Non-Compliance on Chinese University Campuses:
a Study of Student Associations and Political Control

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The scholarly literature on Chinese youth and contentious politics largely claims that in the post-Tiananmen period, university students are apathetic, materialistic and have been successfully co-opted by the regime. They also claim that university campuses are no longer hot beds of political activism. Rather, the regime has made a concerted effort to institutionalize political indoctrination, enhance its monitoring capacity, and limit the political autonomy of students. As such, scholars assert that oppositional mobilization is unlikely to come from students. My study challenges these perspectives by examining the emergence of *"unregistered"* student clubs, specifically those that focus on LGBTQ and women's-based issues. This phenomenon challenges the idea that young people are not concerned with social and political issues. Focusing on large-scale political demonstration obfuscates the fact that non-compliance by students do occur, but in less overt ways. My study on the emergence of unregistered student clubs is a lens through which to examine a back-and-forth dynamic that occurs in authoritarian regimes between the regime and citizens. The former develops an extensive set of rules and norms to induce political conformity and the latter devises ways to circumvent those very rules. Rather than seeing open contestation against the regime, we observe that citizens are more likely to perform loyalty in the public arena, and in private spaces, non-compliance unfolds in subtle forms.

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1.0 Introduction

Over the last few years, there have been a several incidences on Chinese university campuses that have challenged longstanding views that Chinese students are politically apathetic and disengaged. In the fall of 2018, student activists from various Marxist student groups, travelled to Southern China to help factory workers unionize. Fifty students were arrested and there was a subsequent crackdown on these organizations (Zhou, 2019). At Peking University, a new set of students, handpicked by the university, replaced the original leaders of the Marxist student group (Lau, 2019b). Former members protested outside university buildings to oppose the reshuffling (Lau, 2019b).

Other Marxist student organizations rallied in support of the Peking University students. The Beijing Language and Culture University's Marxist group *Xinxin qingnian shetuan* (北语新新青年社团) published a declaration of support (Beiyu Xinxin Qingnian, 2018). In the letter, they were critical about the increasingly limited environment on Chinese campuses. Not only have Marxist associations been forced to halt activities and cease recruitment, but they lament that other student groups face similar pressures by university authorities:

> What is happening to Marxist student groups is not unique. The management of student clubs at other universities is getting stricter. The space we have to organize is increasingly limited. Regulations governing student groups are increasing, and the application and review process for events are becoming stricter. For example, groups related to gender equality are forced to either operate underground, become merely nominal or have disbanded altogether. The gender organization at Nanjing University for example no longer exists (Beiyu Xinxin Qingnian, 2018).

In December 2019, Fudan University, an elite institution in Shanghai, made changes to its charter, which references the institution's core values. A clause that venerated *freedom of thought*

(*sixiang ziyou* 思想自由) was removed and clauses to *adhere to the Party's leadership* (*jianchi dang lingdao* 坚持党领导) were added (Lau, 2019a). After the university's decision to revise their charter, a dozen students spontaneously gathered in the cafeteria and sung a verse of their school song in unison. The verse notably contained the phrase, *freedom of thought*, in the lyrics (Lau, 2019a). Lasting twenty minutes, students scattered after their rendition. While no formal statement was made by participants, their message of dissatisfaction with the university was clear (Lau, 2019a).

Whether it be an overt demonstration, such as the one at Peking University to a more unassuming act such as the one in Fudan University, the two incidents at China's top elite schools are considered rare. While the study of collective action and contentious politics in China has received a great deal of scholarly attention, the focus tends to be on strikes and demonstrations by laborers and farmers, in which many of the issues focus on specific grievances that can be redressed (Lee, 2007; O'brien & Li, 2006). They rarely veer on ideological and abstract questions of human rights. The literature on contentious action in China also rarely touches on students because such incidents on campus occur so infrequently. They are largely unheard of because of the intense control and monitoring of student activity, especially after the Tiananmen protests of June 1989. Youth in China are often painted as politically disengaged, apathetic and co-opted by the regime (Rosen, 1993). Their general disinterest in politics should render them an unlikely group to incite political mobilization.

These two events at Beijing and Fudan therefore contrast with narratives in China's official media that portrays students as compliant and obedient young citizens. For instance, a news article in March 2016 that featured a young newlywed couple had attracted substantial ridicule. The article was about two employees from the Nanchang Railway Bureau, who so devoted to the Party,

had spent their wedding night copying the Party's 15,000-word constitution by hand (Jing Li, 2016). The article was widely mocked on Chinese social media because there was such disbelief that the young couple could show such devotion.

The disjuncture between these two narratives, young people as pliant versus young people as oppositional, highlights a more likely phenomenon in a strong authoritarian regime like China, which is how common it is for acts of non-compliance to occur. The longstanding narrative of China's student population in the post-Tiananmen period, one that is obedient and apathetic is worthy of further investigation as it invites a discussion about an authoritarian regime's persistent efforts to elicit compliance and to what extent do citizens comply.

Large scale oppositional protests in China are indeed rare, especially by students. However, focusing on overt political protests obfuscates how non-compliance and evasion of political control commonly unfolds in authoritarian contexts. Just because we do not observe large-scale protests, does not necessarily mean that the regime has been successful in securing compliance. By the same token, when citizens push back to evade the rules of control, it also does not mean they hold dissident and anti-regime views. Rather, by studying political non-compliance as the outcome of interest, it helps to examine a more relevant dynamic that occurs in authoritarian contexts.

1.1 Study Objective, Research Question and Argument

This study investigates acts of non-compliance and rule-breaking specifically among China's university students. Across Chinese universities, the regime has created an ecosystem that reflects soft and hard mechanisms to induce political conformity. The former reflects efforts to induce positive support for the Party. The latter refers to mechanisms that enhance the regime's

capacity to monitor and limit the political autonomy of students and groups. The former is achieved through political education and student participation in official university activities, specifically through the Communist Youth League. The latter is established through a system of close monitoring of student behavior by peers and staff, and strict management of campus life. Therefore, given the extensive system of indoctrination and control, the regime should be able to induce compliance and we should see a largely obedient student population.

The rise of unregistered student clubs on Chinese universities challenges this assumption. My study examines the emergence of student clubs that focus on women's development and gender equality, and LGBTQ issues. Although members of these groups are not anti-regime, addressing social problems in China can be politically sensitive, especially if they are framed as criticisms against the government or government policies. As such, many of these groups often fail to receive approval and operate as unregistered student groups. The emergence of unregistered student clubs, which organize around social issues, is a prime example of non-compliance and disobedience. Given the extensive efforts to institutionalize surveillance and control, and impart political ideology, this study asks how is that these student clubs can emerge in such an environment?

In China's political system, which relies on monitoring and indoctrination, it is easy to assume that the regime has effective control over the population. However, this study argues that the absence of large-scale protests obfuscates how acts of non-compliance commonly occur. Given China's coercive capacity, citizens outwardly perform loyalty and compliance. Citizens act *as if* they are following the rules. Arguably, this is not sufficient for regime stability. As Yan pointedly notes, if citizens perform loyalty publicly, this leaves opportunities for individuals to develop non-conforming attitudes privately (Yan, 2014). A consequence is that acts of non-compliance can

build and chip away at the institutions of political control, thereby potentially weakening the regime.

An objective of this study is to unpack a dynamic that occurs in authoritarian contexts, in which there is a back and forth between the regime and its citizens. The former engineers a myriad of ways to assert control and indoctrinate support. Citizens may seemingly comply, but beneath the surface, citizens find ways to resist in less overt ways. University campuses in China offer an interesting lens to study this dynamic. There is an environment of intense control, monitoring and indoctrination. The rise of unregistered student clubs is an example of how methods of control are challenged in ways that are short of political protest.

1.2 Non-compliance in Authoritarian Regimes

Everyday acts of non-compliance are not often seen as significant political events because they so rarely change the overall power structure between dominant and subordinate groups and in the case of authoritarian countries, the regime and citizens. For James Scott, when power relations are grossly disproportionate, subordinate groups will engage in strategic behavior that is hidden from powerholders (Scott, 1990). In the public realm, subordinate groups act in compliance and adhere to these power dynamics. Deference in the public sphere may be performative, as it is necessary for survival (Scott, 1990). When there is such a disparity in power, open and direct forms of resistance in the form of protests, petitions, or strikes are simply not possible. The fear of repression makes them rare occurrences. Challenges to the power dynamics emerge more subtly, as disguised, anonymous and seemingly innocuous acts; they come in the form of everyday resistance in what Scott calls *infrapolitics* (Scott, 1990). A criticism however is that if these acts

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of defiance remain hidden and individuals nevertheless comply in public, the power structures are never really challenged (Scott, 1990).

The "infrapolitics of the powerless" is nevertheless important to observe for a few reasons. Firstly, because open confrontation is rare when there is a threat of repression, everyday resistance *is* political for ordinary citizens (Scott, 1990). Where there is structure of punishment and reward, outward compliance does not necessarily denote total acceptance of the social and political norms set forth by the powerholders (Scott, 1990). Secondly, to focus solely on when such discontent boils over into outright resistance fails to document the process of how it develops in the first place. The factors that lead to open demonstration do not occur suddenly but rather the seeds that produce the values of dissent and opposition were planted long ago. Small, disguised acts have the potential to accumulate and transform into outright resistance (Scott, 1990). "At another level it is well to recall that the aggregation of thousands upon thousands of such "petty" acts of resistance have dramatic economic and political effects" (Scott, 1990).

Acts of non-compliance can become normalized so much so that the rules and institutions that sought to create a rule-abiding citizen gradually cease to have an effect. In the case of the Soviet Union, institutions lost resonance among the larger population. Indeed, contrary to the belief that the collapse of the Soviet Union was quick and surprising, scholars have argued that the regime faced a slow and gradual demise (Fürst, 2002; Solnick, 1998). Citizens simply began to ignore the rules and carved alternative spaces outside of the official channels (Fürst, 2002). What potentially undermines the regime are everyday forms of resistance where individual citizens navigate within the parameters of what is permitted. It was the creation of alternative spaces and distancing from the official channels that made state-inculcated norms merely performative and eventually non-existent. Soviet citizens learned how to *speak Bolshevik,* that is to speak and act

according to the prescriptive rules set forth by the regime (Gorsuch, 2000). It was not active resistance and confrontation that contributed to the collapse of Soviet institutions but withdrawal, disengagement, and opting out (Fürst, 2002).

Therefore, when the arrest of students from Marxist student groups happened in China, we only observed the tipping point in which the regime resorts to repression. Prior to that, there were several low-level transgressions and struggles in which students pushed the boundaries. For instance, years prior to this incident, the Peking University Marxist student group had been disciplined before for publishing a research report on the state of migrant and wage workers on its campus ("Beida makesi zhuyi yanjiu," 2018). There is therefore a great deal of back and forth before a group reaches its tipping point. There are consequences when students gradually chip away at the rules designed to keep them in check. The rise of student clubs and how they push back on university rules, for instance, suggests that public performance of obedience may not be sufficient. Non-compliant acts can accumulate such that they have the potential to weaken the regime's ability to maintain control.

1.3 Historical Legacies and Comparisons

1.3.1 The Legacy of the May Fourth Movement: A tradition of student activism emerges

Student-led movements from the early twentieth century, specifically the May Fourth movement of 1919, carry symbolic importance. Historical student movements have been appropriated by both the CCP and student activists (Wasserstrom, 1990). May Fourth specifically is deeply ingrained in the public consciousness as a patriotic movement, in which the fervor of

urban college and high school students inspired citizens to demonstrate against the Chinese regime for failing to protect the country against foreign encroachment (Wasserstrom, 1990). On May 4th, students from high schools and universities across Beijing led large street demonstrations, classroom strikes, and anti-Japanese boycotts. The actions of students in Beijing quickly spread to other cities in the weeks that followed (Chow, 1960). Students and professors who participated in the movement went on to form the Communist Party.

The May Fourth Movement and several of the subsequent student protests that followed in the years after, are part of the political mythology that ties the CCP's founding to the student protests. Engraved at the base of the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square, which commemorates eight revolutionary events, the May Fourth Movement is included (Wasserstrom, 1990). To this day across university campuses, school authorities organize events to mark May 4th, and official propaganda encourages students to emulate the May 4th spirit. However other elements of the May Fourth movement are what precisely informs the regime's fear of student activism. The iconoclastic and anti-conformist attitudes, the emergence of associational life and free exchange of ideas were crucial in creating a tradition of student activism that began with the May Fourth movement.

The student movement can be traced back further in history to the fall of the dynastic regime. In the late 1800s, thousands of students were awarded scholarships to study abroad as part of the dynastic regime's program of reformation. The influence of foreign education on this new class of intellectual elites however played a role in the revolution that overturned China's imperial government. Importantly, it also introduced new ideas that changed the political culture (Israel, 1968). New associations and clubs, independent newspapers and magazines, and literary salons emerged concomitantly (Whyte, 1992). Many of these associations and magazines were not

initially political, but gradually took on a more political tone that later contributed to the student movement (Chow, 1960).

For example, the Cooperative Student Society first began as a group that translated western dramas and literature, and gradually began to translate communist literature (Chow, 1960). The founding of the New Youth magazine was crucial in galvanizing students. It gained wide circulation beyond Beijing and inspired the publication of student-based journals and the formation of student societies in other cities, (Chow, 1960). Many students and intellectuals during that period became key players in the founding of the Communist Party. For example, it was upon reading the New Youth magazine as a student that a young Mao Zedong went on to create the New People's Study Society in Changsha, another autonomous student group that engaged in critical debate and discussion (Chow, 1960).

An important factor that mobilized students so effectively was the role of autonomous organizations. Angered by the outcomes of the Paris Peace Conference that saw the transfer of Chinese territory from German to Japanese control, it was student members of these societies and literary magazines that initiated meetings to hold student-wide demonstrations (Chow, 1960). An important consequence of these demonstrations was that student organizations became more formalized. Students established a number of inter-collegiate federations that united students from different institutions and regions. For instance, the Peking Student Union, which represented students from different schools across Beijing, became the first to form an inter-collegiate federation. Students in other cities soon established inter-collegiate bodies of their own (Chow, 1960). These inter-collegiate student federations fundraised, published journals and sent students to different cities to conduct street lectures (Chow, 1960). From 1919 until the Communist Party's victory in 1949, student-led organizations would incite and mobilize major demonstrations and

boycotts (Lutz, 1971). They became a mainstay in the political landscape. The political reach of student organizations and their immense mobilizing power was precisely why the CCP sought to depoliticize the student body once it gained control. The significance of the Tiananmen protests in 1989 lies in part in how institutions of control designed by the CCP unraveled.

1.3.2 The Significance of Tiananmen: When political control unravels

Discussions about the Tiananmen protests, often center on the actual demonstration itself. Images of students occupying the city center and protesters being met by military tanks, undoubtedly draw the focus on the street demonstrations. However, it is also crucial to study the general milieu on university campuses that facilitated the student movement and how the mechanisms of political control unraveled.

Therefore, when we analyze the Tiananmen protests in the spring of 1989, the previous decade provides an important backdrop. The chorus of open debate and criticism along with the formation of underground journals and organizations played an informative role. After Mao's death in 1976, citizens began to air grievances about injustices and political persecution experienced under Mao's rule, particularly during the Cultural Revolution (S. Jiang, 2015). Known as the Beijing Spring or the Democracy Wall movement, citizens expressed their criticisms in the form of large character posters known as *dazibao* (大字报). Some aired grievances and others expressed a desire for greater political freedom (Brodsgaard, 1981). Poems, satires, and essays were plastered on city walls in Beijing. They soon spread to other cities in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Wuhan (Goldman, 1999). It sparked open debate and critical discussions in public spaces, as writers recited poems and delivered speeches, and citizens huddled in groups to read the posters. (S. Jiang, 2015). A number of underground publications and magazines were mimeographed and

sold at the wall (Brodsgaard, 1981). The critical atmosphere in this period set the stage for the student-led protests in the spring of 1989.

After the unexpected death of former Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang on April 15, 1989, students spontaneously organized a march to honor his legacy (Wright, 2001). What began as public acts of mourning, spiraled into outward expressions of discontent about the pace of political reform, party corruption, and economic stagnation. Shortly after Hu's death, autonomous student governments formed both in and outside of Beijing (Saich, 1990; Wright, 2001). Student activists at Peking University were the first to establish an alternative student body, which unlike the official student government, was free from university control. After the formation of the *Beida Preparatory Autonomous Student Union,* students at other prestigious universities followed suit (Wright, 2001). It also led to the formation of an inter-university body called the *Beijing Students' Autonomous Federation,* which represented different Beijing universities (Wright, 2001). These new student unions coordinated different aspects of the demonstration from sending press releases, fundraising to coordinating the hunger strike (Wright, 2001).

Although these autonomous student bodies emerged quite quickly, they were already part of an environment where critical debate and active political organizing had been occurring for some time. Student leaders of these new student unions had been part of a number of unofficial student groups that had formed throughout the 1980s (Wright, 2001; D. Zhao, 2000). Students at Peking University and Peking Normal University Groups established groups like the *Wednesday Forum*, *Committee of Action*, *Democracy Salon, Olympic Institute*, and the *Confucius Study Society*. They organized discussion groups, invited guest speakers, and published newsletters (Saich, 1990; Shen & Yen, 1998; Wright, 2001). The *Wednesday Forum* at Peking University was an informal group that congregated on the university's campus lawns and was known to invite

liberal intellectuals and foreign guests (Wright, 2001). These groups also moved beyond discussion groups and engaged in political advocacy. They drafted petitions to release political prisoners and established a human rights hotline for instance (Khu, 1993).

In addition to these politicized organizations, several groups emerged that were not directly oppositional. For instance, members of women's-based NGOs that developed in the 1990s, had their first experience with campus organizations (Milwertz, 2002). As students, they formed academic salons and discussion groups, invited guest speakers and translated feminist texts (Milwertz, 2002). At Peking University, the *Education Society* emerged to address issues of educational reform and conducted research on educational outcomes in rural China (Wright, 2001). Although some of these groups were engaged in advocacy around social issues, they did not engage in questions about political reform. Therefore, part of the overall milieu was greater openness that led to a proliferation of all types of student-led organizations.

The emergence of autonomous student unions is also significant because they signify how students eschewed and rejected official state-sanctioned organizations (Wright, 2001). The student federations arose out of a desire to set themselves apart from the official student government at their respective universities. Students viewed their own student governments as illegitimate and as an extension of university authority rather than as a truly representative body (Shen & Yen, 1998; Wright, 2001). Therefore, an important part of the analysis regarding the rise of student activism in the 1980s, is examining the general landscape on college campuses. There existed an environment in which students eschewed official student institutions in favor of their own organizations (Rosen, 1992). In lieu of participating in the mainstream institutions, they created unofficial student clubs that sparked political discussion and debate.

The history of student activism in China helps to explain why the regime has created such tight measures of control and indoctrination. In one instance, the regime is concerned that the myth and romanticism surrounding student movements can be used by activists for their own objectives. This was the case during the Tiananmen protests, as student leaders framed their activities as "the New May 4th Movement" (Holley, 1989). Secondly, a common pattern across these historical incidents is the role of student organizations. Conditions that led to the formation of student clubs, often saw the politicization of politically innocuous groups. For instance, literary societies and salons emerged that gradually led to the proliferation of more critical organizations. Further, the emergence of student associations also led to the formation of inter-collegiate bodies that played a crucial role in facilitating mobilization. Lastly, an important lesson of Tiananmen is understanding how official mechanisms of control broke down, the emergence of unregistered student clubs coincided with disaffection towards official institutions.

1.3.3 The Rise of Informal Organizations in the Soviet Union

The political challenge for the Soviet regime was not necessarily the rise of dissident beliefs, but rather how attachment to the Soviet identity and participation in official institutions gradually declined. They no longer had a significant impact on individuals' daily lives. The emergence of informal organizations, referred to as *neformaly,* coincided with growing disinterest towards Soviet institutions and state-led initiatives.

Students eschewed official channels, turning their nose to state-sponsored efforts to attract young people. Officials in the Komsomol, the Soviet Party's youth organization, were forced to falsify membership rates to conceal the institution's lack of popularity (Solnick, 1998). Small acts of non-compliance and political distancing had ramifications for the regime. Diaries and interviews

collected by Yurchak paints a picture of how students used Komsomol activities to socialize rather than to participate in political activities (Yurchak, 2013). At Komsomol meetings because members were all friends, they would sit for hours talking about things other than politics (Yurchak, 2013). While they would dutifully attend parades, students participated because it was a fun way to meet up with friends (Yurchak, 2013). Their behavior is an example of outward performances of loyalty. The Komsomol meetings and activities had high attendance but failed to achieve the ideological goals intended by the regime. Because these acts of non-compliance gradually became the norm, the indoctrinating function of the meetings and activities weakened. Further in private, young people showed disdain for the Komsomol. Yurchak tells the story of Irina, who as Komsomol cadre had to collect membership fees. Members mocked her, called her the "levy collector" and often dragged their feet when it came to paying their dues (Yurchak, 2013).

Young people's disinterest in official institutions like the Komsomol was tied to the rise of informal organizations. The various periods of thaw under Khrushchev saw the rise of cultural and interest groups. What began as informal meetings, salons, poetry circles among friends, grew in popularity (Yurchak, 2013). Underground publications and journals, called *samizdat* (self-publishing) gained wide circulation (Fürst, 2010; Pyzhikov, 2004). These informal groups, which were often formed by students, were appealing because of the absence of official ideology. These groups gradually contributed to the building of a nascent civil society during the Gorbachev years. With growing disaffection toward official ideology and lack of enforcement by official institutions, these various *neformaly* organizations took on a more critical tone. One that is particularly notable is *Memorial Society*, a group that emerged during the Brezhnev period whose mission was to preserve archival information about Stalin's purges (Brovkin, 1990). Unregistered groups like *Memorial* began putting pressure on the legislature and introduced a rights-based discourse

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(Alekseeva & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Today, *Memorial* remains part of Russia's current civil society landscape, but under Putin's Russia, they are often threatened with state repression ("Controlling the past," 2014).

This brief look at the Soviet Union sheds light on how informal organizations gradually became a political challenge. They also arose in part because of citizens' disillusionment with official institutions like the Komsomol. Political opposition did not emerge immediately but rather there was a gradual process, in which disillusionment with officialdom contributed to the rise of informal groups.

1.4 Preview of the Research Study

The study is divided into three sections. In Section 1, I describe China's university ecosystem, in which I detail the different mechanisms in place that are intended to ensure political compliance. I categorize the different mechanisms as *soft* and *hard* methods. The former refers to how political ideology is imparted through formal courses and the university's control over the extracurricular space. The latter refers to mechanisms that enhance the regimes' capacity to monitor and limit the political autonomy of students and groups.

