirit" and "cooperative spirit") that employers think highly of, ranking even before "health".⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Xian Liting, "Guanyu woguo gaodeng jiaoyu fazhan sudu, guimo wenti de sikao" [Considerations on the Speed and Scale of the Development in Our Country's Higher Education], in *Zhongguo gaodeng jiaoyu* [China Higher Education], no.10 (1991), p. 27.

⁷⁶ The goal year was moved forward to 2005, see *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily] 2002-12-16, p. 6.

⁷⁷ <http://www.54youth.com.cn/gb/paper113/1/class011300001/hwz51667.htm>, accessed 2003-07-31.

On the other hand, the dramatic increase in college enrollment since 1999 has also strained the capacity of the Party's recruitment efforts on campus to keep up. Many universities have experienced a plateau in the proportion of Party members since 1998, as the Party organizations on campus strive to keep up in their recruitment and ideological and political work with the rapid growth in the number of students. Table 7 shows data from Dalian University of Foreign Languages and Northern Jiaotong University.

Table 7: Party Recruitment at 2 Universities

Year	Dalian University of Foreign Languages				Northern Jiaotong University ⁷⁸	
	Applied	% applied	New recruits	% members	New recruits	% members
1996	996	51.3%	52	3.3%		
1997	1043	56.6%	91	5.6%		
1998	1260	57.5%	97	7.8%	391	8.33%
1999	1758	57.6%	98	8.0%	377	8.57%
2000	2309	58.6%	107	8.1%	385	7.63%

Comparative Status

Student Party Members versus Non-Party Students

As a small fraction of all college students who have been successfully screened by Party organizations, how do Party members stand out from other students? On the one hand, the comparison of Party members with non-Party students indicates Party organizations' recruiting criteria. On the other hand, as two of the college students who were recruited by the Party in the 1940s and 1960s went on to become the Party's top leaders in the 1990s and 2000s, today's student Party members on campus may well include China's future political leaders at various levels. In this sense the comparison of Party members versus non-Party students can provide some glimpse into the ideological status of the next generation of technocrats.

First of all, student Party members' academic performance has to be better than average. Indeed, Party general branches won't even examine those applicants whose grades are lower than average in their class.⁷⁹ However, in terms of ideological orientation, surveys conducted at universities have shown, surprisingly, that Party members and non-Party students are hard to distinguish. In 2001, two surveys were conducted in Zhejiang province. One was of 964 undergraduate Party members at Zhejiang University, and the other was of 2,724 undergraduate students (9.62% of them were Party members) at 11 institutions of higher education (including Zhejiang University). For the sample of Party members, 8.63% "agree" and 16.87% "basically agree" that "privatization is the inevitable strategy for our country's social development". For the sample of all students, 15.38% agree that "China's ultimate way out is privatization". With regard to the statement that "socialism and capitalism are converging" 18.58% of the students agree, while for the sample of student Party members almost a third (32.33%) "agree" or

⁷⁸ *Guangming ribao* [Guangming Daily] 2001-06-19.

⁷⁹ Zhou Mengjun and Xu Shaohua, "Quancheng genzong peiyang quebao daxuesheng dangyuan zhiliang" [Fostering by Following Whole Course and Guarantee Quality of College Student Party Members], in *Dangjian yanjiu* [Research on Party-Building], no.3 (2000).

“basically agree”, and 12.05% chose “hard to say [*jiang buqing*]”.⁸⁰ Ironically the student Party members appear to be even more receptive to privatization and capitalism than ordinary students.

It may suggest the low priority of ideological criteria in Party organizations’ screening process that Party members don’t stand out as more identified with the Party’s ideals than students as a whole. However, student Party members don’t even seem to be more enthusiastic about learning the Party’s sanctioned theories than non-Party students. At Central China Agricultural University, a survey shows that 40% of the probationary Party members had read Marx or Lenin’s works, 28.3% had read Mao Zedong’s works, 65% had read Deng Xiaoping’s works, and 5% never read any political theoretical works.⁸¹ In contrast, 73.8% of the undergraduate students surveyed at a college in Fujian province had read Deng Xiaoping’s works.⁸² A college in Hebei province surveyed all the 610 sophomore, junior, and senior students in a department and 37% of them thought that student Party members “have a low theoretical level and inadequate understanding, propaganda, and application of the Party’s basic knowledge”. 35% think that student Party members “don’t pay great attention to theoretical study and only occasionally are concerned about current events”.⁸³

In practice, the Party expects its student members to maintain a crucial link between the Party and the student body. The members “lead by example” and use their influence among students to “stabilize the political situation on campus”.⁸⁴ From 1990 to 2001, “in maintaining stability in institutions of higher education for 11 years in a row, the mass Party members among teachers, cadres, and students performed irreplaceable functions”.⁸⁵