Section 2 explores the limitations in the university's ability to induce compliance. While the previous section paints a picture of a strong system, this section by contrast reveals challenges that hinder its ability to control students. I examine how changing incentive structures in post-reform China is a reason why at the class level, the CYL and CCP branches may not be the strongest part of China's university ecosystem. I also use survey data of Beijing university students

to examine how it may be difficult to gain compliance from certain subpopulations. The regression analysis shows the pool of politically reliable students is narrow. The regime can only count on individuals who are party members and who seek a job in the Party-state sector. Another challenge is that students from elite universities are not necessarily more obedient. This is surprising given the regime seeks to recruit party members heavily from these institutions.

Section 3 presents a qualitative study that investigates the emergence of unregistered student clubs on university campuses, specifically groups that are concerned with LGBTQ and women's-based issues. I trace how their development is connected to the growth of civil society in China. Further I identify how they pose a challenge to the regime. Tight restrictions on campus force student groups to operate unofficially or underground. As such, they devise ways to survive outside the control of university authorities. They therefore have the capacity to develop into a civil society organization, in which their reach impact goes beyond students. Secondly, student groups have the potential to engage in public advocacy and external-facing activities.

2.0 China's University Ecosystem: Soft and hard mechanisms

Chinese university campuses are made of a carefully designed system that inculcates political support and induces compliance through formal indoctrination, political monitoring, and tight control over the extracurricular activities of students and student organizations. For authoritarian regimes, universities have a politically important role for regime stability. On the one hand, it is not dissimilar from democratic regimes, in which the research and academic output of universities are important for the country's development and competitive edge. However, there is also an important political function that universities serve for authoritarian regimes (Du, 2020; S. Han & Xu, 2019). Universities are important mechanisms of indoctrination and political socialization, in which faculty and staff have to fulfill both academic and political duties (Du, 2018; Hao & Guo, 2016). In contrast to the notion that universities are autonomous institutions and the intelligentsia class are defenders of free ideas and critical thought, universities in authoritarian systems, also serve the regime by creating politically compliant citizens (Connelly & Grüttner, 2010; Du, 2020; Tromly, 2013).

Since 1949, when the Communists came to power, universities have at times struggled with these competing objectives, that is to create *red experts,* who are competent but who must also be politically obedient (Du, 2020). There have been ebbs and flows throughout the Communist period in terms of how well the regime has subdued the intelligentsia. But the regime has largely been adept at creating a system of *soft* and *hard* mechanisms to transmit official ideology, monitor and surveil students, and limit the political autonomy of students and student organizations.

After CCP's victory in 1949, it followed the Soviet model by creating hierarchical institutions that extended the regime's control. At every institution, there existed a cellular unit,

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also referred to as *small group* (小组) (Whyte, 1974). It was largely through these units, that the regime transmitted official ideology, mobilized political support, and generated a collective identity. The idea was that these new social bonds and peer dynamics would encourage rule following and conformity (Schurmann, 1959). In these small groups, they conducted regular study sessions to learn official ideology. They also engaged in self-criticism wherein members publicly admonished themselves or their peers for failing to live up to socialist ideals (Whyte, 1974). There was an effort to create new social relationships, that is to engender "comradeship over friendship" (Gold, 1991). As such, peer dynamics in these groups helped to instill political conformity, as individuals feared they would be outed by classmates or colleagues (Whyte, 1974). Even though, both the Soviet and Chinese Communist regimes sprung from radical student movements, the regime endeavored to mold politically obedient citizens.

Schools were particularly important in helping the regime develop a system of political socialization. From primary schools to universities, the Communist regime sought to shape the entire course of a younger person's formative years (Gold, 1991). The class or the ban – 班 is the primary unit through which orders are carried from university authority to students.

The class (ban – 班), the Office of Student Affairs, a branch within the university's Party Committee, and the Youth League are important institutions that make up the university's ecosystem (Du, 2020; Yan, 2014). Their functions are multifold: to inculcate formal tenets of official ideology, instill a moral and social code of behavior that would encourage obedience, create localized structures of surveillance both horizontally among peers and vertically between political personnel and students, and limit the autonomy of student organizations.

Below is an organizational chart that encapsulates the various departments and personnel responsible for ensuring students' political compliance[1]. At the top of the organizational chart, it is important to note that public universities in China are governed by state institutions, either the central Ministry of Education, provincial Ministry of Education, or the municipal Ministry of Education (H. Jiang & Li, 2016). The Ministries of Education fund the respective universities under their control. More importantly, the Party Committee in each Ministry appoint the Party Secretaries (*daxue dangwei shuji* 大学党委书记) for each university. Party Secretaries lead the university's Party Committee, which hold highest authority within the university (S. Han & Xu, 2019). Because they are appointed by the state, this ensures that universities comply with the Party's policies (S. Han & Xu, 2019). This therefore allows the regime to use universities to carry out programs of political indoctrination.

The Party Committee overseas various bodies that are tasked with different aspects of ensuring political compliance. These institutions and roles include: the Office of Student Affairs (OSA), the Communist Youth League (CYL), department Party Committees, class Party Branches and political guidance counsellors. The OSA (*dangwei xuesheng gongzuo bu* 党委学生工作部) is a division within the university and department-level Party Committee. It is tasked with the overall management of students' political and ideological education. It also oversees the work of political guidance counsellors, who are in direct of contact with students (Du, 2020; D. Zhao, 2008). The CYL is a mass institution that is supposed to represent the interests of China's youths, and whose members are between 14 and 28 years of age. However, in practice, the work of the CYL is also

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[1] This organizational chart combines diagrams found in Yan (2014) and Huang et al. (2021). As well, it was informed by descriptions found in Zhao (2008) and Fu (2020), and my reading of various university yearbooks *daxue nianjian* (大学年鉴).

managed by the Party Committee. Rather than acting as a representative institution, it serves more as a "transmission belt" that extends the regime's political control (Healy, 1982). Within the university ecosystem, the CYL Committee oversees the university's student government, manages student clubs and supervises department-level CYL Committees. At some universities, the CYL oversees a body called the *Student Club Union* (*xuesheng shetuan linahe hui* 学生社团联合会), which has more direct contact with student clubs. Their responsibilities may include helping clubs with the registration process for instance. In the diagram below, I mark this organization in dashed lines because not every university has a *Student Club Union*.

The class level is the lowest administrative unit that organizes the student population. Students are divided into classes within academic departments and within these classes, a CCP and CYL branch is established. Through the CYL and CCP branches, students are expected to carry out ideological and political tasks and activities.

Below I summarize the university ecosystem by categorizing different mechanisms of political control as *soft* and *hard* methods. The former refers to methods of indoctrination, in which political ideology and regime support are inculcated through formal courses and extracurricular activities. I label these methods as *soft* principally because the political content is not imparted through monitoring or the threat of punishment. The latter, *hard* methods refer to mechanisms and rules designed to enhance the monitoring capacity of the university as well as to limit the political autonomy of students, especially when it comes to organizing.
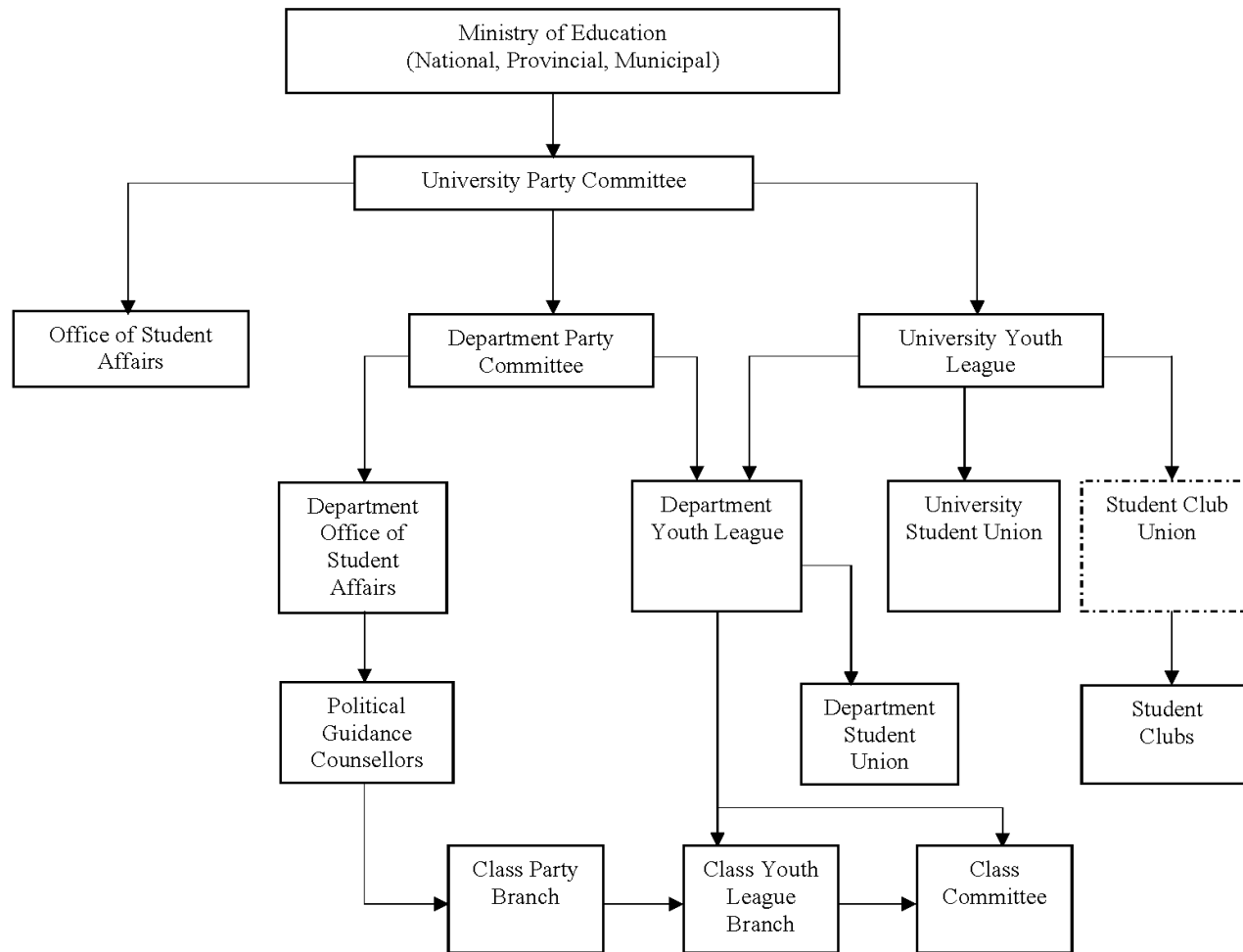
Figure 1 University Ecosystem of Political Control

2.1 Soft Methods

The *soft* methods in the overall university ecosystem refers to ways that the regime imparts political ideology. This is largely achieved through formal political education courses that are mandatory for university students. In addition to learning about the formal tenets of the Party's official ideology, the courses are also infused with contents that equate political compliance with moral virtue, and narratives that stress national humiliation. Further, the regime is also able to transmit ideological themes by monopolizing the extracurricular space.

2.1.1 Political Education

Public education plays an important role in the political socialization of a country's youth. It is a vehicle that promotes national symbols, myths and histories to augment positive attachment to one's country and political institutions (Fairbrother, 2003). In some respects, efforts by an authoritarian regime to produce model citizens are not different from those of democratic regimes. With civic education in democratic countries, there is an aim to increase young people's knowledge of public institutions and the political process. Similarly, political education in authoritarian regimes also seeks to mold politically informed and law-abiding citizens. One crucial difference however is that it also aims to engender support for the regime. The use of symbols, myths, and histories in formal instruction is to strengthen the regime's legitimacy. There is also an effort to socialize and impart correct political behavior, which is obedience to the Party (Hsu, Teets, Hasmath, Hsu, & Hildebrandt, 2020; Rosen, 1983).

During the Maoist years, political education was largely undertaken through mass political campaigns and through small study sessions conducted by the class (Qinghua Wang, 2012).

Formal instruction of official ideology was not institutionalized or standardized by the Ministry of Education until the early to mid-1980s (Qinghua Wang, 2012; C. Zhang & Fagan, 2016). In 1984, political education became a bachelor's program at twelve universities, which signaled efforts to standardize the discipline (Qinghua Wang, 2012). It is now a common major across Chinese universities. In the literature, scholars refer to the formal instruction of official ideology or *sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu* (思想政治教育), as patriotic education, moral education, ideological education, or citizenship education; in this study I use the term political education (Cantoni, Chen, Yang, Yuchtman, & Zhang, 2017; Du, 2020; Fairbrother, 2003; Hsu et al., 2020; Qinghua Wang, 2012; S. Zhao, 1998).

Political education is standardized through the Ministry of Education, which has authority over the general curriculum. It mandates the required hours and credits for all students at every level of education, from primary to graduate students (Ministry of Education, 2020). Under the purview of two departments, the Ministry of Education and the Central Propaganda Bureau compile the syllabus and review textbooks for universities to follow (Ministry of Education, 2005). Universities seemingly only have leeway to assign textbooks and shape the curriculum for non-credit courses (Tu, 2011).

Despite efforts in the 1980s to use political education courses as the main conduit to impart official ideology, the Tiananmen protests demonstrated the state's failure (Qinghua Wang, 2012). For Chinese leaders, students were led astray because of the infiltration of western ideas, namely "bourgeois liberalization" (*zichan jieji ziyouhua* 资产阶级自由化). This was clear in Deng's address to military officials after the declaration of Martial Law.

> The recent incident was in the nature of a conflict between bourgeois liberalization and adherence to the Four Cardinal Principles. True, we have talked about keeping to those principles, conducting ideological and political work, and combating bourgeois liberalization and mental pollution. But we have not talked about those things consistently,

and there has been no action or even any mention of the need for action. The mistake was not in the principles themselves, but in the failure to keep to them consistently enough and to do a good job in education and in ideological and political work (X. Deng, 1989).

In the post-Mao period, political education was not well-received by students. The political zeal during the Mao era had made students and scholars wary and unreceptive to the political education courses (Qinghua Wang, 2012). Universities were also lax with the implementation of political education, in part because economic reconstruction was a primary concern given China's embrace of economic reform (Du, 2020; Qinghua Wang, 2012). There was a desire for China to catch up with the rest of the world, as such political education became less of a priority as universities focused more on academic and professional training.

Tiananmen was therefore a turning point as conservative leadership within the regime sought to make political education more rigorous and institutionalized across universities. For university students, the required courses should make up 10 percent of students' total credits (Du, 2020). There was also a concomitant increase in required credit hours. For instance, at Chengdu University of Science and Technology, which is present-day Sichuan University, shortly after the protests, the course Principles of Marxism (马克思主义原理) was increased to 140 credit hours, the History of the Communist Revolution (中国革命史) and the Construction of Chinese Socialism (中国社会主义建设) were each increased to 70 credit hours (Sichuan University, 2006).

Another issue concerned the lack of prestige and low pay associated with being an instructor of political education courses (Qinghua Wang, 2012; D. Zhao, 2004). By making the political education courses mandatory, requiring that they make up 10 percent of students' total credits, this ensured consistent student enrollment and therefore a steady income for instructors of political education (Qinghua Wang, 2012). To raise the prestige of these positions, there was an

effort to professionalize political education as an academic discipline. The number of bachelor programs for political education increased and in the 1990s there was an expansion of masters and doctoral programs in political education (Qinghua Wang, 2012). The position of political education instructor was also classified as faculty, allowing promotional opportunities for instructors to become full professor (Hayhoe, 1993).

The courses being taught are not simply a recitation of official ideology, but there is also an effort to frame political education in terms of moral responsibility and civic virtue. In what is referred to as *Two Sets of Courses – liangke*（两课）, the political education curriculum is divided into two categories of courses, one that emphasizes the regime's official ideological theories and one that fuses political ideology with morality (Qinghua Wang, 2012). In the former type, teachings of Marx and Mao Zedong theories have been a mainstay. Over the years they have been updated to include the political theories of different Chinese leaders. It is standard for instance for students to take *Fundamental Principles of Marxism* and *Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought*. More recently, universities are required to offer a course on *Xi Jinping's Thoughts on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era* (Ministry of Education, 2020). The moral component of *liangke* is realized through the course, *Cultivation of Ideology and Moral Character and Foundations of the Law*. The objective is to shape students' individual moral character and address issues more closely related to their everyday lives (Hayhoe, 1993; Qinghua Wang, 2012). The course attempts to impart what it means to be a good citizen. It encourages values like collectivism and volunteerism, but it also emphasizes the importance of rule-abidance and political compliance especially to the Party's leadership.

For instance, in updated editions of the textbook, the 2007 and 2015 copies both include chapters that try to emphasize the importance of social order. When it comes to public assembly

and demonstrations, organizers are often charged with disturbing public order and "picking quarrels" (Wong, 2015). It is therefore not surprising that the texts try to instill values around the importance of preserving social order. In contrast to western political values, wherein the protection of individual rights is emphasized, ideas around stability and order are stressed.

> A stable and orderly society is itself a reflection of different interest groups, with different abilities, living in harmony together. If people do whatever they want in public life, society will be in a state of disorder, and social harmony will be impossible to talk about. (Sixiang daode xiuyang yu falujichu bianxiezhu, 2015)

Political education curriculum has also been infused with a strong sense of patriotism. Student mobilization during Tiananmen shed light on how receptive young people were to western political values (S. Zhao, 1998). To combat the appeal of western political ideas, a prominent narrative in the required text emphasizes China's history of national humiliation at the hands of foreign incursions (Z. Wang, 2008). A narrative of victimhood therefore attempts to villainize the west, and exalts the Party's leadership to reverse that history (Z. Wang, 2008). A history textbook, *Modern and Contemporary Chinese History* was added to the political education curriculum in the mid-2000s, which emphasizes those precise themes (Tu, 2011).

Over the years, political education has gone beyond rote memorization of official ideology. There are efforts to shape a sense of civic and moral virtue when it comes to rule abidance and party support. Political education has also been infused with a narrative of national humiliation in a bid to weaken the appeal of western ideas. An important lesson of the Tiananmen demonstrations was to prioritize the instruction of political education. Although universities play a crucial role for the regime to pursue a program of economic growth and development, the regime has endeavored that it should not be at the expense of political indoctrination. It has built up its political education program by professionalizing the discipline, mandating required courses for students and by

introducing new narratives and themes to induce political support and shape politically correct behavior.

2.1.2 State-Led Extracurricular Activities

A second mechanism, which I also categorize as a *soft method*, is how the regime attempts to encourage student participation in state-led extracurricular activity. This is accomplished in several ways, firstly official bodies within the university try to monopolize the space such that extracurricular activities are under their auspices. Secondly, university authorities assert significant control over the Student Union, which allows them to influence campus-wide events to help fulfill their ideological mandate.

Patriotic events, especially ones that commemorate the Party's history have played a crucial legitimating function. The CYL and the Student Union typically organize campus-wide activities, especially to commemorate events like May Fourth and December Nineth (Du, 2020). Both historical events, have played a part in the regime's political mythology. The regime has used the history of the two student-led demonstrations to create a narrative around the founding of the Party and the history of foreign incursion. To celebrate December Nineth, many universities across China hold various talent exhibitions. One that is often held is a singing competition, in which groups of students perform patriotic or *red* songs from the Maoist period. A large auditorium is booked, and often undergraduate students are asked to participate (Participant Observation No.2). Students have dressed in period costumes and carried flags; several groups I witnessed dressed in Red Army uniforms as a nod to the historical period (Participant Observation No.2). The regime strives to reinforce these narratives and strengthen the Party's legitimacy by requiring universities to hold such campus-wide events and encourage students' participation.

There is also an effort to monopolize extracurricular space, such that official institutions, like the university's CYL and Student Union, are the main organizers. By doing so, this ensures that the regime has control over students' participation. This is evident in the area of philanthropy and volunteerism. Scholars note that universities have sought to capitalize on the significant interest among young people to participate in volunteer activities (Palmer & Ning, 2020; Perry, 2014). For example, across Chinese universities, students often use the winter or summer holiday to volunteer. A popular activity is to participate in trips and visit schools in impoverished regions in China, what is referred to as *zhujiao* (助教). Rather than leaving this space to be filled by civil society organizations, these types of trips are often organized and overseen by the university's Youth League (Palmer & Ning, 2020). State-driven volunteer initiatives therefore seek to capitalize on young people's interest to engage in community service and thereby control the space to diminish the role of organizations outside of the university (Palmer & Ning, 2020).

Another way that the regime tries to claim the extracurricular space is to ensure official institutions like the CYL oversee and control the Student Union *xueshenghui* (学生会). In the study of student-led movements, the mobilization and politicization of these student unions have played a crucial role (Weiss & Aspinall, 2012). This was certainly evident in the case of the student protests in Hong Kong, in which student unions across Hong Kong universities organized class boycotts and drafted political manifestoes (McLaughlin, 2019; Pang & Tam, 2021). They have been directly involved in the larger political debates about Hong Kong's political autonomy for instance. Because of the potential danger for the Student Union to become politicized, it is no surprise that in China, student government lacks true autonomy.

At the university level and within each department, there exists a Party Committee, CYL Committee and Student Union. The latter institutions are made up of predominantly student cadres,

while the former two institutions are largely made up of staff personnel (Francis, 1989). Formally and in practice, the Student Union at the departmental and university level is overseen by the respective CYL Committee. While one might think of student government as a representative body, in which members are elected to represent the interests of students, in China, the Student Union must also answer to university authorities (Francis, 1991). Universities have different rules regarding the election and makeup of the student body, but they are designed to ensure their control over the body.

For instance, at Peking university, to sit on the student union, one must be a CCP member or Youth League member as well as "love and support the Communist Party of China, have a strong sense of patriotism…" (Peking University, 2020). Further, while it is common for students to directly elect members of the student union at the class level, *banweihui* (班委会), students who sit on the student union at the university level tend not be determined by campus wide elections (Huang, Yao, Li, & Liao, 2021). Candidates usually have to be approved by the CYL, and they are usually elected by student representatives who attend the congress meeting (Du, 2020; Huang et al., 2021). These mechanisms essentially tie the student body closer to university authorities. Therefore, rather than truly representing the interests of students, their initiatives and activities are very much shaped by university authorities. This then allows the university to infuse extracurricular activities that are under the purview of the Student Union with ideological and patriotic themes. This is exemplified with the commemorative events to mark the May Fourth and December Nineth student movements, which are usually organized by the Student Union and CYL.

In sum, the *soft* methods reflect a program of political inculcation in which lessons, narratives and themes are imparted onto students. This is conducted through mandatory political education courses, which are no longer strictly about rote memorization of formal tenants of

official ideology. Efforts to equate civic and moral duty with compliance along with narratives about China's history of victimhood are important components of today's political education curriculum. Efforts to dominate the extracurricular space is another way that university authorities try to shape political norms. Their control over the Student Union and role in organizing campus-wide patriotic events are examples of how, through extracurricular participation, the regime endeavors to induce political compliance

2.2 Hard Methods

To complement these *soft* methods, which largely reflect a program of political indoctrination, the *hard* methods are a system of rules and regulations intended to enhance the monitoring capacity of university authority as well as to limit the political autonomy of students, especially when it comes to student organizing. The following discussion examines the function of political guidance counsellors, *fudaoyuan* (辅导员), the role of CYL and CCP branches and, and the CYL Committee's management of student clubs.