The student Party members also provide constant feedback of students’ ideological conditions, grievances, or concerns. They maintain constant connections with Party branches and committees at various levels in the university to bring problems and concerns to Party organizations’ attention. That is undoubtedly not an easy task, one that student Party members seem either unwilling to perform or for which they have lost the necessary political sensitivity. A survey of 1100 college students in Beijing shows that 42.9% think the “reactionary political

⁸⁰ Gong Huixiang, Wang Zhiqiang, and Shen Wenhua, “Zhejiang gaoxiao xuesheng sixiang daode zhuangkuang de diaocha yu fenxi” [Survey and Analysis of Students’ Ideological and Moral Status at Institutions of Higher Education in Zhejiang], in *Dangdai qingnian yanjiu* [Contemporary Youth Study], no.5 (2002), p. 20 and Li Jinlin, Zhou Wenwen, and Yao Li, “Cong daxuesheng dangyuan sixiang zhuangkuang kan gaoxiao dangjian duice” [Strategies of Party-building at Institutions of Higher Education in View of Student Party Members’ Ideological Condition], in *Shanxi gaodeng xuexiao shehui kexue xuebao* [Social Sciences Journal of Colleges of Shanxi], vol.14, no.5 (May 2002), p. 86.

⁸¹ Wang Hongbo, Yan Wanchun, and Xiang Yizhi, “Daxuesheng yubei dangyuan sixiang zhengzhi zhuangkuang diaocha fenxi” [Survey and Analysis of Ideological and Political Situation of Probationary Party Members among University Students], in *Qingnian yanjiu* [Youth Study], no.4 (2002), p. 45.

⁸² Lai Jinlong, Zeng Lingchao, and Xu Guilan, “Gaoxiao xuesheng sixiang zhuangkuang diaocha ji duice sikao” [Survey and Thoughts on Strategies of Students’ Ideological Conditions at Institutions of Higher Education], in *Longyan shizhuan xuebao* [Journal of Longyan Teachers College], vol.20, no.2 (April 2002), p. 112.

⁸³ Bo Jianzhu and Yan Suping, Shiyong xin xingshi zhaozhun qierudian tansuo xin xingshi [Adapt to New Situation, Locate the Entry Point, and Explore New Format], in *Hubei meitan yixueyuan xuebao* [Journal of North China Coal Medical College], vol.4, no.5 (September 2002), p. 671.

⁸⁴ Bai Tongping and Wang Zhengyao (eds.), *Tan xuesheng dangjian gongzuo* [On Party-building Work among Students], (Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province: Zhejiang University Press, 1989), p. 110.

⁸⁵ Yan Xihe, Yan Chongmin, and Meng Qingfeng, “Liaoningsheng gaoxiao dangjian gongzuo diaocha baogao” [Investigation Report on Party-building Work at Institutions of Higher Education in Liaoning Province], in *Liaoning jiaoyu yanjiu* [Research on Liaoning Education], no.4 (2001), p. 10.

speeches” on the Internet don’t have a large influence on students. Interestingly, 73.8% of the student Party members in the survey held that view.⁸⁶

Comparison across Schools and Regions

Party members accounted for 3.83% of all undergraduate students on China’s mainland in 2000. The variation across schools nonetheless is enormous. For instance among the 58 institutions of higher education in Liaoning province the proportion of Party members among students ranges from less than 1% to 16%, while the provincial figure was 8.56%.⁸⁷ Needless to say many factors affect the proportion of Party members on campus. Different provinces and institutions of higher education set different quotas in their recruitment plans. Universities and colleges also have different understandings of the criteria for screening prospective Party members. The criteria are hard to determine objectively, and thus those schools that adhere to higher recruitment standards often have smaller proportions of Party members among the students than those that don’t. Besides, “some schools gradually lowered standards for student Party members in pursuit of quantity in student Party building and in order to solve the problem of the students’ difficulty in obtaining employment”. Party membership becomes “a decorative package to enhance the students’ capital in obtaining employment and even a chip in trades of favors”.⁸⁸

It is not to say, however, that the variation in Party recruitment among institutions of higher education is totally random and unpredictable. There are some patterns in the proportion of Party members at different schools. Generally speaking elite high quality universities have a higher percentage of Party members, since their recruitment work is paid more attention to by Party organizations. Party documents have repeatedly called for the “recruitment of the excellent elements among college students into the Party”, and top quality universities naturally gain special status in the Party’s recruitment strategy. Moreover, the students at those universities are also more likely to become employees at government or Party agencies or to assume administrative positions at other work units and thus have more incentives to strive to join the Party. In Hubei province, for instance, the three best universities also have the highest proportions of Party members among students.⁸⁹ Last but not least, the intensity of Party recruitment seems to be related to students’ majors. At Yunnan University, Party members constitute over 40% of the students at the Law School or the School of Public Administration, much higher than the average for the whole university.⁹⁰ One immediately notable common feature of those schools is that their students are the most likely to work for government and

⁸⁶ Shen Fuguang, Zhang Mingde, Zhao Enping, and Yan Jianfeng, “Daxuesheng wangluo xingwei tanxi” [Inquiry and Analysis of University Students’ Behavior on Internet], in *Beijing huagong daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* [Journal of Beijing University of Chemical Engineering (Social Sciences Edition)], vol.36, no.1 (2002), p. 10.