2.2.1 Front Line Political Personnel: The role of political guidance counsellors

In addition to efforts to win the hearts and minds of students by strengthening its political education curriculum, the regime also bolstered the role of political guidance counsellors after the Tiananmen protests. They are assigned to each class, *ban* (班) and serve as the front-line personnel in charge of monitoring students and to keep them in check (Du, 2020; Yan, 2014). They gather information about students' extracurricular activities, discourage the spread of radical ideas and

non-conforming behavior, investigate students' position on various political issues, and lead political meetings at the class-level (Du, 2020). When it comes to Party members, they also help recruit new members by selecting appropriate candidates and assisting with the application process (Du, 2020).

Like the role of a guidance counsellor at an American university, their duties also involve offering support when students have family problems or difficulties with courses work (Perry, 2014). Importantly, because they are more intimately aware of students' academic performance, extracurricular commitments, and personal life, they play a significant role in terms of political surveillance and control. They warn students if they cross the political line in terms of their political activities and attitudes, especially with regard to students' online social media presence (Du, 2020).

Often, front-line political personnel rely on politically reliable students to help gather information on classmates (D. Zhao, 1997). In the late 1980s, however this system was not particularly effective. This supervisory role relies on mutual supervision and cooperation from students. However, in an atmosphere where young people were critical of the regime, students were not particularly keen to cooperate. Further the role is often filled by recent graduates, who only a few years older than students, shared similar feelings of discontent and did not take their role seriously (D. Zhao, 1997).

There are now much stricter expectations regarding the supervisory role of a front-line political personnel. The status associated with this position as well as their wages had been increased in an effort to strengthen their role on campus (D. Zhao, 1997). It is now mandated that the ratio of *fudaoyuan* to students is 1 to 200 (Yan, 2014). Further, the politically reliability of the *fudoayuan* is critical (Du, 2020). Their hiring and evaluation are conducted by the OSA of the

university's Party Committee and as such, their political background is highly scrutinized. For example, they are subject to multiple examinations that not only test how they would respond to different scenarios, but also their understanding of official ideology (Du, 2020). The presence of political guidance counselors at the class-level and their direct involvement with students are a crucial part of the university's capacity to monitor and prevent politically deviant behavior.

2.2.2 CYL and CCP Branches at the Class Level

Another important part of the university ecosystem is how the regime extends control over students through the class or *ban* (班). As previously discussed, the class, is the lowest administrative unit at the university. Scholars have likened it to a homeroom class, in which it helps convene students into one central unit (Du, 2020). It is through the class, that university authorities can disseminate news, information, and policies directly to students, including political ideology. As such, it provides another vehicle for the regime to conduct political indoctrination and assert control. Specifically, the CYL branches and CCP branches at the class level organize activities and meetings that are supposed to facilitate political indoctrination as well as create peer dynamics that would lend itself to mutual surveillance.

Within each class, if there are more than 3 CYL members, they must form a CYL branch *tuanzhibu* 团支部. Similarly, if there are more than 3 Party members, they are obligated to form a Party branch *dangzhibu* 党支部. It is at this branch level that students are instructed by higher authorities to organize study sessions and activities around political and ideological themes. The goal of these activities and study sessions is to increase Party legitimacy and support (Du, 2020) Because most university students are already CYL members, since many join the CYL in junior

high, a large number of students at the class level are CYL members. The CYL branch therefore is an important channel for the regime to transmit political ideology. For those interested in joining the Party, they would be required to participate in CCP branch meetings and sessions. Thus, a small portion of students are neither CCP nor CYL members. Figure 2, using a survey of Beijing universities from 2009, displays the ratio between CCP and CYL members among undergraduate students.[2] Across the 3 top schools in China and lower ranking institutions, administered by the Municipal Ministry of Education, they all have an overwhelming number of CYL members, and very few have no political affiliation. Therefore, at the class level, most students either through the CYL or CCP branches are required to participate in group activities intended to augment regime support.

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[2] This data is sourced from the first wave of the Beijing College Students Panel Survey.
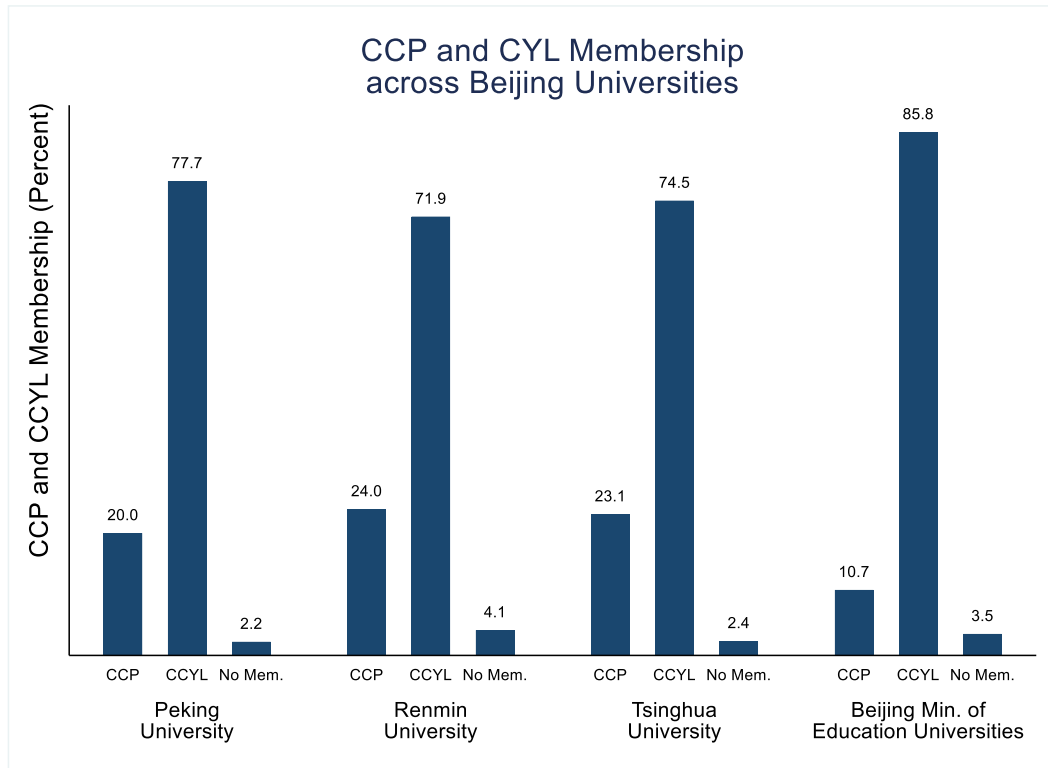
Figure 2 CCP and CYLMembership across Beijing Universities

As discussed earlier, the use of peer groups has been a prominent feature in how the regime asserts control. Under Maoist rule, there was an aim to overhaul institutions. *Small groups* were created to mobilize support (Whyte, 1974). A principal objective behind these small groups is that social pressure from one's peers would induce obedience and discourage deviance (Whyte, 1974). These groups would be asked to organize political activities that were intended to mobilize political support. Instead of using repressive means or material incentives, there was a reliance on social and political rituals through these group activities, wherein the everyday nature of these social groups would create group norms to elicit political support and compliant behavior (Whyte, 1974). The same objective applies to the class or *ban* (班), in which participation amongst close peers in the class would create a group dynamic that increases political conformity. For example, part of the responsibilities of CYL and CCP branch secretaries is to pay attention to their peers,

including their political dispositions. They are also encouraged to serve as role models, *bangyang* (榜样) and therefore there is group dynamic that emphasizes correct political behavior.

In the aftermath of the Tiananmen protests, the regime noted that both ideological education and political control on campuses were weak and ineffective (D. Zhao, 2008). This included the performances of CCP and CYL branches. Throughout the 1980s, Party leaders saw declining Party membership rates among young people. Chi discusses how there was growing cynicism towards official institutions like the CYL and CCP, with membership into the Party decreasing and disinterest towards student leadership positions:

> Many students now became openly contemptuous of political activists, dismissing them as people without integrity or scruples. Extracurricular social work, which previously had been highly praised, was now regarded as a waste of time and a detriment to one's academic performance. Some students refrained from seeking Party membership for fear of becoming the objects of ridicule and verbal attacks by their peers (Chi, 1991)

As mentioned previously in the discussion about the role of political guidance counsellors there was an overly lax and permissive environment in the 1980s, in which cadres and political personnel did not adequately enforce rules. Therefore, at the class level, this meant that CYL and CCP branches did not really perform the required obligations; student cadres and members failed to attend self-criticism sessions meetings or collect membership dues (Chi, 1991). With weak enforcement of rules by political personnel along with declining appeal of official institutions like the Party and CYL, branches at the class level were not fulfilling their political duties.

The post-Tiananmen period saw that political guidance counsellors are held to stricter standards to ensure the ideological and political education of students. This means that they should also be more attentive in supervising CYL and CCP branch sectaries. Mechanisms are in place to ensure that they conduct meetings and sessions. The class secretary for the CYL branch is responsible for organizing political education activities that usually follow different themes,

sometimes to coincide with major political speeches and policy announcements. Branches might also watch *Red* films or visit museums to mark historical events for the Party. A CYL branch secretary would be responsible for leading discussion and study sessions. To induce compliance such that the branch level follows the instructions from the Department level's Youth League Committee and their political guidance counselor, students may be rewarded credits or may receive demerit points for failing to attend and submit reports of their activities (NCWU, 2019).

Similarly, for students who are party members and those who have begun the process to join the Party, which are referred to as party activists *jijifenzi* (积极分子), they must participate in an array of activities at the CCP branch level. Since reform, a motivating factor to join the Party has been to enhance one's career and attain social upward mobility. Given the screening process involved in Party recruitment and the competitiveness of the job market, Party membership can provide a helpful heuristic for employers (Dickson, 2013). Higher social status and networking benefits are also said to be conferred with membership (Appleton, Knight, Song, & Xia, 2009; Hu & Yao, 2012). Therefore, students participate in CCP branch activities as part of their duties or in the case of applicants, to help boost their chances for successful admission. Failure to attend as applicants would hurt their chances of getting admitted. Applicants and party members are required to submit regular reports on their political dispositions, which is referred to as *sixiang huibao* (思想汇报). They must be written by hand. Keeping tabs on members and applicants to ensure their participation and requiring handwritten reports are some of the ways the university ensure participation.

Whereas in the 1980s there was considerable disinterest to join the Party and overall disenchantment with official institutions like the Party and CYL, there have been significant efforts

to increase student Party recruitment.[3] The two figures below, which display national level statistics for Party membership, demonstrate that overall interest and attachment to the Party has changed dramatically over the decades. Figure 3 shows that university student Party members have increased sizably over the years. In 2010, there were over 3 million student party members. Figure 4 represents Party applicants who have submitted materials to join the Party and are taking the requisite classes to become a CCP member, they are referred to as *fazhan duixiang* (发展对象). It is therefore a good measure to represent interest in the Party. Again, this number has increased considerably over the years. It is notable to mark the two major dips that occurred in the 1980s, which represent the Beijing Spring and Tiananmen protests respectively. During those two periods, there was considerable disillusionment with the Party and the CYL, which is evident with declining membership applications.

In sum, the regime continues to use CYL and CCP branches to conduct political indoctrination and enhance mutual surveillance. By strengthening the monitoring capacity of political guidance counselors, this is supposed to trickle down to CYL and CCP branches such that they organize political activities and study sessions for their respective members. These activities and meetings are mandatory and highly supervised, such that students may receive demerit points or face discipline for failing to attend. In participating in these activities, the social relationships that are fostered are supposed to create a system and culture of mutual surveillance. Peer dynamics should encourage conformity and student leaders in these groups should serve as role models especially when it comes to correct political behavior.

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[3] The data is sourced from the *Compilation of Internal Statistical Material on the Chinese Communist Party*. See (Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu xinxi guanli zhongxin, 2011)
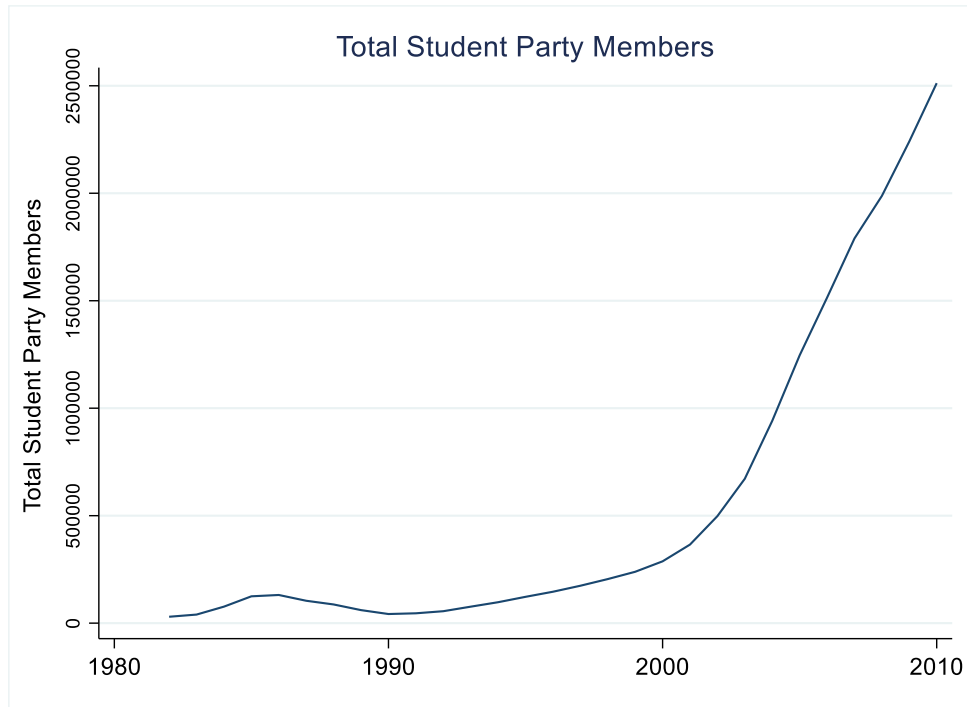
Figure 3 Total Student Party Members as a National Figure
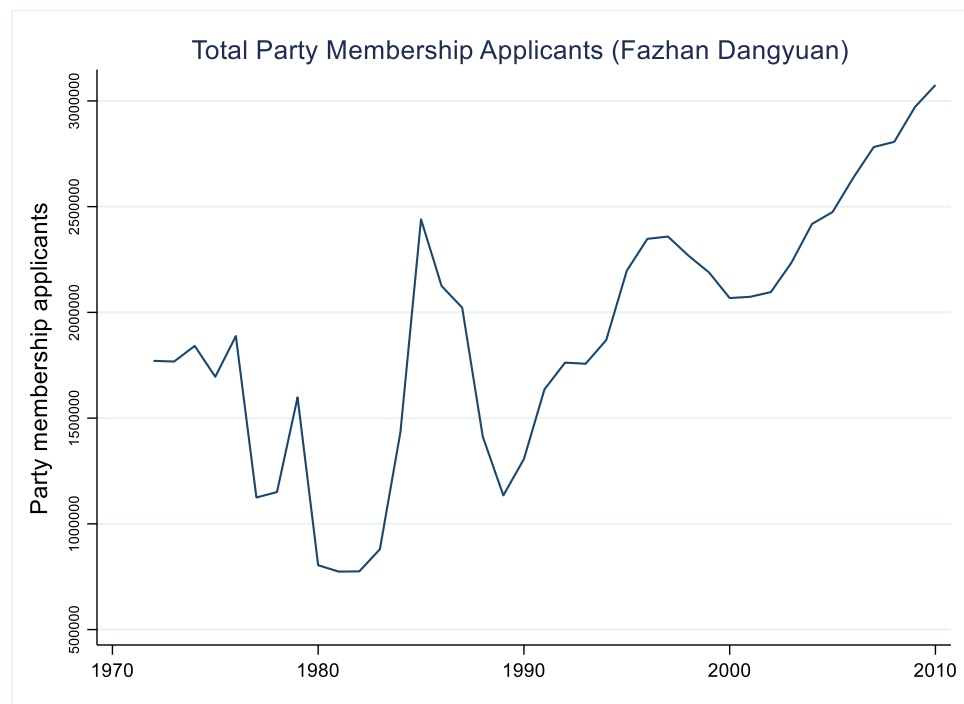
Figure 4 Total Party Membership Applicants (Fazhan Dangyuan)

2.2.3 Managing Student Clubs and the Gatekeeping Function of the CYL

As discussed earlier, at both the university and departmental level, the CYL oversees the student union. This allows university authorities to influence the extracurricular space by infusing campus-wide events with patriotic and ideological themes. University authorities also control the extracurricular space by setting strict rules that gatekeep and depoliticize student clubs. They have the power to approve and terminate clubs, as well as cancel events. They also try to depoliticize student groups by limiting their fundraising and network potential and regulating their publishing capacity. Therefore, when it comes to the management of student clubs, the CYL plays a critical role. The university's Party Committee establishes the rules and guidelines, and the CYL implements them and often serves as the first point of contact for student clubs. As mentioned, at some universities, the CYL may oversee an intermediary body that works more closely with student clubs, often referred to as *xueshenglianhehui*, 学生联合会. This is reflected in the organizational chart using dashed lines.

Rules and regulations across universities in China are relatively similar as they reflect guidelines that have been devised by the Ministry of Education and the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League. In 2016 for instance, the central government issued the Interim Measures for the Management of Student Association in Colleges and Universities to standardize the management of student clubs across Chinese universities (Ministry of Education, 2016). There are basic stipulations that student clubs must meet, which are common across universities in China. For instance, they must have a minimum number of student members – usually 20, find faculty member to act as an advisor (zhidao laoshi 知指导老师), create a charter that details the operations of the group, and they cannot duplicate an already existing campus club. After receiving

sponsorship from a faculty member and the affiliated department, they must go through a defense hearing, in which a committee formed by the university's Youth League review the materials and application. The leader of the student club, what is referred to as the *fuzeren* 负责人 makes a small a presentation at the defense. This presentation along with the application materials are used to determine whether a club obtains approval.

There are also important political guidelines that student clubs should adhere to. Student groups must abide by relevant laws and regulations; they cannot endanger national security nor harm the unity of China. Some universities also explicitly indicate that student groups should be guided by the official ideology of the Party. In sum, they must have the correct political orientation. For a number of student clubs, these guidelines do not pose an issue. Clubs that are related to music, calligraphy, dance, which are essentially interest and hobby-based, have no problem obtaining approval. The problem of course arises when student clubs begin to form around social and political issues. This then provides grounds for CYL to deny student clubs. Students would be subject to disciplinary measures if they created a club without formal approval. Recruiting student members, conducting activities, disseminating articles, and publicizing their activities without authorization by the university would be in violation of university rules. From the regime's view, they would be considered illegal entities ("WU Discourages Participation," 2018).

There are specific guidelines that for example limit student clubs' ability to network and collaborate outside of the university. The mobilization of student clubs would be particularly dangerous if it spread across multiple universities, which occurred during the May Fourth movement and the Tiananmen protests. There is also a concern that ties to organizations abroad or outside of the university could influence the political values of students, specifically the regime fears the appeal of western political ideas. This is a consistent narrative by the regime, which

claims that dissidents and protestors are influenced by foreign powers intent on destabilizing China's one-party rule. As such, student clubs cannot be affiliated with organizations outside of the university nor be a branch of an international organization without formal approval (Peking University, 2019). Further, groups are not allowed to have cross-regional or cross-university branches and alliances (Hainan Normal University, 2013).

Further, the regime also fears the potential for religious and nationalist-based movements to destabilize the country, a fear driven by Tibetan and Uighur independent movements. As such, students are not permitted to form religious or ethnic clubs that recruit exclusively from a specific group (Hainan Normal University, 2013). They cannot disseminate religious materials or publications (Peking University, 2019). Several universities have also vague rules about the type of clubs that are prohibited. At Hainan Normal University for instance, not only are students prohibited from recruiting exclusively from a religious or ethnic group, but a club also "cannot represent or express the interests of a specific group" (Hainan Normal University, 2013). At Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen, Guangdong, rules prohibit clubs from engaging in activities "contrary to morality and mainstream values" (Southern University of Science and Technology, 2017). The broadness and ambiguity of these stipulations therefore make it difficult for clubs that are concerned with social issues like LGBT or gender. They can be construed as representing the interests of a specific group or deviating from mainstream values and as such be denied.

Rules on fundraising and sponsorship also reflect the university's fear about outside forces and their potential influence on students. Student clubs are free to receive sponsorship or donations from outside organizations, but they must obtain approval, especially if the funds are from a foreign-based organization (Peking University, 2019). It must also obtain approval for any

fundraising activities. When a student club fundraises for a social cause, there are specific issue areas that their funds can go to, which are mainly to assist with social welfare and development programs. Fundraising for disaster assistance, poverty relief, education, culture, health and sports, environmental protection are acceptable (Peking University, 2017). This also provides grounds for events or groups to be denied if university authorities take issue with a group's social cause.

Even after a club is approved, they are still subjected to supervision and control. When official student clubs host events or activities, they must obtain approval from the CYL. This allows university authorities to gatekeep and control club activities and therefore control the narratives and themes that get disseminated. An important rule is that the nature of the event must be as described in their application form. Any discrepancy would be a serious violation (Peking University, 2019). Inviting speakers, especially foreign guests, is a type of activity that invites extra scrutiny and often requires approval from multiple university bodies (Peking University, 2019). To use classrooms or university facilities for events and meetings, student groups must also obtain approval. Denying space to student groups is another mechanism that the university employs to control the campus environment.

Further, publicity for events is subject to numerous rules. When it comes to the spread of information, the university is very careful with student clubs and tightly controls their ability to disseminate material. Historical student movements, like the May Fourth movement and the Tiananmen protests showed how campus walls became a space for public debate (Goldman, 1999; S. Jiang, 2015). Large character posters in the forms of essays and poems hung across campus, which contributed to a chorus of grievances and criticisms against the regime (S. Jiang, 2015). For instance, on the campus of Peking University, there is an area known as the Triangle (*san jiao di*, 三角地), which is where posters and advertisements are commonly hung. Its namesake stems from

the fact that the area forms a triangle as it marks a cross section of three paths ("Triangle the Immortal ", 2011). The Triangle holds historical significance because across the different historical student movements, from the May Fourth movement to the Tiananmen protests, it was there that students spontaneously hung critical posters and called on peers to march (Hayhoe, Zha, & Fengqiao, 2012). Today, university authorities remain cautious about how the Triangle can be used by students to post information that they deem harmful (A. J. Li, 2018). Both online and on-campus publicity, such as the use of posters, banners etc. must be approved by the advising faculty member and the affiliated department of the student club before they can be publicly posted (Peking University, 2017).

Another concern is the dissemination of edited publications, like magazines and journals. A lesson learned from the Beijing Spring and the Tiananmen protests was how the spread of underground publications contributed to political mobilization (S. Jiang, 2015). Current regulations demonstrate that the regime pays close attention to student groups that produce their own publications. For Peking University, for instance, the content must be reviewed by the advising faculty member, the departmental-level CYL Committee and final approval from the university-level CYL Committee (Peking University, 2019).

The potential for student clubs to become politicized and activated is a real threat for the regime. The May Fourth movement and Tiananmen protests demonstrated that student clubs play a critical role when it comes to political mobilization. The extensive system of rules and guidelines that manage student clubs reflects how controlling the extracurricular space is imperative when it comes to campus stability. University authorities strive to manage student clubs in several ways. First, the CYL has the power to gatekeep what type of clubs get approved and what type of events are allowed. This helps to neutralize organizations whose mandate might include political and

social issues. Its ability to approve and cancel events and deny guest speakers also allows university to retain control over the messages and narratives that can be disseminated. Rules and regulations also limit the network and collaborative potential across universities, by prohibiting the formation of branch organizations or limiting their fundraising capacity. Control of the extracurricular space is therefore an important component of the university ecosystem that helps the regime secure political compliance.

2.3 Conclusion

China's university campuses reflect a labyrinth of mechanisms, institutions and political personnel that are designed to both mobilize support and deter oppositional attitudes and behavior. Institutions of higher learning serve the regime not only by producing technical experts to assist with the country's development, but they are important instruments of political socialization. Across Chinese universities, the regime has created an ecosystem that reflects *soft* and *hard* mechanisms to induce political conformity. The former entails ideological lessons and themes that are systematically imparted through formal courses and through university's control of the extracurricular space. Compliant behavior is therefore engendered by leveraging specific themes and political content. The *hard* mechanisms demonstrate a system of monitoring and surveillance as well as one that gatekeeps and depoliticizes student clubs. The interesting question that arises is that even though the Chinese regime has created an elaborate system of political indoctrination and control, what explains the occurrence of non-compliant behavior, specifically the formation of unregistered student clubs?

3.0 Limitations to the University's Control System

The previous section described China's university ecosystem, which is made up of different roles and institutions that enhance the regime's political control over students. Given such extensive measures to induce compliance, an interesting puzzle is why do we see the emergence of unregistered clubs? The existence of these types of student organizations, precisely marks the contravention of university rules. This section explores vulnerabilities within the institutions of political control to partly explain how such acts of non-compliance can arise. I focus on how changing incentive structures in post-reform China might weaken mutual and peer surveillance. Therefore, at the class level, the CYL and CCP branches may not be the strongest part of China's university ecosystem. A discussion about changing incentive structures reveals limitations in the regime's ability to exact political control.

At the class level, participation in CYL and CCP branch activities is a good example of how compliance is performed. Therefore, one consequence is that students do not fear mutual or peer surveillance. In the case of student clubs, they are more likely to find support and allyship. For the most part, they feel confident that their activities will not be brought to the attention of university authorities. This section also leverages survey data to further explore how weaknesses at the class level not only impacts mutual surveillance but potentially impacts political attitudes. If branch level activities do not have much of an effect on a student's life, this may be evident in survey data.

3.1 Problems with Peer and Mutual Surveillance

As previously discussed, the class or the *ban,* plays a crucial role in enhancing the regime's surveillance capacity. Within the class, the social dynamics amongst peers should induce political conformity. This dynamic was particularly intense during the Maoist years. There was a high incentive to demonstrate one's political zeal, which meant students were more likely to report on fellow peers. During this period under central planning, the state was responsible for assigning jobs. One's political record and class background were crucial determinants of a good assignment. For instance, being from a wealthy class prior to the Communist revolution, could cost students' access to jobs (Gold, 1991). Therefore, students, compensated by being extra politically zealous when criticizing and outing their peers. A strong record of political activism would make up for "bad" class background or poor grades (Shirk, 1982). During the socialist era, one's political record was equally important as academic achievement. This incentivized more ardent political behavior that would often lead peers to report on classmates' political attitudes and behavior (Shirk, 1982). At self-criticism meetings for example, students seeking to enhance their political record might openly criticize their peers for failing to live up to socialist ideals (Shirk, 1982; Whyte, 1974).

However, scholars also noted that another practice emerged, in which it was more acceptable to tone down one's political rhetoric. Instead of finding a group dynamic wherein there was pressure to reinforce rules and punish deviant behavior, group norms also developed that pushed students to be loyal to each rather than to authorities (Shirk, 1982). If a student was overly enthusiastic, especially in their criticism of others, they were ostracized by classmates. There was a social cost for being overly zealous (Shirk, 1982). For instance at self-criticism meetings, it was accepted that students would sometimes only cite minor infractions to protect one another (Shirk,

1982). Political study sessions and meetings became formalistic and in practice deviated from the goal that the regime sought to achieve.

The end of central planning and the introduction of economic reform significantly altered the incentive structure, especially when it came to the function of these state-constructed peer groups. With China's embrace of economic reform and central planning gradually ceased, the state was no longer responsible for assigning jobs, and the opening of the private sector presented new opportunities for graduates. It was therefore no longer necessary to demonstrate political loyalty by reporting on classmates. One's political record was no longer important for job posts or university placement.

China still depends on university personnel and students to monitor and report non-compliant behavior. It is however puzzling that the regime uses peer structures, such as the CYL and CCP branches to enhance their monitoring capacity. Just as norms developed during the Maoist period to protect peers and ensure loyalty to one another, these norms are certainly ever more present in today's China. Indeed, those institutions fell short, which led to a more permissive environment on campus and thus played role in the Tiananmen protests. Scholars note that students' interest in CYL activities are low and perfunctory and students' motivation to join the Party are instrumental (Du, 2020). While students participate in the required activities mandated by the CYL or CCP branch, they likely do so out of obligation and as such compliance might be merely performed.

Because mechanisms of peer surveillance may be limited, this allows unregistered groups to develop. Rather than being afraid that their classmates might report them for creating an unregistered group, peers often show support. For instance, one student member of an LGBTQ group indicated that since unregistered groups cannot openly recruit and advertise, she went to the

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freshman dormitory and passed out flyers door-to-door to promote her group. While she had some concerns that she might be reported, she felt confident that her peers were open-minded (Interview No. 11). She also recalled a story, in which a student at a neighboring university had pinned a rainbow flag to their shirt to commemorate the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. They were stopped by another student, who had warned them that it was not a good idea to display the flag so openly on campus (Interview No. 11). There are therefore instances, in which these student groups find support and assistance from their peers. They are less concerned about being reported by them, which is something that university authorities would like students to do to enhance their monitoring capacity.

Support can also surprisingly come from student cadres. Because they are closer to official institutions on campus, one would expect that student cadres would discourage rule-breaking behavior. For instance, I interviewed various members of a student group concerned with women's development and gender equality and had been operating as an unregistered entity for several semesters. Initially, they had considered applying to become an official group. They sought the advice of one of their members, who also volunteers as a student cadre with the university's Student Clubs Union, *xuesheng shetuan lianhe hui* (学生社团联合会). This body works under the guidance of the university's CYL and follows directives set by the university's Party Committee. One of their responsibilities is to review applications by student clubs. Being both a member of their student club as well as assisting as a student cadre, she suggested that they forgo registering and operate as an unofficial group (Interview No. 18). Her understanding of the CYL, having worked closely with the institution, was that they were unlikely to approve of the student club (Interview No. 18). This in part demonstrates how rules and institutions designed to enforce the regulations such as managing student clubs can have the potential to unravel. Rather than

extending the surveillance capacity of the regime, there is evidence of mutual help and support instead.

3.2 Quantitative Analysis: Leveraging survey data to study student control

CYL and CCP branches at the class level might be a limited tool for the regime when it comes to political indoctrination and peer surveillance. Branch level activities required of CYL and CCP members might yield high levels of participation, but they might merely be signs of outward and performative loyalty. A quantitative study of student-level survey data might help elucidate if students express non-conforming attitudes. If in public they feign loyalty, are they compliant in political attitudes? China's university ecosystem certainly appears impressive, but another limitation the regime faces is that compliance might be hard to achieve among certain subpopulations of students.

When we examine for instance, students' support for demonstrations and disobedience towards authorities, one might expect low support across all students. There should be little difference among students given the regime's efforts to indoctrinate and monitor student activity for Party members and non-members alike. However, analysis below shows that obedience is not guaranteed across student populations. The regime is seemingly only able to rely on Party members and students who wish to join the Party. Therefore, among students who are not inclined to join the Party and are more interested in careers outside of the Party-government sector, they represent a subpopulation over which the regime might not have good control. Another finding is that even though the regime devotes a lot of resources to recruit Party members from elite universities, students from high-ranking schools are in general more likely to support demonstrations and

disobedient behavior. This suggests an interesting conundrum for the regime; it seeks to cultivate party members from the best schools, but it might be more difficult to elicit conformity from these institutions. The best and brightest are also more critical, and more likely to resist indoctrination efforts.

3.2.1 Description of Data

The Beijing College Panel Survey (BCPS) was conducted by Renmin University to investigate students' social and educational experiences as well as to understand social stratification within Chinese universities. While, panel data was collected across four waves, only the first wave from 2009 was available for download from the Chinese National Survey Data Archive. The survey data consists of undergraduate respondents from 15 universities in Beijing. Freshman and junior students were selected to complete the survey. The primary sampling unit are universities and the secondary unit are university majors. There are six sampling strata; the first three strata reflect top elite schools in Beijing, Peking University, Renmin University and Tsinghua University respectively. The fourth strata consist of universities that are identified as 211 Project schools – a category of institutions that receives significant funding from the state. Overall, the rankings of these universities would be lower than the top 3 schools listed above but higher than universities in the fifth strata. The fifth strata are institutions that are not classified as 211 Project schools and therefore tend to receive less state funding. They represent universities that would be lower ranked than the fourth strata but higher than universities in the sixth strata. The last strata consist of universities that are governed by the Beijing Ministry of Education instead of the central Ministry of Education. Schools that are governed by local Ministries of Education such as at the provincial or municipal level, tend to be lower ranked and receive less state funds. Table 1, which

provides descriptive statistics of the variables used in my analysis, includes the distribution of students across the 6 sampling strata. Table 2 also shows the average rankings of the universities, as well as the lowest- ranking university and highest-ranking university in each stratum. At noted in Table 2, Strata 1 samples students from Peking University, which ranks number 1, Strata 2 samples from Renmin University, which ranks number 3, and Strata 3 samples from Tsinghua University which ranks number 2 in the country. The mean rankings of the universities in Strata 4, 5 and 6 demonstrate how the quality of the universities are distributed across the remaining 3 strata.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

	Total (N = 4771)
Political Status	
CCP Member (includes probationary party members)	731 (15.3%)
Democratic Party Member	9 (0.2%)
CYL Member	3880 (81.4%)
No Affiliations	147 (3.1%)
Parents are CCP Members	
Neither	2492 (52.2%)
At least 1 parent CCP	2279 (47.8%)
Plan to Apply to CCP during University	
No Plan to	1743 (43.3%)
Plan to	2285 (56.7%)
Career Choice after Graduation	
Party/Government/State Owned Enterprise	1592 (33.4%)
Private sector	2037 (42.8%)
Public institutions (Education, Research)	1038 (21.8%)
Other	94 (2.0%)
Disobeying Authorities	
Mean (SD)	4.44 (2.57)
Support Demonstrations	
Mean (SD)	2.83 (1.16)
Class Rank Percentile	
Mean (SD)	0.56 (0.24)
University Year	
Freshman	2473 (51.8%)
Sophomore/Junior	2298 (48.2%)
Sampling Strata	
1 Peking University	450 (9.4%)
2 Renmin University	487 (10.2%)
3 Tsinghua University	467 (9.8%)
4 201 Project Universities	1680 (35.2%)
5 Non 201 Project Universities	575 (12.1%)
6 Beijing Ministry of Education Universities	1112 (23.3%)

Table 2 University Rankings per Sampling Strata

Sampling Strata	Mean Rankings	Highest Ranking	Lowest Ranking
1: Peking University	1	1	1
2: Renmin University	3	3	3
3: Tsinghua University	2	2	2
4: Project 211 Universities	12.305	5	23
5: Non-Project 211 Universities	28.309	26	30.5
6: Beijing Ministry of Education Schools	38.208	25	52

3.2.2 Description of Variables

The key outcome variables in this analysis are support for unconventional political behavior and inclination to disobey authority. For the measure of unconventional behavior, respondents were asked *do you approve of an individual or organization's use of the following methods to expression their own interest.* That list included *participation in public meetings, demonstrations, strike, student strike,* and *petitioning.* Respondents were asked to rank their approval on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being *very much do not support* and 5, *very much support.* For this study, I examine support for demonstrations to represent non-compliant behavior. This measure exemplifies a serious type of political action that in general Chinese citizens are unlikely to engage in as it might be as seen stirring trouble – a common charged used to arrest protesters (Wong, 2015). To measure students' support for disobeying authorities, respondents were presented a hypothetical situation; *if a Student Union cadre, named Xiao Wang, believed that instructions from the university's Youth League Committee do not conform to his or her own*

values, and refuses to follow the instructions, to what degree do you support his/her actions.[4]

Respondents are asked to rank their support on a scale 1 to 10, one being *very much do not support* and 10 *very much support.* This question therefore identifies students' predilection to follow rules set forth by important university personnel such as the Youth League Committee. If students demonstrate support for the fictional student cadre's action to disobey instructions, it would be an indicator of students' disregard for university rules.

For the independent variable, I combine two variables; individuals' political status and whether they plan to apply to join the Party during university. As identified in Table 1, student party members represent 731 respondents, 15% of the sample. This illustrates the selective nature of Communist Party membership in China, in which the Party is not a mass institution that seeks to expand membership but rather limits its membership base.[5] As well, from Table 1, it is notable that a large proportion of university students are CYL members, representing 80% of the sample. This illustrates how unlike the CCP, the CYL is a mass institution that is less discriminatory. In urban settings, a majority of students enter university as CYL members. Because a significant number of university students are already CYL members, students with no political affiliation make up only 3% of the sample.[6] As such, it would not be analytically useful to make students

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[4] Another hypothetical question is presented to survey respondents, in which they are asked to indicate to what degree they support Xiao Wang if he or she refused to follow instructions from the Youth League Committee because the instructions do not conform to the spirit of the Central Government. I chose to focus on the scenario in which the instructions do not conform to his/her values because it better reflects disregard for the rules.

[5] In the survey, Party membership denotes both official party members (*zhengshi dangyuan* 正式党员) and probationary members (*yubei dangyuan* 预备党员). This latter group refers to students who are in the last stage of the membership process. As long as individuals do not fail academically or violate serious rules, probationary members usually go on to be formal members. Therefore, in surveys, CCP membership tends to include both official and probational members.

[6] Table 1 also indicates there are 9 individuals (0.2%) who identify as members of the Democratic Party (*minzhudangpai* 民主党派). This does not represent an opposition party in China, but rather one of eight legal parties whose aim is to support the Communist Party as part of China's United Front. It is therefore not an autonomous political party but one that was established under the guidance of the CCP.

with no political affiliation the baseline comparison group. I therefore construct a 3-factor variable that consists of 1) party members, 2) non-members who plan to apply to join the CCP, and 3) non-members who have no plans to apply. The second and third grouping therefore consists of both CYL members and students with no political affiliation. In doing so, I can analyze the effect of *intent to join the Party*, which may be more elucidating than simply examining CYL membership. Given that a majority of students in the sample are CYL members, there is considerable heterogeneity within this group. For students who have no plans to join the CCP, they represent a sizable group. In Table 1, those who do not plan to join the Party represent 43% of respondents, compared to 57% of students who plan to apply.

Intent to join the Party thus represents an interesting group to analyze. The challenge arises for the regime when it is confronted by a group that has no desire to join the CCP. If this group presents itself to be less rule-abiding, such as by expressing higher support for demonstrations and disobedient behavior, this suggests the regime might need to rely on more costly measures to monitor or supervise students. If the only compliant group of students are Party members and those who wish to join the Party, this suggests the regime is limited in terms of who are politically reliable subpopulations on Chinese university campuses and how the regime can elicit rule-abidance. The regime can therefore only rely on students who aligns with the Party, and this may be primarily based on the instrumental goods that Party membership can provide. As such, the regime has to make itself appealing and attractive. This challenge is compounded by the fact that in post-reform China, individuals can gain upward social mobility in the private sector and as such might not find it beneficial to join the Party.

3.2.3 Description of Modeling Approach and Hypothesis

I examine which subgroup of students are more compliant and rule-abiding by conducting a linear regression model.[7] The outcome variables being *support for demonstration*, measured on a scale of 1 to 5 and *support disobeying authorities*, measured on a scale of 1 to 10. The independent variable is 3-factor variable, *party members, intent to join the Party* and *no intent to join the Party*, which serves as the baseline measurement.

I also include in the model students' desired career choice upon graduation. I create this variable by collapsing career choice into 3-factors. I combine sectors related to party, government, and state-owned enterprises into one level to denote jobs in the Party-government sector. They are what would be referred to as *tizhinei gongzuo* 体制内工作, meaning jobs within the organizational system. For these types of jobs, because they are part of the state bureaucracy, having Party membership is an important criterion. It is often considered a minimum threshold – *jiben menkan* 基本门槛. Careers in foreign enterprises and joint ventures, private enterprises and self-owned businesses were collapsed to form the second level to denote careers in the private sector. Students interested in working in the private sector therefore do not see an incentive in joining the Party as it would not be a requirement. Lastly, I coded careers related to school, research and other public institutions into the last level to denote public service institutions. In this case, other public institutions do not refer to government jobs but careers in institutions that are public such as hospitals, secondary schools, and universities. Unlike jobs in government or state agencies, Party membership is not an important criterion to enter the profession. I coded *Other* as missing for the

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[7] Given the scale of the two outcome variables, the appendix also includes the results of an ordered logit regression model, which presents the output using odds-ratio. Because the parallel regression assumption was violated, I also present the results using a generalized ordered logit model. See Appendix A.

regression analysis. Table 3 shows the distribution of career choice by political status and intent to join the Party. It is notable that a significant number of CCP members are interested in the Party-state sector (46%). Among students who have no plan to apply, a large proportion seek careers in the private sector (55%).

Table 3 Cross Tabulation of Career Choice by Political Status/Intent

	No plan to apply (N = 1743)	Plan to apply (N = 2283)	CCP (N = 731)
Career Choice			
Party/Gov/SOE	375 (22.1%)	879 (39.3%)	333 (46.4%)
Private	935 (55.1%)	886 (39.6%)	209 (29.1%)
Public Institutions	386 (22.8%)	474 (21.2%)	176 (24.5%)

In the regression models, I interact students' desired career choice with the main independent variable. I include this interaction effect to examine how career choice can potentially widen the effect of political status and political intent. Compliance may be least likely among those who seek a career in the private sector *and* who have no interest to join the Party. Among Party members, compliance may be more likely among those who seek a job within the Party-state institutions. Table 3 shows that while party members mostly desire a career in the Party-government sector, close to 30 percent also desire a path in the private sector. Therefore, even though one is a Party member, if you seek a career outside of the Party-government institutions, being a member might not be very meaningful to you. You might exhibit attitudes and behavior that are not that dissimilar from non-members. This might suggest that while the regime tries to recruit and select politically reliable individuals, there may be some heterogeneity in this group. This also suggests the difficulty the regime has in terms of control over its student population, wherein even among party members, it might not always be able to guarantee complete control.

The control variables include whether a parent is a CCP member, their class rank percentile, their university year, which is freshman or junior/sophomore and the sampling strata from which the universities were selected.[8] If students have a parent who is a CCP member, it might represent family socialization, in which obedience and compliant behavior are instilled during the students' upbringing. Academic performance, which I measure using their class rank percentile, is also a predictor of obedient behavior. If they do well in their academic studies, they are likely to be good students who follow the rules. I create this variable using two survey items; the size of their class and second and where they rank in the class.

Investigating sampling strata allows us to examine the potential impact of universities themselves. As shown in Table 2 above, the rankings of the universities across the 6 strata vary quite significantly. The first 3 strata consist of the country's top universities, specifically Peking University, Renmin University and Tsinghua University respectively. The following three strata reflect three different categories of Chinese universities, whereby the rankings of the universities per stratum decrease from Strata 4 to 6.

There is therefore interesting variation in the type of students that attend these different universities. In Table 4 below, one noteable finding is that among the top universities, there is a higher proportion of party members. At Peking, Renmin and Tsinghua University, the proprtion of party members is approximately 20 percent of the student body. Across the other 3 strata which represents lower ranked schools, the proportion of party members is much smaller by comparison; around 10 to 13 percent of the student body. But when one examines plans to join the Party, students from the lower ranked universities express higher interest to join the Party. This is

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[8] The survey is supposed to sample freshman and junior students only, but there are 19 respondents who identify as sophomore. I therefore combine sophomore and junior to make a distinction from first year students.

especially true for Project 211 schools and schools governed by the Beijing Ministry of Education with approximately 63 percent and 61 percent wanting to join respectively. By contrast, for Peking University and Tsinghua University, plans to apply to the Party is around 37 percent and 45 percent respectively.

This reflects an interesting gap; the regime seeks to recruit the best and brightest into the Party, but the best and brightest from China's elite schools express lower interest in joining. This echoes Wu's research findings which highlights that while coming from an elite school leads to higher probability of being admitted into the Party, they are less likely to express intent to join compared to students from lower ranked schools (Wu, 2017). This in part reflects the regime's overall strategy with recruitment, in that it will allot a higher quota for Party members for prestigious schools, while the lower ranked universities will have a smaller quota. Because students from elites schools exhibit less interest in joining the Party and in seeking a career in the Party-government sector, they may demonstrate higher support for demonstrations as well as disobedient behavior.

The following hypotheses summarize the discussion above:

H1: If the regime faces difficulty in effectively indoctrianting students, there should be a difference across student subpopualtions in terms of their support for demonstrations and disobeidence; students who do not plan to apply to join the Party should express higher levels of support for demonstrations and disobeidence.

H1(alternative): If the regime is successful in its indoctrination efforts, there should be no difference across student subpopulations; they should all express low support for demonstrations and disobedience.

H2: If the regime faces difficulty in effectively indoctrianting students, such that the private sector pulls students to be less aligned with officialdom, preference to find a private sector job should have a positive interaction effect. Pursuit of a career in the Party-government sector should have a negative interaction effect.

H2(alternative): If the regime is successful in its indoctrination efforts, students' preferred career choice should not make a difference.

H3: If the regime faces difficulty in effectively indoctrianting students because elite schools and higher quality education can produce more critical students, students from elite schools will show higher levels of support for demonstration and disobedience.