⁸⁷ Yan Xihe, Yan Chongmin, and Meng Qingfeng, “Liaoningsheng gaoxiao dangjian gongzuo diaocha baogao” [Investigation Report on Party-building Work at Institutions of Higher Education in Liaoning Province], in *Liaoning jiaoyu yanjiu* [Research on Liaoning Education], no.4 (2001), p. 11.

⁸⁸ Zhang Ying, “Yinshilidao, jiaqiang he gaijin gaoxiao xuesheng daojian gongzuo” [Adroitly Guide Action According to Circumstances to Strengthen and to Improve Party-building Work among Students at Institutions of Higher Education], in *Minjiang zhiye daxue xuebao* [Journal of Minjiang Professional University], no.2 (2002), p. 40.

⁸⁹ Zhongguo Dizhi Daxue 2002 nian fazhan dangyuan gongzuo jihua [China University of Geology’s Plan on the Work of Recruiting Party Members in 2002].

⁹⁰ Party Committee of Yunnan University, Ba zai daxuesheng zhong fazhan dangyuan zuowei dangjian de zhanlue renwu lai zhua [Grasp the Recruitment of Party Members among University Students as Strategic Task of Party Building] (2002)

Party agencies and thus have the most incentive to join the Party to enhance their career prospects.

Besides the above, there could also be a regional pattern in Party recruitment of college students. Gao provided a list of the 25 institutions of higher education that had the highest proportion of Party members among students in 1998.⁹¹ Table 8 shows the top 10 in the ranking.

Table 8: Top 10 Universities in Proportion of Student Party Members

Ranking	Name	Province	Proportion
1	College of People's Armed Police Forces	Hebei	30.57%
2	Petroleum University	Beijing	29.40%
3	Mining University	Beijing	17.28%
4	People's University	Beijing	16.07%
5	Nankai University	Tianjin	15.98%
6	Lanzhou Medical College	Gansu	15.97%
7	Youth Politics College	Beijing	15.15%
8	University of Foreign Economy and Trade	Beijing	14.70%
9	Shanghai Jiaotong University	Shanghai	14.62%
10	Fudan University	Shanghai	13.98%

5 of the 10 universities are located in Beijing (besides one that is only 40 kilometers from Beijing) and 2 are in Shanghai. Among the top 25 universities on the list, 10 are located in Beijing and 3 are in Shanghai. Beijing has more college students (340,284 in 2002) than any other Chinese city and regularly enrolls some of the best students in China. Therefore its recruitment work among college students has been given more attention and emphasis by Party organizations than in other regions. Moreover the numerous government and Party agencies there until very recently administered most of the institutions of higher education in Beijing and continue to be major employers of their graduates. Compared with other provinces and municipalities, Party recruitment of college students in Beijing is apparently more intensive and also more successful (see Table 9).

Table 9: Party Recruitment of College Students in Various Provinces

Province	% Party Members	Source
Beijing	9.3%	⁹²
Liaoning	8.56%	⁹³
Shanghai	8.2%	⁹⁴
Yunnan	8.06%	⁹⁵

⁹¹ Gao Xin, "Gaodeng xuexiao xuesheng zonghe fazhan chengji paihangbang" [Ranking of Institutions of Higher Education in Students' Comprehensive Development Achievements], in *Zhongguo qingnian* [China Youth], no.12 (December 2000).

⁹² *Guangming ribao* [Guangming Daily] 2002-12-02.

⁹³ Yan Xihe, Yan Chongmin, and Meng Qingfeng, "Liaoningsheng gaoxiao dangjian gongzuo diaocha baogao" [Investigation Report on Party-building Work at Institutions of Higher Education in Liaoning Province], in *Liaoning jiaoyu yanjiu* [Research on Liaoning Education], no.4 (2001), p. 9.

⁹⁴ *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* [China Education Daily] 2002-06-30.

⁹⁵ *Yunnan ribao* [Yunnan Daily] 2001-08-06.