H3(alternative): If the regime is successful in its indoctrination efforts, students from elite universities should express low support for demonstrations and disobedience since it expends a lot of resources on elite universities.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics across Sampling Strata

	Peking University	Renmin University	Tsinghua University	Project 211	Non-Project 211	Beijing Min. of Edu
	(N = 450)	(N = 487)	(N = 467)	(N = 1680)	(N = 575)	(N = 1112)
Political Status						
CCP Member	90 (20.0%)	116 (23.9%)	108 (23.1%)	228 (13.6%)	70 (12.2%)	119 (10.7%)
Democratic Party	1 (0.2%)	2 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.3%)
CYL Member	349 (77.6%)	348 (71.6%)	348 (74.5%)	1397 (83.3%)	487 (84.8%)	951 (85.5%)
No Affiliation	10 (2.2%)	20 (4.1%)	11 (2.4%)	50 (3.0%)	17 (3.0%)	39 (3.5%)
CCP Parent						
Neither	176 (39.1%)	212 (43.5%)	196 (42.0%)	911 (54.2%)	333 (57.9%)	664 (59.7%)
At least 1 parent	274 (60.9%)	275 (56.5%)	271 (58.0%)	769 (45.8%)	242 (42.1%)	448 (40.3%)
Plan to Apply to CCP						
No Plan	225 (63.2%)	162 (43.7%)	197 (55.2%)	540 (37.2%)	231 (45.9%)	388 (39.2%)
Plan to Apply	131 (36.8%)	209 (56.3%)	160 (44.8%)	910 (62.8%)	272 (54.1%)	603 (60.8%)
Career Choice						
Party/Gov/SOE	107 (23.8%)	209 (43.1%)	143 (30.6%)	484 (28.9%)	203 (35.4%)	446 (40.3%)
Private	177 (39.3%)	185 (38.1%)	192 (41.1%)	755 (45.0%)	238 (41.5%)	490 (44.2%)
Public Serv. Inst.	156 (34.7%)	75 (15.5%)	121 (25.9%)	404 (24.1%)	124 (21.6%)	158 (14.3%)

3.2.4 Results and Analysis

Table 5 displays the linear regression models for students' support for demonstrations and support of disobeying authorities. For both outcome variables, there is a consistent direction when examining the effect of Party membership and intent to join, compared to the baseline group (students who do not intend to join the Party). Students who are party members and who plan to apply are in general less likely to show support for demonstrations. In terms of disobedient behavior, they are also in general less likely to support the student cadre who refuses to follow Youth League's instructions. While statistically significant, particularly between party members and those who do not want to apply, the substantive size of the difference is not particularly large. In the linear model when it comes to support for demonstrations, those who are a party member and who intend to apply, are both less than half a point less supportive than the baseline group. However, on a scale of 1 to 5, and given the politically sensitivity around the topic of demonstrations in an authoritarian setting, there may be some social desirability bias and there may not be wide variation on this question. Support for disobeying authorities shows a more notable difference. Student party members and those who intend to apply are 0.7 and 0.56 points lower than of those who do not want to apply to the Party. Again, when asked asking students about whether they support disobeying university authorities, there may be a similar social desirability effect.

Figures 1 and 2 below show the predictive probabilities based, which display a statistically significant difference, in which students who do not plan to join the Party, in general show higher support for demonstrations and disobeying authorities. This lends to the argument that students who do not wish to align themselves with official institutions exhibit a predilection towards non-

compliance. If they represent a subpopulation that cannot be pulled towards the regime, the existing tools to secure compliance from this group is therefore limited.

When it comes to the effect of career choice, China's landscape in terms of jobs sectors has interesting implications. For the variable of career choice, the baseline comparison is careers in the Party-government sector, which include state-owned enterprises. The coefficients in Table 5 represent the effect of careers in the private sector and public service institutions. For support of demonstrations, there is a positive and statistically significant effect. Students who desire a career in these two sectors are more likely to support demonstrations compared to those who seek a career in the Party-government sector. Though, the same effects of career choice do not hold when examining support for disobeying authorities. Although the substantive effect is not particularly large, the difference across sectors still points to an interesting trend in terms of which subpopulations are more obedient and easier to control.

Table 5 Linear Regression Models on Support for Demonstrations and Disobedience

Variables	Support for Demonstrations Model 1	Disobeying Authorities Model 2
Political Status: Plan to Apply	-0.119	-0.555***
	(0.0721)	(0.161)
Political Status: CCP Member	-0.245***	-0.698***
	(0.0880)	(0.196)
Career Choice: Private Sector	0.210***	0.167
	(0.0706)	(0.157)
Career Choice: Public Service Inst.	0.192**	0.0739
	(0.0849)	(0.189)
Plan to Apply x Private Sector	-0.104	0.143
	(0.0894)	(0.199)
Plan to Apply x Public Service Inst.	-0.182*	-0.0549
	(0.107)	(0.239)
CCP Member x Private Sector	-0.0991	0.0298
	(0.123)	(0.275)
CCP Member x Public Service Inst.	0.0548	0.195
	(0.137)	(0.305)
CCP Parent	-0.0290	-0.0897
	(0.0343)	(0.0765)
Class rank percentile	0.0504	-0.293*
	(0.0719)	(0.160)
Junior/Sophomore	-0.0332	0.113
	(0.0365)	(0.0813)
Strata 2: Renmin	-0.0406	0.187
	(0.0788)	(0.176)
Strata 3: Tsinghua	-0.0696	-0.210
	(0.0788)	(0.176)
Strata 4: Project 211 Schools	-0.324***	-0.407***
	(0.0649)	(0.145)
Strata 5: Non-Project 211 Schools	-0.444***	-0.265
	(0.0760)	(0.170)
Strata 6: Beijing Min. of Edu. Schools	-0.395***	-0.247
	(0.0683)	(0.152)
Constant	3.098***	5.051***
	(0.0916)	(0.204)
Observations	4,514	4,513
R-squared	0.034	0.022

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
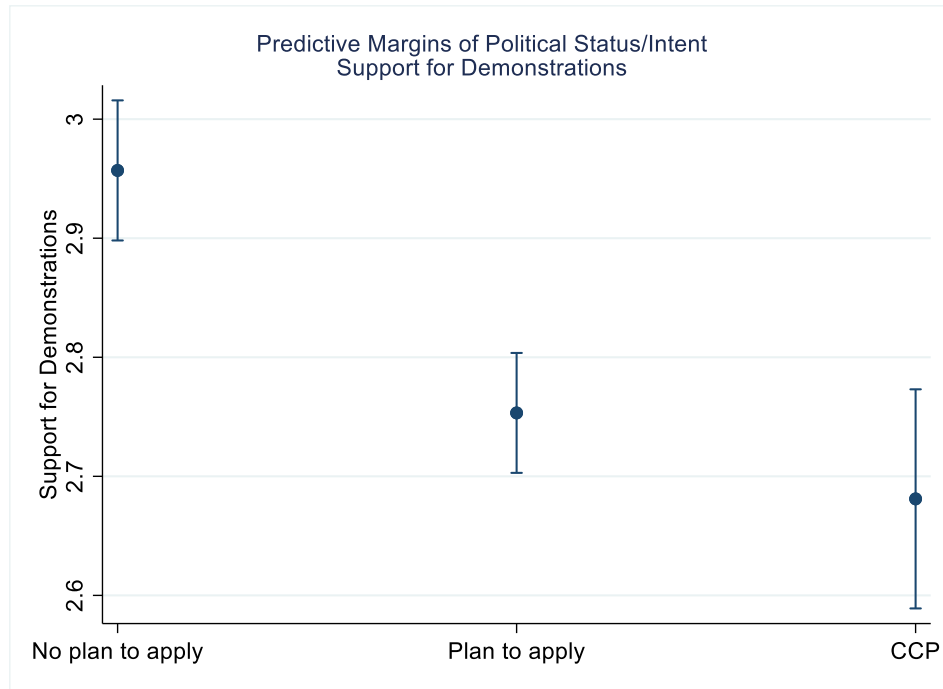
Figure 5 Predictive Margins of Political Status/Intent on Support for Demonstrations
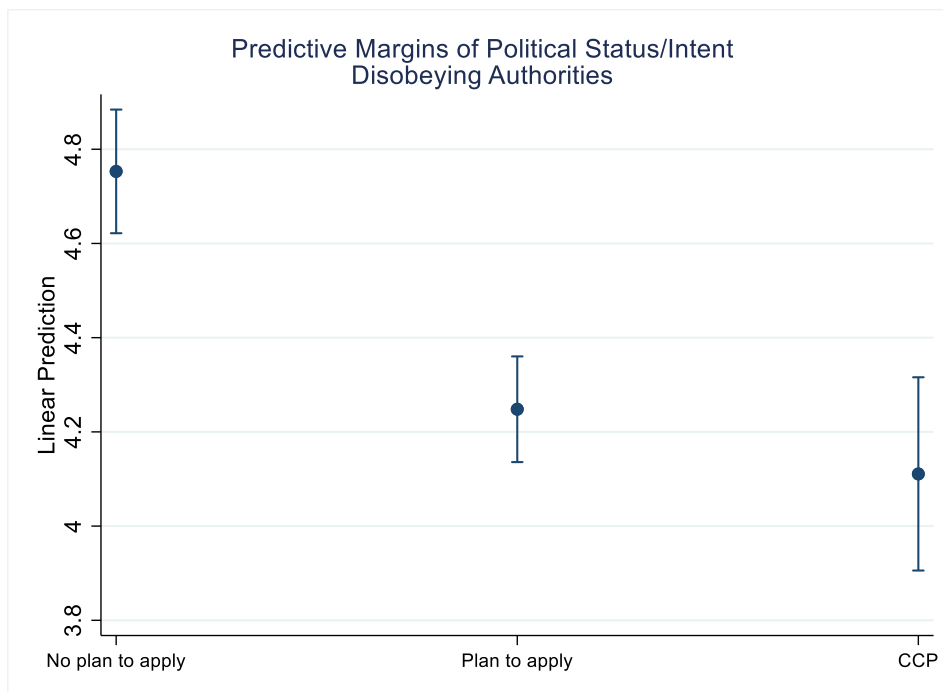
Figure 6 Predictive Margins of Political Status/Intent on Disobeying Authorities

Young people's desire to seek upward mobility within private enterprises, suggests that they are less likely to be easily co-opted. This may be potentially troubling as China contends with how much of its economy should be driven by private sector growth. Further, when it comes to public service institutions, which include schools, universities and research institutes, the regime certainly expects that in these types of institutions, there should be a low proclivity to support demonstrations. In these institutions, regardless of one's political status, the regime would want a high level of compliance given its extensive efforts to indoctrinate and engender political support.

I also included an interaction between career choice and political status/intent. I posited that the difference between students who do not plan to apply to the Party and Party members for instance might be even more notable given their career aspirations. The group of students who express the highest level of support for demonstrations and disobedience are those who do not plan to apply *and* who seek a career in the private sector. Similarly, those who should express the lowest level of support should be party members *and* those who seek a career in the Party-government sector. I also suggest that there may be heterogeneity amongst party members. If amongst these students, they do not necessary desire a career in the Party-government sector, party identity might not be particularly meaningful. They might be similar to their peers, who are not party members.

In the regression models in Table 5, the interaction variables do not show a discernible effect at the conventional levels of statistical significance. However, in Figure 3 and Figure 4, I show the contrast between the predictive margins of career choice, with the Party-government-sector as the baseline comparison. There are several interesting findings by contrasting the predictive probabilities. Firstly, on the question of support for demonstrations, career choice makes a difference among those who do not want to apply. Wanting a career in the private sector or in public service institutions can pull students to be less compliant. However, if there are individuals

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who are contemplating a career in the Party-government sector, that would be a key conduit to induce compliance. Making party-government sector attractive as a career choice, can pull individuals in this subgroup to be more obedient.

Another interesting finding regarding the difference in predictive probabilities for this group is that the regime might not be able to count on them to enforce campus rules. Non-party members entering the private sector and even in public institutions are not politically reliable. This might be discerning for the regime, especially with regards to public service institutions. Within universities for example, it would be imperative that personnel, faculty, and staff play a role in enforcing rule-abiding behavior. If non-members in this sector have a higher predilection to support demonstrations, this would be troubling for the regime as they cannot rely on this subpopulation. Among party members, there is some heterogeneity. The difference between choosing private sector versus party-government sector jobs was not statistically significant, but party members seeking a career in public service institutions are slightly more supportive of demonstrations. Therefore, in public service institutions like universities, the regime might have difficulty producing politically reliable personnel.
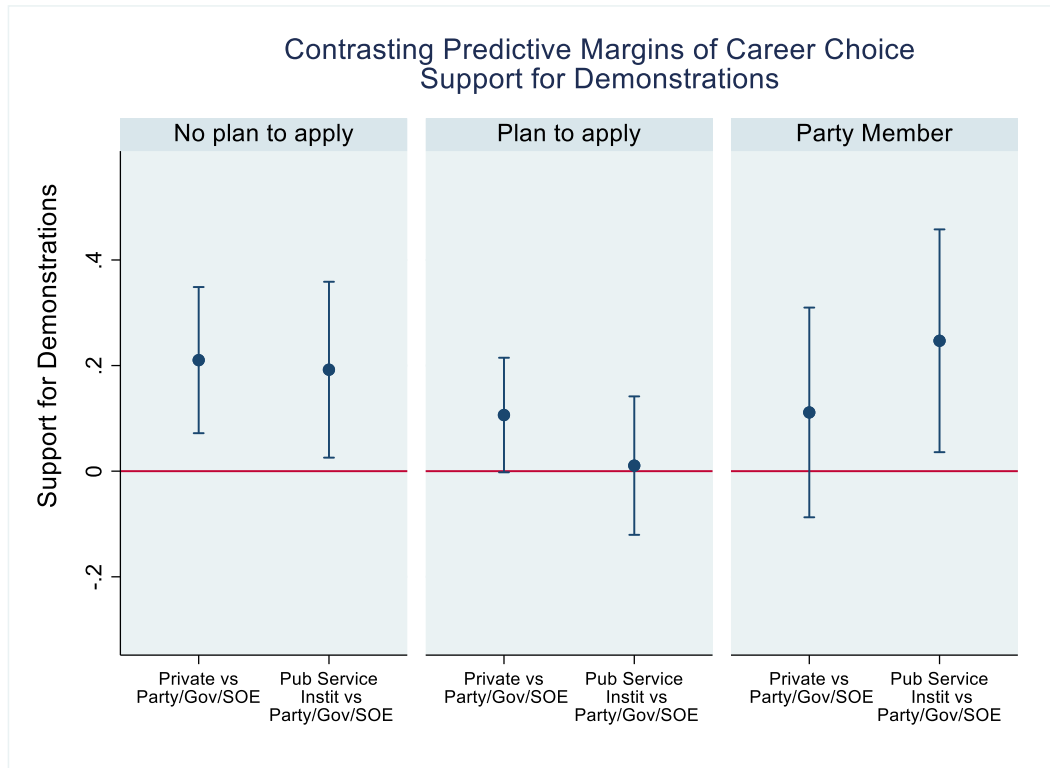
Figure 7 Contrasting Predictive Margins of Career Choice on Support for Demonstrations
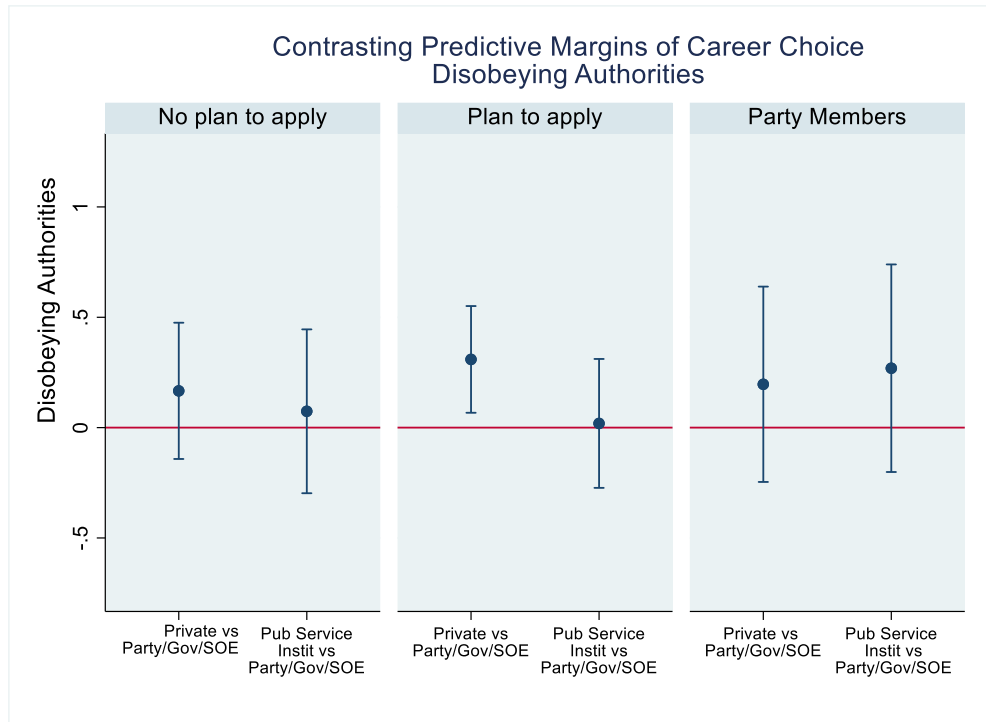
Figure 8 Contrasting Predictive Margins of Career Choice on Disobeying Authorities

Given, the wide differences in terms of ranking, prestige and the type of students who are admitted to these universities, the effects of the sampling strata in the regression model show meaningful differences between elite universities and lower ranked institutions. Examining the effect of strata on the support for demonstrations, there is a statistically significant difference between lower ranked schools, and the baseline stratum which is Peking University. The university, which is not only ranked number one in China, but it is deeply connected to student-led movements in China's history (Hayhoe et al., 2012; Israel, 1965). Students from Peking university played an important role in galvanizing demonstrations during the May Fourth movement of 1919 and December Nineth movement 1935. As well, the Tiananmen protests of June 4th, 1989, began in the dormitories and classrooms of Peking University (Saich, 1990). As such, Peking University has a reputation of being more non-conformist in culture.

In Figure 5, the predictive probabilities for each stratum show that students from Peking University express higher support for demonstrations. Another interesting difference however is between elite schools and lower ranked universities. Even though Peking University has a particular reputation for being non-conformist, it is not significantly different from Tsinghua University or Renmin University. On the question of disobeying authorities, there is not a statistically significant difference among the three elite universities. The difference is mainly between elite and lower ranked universities. Specifically, students from Project 211 universities and schools governed by the Beijing Ministry of Education express lower levels of support for disobeying authorities in contrast to Renmin University and Peking University.
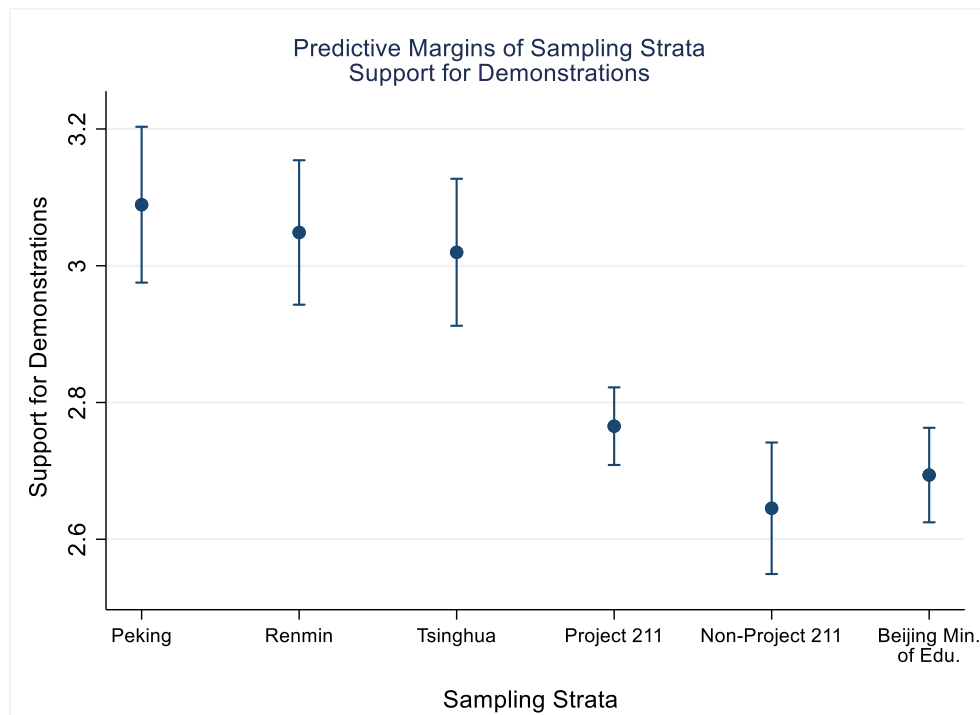
Figure 9 Predictive Margins of Sampling Strata on Support for Demonstrations

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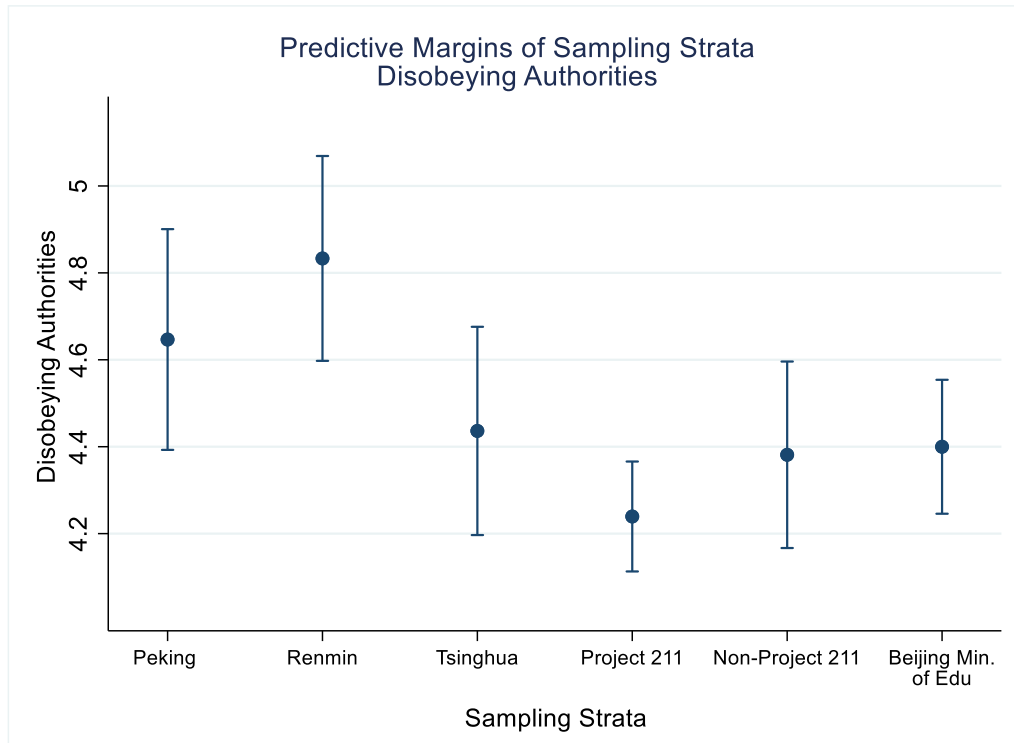
Figure 10 Predictive Margins of Sampling Strata on Disobeying Authorities

This lends to the argument that China's elite universities, from which the regime seeks to actively recruit party members, are also paradoxically less politically reliable. More compliant students tend to be from lower ranked universities.