Heilongjiang	6.87%	96
Shandong	6.2%	97
Gansu	5.43%	98
Tianjin	5.3%	99
Jiangxi	5.1%	100
Henan	4.8%	101

Besides Beijing, other coastal cities and provinces generally have a higher proportion of Party members among college students than the inland provinces. One reason is that China's elite top-quality universities are mostly concentrated in the coastal regions, and those schools generally speaking are more successful in recruiting Party members among students.

College Students versus Other Social Groups

The proportion of Party members among college students is actually lower than that among other social classes, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: % Party Members in Various Social Classes¹⁰²

Social class	Shenzhen (city)	Hefei (city)	Hanchuan (county)	Zhenning (county)
state & social administrators	100.0%	77.5%	100.0%	100.0%
managers	35.7%	58.8%	53.8%	
private entrepreneurs	22.2%	24.4%	9.1%	0.0%
specialists & technicians	27.2%	25.2%	17.8%	24.0%
clerks	28.2%	40.7%	54.5%	46.3%
individual household businesses	13.7%	10.4%	7.7%	5.2%
commercial & service employees	10.4%	7.6%	10.6%	3.9%
industrial workers	0.0%	13.3%	5.9%	10.3%
agricultural workers			4.3%	5.2%
not employed or part-time	2.0%	9.1%	1.8%	3.9%

Obviously that doesn't mean the Party is keener on recruiting from other groups. Since 1945 the Party has only recruited people over 18, and college students just pass that cut-off point. Most of them are not able to go through the long and elaborate recruitment process while in school, yet they have a very high success rate of becoming a Party member later on in life. That is one reason why Party members constitute almost 30% of graduate students. Analysis of a

⁹⁶ *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* [China Education Daily] 2001-07-03.

⁹⁷ *Xinhua she* [Xinhua News Agency] 2000-06-28.

⁹⁸ *Gansu ribao* [Gansu Daily] 2001-04-02.

⁹⁹ *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* [China Education Daily] 2001-05-04.

¹⁰⁰ Xu Guangming, "Wosheng gaoxiao dangjian he sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo zhashi youxiao" [Our Province's Party-Building and Ideological and Political Work at Institutions of Higher Education Is Solid and Effective], in *Jiangxi jiaoyu* [Jiangxi Education], no. 6 (2002), p. 10.

¹⁰¹ *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* [China Education Daily] 2001-06-28.

¹⁰² Lu Xueyi (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo shehui jieceng yanjiu baogao* [Research Report of Contemporary China's Social Classes] (Beijing: Social Sciences Literature Publishing House, 2002), p. 36.

national probability sample drawn in 1993 - 1994 indicates that 29.5% of those with college degrees are Party members.¹⁰³

Conclusions

The Party's penchant for college students has lasted for most of its history. Two of the students recruited in 1940s and 1960s went on to become the party-state's top leaders in 1990s and 2000s. In terms of difficulty of recruiting, college students make excellent targets for the Party. They are well organized, easy to contact, and eager to learn. They are young and thus can contribute to the Party's cause for a long time. In the current reform era, they are also being inducted into the Party in great numbers because they have the knowledge and skills required for economic development. As the incarnation of political credentials and practical knowledge, the student Party members may well be the source of China's future technocratic leaders. Yet they don't show a strong commitment to or even enthusiasm for the Party's orthodox ideology despite the Party's unrelenting ideological and political work on campus. Survey results have repeatedly suggested that they are more concerned about their future job searches or career advancement than realizing communism or building socialism.

What do all these trends imply for the Party's future? Recruitment of college students has brought large number of bright youths into the Party, but the Party's ideological and political work on campus has largely failed to bring either college students in general or the Party members among them any closer to the Party's sanctioned ideals and values. Some college students even join the Party with the intent to "change the Party". On the other hand, the party-state's obsession with its technocratic development strategy in the reform era has given those student Party members a head start in political advancement at various levels. Indeed, 8 of the 9 members of the current Politburo Standing Committee joined the Party when they were university students in 1950s and 1960s. They were all recruited between 1959 and 1965, when the Party's ideological and political work at elite universities was relatively successful. However, leadership positions in China at various levels will increasingly be filled by college graduates who have joined the Party since the 1980s.¹⁰⁴ The rise of materialism and pragmatism among them has important ramifications for China's political future. Most importantly, although they are unlikely to become advocates of liberal democracy, gradual deviation from orthodox communist ideology will gain momentum. The Chinese Communist Party will probably not change its name in the foreseeable future, yet it would be more and more difficult to envision a proletarian vanguard in it as it moves further and further towards a technocratic ruling party.

¹⁰³ Shi, Tianjian et al., the Project on Political Participation and Political Culture in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

¹⁰⁴ In the past decade the Party has recruited probably around half a million members from college students in mainland China.