3.2.5 Summary of Results

The linear regression analysis leads us to make several conclusions about the challenges the regime encounters when it comes to managing the student population. Firstly, when investigating whether there are subpopulations that are more compliant than others, there exists meaningful differences. The university employs a multitude of different mechanisms that are aimed to reinforce political norms and enhance their monitoring capacity. All students receive the

brunt of these efforts, Party members and non-members alike. Because a majority of students are CYL members, they too are required to participate in activities and tasks that are aimed to transmit political norms. Therefore, Party member or not, there is an expectation that if the regime's efforts are effective, there should be low support for demonstrations and disobedience across all students. The findings show that there is meaningful difference, specifically students who have no intent to join the Party, are more supportive of demonstrations and disobeying authorities. This can be challenging for the regime if the proportion of these students increase. If more students eschew officialdom and Party institutions, the population of politically reliable students are smaller. The regime can only rely on Party members, which do not represent a sizeable population on campus. Therefore, the regime might be limited in its tools to secure compliance.

The difference among these groups when it comes to support for demonstrations and disobedience is exacerbated by the type of career choice that students are more inclined to pursue. For instance, as private enterprises are seen as a more lucrative option, students are not inclined to join the Party, and the effect of indoctrination efforts might weaken. In general, seeking a career in the private sector or public service institutions, represents again a population that might be more difficult for the regime to control. Even among Party members, there is not a uniform effect. The contrast in the predictive probabilities, shows that Party members interested in seeking a position in political service institutions, like universities, are slightly more supportive of demonstrations and disobedience than Party members interested in the Party-government sector. This does not bode well for the regime given that it expects personnel in public institutions like universities to enforce rules and discourage deviant behavior.

There is a question about self-selection and endogeneity issues when it comes to the effect of Party membership and intent to join. The type of students that want to join the Party might also

be the type of students that are least likely to engage in demonstrations or disobey authorities. The career choice variables attempt to tackle this issue. People might be motivated to join the Party because they are generally aligned with the policies of the regime but there is also an instrumental component. Party membership is an important requirement for Party-government jobs, like state-owned enterprises. If career choice can moderate the effect of CCP membership, political identification and support among Party members might not be that strong as one is led to believe.

Furthermore, there is meaningful difference between elite universities and lower-ranked schools. Politically reliable students tend to come from lower-ranked schools, who in general express less support for demonstrations and disobedience. Even though, the regime wants to recruit Party members from the best schools, students from these institutions might be more critical and resistant to indoctrination efforts. This too presents a challenge in terms of how a regime can secure compliance, especially when the threat potentially comes from the best institutions.

In sum, creating a politically reliable student population is not an easy task for the Chinese regime. It contends with multiple challenges that can weaken their efforts to indoctrinate and transmit political norms to students. A population that is not interested in joining the Party is potentially impervious to indoctrination efforts. The pull of the private sector means there is little incentive to join the Party. As well, those who choose a career in public service institutions like universities, the regime might have difficulty producing a politically reliable staff.

3.3 Conclusion

In my interviews with student clubs, there was often a pattern in which students felt confident and safe to commit low level transgressions. There was something unique about the

atmosphere within Chinese campuses that allowed students to feel confident in creating these student clubs that clearly flout university rules. I examined how the incentives have altered in such a way that it is difficult to maintain a system of peer surveillance. If CYL activities and Party membership are increasingly ritualistic, perfunctory and in the latter case instrumental, then the ability to secure compliance on university campuses is increasingly difficult. From the regression analysis, using support for demonstrations and disobeying authorities as proxies for non-compliance, the regime does face challenges. The most politically reliable group are Party members and those who want to apply, particularly among those who want a career in the Party-government sector. It seemingly cannot rely on other subpopulations to follow the rules, nor can they rely on them to engage in peer surveillance.

4.0 The Emergence of Student Clubs as a Challenge to Political Control

In the following discussion, I provide background about how civil society has developed in China, specifically LGBTQ and women's-based organizations. The way that these two types of civil society organizations have grown, greatly informs the emergence of student clubs. The development of LGBTQ and women's-based student clubs reflect how non-compliance and rule-breaking can manifest on Chinese university campuses. I assert that these clubs challenge the regime in two ways; firstly, in some cases, groups develop the capacity to move beyond being a small student group and become a civil society organization, and secondly when groups go unchecked, they develop the skills and motivation to engage in social activism by organizing external and public-facing activities.

4.1 Civil Society Development in China

The emergence of student clubs, specifically those that focus on social issues, reflects how non-compliant behavior and rule-breaking can occur despite tight controls. Students' interest in social issues and how they address them through extracurricular activities is very much connected to how civil society has developed in post-reform China. There are similar patterns regarding how both civil society organizations and campus clubs have emerged, challenged authorities, and adapted to constraints. Their connection reflects patterns of emulation and confluence. With the former, there is evidence of imitation and learning, in which the activities, strategies and initiatives of student clubs follow the experience of civil society groups. With the latter, civil society groups

and campus clubs not only develop and adapt in parallel fashion but there is an interaction between the two. Members of campus clubs learn about adaptive and survival strategies directly from civil society groups as they interact more with them.

The opening up of China's economy and fiscal decentralization has led China's voluntary sector to grow in several ways. NGOs have emerged to address a range of social challenges that have arisen as a result of rapid economic growth, from environmental degradation, income inequality, health and welfare to labor conditions. China's shift from central economic planning meant local governments were now responsible for providing public goods, such as in areas of healthcare, education, social security etc. (Teets, 2013). But this devolution of responsibility did not coincide with the power for local governments to raise local taxes (Teets, 2013). This has facilitated a role for NGOs to assist local governments with the delivery of social services.

Economic growth has also led to the expansion of a middle class that is more willing to engage in associational life as well as embrace new norms and values that have come with globalization. The rise of white-collar urban elites has created the impetus for professional and business associations, and research guilds that reflect the changing social stratifications (Pearson, 1994; White, 1996).

Increasing wealth has also informed a growing culture of volunteerism, participation and philanthropy (G. Deng, 2015). September 5th is marked in China as Charity Day and is widely promoted across the country as a day of giving. Charities and organizations engage in a large fundraising blitz as they vie for donations on social media (Corsetti, 2019). This voluntary spirit was most evident during the 2008 earthquake in Wenchuan, Sichuan. There was a wide outpour of public support in the aftermath of the earthquake, both in terms of donations and grassroot mobilization by NGOs and volunteers (Shieh & Deng, 2011; Xu, 2014).

Further, the increased flow of people, goods, and ideas between China and the rest of the world has also thickened the ties between Chinese organizations and transnational networks and movements, which facilitated the spread of new ideas and social values. For example, when the UN Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, it helped spur the development of women's NGO's in China, connecting local groups to a wider movement (L. Zhang, 2009). The number of international donors and organizations that have emerged to combat HIV/AIDS has helped the development of LGBTQ organizations in China, which have become partners to raise awareness and provide public education (Hildebrandt, 2012). A growing middle class, and the increased connection to a globalized world also leads to the exposure and diffusion of new values, norms and identities that are meant to transcend national borders. The notion of a global citizen and universal values has entered the parlance and vocabulary for Chinese organizations and citizens with China's entrance into the global economy.

However, the growth of civil society can be destabilizing for an authoritarian regime. The mobilizing power of civil society groups and interest aggregation can easily lead to political demands and articulation of rights vis à vis the state. The concern that a growing non-governmental sectoral might become independent of the state does not escape the Chinese government. When the Color Revolutions and the Arab spring occurred, a dominant narrative that emerged was that activists received funding from foreign NGOs. This narrative has very much created a security lens through which the Chinese regime at times views the non-governmental sector (Spires, Tao, & Chan, 2014; Teets, 2013). This fear that civil society can be infiltrated by foreign powers and destabilize the regime is very pronounced under Xi Jinping's leadership (Fu & Distelhorst, 2018). In his second year as Party Secretary, an internal memo, known as Document No. 9 was circulated within the Party that warned against the seven dangers of western style democracy, among them

included freedom of the press, universal human rights and civil society ("Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation," 2013). The memo highlights that while organizations can address social challenges, there lurks a nefarious potential, wherein the role of the state and Party might be undermined.

> Civil society is a socio-political theory that originated in the West. It holds that in the social sphere, individual rights are paramount and ought to be immune to obstruction by the state. For the past few years, the idea of civil society has been adopted by Western anti-China forces and used as a political tool. Additionally, some people with ulterior motives within China have begun to promote these ideas… Advocates of civil society want to squeeze the Party out of leadership of the masses at the local level, even setting the Party against the masses, to the point that their advocacy is becoming a serious form of political opposition ("Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation," 2013) .

The regime tolerates NGOs in China, largely because they have played an important role in delivering social services. Equally, NGOs are aware that to survive, they must build partnerships and alliances with the state rather than to push agendas that may challenge the regime. Therefore, rather than being a truly independent voluntary sector in the Tocquevillian sense, wherein the rise of civil society might create a democratizing force, there is more dependence and a strategic articulation of interests (Spires, 2011). The regime has devised regulatory and oversight mechanisms that would render it difficult for civil society in China to become truly independent.

Indeed, over the years, there has been a been a litany of laws and regulations designed to neutralize the potential threat of NGOs. In order to register as a non-government entity with the Civil Ministry of Affairs, organizations must meet a number of requirements, such as having a full-time staff, a fixed address, a minimum number of members (Schwartz, 2004). They must also meet a number of conditions, the most obvious being they must not challenge national unity, public security or national interests and that their activities must not counter social morals (Schwartz, 2004). NGOs might also be denied based on other conditions intended to limit their scale. In a given locality, there cannot be more than one NGO addressing the same issue area nor can NGOs be permitted to establish branch offices (G. Deng, 2010).

For many years, the most significant barrier was the requirement that NGOs find a government agency to act as their sponsor or supervising agent (*zhuguan danwei* 主管单位). Government agencies were often unwilling to take on the risk of endorsing an NGO, which was particularly challenging for organizations that do not deliver social services. Organizations that do the latter, are more closely aligned with the goals of the state and therefore it is unlikely that they would veer into controversial areas that might endanger the sponsoring agency. Organizations that were unable to secure a sponsor simply chose not to register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs or registered as businesses in order to circumvent these requirements (Spires et al., 2014). They sometimes run the risk of being deemed illegal because of these evasive efforts (Spires et al., 2014). The number of registered organizations (社会组织 shehui zuzhi) reached 879, 979 in 2020, a dramatic increase from 4,496 in 1988[9]. Many of these organizations have become legally recognized in part because of their role in social service delivery and have met the rigid conditions set by the state. But the actual number is much larger because of the number of grassroots organizations that operate unregistered or as businesses (Spires, 2020).

The 2016 Charity Law would do away with the requirement of needing a supervising agent (H. Han, 2018). While, in theory the new law should liberalize the registration process and allow more NGOs to operate legally, in practice however, the new charity law still has strict conditions about what would be considered a charitable organization (Spires, 2020). For example the law indicates that organizations should not "violate social morality" – a term that many organizations believe to be vague (Spires, 2020). Changes to the registration process seem to only benefit organizations that already offer a social service that could assist the state. Organizations that were

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[9] The 2020 data was gathered from the Ministry of Civil Affairs. See (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2020). The 1998 data is referenced in Spires et al. 2014.

unregistered or registered as a business prior to the new law continue to operate in the grey zone (Spires, 2020).

The growth of the voluntary sector is no doubt tied to economic reform in China. NGOs emerged in response to a number of social challenges and have often operated in partnership and in collaboration with local governments to tackles social issues. They have grown in response to a new social stratification, as well new wealth has spurred interest in philanthropy. Further, China's entrance into a more globalized world has introduced new values and ideas. These different ways that highlight how civil society has developed in China reflects a similar trajectory for LGBTQ and women's-based organizations. Furthermore, these types of organizations in China's civil society landscape are precisely the types of organizations that have a tenuous status. Despite changes to the 2016 Charity Law, and overwhelming expansion of civil society, these types of organizations are unlikely to receive approval and tend to be unregistered or register as an enterprise. Because their activities are not always in the delivery of social services, these organizations precisely find themselves in the grey zone (Spires, 2020).

4.1.1 The Growth of LGBTQ Organizations

The development of LGBTQ, women's-based organizations are informed by many of the factors that led to the growth of Chinese civil society in general. Urbanization facilitated the growth of LGBTQ communities. The more liberal and open environment in cities allowed individuals to move away from their hometowns that were less accepting of homosexuality (Hildebrandt, 2013; Kam, 2012). Just as professional associations developed to reflect the changing social stratifications and the rise of white-collar elites, LGBTQ organizations also sprung up to serve young gay professionals in urban areas (Chiang, 2019). The early 1990s for instance saw the

creation of pager and telephone hotlines that would not only provide support services, but also information about social activities to help connect LGBTQ members (He, 2001).

Globalization and the flow of information, goods and people have also contributed to the growth of the LGBTQ organizations in China (Kam, 2012). LGBTQ movements and activism abroad have impacted the development of LGBTQ groups within China. There is a transnational component with a gay or queer identity, in which membership transcends national boundaries (Hildebrandt, 2012). Local organizations become part of a larger network and shared identity.

One of the most important factors that have contributed to the growth of LGBTQ organizations in China is their role in addressing the HIV/AIDS crisis. As previously mentioned, NGOs emerged to address a number of social challenges that have resulted from rapid economic growth. LGBTQ organizations in China have become important partners in the fight against HIV/AIDS by reaching the gay population – a high-risk group that would be difficult for local state agencies to reach on their own (Hildebrandt, 2013). While, homosexuality has been decriminalized in China since a Supreme Court ruling in 1957, homosexual men still faced arrest under the act of *hooliganism* in the Criminal Code (Hildebrandt, 2013). The abolishment of hooliganism from the Criminal Code in 1997 and the removal of homosexuality from the official list of psychiatric disorders in 2001 were crucial steps for the LGBTQ community. But, scholars have suggested that these actions were driven by the state's interest to combat HIV/AIDS than out of real concern for discrimination and homophobia (Hildebrandt, 2013).

The state's interest in addressing HIV/AIDS has allowed LGBTQ groups to grow. In order to secure funding and obtain formal registration, many LGBTQ organizations try to incorporate a public health component in their mission and activities (Hildebrandt, 2013). In some ways, this allows groups to develop programs on other issue areas outside of HIV/AIDS such as homophobia,

discrimination and community-building (Chua & Hildebrandt, 2014). This is not however an easy task. In Hildebrandt's study of LGBTQ organizations, one interviewee indicated that "we must be loud about AIDS but quiet about other issues if we want to continue to exist" (Hildebrandt, 2013). But members and activists also lament that while a strict focus on HIV/AIDS provides resources and political security, it is at the expense of other issues that may be more pertinent to community members (Chiang, 2019). There is concern of *de-pinking,* in which organizations that focus too much on public health, run the risk of transforming from an LGBTQ group to one that is exclusively about HIV/AIDS (Chua & Hildebrandt, 2014).

It is this tension between the pressure to survive and the desire to meet the interests of the LGBTQ community that has caused groups to forgo registration. Groups that do not have an explicitly HIV/AIDS agenda and do not deliver social services are unlikely to be approved. They are forced to exist in a grey zone as either an unregistered entity or a business (Spires, 2020). For instance, organizations that serve the lesbian community have long found it difficult to obtain official registration principally because their outreach is not about HIV/AIDS prevention (Hildebrandt, 2013). Further, there are a number of issues that concern the LGBTQ community that are unrelated to public health. By forgoing official registration and by choosing to register as a business entity, they have more leeway to pursue other projects. For example, groups are interested in developing programs that seek to build community or raise the public visibility of the LGBTQ community. Initiatives like queer film festivals, Pride, and the International Day Against Homophobia Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT) are the type of activities that do not include a public health frame. Symbolically important dates like Pride, IDAHOT, Valentine's Day and the anniversary of Stonewall movement have become days in which both NGOs and student clubs alike have commemorated with various initiatives (Engebretsen, 2015). The challenge is that as

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organizations and activities move outside of the public health frame, they may become more vulnerable to being shut down by authorities (Engebretsen, 2015).

As LGBTQ civil society organizations have expanded their programs and missions to go beyond a public health frame, this informs the development of LGBTQ student clubs in several ways. With larger outreach activities such as with Shanghai Pride for example, greater public exposure to LGBTQ issues motivates young people to develop similar initiatives for their campus community. There is therefore evidence of emulation, in which student groups develop similar programs and strategies as LGBTQ civil society organizations.

There is also evidence of confluence and interaction between these two groups. For instance, when Fan Popo first organized the China Queer Film Festival tour in 2008, possible shutdowns by authorities meant they turned to small businesses like independent salons, bookstores, and cafes to host the event. They also looked to student organizations who helped organize screenings on campus. According to Fan, "Colleges and universities are another entry to a broader public. College students are expected to explore and challenge difficult ideas and rules and norms about what kind of images may be screened are more relaxed" (Fan, 2015). LGBTQ civil society groups therefore began to direct their programming towards the student population. Issues that students face like campus diversity, bullying, homophobia have become topics of interest for civil society organizations. Therefore, as programs expanded beyond HIV/AIDS, some civil society groups have begun providing assistance to students and student groups. The emergence of LGBTQ student clubs is connected to how LGBTQ civil society groups have also gradually changed their mission.

4.1.2 Growth of Women's Based Organizations in China

Economic reforms have also contributed to the proliferation of women's-based organizations in a number of ways. Like, LGBTQ organizations that emerged to address HIV/AIDS in China, women's-based organizations arose to deal with social challenges uniquely facing women. For example, with the growth of the manufacturing industry in coastal cities, a vast number of rural women migrated to cities and became a predominant part of the labor force (Howell, 2003). As migrant workers in China's cities, they were a doubly marginalized group who contended with problems of sexual harassment and exploitative conditions in the workplace along with the dangers of sexual violence in cities (Howell, 2003). The privatization of state-owned enterprises led to significance of lay-offs that disproportionately affected women (White, 1996). Female unemployment and discrimination also became topics that drew public attention in the early period of reform.

Informal salons and research groups on university campuses began to form around issues that disproportionately affected women (Nathansen Milwertz, 2002). These groups helped to inform the development of research institutions and networks that contributed to the growth of autonomous organizations. Women's studies programs also developed across Chinese universities and international exchanges facilitated the flow of new ideas, philosophies, and practices (Howell, Zheng).

Traditionally, issues related to family and women's development fall within the purview of the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) – a mass organization that was established once the Communist regime took over in1949. As a mass organization under the CCP, it has the dual function of transmitting the Party's policies to women as well as to communicate concerns back to the Party (Jin, 2001). Prior to the introduction of economic reforms, it was the sole institution

that represented women's interests. However, with the rise of new social challenges facing women, the ACWF cannot address these issues alone (Liu, 2001). A mutually beneficial relationship developed between the ACWF and women's-based organizations, in which their research and initiatives, particularly in the area of social service delivery, assisted the state.

Another major impetus that led to the rise of women's-based organizations was China's hosting of the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women and the parallel NGO Forum (L. Zhang, 2009; Zheng, 1997) The Chinese government sought to host the international event in a bid to repair its international image after the Tiananmen protests (Zheng, 1997). At the time, supporting gender-based issues was seen as a politically safe way to regain favor within the international community. The political environment was therefore more open and supportive towards women's organizations (L. Zhang, 2009). This period led to the development of new women's organizations and initiatives as well as it raised the profile of existing groups. Also, prior to the event, Chinese women's organizations had limited opportunities to develop international ties. The conference linked Chinese groups to international donors and foreign women's organizations, which embedded them into a transnational network and movement (Zheng, 1997). This process helped to legitimize issues areas and open the political space for women's organizations to develop. For instance, the topic of violence against women had gained international attention since the 1980s and became a major focal point at the 1995 UN Conference on Women. There was a new momentum that had the states' approval, and women's-based organizations seized on the opportunity.

The UN conference was also an example of the collaborative relationship that the state or the ACWF had established with women's-based organizations. To be given the space to pursue various gender issues, women's-based organizations recognized the importance of working with

the state and through official channels (Zheng, 2015). Avoiding confrontational strategies and steering away from politically sensitive topics defined the approach that early women's-based organizations took. At the same time, the state was also tolerant of their growth as their cooperation allowed them to address challenges that was also a priority for the regime, such as women's development in rural areas and gender gaps in education. A mutually beneficial relationship developed.

In recent years, however, young female activists have taken a different approach in the way they bring attention to women's issues. Unlike the earlier generation, who worked with the state and avoided contentious approaches, young female activists have used the power of public performance to draw attention to gender related issues (Fu, 2017b). Although, they are not what many would consider an overt protest or street demonstration, their performances are provocative and intended to raise awareness (Fu, 2017b; Jun Li & Li, 2017).

One of the earliest examples was in 2012, when a number of college students protested against what they saw was gender-based discrimination in university admissions (Ying, 2012). They raised the concern that universities required a higher college entrance exam score from female students (Ying, 2012). When the Ministry of Education justified these practices, twenty students in Guangdong and Beijing publicly shaved their heads and held signs to express their opposition to gender-based discrimination (Ying, 2012) Many of these students continued their feminist activism after graduation and went on to make national headlines with other performative forms of protest. On Valentine's Day in 2012, three female activists walked through the streets of Beijing wearing wedding gowns that were splattered in red paint to symbolize blood. They held signs and shouted slogans like "Love is not an excuse for violence" (Lü, 2019). The culmination of these events occurred in 2015 when five female activists were arrested on the day before

International Women's Day. They were arrested for picking quarrels and stirring trouble (Zheng, 2015). Their plan to protest against sexual harassment on public transportation by handing out leaflets inside a subway station was thwarted by police. They became known as the Feminist Five in international media, and their detention drew condemnation (Zheng, 2015)

Their arrest was not because of the issues they raised. For years the ACWF and women's-based organizations have cooperated on topics like domestic violence – an issue that both young feminists and long-established women's organizations care about. However, the speed with which the feminist activists were able to network and mobilize across many different cities without being an officially registered organization was alarming for the regime (Fu and Diestlehorst). While these performances were small in scale and designed to not appear like an organized street protest, the public nature of their campaigns drew the regime's attention. The rise in female activism in the last few years and the state's response, mark a significant departure in the nature of the relationship between the state and women's organizations. No surprise, there was a concomitant shift in terms of how the state perceived women's-based issues, which was increasingly through a security lens.

Even the use of the translated term for feminism, *nuquan zhuyi* (女权主义) which is often employed by young feminist activists, reflects a departure from the previous generation. Early women's-based organizations that sought to establish cooperative relationship with the state steered away from using that particular translation, in favor of *nüxing zhuyi* (Howell, 2003). The latter translation is seen as less threatening, with an emphasis on feminine identity (Ko & Wang, 2006). By contrast, the former translation, *nüquan zhuyi* is often seen as derisive, as it evokes the stereotype of man-hating, women-first ideology (Ko & Wang, 2006). This particular translation is also associated with western political thought, in which today, its meaning is tied to a western

conception of natural rights (Ko & Wang, 2006). Because their campaigns and arrest drew international media attention along with support from international scholars and organizations, the perceived threat also stems from a fear that the young feminists were being influenced by foreign actors (Fincher, 2012).

Unlike the earlier generation of women's organizations that sought to curry favor and develop mutual trust with the state, these groups operate outside of the mainstream institutions and reject the cooperative approach (Qi Wang, 2018). This might be attributed to a generational difference, in which young feminists unlike earlier groups lack the social capital and network to leverage partnerships with the state (Qi Wang, 2018).

Further, unlike their predecessors who may have lived through the Maoist years, and have experienced the Communist regime's support for gender equality, the younger generation do not necessarily see the state as a real advocate for women (Qi Wang, 2018). The ACWF is an extension of the state and must promote the Party's directives and policies. In doing so, activists question if the ACWF can truly represent women. For instance, in the 1980s it had to promote the country's one child policy, despite problems for women's health and violating women's reproductive rights (Howell, 2003). A more recent example that drew the ire of young women in China was when the ACWF published articles as part of a campaign to encourage women to marry, popularizing the term *leftover women,* referring to unmarried women over the age of 27 (Fincher, 2012).

The state and by extension the ACWF are seen by young feminist activists as socially conservative when it comes to gender norms. The use of public performance to express social criticism and the embrace of the feminist moniker marks a very different approach to bringing attention to women's issues. These new practices and approaches inform the growth of student clubs and student activism in several ways. Firstly, many of the young feminist activists, who had

been detained or arrested for their street performances, began their activism as students. For instance, Li Maizi was one of several students, who shaved their heads to oppose gender discrimination in university admissions.

Similarly, Wei Tingting, another activist of the Feminist Five, also began her activism as a student when she organized a Chinese rendition of the Vagina monologue at her university (Qi Wang, 2018). Many of these young female activists have also gone onto to form their own civil society organizations after they graduated. In turn, these organizations have aided and supported students and student groups to address issues like sexual harassment, domestic violence, and sexual education on campus. For example, BCome and the Guangzhou Gender and Sexuality Education Center are notable examples, whose founders were members of the Feminist Five. The former organization has used performance art as a vehicle to engage the public with their own production of the Vagina Monologues (Qi Wang, 2018). Inspired by on-stage performances that begun in the United States by playwright Eve Ensler, which detail various experiences women encounter from body images, dating and relationships to sexual violence. The performances are meant to celebrate womanhood, female empowerment and to normalize conversations around sexual health and sexual assault. Bcome has helped student organizations perform their own versions on campus. Their programming and outreach efforts therefore are aimed at students.

This new generation of female activists has taken a more contentious approach with street performance demonstrations. Their activism often began while they were students and they later formed civil society organizations which then engaged in student issues and aided student groups. Not unlike the development of LGBTQ student clubs, groups that focus on women's issues have also emulated the approaches and strategies of civil society organizations as well as receiving support from them.

4.1.3 The Implications for the Development of Student Clubs

LGBTQ and women's-based organizations have developed and survived in China's setting by providing a benefit to the state, principally when it comes to the delivery of social services. The former organizations emerged to address the problem of HIV/AIDS among the gay male population. The latter organizations developed to address a range of social issues facing women like labor conditions for migrant workers, rural development, and domestic violence. As these sectors developed, new groups emerged, in which their objectives deviated from the those of the state. LGBTQ organizations have for instance expanded their mandate to go beyond HIV/AIDs. Young female activists and the organizations they have gone on to establish, have deviated from the previous generation of women's-based NGOs by adopting more contentious approaches. Rather than seeking out a cooperative relationship with the state, they relied on the use of performance and street-level demonstrations to raise public awareness. The rise of these organizations and how they have departed from their predecessors or expanded their mandate have informed the rise of unregistered student clubs, which in turn creates a new challenge for the regime.

There is a phenomenon of confluence and emulation wherein the latter, student clubs copy the strategies and programs of NGOs and in the latter, they interact with each other, and student clubs receive support from the NGO sector. As LGBTQ organizations have expanded their outreach mechanisms and they have widened their profile, this has attracted young people as participants. Many women's-based organizations were founded by young people who also in turn attract young people to join. A second mechanism is that NGOs have developed programs to specifically address issues that concern students directly. This might come in the form of co-

sponsoring events, helping to publicize as well as providing materials, and offering opportunities in capacity-building through training workshops or small grants.

With the dynamic of emulation, campus organizations adapt and evolve in the same way as NGOs have by copying or adapting their programs and strategies. For LGBTQ groups, just as urbanization created a community that would allow members of the LGBTQ community to network and seek support, university students are also coming from hometowns to urban centers as they embark on the first time away from home. Just like civil society organizations, campus organizations develop a similar mission to create a safe community for university students. They develop a similar language that is focused on community-building and strategically avoid rights-based language that might be seen as politically sensitive and trigger unwanted surveillance. Their objective is to provide a space to allow students who identify as LGBTQ to socialize and feel welcome. For women's-based organizations, the use of performance as a strategy to bring attention to issues is an example of how adaptive strategies are diffused and copied.

The way that these NGOs have developed, specifically as they move away from social service provision, have informed the growth of student associations. This is a useful lens in which to study student non-compliance. A phenomenon that we witness is that students do have a propensity to challenge norms and rules as these particular social issues motivate young people to become more vocal. The emergence of these types of student clubs therefore highlights how rules and norms designed to curb student activism can unravel. From the bottom up, the motivation to address social issues in China therefore creates challenges for the regime in terms of their ability to control student behavior. From extensive interviews and participant observations, the following sections therefore detail the mandates and missions of these student organizations, the manner in

which they challenge the rules and norms and how the actions of some groups have the potential to escalate.

4.2 The Rise of 'Unregistered', 'Underground', or 'Unofficial' Student Clubs

My fieldwork focuses on the emergence of *underground* (*dixia* 地下), *unregistered* (f*eizhuce* 非注册), or unofficial (f*eiguanfang* 非官方) campus organizations.[10] Many of these student groups are unable to become a recognized student club, and thus exist as *underground, unregistered* or *unofficial.* They fail to obtain approval, or they choose not to apply. Some universities might be more traditional and socially conservative and fear a backlash from parents. There is also fear that these clubs might veer into a human rights discourse, in which a club might develop a more activist or critical tone to highlight problems of inequality or discrimination. Authorities might also fear that the values promoted by these clubs reflect western culture of universalism and individualism, which are antithetical to the very values they seek to impart.

These unregistered student clubs therefore often choose to operate without formal approval and evade the campus rules that seek to depoliticize, control, and supervise students. The risks and challenges they face along with their frequent negotiation with the bounds of what is permitted demonstrate a particular dynamic that might undermine regime stability. While students do not directly challenge regime's legitimacy, they find creative and evasive ways to challenge the rules

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[10] During my interviews, some student clubs openly identify themselves as underground, *dixia shetuan* 地下社团 while some groups were less inclined to use this term. They would prefer unregistered or unofficial. For simplicity, the study will use the term unregistered or unofficial interchangeably. Further, some groups are not inclined to identify themselves as a campus club (shetuan 社团) club, and instead choose the term small group (xiaozu 小组). For the purpose of the study even though some organizations see themselves as a *xiaozu*, I will continue to use the term *shetuan*, since their memberships are predominantly students from the same institution.

and norms of compliance. These strategies by students therefore weaken the regime's long-term efforts to create compliant and obedient citizens.

4.2.1 Brief Portrait of the Student Clubs in this Study

The student groups that I interviewed for this study principally focus on issues related to gender, the LGBTQ community and international volunteerism. Their emergence reflects students' interest in addressing social problems in China. Labor and Marxist groups are another example of student clubs that have emerged to address social issues. During fieldwork, I became aware of labor and Marxist groups from my contacts and interviewees, but I was not able to interview members of these organizations to learn more about their development. As such, I focus on organizations that address gender, LGBTQ community, and international volunteerism.

In addition to unregistered student groups, I also interviewed student organizations that focus on the same issues but were able to successfully obtain approval form their university. Even though they were registered, they faced a number of restrictions in terms of their ability to organize activities and publicize events. As such they too engaged in non-compliant behavior to circumvent these rules.

In Table 6, I divided the student clubs into three categories based on issue area. In this study, the two main types of organizations are those that are concerned with LGBTQ and women's-based issues. I interviewed 10 different LGBTQ student organizations, 7 different women's-based student organizations, and 2 civil society organizations. Of the 7 women's-based groups, 4 would be considered chapters of a women's-based organization that has gained popularity in China for promoting women's career and professional development. They do not consider themselves feminist or part of the feminist movement, but chapters of this organization have had trouble

getting approval, nonetheless. In addition to their focus on gender, which is why schools might reject their application, they are connected to a larger organization that was founded by a foreigner. These foreign ties also complicate their ability to become an officially recognized student club. These chapter organizations have considerable leeway in terms of the type of issues they address. Groups have for instance focused on sexual harassment as a topic. Therefore, even though they do not identify as being a feminist organization, I categorize these 4 chapter-organizations along with other women's-based organizations.

My interviews also include 2 organizations, in which their principal interest is in international volunteerism. In China, there are unregistered and registered chapters – also known as local committees – of an international non-profit organization that conducts youth-focused, cross-cultural internships and volunteer exchanges. These chapters organize trips for Chinese students to volunteer abroad and provide a similar experience foreign students coming to China. These groups have had trouble obtaining approval and like LGBTQ and women's-based student groups have sought to operate unofficially. Some of their experiences are similar to those of women's-based and LGBTQ student groups, so I have also included interviews with these organizations in my study.

I also interviewed 2 non-governmental organizations that I categorized as women's-based and LGBTQ. While, the former organization consists of student members, they do not consider themselves to be a student club but rather a youth-based organization whose activities are not specific to one campus. The latter has worked with student organizations and have provided small grants to support their programs.

Table 6 Group-Level Subject Interviews

Group No.	Focus	Approved Status	Type	Region
1	INTL_VOLUNEERISM	No	Student	Huabei
2	INTL_VOLUNEERISM	Yes	Student	Huabei
3	LGBTQ	Yes	Student	Huanan
4	LGBTQ	No	Student	Huanan
5	LGBTQ	No	Student	Huabei
6	LGBTQ	No	Student	Huabei
7	LGBTQ	Yes	Student	Huabei
8	LGBTQ	No	Student	Huabei
9	LGBTQ	No	Student	Huabei
10	LGBTQ	No	Student	Jiangnan
11	LGBTQ	Yes	Student	Jiangnan
12	LGBTQ	Yes	Student	Jiangnan
13	LGBTQ	Yes	Student	Jiangnan
14	Women	Yes	Student	Jiangnan
15	Women	No	Student	Huabei
16	Women	No	Student	Huabei
17	Women	No	Student	Huabei
18	Women	No	Student	Huabei
19	Women	No	Student	Huabei
20	Women	No	Student	Huabei
21	Women	No	Social Org	Huabei
22	LGBTQ	No	Social Org	Huabei

4.2.2 Motivation for Creating and Joining a Student Club

Not dissimilar from women's-based and LGBTQ NGOs, student clubs that also address these issues have comparable objectives. They seek to provide a sense of community, belonging and support for their fellow peers. In other cases, they believe they provide a direct service to students by engaging in public awareness raising. They are therefore motivated by both inward and outward-facing goals to serve a specific group as well as to raise awareness about social issues pertaining to their community.

Another motivation for students' involvement and participation in these campus clubs is their aversion and disinterest towards official organizations, like student government and the CYL. Official organizations, like the CYL and student government are extensions of university authority, in which a predominant goal is to transmit political ideology. Rather than representing student interests, they operate more as a top-down institutions, in which they follow directives from university authorities (Shen & Yen, 1998; Wright, 2001). By contrast, student efforts to establish and participate in these types of clubs, reflect a bottom-up phenomenon. Students' interest in social issues drives them to create their own organizations and initiatives, which causes them in some instances to violate university rules and norms. While, these student groups are not seeking to challenge the political status quo or legitimacy of the regime, they are trying to promote new ideas and values that challenge traditional and mainstream attitudes.

In terms of inward facing goals, creating a sense of community and belonging is an important motivation. For example, I had interviewed one student, who founded an LGBTQ student organization at the university where he was completing his master's degree. He explained that when he was an undergraduate student, he had been an active member of that school's LGBTQ club. He had such a positive experience, that he felt compelled to create a similar group at his new institution. As an undergraduate student, he indicated he experienced anxiety and after joining the student group he felt a sense of relief. The warmth and support he received from others had a positive impact. When he was graduating, he discussed with members of his group, and he was encouraged to start a similar organization since none existed at his new university nor at nearby schools (Interview No. 9).

While events and activities often tackle issues related to the LGBTQ community such as homophobia or discrimination, groups also often organize social events for members, what they

call internal events (neibu huodong 内部活动). The goal is to create a more relaxed and fun environment that allows members to get to know one another, interact, and to foster a sense of community amongst students.

Another student organization offers a live chat service through their public WeChat account, which is not dissimilar from the pager and telephone hotline services that began in the 1990s when early LGBTQ civil society groups emerged. Through their social media account, every Friday, users can privately message the platform where an anonymous volunteer from the organization, tries to offer support and resources. Instructions on how to use the service also assure anonymity by indicating to users that they can change their avatar and username before chatting. Their page indicates while they are not a substitute for psychological counselling, they can provide resources and lend support to students who are struggling. Questions like "What should I do if I am treated badly after I come out" or "Are my feelings healthy?" indicate the group's desire to help fellow peers to not feel alone.

Coming out to family and friends can be a difficult a process in any country and culture especially for young people in high school or university. For students, it is often their first time leaving their hometown and it is in the school environment away from home that they can express their sexual orientation. Indeed, for student activists involved with these types of organizations, an often-made threat is that the school will out them to their parents (Jeffreys, 2018). While university and peers can offer a safe environment for young people to come out, it is not uncommon that they are not out to family members. The goal for these clubs therefore is to offer a safe space and a sense of community so that people can develop a positive sense of identity and pride in their common identity (Interview No. 9).

For women's-based organization, part of the mission for some is to also offer a sense of community and support. For one group, an organizer indicated that their university is predominantly known for research in the STEM fields, which are more male dominated. Their group therefore can offer support when it comes to issues of discrimination or to help one another as they pursue careers in male-dominated fields (Interview No.15). Some women's-based groups offer workshops that would be difficult to find on campus, such as peer sex education or women's health workshops.

These initiatives not only offer resources that might be difficult to access on campus, but they aim to create a safe environment where students can share stories when it comes to sexual abuse, harassment, or intimate partner violence. Through their events and initiatives, some groups indicate that they want to create a sense of sisterhood (Interview No. 24). In some of these women's-based organizations, they have what is called circle events, which are often led by an older student or an alumnus who might share a personal experience.

These groups are also motivated by an external and outward-facing objective, in which they believe they seek to raise public awareness or provide a service to the university and to the larger community. They often try to do this by challenging harmful stereotypes and bringing awareness to issues facing women and sexual minorities, like homophobia, bullying, discrimination, sexual harassment and intimate partner violence. This objective can lead to more outward and public-facing events in contrast to internal events, which are focused more on providing support and a sense of community for members.

For one women's-based group, they see that there are three phases or stages when working with new members. They want to help members develop a sense of gender identity, self-identity and a collective identity (Interview No. 17). An important goal is to be able to influence students

from across different fields and disciplines and not just students who are already interested in these issues. The hope is that when their fellow peers graduate, they are able to apply a gender lens to their own line of work. She gave the example of students who will graduate and become teachers. Through student organization like hers, in which they actively bring attention to women's issues, future educators would be better equipped to approach sex education and pass on correct information to younger generations for instance (Interview No. 17).

Another way that groups have raised awareness is that they conduct and publish research on their social media platform for public consumption. It is through these types of research reports that groups feel they can bring attention to issues that directly impact students and their school community. One women's-based student group sought to address reported incidences of indecent exposure near their campus. They conducted interviews with 50 plus female students to understand which campus entrances were vulnerable, the time of day of the incidences and how students felt about campus security. The group created a short video to bring awareness to the problem, helping to define the criminal act, and to advise students what to do if they see suspicious activity. They felt it was important because in their research they found students were not familiar enough about indecent exposure and harassment and did not know what to do if they were in that situation (Interview No. 16). From their interviews, they also drafted a report and suggested measures to increase campus safety; one of their suggestions was to offer a lecture to incoming students, so they are more equipped about how to report the crime and how to take precautions. During the university's fourth meeting of the student congress (*xuesheng daibiao dahui* 学生代表大会), they entrusted a student representative to present their findings and suggestions. They worked with the student representative in terms of how to present their concerns and how the university could address them (Interview No. 16).

There are also less explicit ways that public awareness is raised, and new values and ideas get transmitted. For instance, a women's-based group which had received approval and runs as an official student club, organized an event that focused on women's health, specifically about the misconceptions around feminine hygiene products (Participant Observation No. 19). In conservative cultures, the use of these types of products are associated with narratives about women's chastity. On the surface, it was an event to learn about women's health and to ask questions in a safe environment, but it was also an event where messages that challenged traditional ideas about gender were tacitly expressed as well. For instance, a sign in the background contained the phrase: "An event about female body, self-exploration and autonomy" (*yige guanyu nuxing shenti, ziwo tansuo he zizhu de xiangmu* 一个关于女性身体，自我探索和自主的项目). To introduce the event, one of the organizers emphasized the importance of autonomy and cautioned against traditional ideas about women's purity (Participation Observation No 19).

The aim to raise awareness can also be much more overt, public facing and demonstrative. Internationally recognized and symbolically important dates like Pride, International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT), International Women's Day have been events around which both NGOs and student groups have rallied. They offer an opportunity for groups to raise awareness around discrimination, bullying and to challenge harmful stereotypes. It has mobilized student groups to partake and organize in more demonstrative activities that the regime sees as exhibiting a social activist agenda. It is these types of public-awareness activities that demonstrate the potential for student groups to become a more active part of civil society.

Lastly, another important motivation for creating and joining these types of student clubs is that it reflects students' aversion and disinterest towards official institutions and sanctioned methods of student participation. The formation of these student organizations reflects grassroots

and bottom-up initiative to address social issues that are in stark contrast to the top-down activities organized by official institutions such as by the Student Union or the CYL. Official institutions like the latter often require and mandate students to participate, in which a principal a goal is to transmit political ideology. The formation of these types of student organizations therefore demonstrates a challenge to officialdom. Rather than being top-down measures that mandate student participation, the formation of these student clubs demonstrate an interest to conduct their own initiatives.

For one student who is part of a student club that has not obtained approval and is focused on international volunteerism, her decision to join was in part because there was more freedom and openness. In her eyes, students who were part of student government are under strict control (“*beiguanshu* 被管束”) and it is too official and bureaucratic (“*guanqiang* 官腔”). Student government would be an extension of the university. She did not want to be heavily controlled and wants to be able to think for herself (“我不太喜欢被管束”) (Interview No 2).

In another interview, a student who started a women’s-based student group, echoed similar sentiments. She recalled that when she was in junior high and high school, she was very active in the official institutions. She was a good student and was one of first students allowed to join the Communist Youth League in her class. In high school, she was also a member of student government. She was enthusiastic and participatory and described herself as very much politically ardent; she described her young self as “*feichang hong, feichang zhuan* 非常红， 非常转”, meaning *extremely red and extremely skillful,* a saying to denote one possesses both the political value of a good, loyal proletariat and also the skills and knowledge to contribute to the nation. Before starting college, she wanted to join student government, but her attitude later changed. She had originally thought to make positive changes in society, it would have to be through

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policymaking, and it could only be from within government (*tizhi nei gongzuo* 体制内工作) that she can affect change. When she was younger, she wanted to be a prominent female leader since as a child she only saw male political officials on television. This position changed as she learned that you are more likely to be constrained and creativity is not encouraged; your ideas are more likely to be rejected. Student government in her view, mirrored government in general. It was not an avenue to be creative or to show initiative, rather you are more subject to supervision by university authorities. You are more like to be boxed in "*tiaotiao kuangkuang* 条条框框". To get far in student government, she cynically described that you need to curry good favor with university staff. That was a principal reason for forming her own women's-based group. How far it would grow and how it would develop was based on members' individual contribution (Interview No 24).

Further students in these types of clubs also express disinterest towards students who serve in the official institutions like student government. In an interview with a student leader who formed her own women's-based organization at her university, she also echoed that in these official institutions the language and discourse reflect officialdom, *guanliao de huayu* 官僚的话语. One's ability to voice your opinion is limited. For students who work in these official institutions, she decries that they tend to be close-minded. They want to become bureaucrats because they do not have many other choices for a career path and as such, they tend to join official institutions where they have to follow orders (Interview No. 20). There is implication is that she and her friends are different because they started their own organization. They are not close-minded in their views and want to have the ability to not merely follow orders from the top but to freely pursue their own initiatives.

Unlike activities and initiatives that are mandated by official institutions, the existence of these unregistered campus organizations represent a channel for students to create their own activities and to articulate values that are important to them. As China has embarked on this path of rapid economic growth, values among young people have been shaped by social issues, like women's development and the rights of LGBTQ members. To be part of official institutions means to enact and carry out guidelines from university authorities wherein a goal is to ensure the political correctness of the student body. Forming and joining an organization of their own not only reflects an aversion and disinterest towards official and sanctioned institutions but it also reflects students' attraction to new ideas and values that challenge mainstream beliefs and conventionalism (zhuliu jiazhi guan 主流价值观). They reflect students' predilection toward non-conformist values. The desire to promote new values is an important reason why students become involved with unregistered entities.

As students become committed to social issues, they have formed their own campus organizations, in which in many cases they end up being unregistered student clubs that are established without university approval. Students are motivated by an internal objective, wherein they seek to provide a sense of community and provide services to their peers and classmates. They are also driven by an external, outward-facing goal, in which they seek to raise awareness about social issues to a wider public. Lastly, another important factor in their rise is growing disinterest and aversion towards official institutions, whose aims are to control and ensure compliance among the student population.

4.2.3 To be an Unregistered Student Organization

There are a litany of rules and regulations designed to gatekeep student clubs, safeguard the political correctness of students, and prevent potential mobilization. When it comes to the management of student clubs, a university's CYL Committee has the power to gatekeep by determining whether a club is approved, the power to terminate a club, and to discipline individual students. Managing and gatekeeping student clubs is one way the regime seeks to minimize potential threats on university campuses. For a number of student clubs that are politically innocuous, in which they are primarily hobby and interest-based, these guidelines do not apply to them. The rise of LGBTQ and women's student groups precisely illustrate this challenge.

Because of these tight rules, student clubs included in this study often face challenges in their attempt to become an official student club. Some groups have faced rejection in their attempts to register, others face obstacles that render it impossible to apply, and in other cases students forgo applying altogether and embrace the idea of existing as an unregistered student organization. Because these student clubs focus on social issues, there is a fear from university authorities that student group may engage in a human rights discourse, mobilize their peers or promote western values.

In my interviews, some student clubs were rejected or faced difficulty making it impossible to formally register. For instance, a formidable obstacle is being able to find a faculty advisor who is be willing to take on the responsibility. Without the support of a faculty advisor, many organizations believe it is unlikely to receive approval. Faculty members might personally support their cause but find it too risky to act as their advisor. For groups that have been denied, they have never been told directly that their topic is too political taboo or sensitive, but they have been given indirect reasons for their rejection. In one case, a student group focused on women's issues

indicated her application did not receive approval from her department's Youth League committee because she was told that her organization appeared to duplicate the function of an already existing club (Interview No. 24). The student was puzzled by this response because the organization they seemed to duplicate was an English-corner group, whose mission is to provide opportunities for students to practice English (Interview No. 24). Indeed, one of the activities that her student group run is to create small discussion groups, in which female students can openly share challenges with their peers in a safe environment. While that may cause confusion, it is obvious that they are distinct organizations and the reason she was given was unclear to her (Interview No. 24).

Student clubs that have chosen to operate as an unregistered entity express that they forgo applying because they know they are unlikely to obtain approval. One reason that some students have surmised is that universities do not want to be the first to make such a bold move. Universities do not want receive media attention, fearing it might harm their reputation (Interview No 4). A student member indicated that her club was one of the first LGBTQ student groups to become officially recognized, which received media attention. However, after one year of being of an approved student club, the following academic year they lost their status and have since operated as an unregistered organization. She indicated that universities are worried about receiving complaints from parents and in turn how it might affect their reputation and school enrollment (Interview No 4).

Even though, issues concerning sexual minorities, LGBTQ community and women's issues are not directly political, students indicate that from the university's perspective, these topics can easily touch on human rights issues. These subjects are not considered politically safe (*zhengzhi anquan* 政治安全) or politically correct (*zhengzhi zhengque* 政治正确) and so universities would be hesitant to approve these clubs. For instance, for clubs that openly identify

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as feminists or embrace feminism (nuquan zhuyi 女权主义), in which the Chinese characters reflects the words *women's rights*, the term is inextricably tied to a human rights discourse (Interview No. 20).

Even when student organizations attempt to distance themselves from a human rights discourse, it is difficult for school authorities to make that distinction. For a women's-issue based club, members have made a conscious effort to not identify themselves as a feminist group and refrains from using the term *nu quan zhuyi* 女权主义. In their application materials, they steered clear from using the term, indicating that there could be no link ("*yi dian de guanxi dou be keyi* 一点的关系都不可以") (Interview No. 24). Rather as one member explained, they preferred to identify themselves as a community for female students, *nu haizi de shequ* 女孩子的社区 or *nusheng shequ* 女生社区 (Interview No. 23). Regardless of this distinction, she claimed that it would nevertheless be hard to convince university staff that the group did not have a social activist agenda. She anticipated staff would ask her to justify the need for her club and defend how could it not be an activists group given that by law women and men already have equal rights. If she pointed out the social challenges that women face, which would justify the need for her club, it would be hard for the university to accept that the group would not pursue an activist agenda (Interview No 23).

For student clubs that try to establish themselves as branch organizations or as they call it *local committees* of the international volunteer organization, they are often denied because of safety concerns. Because part of their activities includes facilitating volunteer and internship exchanges, there is a concern about student safety. However, student members of these organizations have also had to contend with negative rumors and misinformation. At some universities, staff and other students have called their group a cult (*xiejiaozuzhi* 邪教组织), an

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illegal organization (*bu he fa* 不合法组), and a pyramid scheme (*chuanxiao* 传销) as a way to dissuade students from joining (Interview No. 1). One student indicated that she saw a message sent through WeChat warning students to not join their club. While physical safety is a concern, another issue is about the values that the organization espouses, such as ideas about global citizenship, internationalism, and universal values (Interview No. 1). The ideas of universalism for example clashes with Asian values and particularism that the regime has sought to endorse. While international exchanges and volunteerism are not controversial nor discouraged by the regime, there is a concern is about how allowing branches of an international NGO might lead to the spread of western values. In fact, volunteerism is certainly encouraged among young people by university authorities, but an important difference is that opportunities for community engagement are run by official institutions like the Youth League. The international exchanges that the group facilitates also raises concern about the transmission of new ideas and values. For one member of a *local committee* that has not received approval at her university, she discussed how international trips can expose students to ideas that would be worrisome for authorities. She talked about going to Hong Kong as a freshman to participate in a business plan competition and how shocked she was by seeing newspapers and magazines that criticized the Chinese government (Interview No. 1).

Some student organizations are acutely aware that universities are concerned about the threat of collective action ("*jiti xingdong* 集体运动") and students' capacity to influence others ("*xuesheng de liliang* 学生的力量") (Interview No 4). One member of an unregistered LGBTQ student organization indicated that there is public misperception and misunderstanding about their intent. He noted that the public might see their group as troublemakers that warrant government crackdown (*yiwei yinqi zhengfu de gongji* 以为引起政府的攻击). People might see their group as not conforming to mainstream values and that members themselves do not conform to the ideal of

a model student ("*bu fuhe zhuliu jiazhiguan* 不符合主流价值观, *bufuhe xuesheng de shenfen* 不符合学生的身份) (Interview No. 9). Students involved in these clubs are therefore deeply attuned to the political concerns of school authorities. As such, they are not inclined to try to register as an official group. In some cases, students are denied or face too many obstacles when they try to apply. In others, there is an understanding of how their organization would be perceived. Knowing these challenges, students simply give up on the idea of being a registered student group.

There are significant advantages in becoming a registered student club within the university, which might incentivize groups to change their approach in order to be accepted by the university. Being an officially recognized group lifts the anxiety around the label of being an "illegal organization". They would be allowed to freely book classrooms, invite guests, publicize and hold events without the fear of potential discipline and punishment. They would also be eligible to receive grants or subsidies to support their group's initiatives and openly recruit student members.

To be able to openly recruit members is a major benefit for student groups. Across universities in China, a commonly held event at the beginning of the semester, is the *baituan dazhan* 百团大战. This is an event where student clubs set up booths and tables to openly recruit members. It offers an opportunity to interact with students and to provide information about their organization and activities. For an approved LGBTQ group, a member indicated that she first learned about the organization at her university's *baituan dazhan*. She was surprised to find that such a student club would exist at her school– it was unimaginable to her (*bukeseyi* 不可思议) (Interview No. 8). She became aware of this group precisely because of this opportunity that official students club have to openly recruit members. Unregistered student clubs by contrast

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cannot openly recruit, so they rely on social media like WeChat, personal networks, and word of mouth.

Likewise, being an official organization means they can openly distribute pamphlets and hanger posters to publicize events. The lack of openness and therefore reliance on social networks to recruit and raise awareness is a real drawback. As one unregistered women's-based organization explained, if their goal is to dispel stereotypes and misinformation, they would need to reach a larger student body. If they continue to mainly attract students who are within their social circle and who are generally interested in gender issues, they are not fulfilling their larger outreach objectives (Interview No. 16). Another incentive that might move student groups to consider registering is the ability to receive financial support from student government. As an official club, they can apply for small subsidies from the university. Unregistered clubs are at a disadvantage in terms of resources.

There certainly exists an incentive, in which the benefits of being a registered student, such as access to financial support, resources, recruitment opportunities, can push student clubs to modify their approach. For instance, one LGBTQ student club was suspended in 2016 and was not permitted to hold public events. At the time of my interview in 2018, the group was still not permitted to openly hold events. They desired to regain their official status and to do so, they believed positioning themselves as an academic group that researches sexuality and gender would help them if they reapplied. They would try to organize activities that are more academically oriented, like reading groups (dushu hui 读书会), salons (shalong 沙龙), and lectures (jiangzuo 讲座). They would steer away from any activism – "*bikai changdong huodong* 避开倡导活动" (Interview No. 10).

As much as there are aspirations to be an official group, student organizations also recognize that there are costs associated with becoming an official student group. In order to maintain autonomy, groups might forgo official registration and opt to be an unregistered group. Firstly, groups face a lot of restrictions and are subject to supervision and monitoring. For instance, when it comes to holding events and hanging posters, approved organizations indicate they face a lot of limitations. For approved groups, they know they must be careful when submitting posters for review. They cannot include terms like homosexuality *tongxinglian* 同性恋, feminism *nuquan zhuyi* 女权主, or use the rainbow flag on posters (Interview No. 12, Interview No. 14). Approved groups have also detailed instances in which, events that have been successfully approved, have been cancelled at the last minute by university authorities. One group for example indicated that for years, they have organized the Vagina Monologue. There was a particular incident in 2018 however, in which after a discussion with the university Youth League Committee they were not allowed to promote the event on WeChat. Later they were told by the Youth League Committee that they could not hold the event on campus at all (Interview No. 14). For another officially registered LGBTQ student group, they received permission to organize a free-hug event, an initiative that is meant to promote tolerance and acceptance. An individual holds a sign to indicate they identify as LGBTQ and asks if people passing by would give them hug. They indicated that despite having received approval, they were being watched and after the event, had their camera taken and were told to delete the footage (Interview No. 12). Even among officially registered student groups, they face a number of restrictions. Having successfully obtained approval does not signify university support.

Given that approved groups face a number of limitations and are subject to surveillance, this further pushes groups to pursue a path of non-compliance. They can obtain approval and face

a litany of restrictions or take their chances and break the rules in hopes of not getting caught. The very rules universities created to control student clubs is what precisely move students farther away from the university institutions. Student groups that try to address social issues often face challenges in gaining approval; they are denied or unable to find a faculty member to act as their sponsor. In other cases, they are aware of how unlikely it is to obtain approval. As such they forgo registration altogether. Therefore, as student organizations are pushed to operate as unregistered groups, they are forced to engage in even more rule breaking and non-compliant behavior.

4.2.4 How Acts of Non-Compliance Unfold

Knowing that they are unlikely to obtain approval or if they do, they will face a lot of scrutiny and surveillance, student groups choose to exist as unregistered entities. Even among legally sanctioned groups, they are often forced to break rules given the attention they receive from university authorities. The most obvious act of non-compliance is that student clubs try to carry out their activities as a non-registered entity. As they attempt to carry out their activities, they are forced to engage in non-compliant behavior to survive. In doing so, they are essentially pushed further away from the reach of the university – the very opposite of what was intended by those rules and regulations.

As indicated, an important advantage of being an officially recognized student group is the ability to promote events widely, which can help expand membership. Official student clubs are allowed to set up booths at the university's *baituan dazhan* 百团大战 and after receiving review and approval, groups can openly promote events with posters and banners on campus. While this might be an incentive to register, unregistered student groups simply take their chances and flout these rules altogether. For instance, one women's-based student group indicated that they put up

posters and conceal them behind already approved posters, so they are not easily detected. They would strategically put-up posters by the communal shower rooms or where laundry is hung to dry – facilities that are almost exclusively used by students and therefore would not easily be detected by staff (Interview No. 17).

Unregistered student groups also lack the privilege to book classroom space or facilities to hold meetings and events. Rather than being deterred, student groups simply occupy classroom space in the hopes they go undetected. One unregistered women's-based group indicated they have prepared responses ahead of time if they were ever approached by security guards for using classrooms. Although they have not yet been approached or questioned by a security guard, they indicated that they would respond by saying they are merely working on a school project together or studying as a group (Interview No. 19).

There is also evidence of unregistered student groups seeking partnership with approved student organizations so that they can organize larger events and find legitimate ways to publicize their group. For an unregistered women's-based group, they have found that by jointly organizing events, they are able to use their logo on promotional materials without a problem (Interview No. 20). Further partnering with official student groups allows them to legitimately use classroom space and facilities and therefore reach a wider audience of students. By co-hosting with official student groups, they believe it helps legitimize their own group, makes their activities more legal – "*heban geng hefa* 合办更合法" (Interview No. 20). They have for instance co-hosted events with international students and the women's committee of the graduate student union – organizations whose interests and objectives overlap with theirs. LGBTQ student groups have for instance partnered with student film clubs or different departments to host film nights where they can show films with themes that touch on homosexuality (Interview No. 13). They also commonly

work with Red Cross chapters, which tend to be well-established official student clubs on campus, to organize events for World AIDS Day, such as distributing pamphlets and condoms (Interview No. 11). Despite the lack of an official status for some groups, there is evidence of partnership, assistance and cooperation among students and peers. It has not deterred students of official groups from working with them, which then provides unregistered groups a lifeline.

A similar strategy revealed by an unregistered women's however indicated concern about relying too much on the help of approved groups. Because they are unable to formally book classrooms and facilities for events, they have asked peers from approved student clubs to book in their name instead (Interview No. 24). They have expressed that they do not plan to rely too heavily on this method out of concern that they risk getting other students in trouble. As such they have turned to holding events outside of campus.

Unregistered groups do not have access to small subsidies or grants that are open to official student clubs often through the university's Youth League Committee. Groups have therefore devised creative strategies to survive under these precarious circumstances. They have turned to partners and sponsors outside of the university for resources and support as well as devised creative survival strategies to fundraise on their own. These survival strategies in essence push students to engage in further non-compliance, which increases distance between student groups and the reach of university authority.

Without access to subsides and grants and being unable to hold events on campus, student groups have lamented about the financial costs associated with having to hold events outside of the university. One group contemplated charging a fee for their events, but they feared that they could lose participants as a result (Interview No. 9). One avenue that several groups have tried has been fundraising on their own. Doing so without the knowledge and approval of the university

would be considered a violation for many schools. LGBTQ organizations have for instance sold merchandise (*xiaowupin* 小物品), such as pins, postcards, stickers, calendars, t-shirts, cell-phone cases, and face masks with designs of the rainbow flag, logos of their group, or expressions to encourage tolerance and acceptance in support the LGBTQ community (Participant Observation No. 11, Interview No. 4). At times groups sell these types of promotional items as part of a campaign such as to coincide with an international event like IDAHOT or World's AIDS Day. But groups have also relied on the sale of these small items to raise proceeds given their limited access to school resources. To find ways to raise funds, one unregistered LGBTQ group has also considered creating a counselling service to students in which they might charge a small fee (Interview No. 9). Lacking the eligibility to apply or compete for grants from their university, groups are forced to find ways to survive outside of their school, which consequently pushes them further away from the reach of the university.

Groups have also leveraged their social media page as means to solicit donations. Prior to 2017, previous versions of WeChat, provided a *tip* button at end of articles, called Reward or in Chinese 点赞. Similar to *liking* a post in Facebook for example, readers in WeChat could directly reward the authors of a post by giving a tip. Unregistered LGBTQ student groups used this mechanism to raise funds (Interview No. 4). After the removal of this tip function on WeChat in 2017, groups have created and shared QR Codes, which directly asks readers to donate to virtual wallets like their WeChat account or Zhifu 支付 account.

Survival strategies have also included developing connections with organizations outside of their university, such as with private businesses and civil society. As China's private sector has developed as the result of its growing economy, it has essentially created a lifeline for groups to

survive outside of the university, such that the unregistered status become irrelevant. Private businesses create a safe space and a platform that allows groups to grow.

As mentioned, as unregistered student groups face risks by holding events on campus, they are often forced to rely on the private sector to host events. Not unlike LGBTQ civil society organizations that emerged in the 1990s that also turned to bars and cafes, student organizations are also embedding themselves within these networks. They too have turned to cafes, independent cinemas, youth hostels, which are sometimes within proximity of universities. One particular venue is a youth hostel that has been used by various NGOs to host performances and lectures. It is located in a residential apartment complex, where its entrance is difficult to find. One must enter through the back of a grocery store that specializes in foreign imports (Participant Observation No. 18). These venues have become safe and reliable places on which student groups have come to depend. Private businesses become a node in this network for student groups, where individuals from other universities can come in contact with the club. Often, when a university student club runs an event, it might not be open to students from outside of that school. Therefore, holding events outside of the university at a private venue, allows student groups to raise their profile, attract new members and essentially build their own network.

Student groups have also developed ties and partnerships with private sectors to act as sponsors for events. In return for advertising a service or product, they can help offset the costs of renting an off-campus venue (Interview No. 19). Student groups have essentially found ways to survive outside of the school system by developing partnerships with private businesses.

In addition to private businesses that can provide safe venues for student groups or act as sponsors, student clubs have also developed ties with civil society organizations. As they develop ways to survive outside of the university, they become more connected to civil society

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organizations. These ties help student groups in a number of ways. One, they offer a platform for student organizations to advertise and raise their profile. For example, as part of Shanghai Pride's program of events, organizers held a showcase that included local student groups. Student groups had their own booths where they interacted with the public (Interview No. 11) This affords student groups an opportunity to recruit members and network with students and similar organizations. Student groups have also run events in conjunction with Shanghai Pride and therefore have benefitted from the exposure and cross-promotion.

Secondly, civil society organizations have also provided direct support by providing small grants and capacity-building opportunities. One civil society organization has for instance developed programs to directly support students in their efforts to address bullying, homophobia and harassment on campus. Their initiatives include classroom outreach, capacity building through training workshops, and small grants.

In 2014, this organization began hosting multi-day workshops for students. The goal of the workshop was to encourage students to make small changes within their own social circles However, a consequence was that participants from the workshop were inspired to create their own student groups at their respective universities (Interview No. 28). The organization now provides these student groups with assistance, such as with small grants (Interview No. 28). The grant application process is partly integrated into the workshops, in which student participants present their projects and vote for the winner (Interview No. 28). Not only do student groups benefit from the financial assistance, but they also learn skills about how to survive as an unregistered entity. For instance, as part of the grant evaluation process, organizations have to outline how they plan to minimize risk as well as provide alternative plans if their event or activity is canceled by authorities (Interview No. 28). The civil society organization cautions student groups to avoid

sensitive terms and encourages them to couch their language, more specifically to *package* their events – "*baozhuang* 包装" – so as to not raise security concerns. They are advised for instance to not use their photos on promotional materials that would reveal their identity. If during events they were ever approached by campus security, they could use the following pretexts to protect themselves, such as *working on a classroom assignment* or *making a film*. Through this civil society group's different initiatives, student organizations have in turn gained resources and tools about how navigate in a precarious environment as an unregistered group. Financial resources, networking and lesson-sharing allows student groups to stay afloat outside of the university regardless of their lack of official status.

The paradoxical consequence is that as universities devise way to regulate student clubs, they have in essence pushed them further from the reach of the university. The strict rules have not necessarily deterred students from forming organizations. Rather, students have engaged in further violations in order to survive. As they devise creative ways to sustain themselves as an unregistered student group, they in essence move away from being merely a student club confined to a single university to becoming part of civil society. They become a student-based organizations that attracts young people from across different universities, and potentially non-students. Students therefore engage in the very activities that the rules and regulations sought to deter in the very first place. Those very rules have in essence led to further acts of non-compliance creating a potentially bigger threat than intended. An escalation of these very violations comes in the form of advocacy and public-facing events – something that school authorities and the regime sees as potentially destabilizing. The potential for these groups to move beyond merely organizing small discussion groups amongst themselves to engaging in public advocacy reflects a key concern for the regime.

It is this potential to move beyond internal events (neibu huodong 内部活动) to public advocacy

activities (changdao huodong 倡导活动) that makes the regime wary.

4.2.5 From Internal Events to Public Advocacy

As discussed, the activities and initiatives by student groups can come in the form of

internal events neibu huodong 内部活动 or external, public-facing events. The former tends to be

smaller in size and for members-only. The latter has an awareness-raising component, in which

members seek to engage with the wider public. They sometimes can consist of small forms of

collective action. Symbolically important dates like Pride, IDAHOT, the anniversary of Stonewall

movement and International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, motivate NGOs

and student clubs alike to develop external, public-facing events. It is precisely these types of

public advocacy events that attract the attention of school authorities and public security. Once

student groups engage in these types of activities, they move away from merely being a small

group of friends and peers to a more organized entity. The transformation from student group to

civil society is even more apparent.

An important event for the LGBTQ community in China is the International Day against

Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT). It falls on May 17th and groups often use the

term 5.17 or *wu-yao-qi* to denote the special day. Like Pride, it marks an important day to show

support and create a sense of community and belonging. However, a key difference is that it is not

run by a single organizer nor by marked by a single program. Rather many groups mark this day

with their own initiatives. These initiatives have run the gamut from individualized forms of

participation to collectively organized events.

For instance, in 2013 unregistered student groups and NGOs organized a street procession just outside of a university in Changsha. They held banners and rainbow flags, and chanted slogans (Engebretsen, 2015). Despite choosing a less conspicuous location by the river instead of the downtown square, organizers were later taken away by police for questioning (Engebretsen, 2015). Out of caution, more individualized forms of participation have emerged. Instead of gathering as a group, members are encouraged people to express support individually (Fu, 2017a). For example, they may be asked to take photos of themselves with a rainbow flag and post it along with a message about May 17th. One organization which coordinated the Run for Love event in 2020 asked people to run 5.17 kilometers and use the hashtag #517RunForLove in their social media. They did not want individuals to run in large groups, nor was it a publicly coordinated event (Shephard, 2018). These individualized expressions of support are done out of caution to avoid attracting the state's attention.

To commemorate these events, groups also use the power of symbols and performance to convey their support and solidarity. Events such as free hugs campaign (*yongbao huodong* 拥抱活动), rainbow bike rides (*caihong qixng* 彩虹骑行) and flag raising events (*yangqi de caihong qi* 扬起的彩虹旗) have been organized by different student groups over the years. For instance, an LGBTQ student group has organized a flag unveiling event every year to mark IDAHOT. On the steps of their university building, a group of students unfold a massive rainbow flag, with multiple students flanked on each side as they unfurl it across the steps. Group pictures are taken, and videos are made, which are then posted on their social media page to further raise awareness. The event does not take the form of a traditional street demonstration but rather its impact lies in its symbolic importance. In the initial years when they held this event, security guards had approached them. Students were easily able to ease their concerns and told them that they were

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only taking pictures for graduation (Interview No. 4). The student organizers did not believe the security guards understood the symbolism behind the rainbow flag (Interview No. 4). However, increasingly there is tension around May 17th and during the time of interviews in 2017 and 2018, student groups have been warned about participating in events for IDAHOT.

Rainbow flag events have been a predominant part of many of the commemorative events for IDAHOT. While unveiling a large rainbow may not be so easy to replicate again, especially as school authorities try to dissuade students from participating, student groups still find ways to incorporate it to mark the special day. Unlike the flag unveiling, which is very public and coordinated, student groups have adapted to make their commemorative events appear as though they are individualized acts that have not been directed by a group. This type of strategizing is not uncommon among NGOs, in which scholar Diana Fu has observed among labor organizations. Instead of seeing protests, strikes, walk-outs and other forms of organized collective action which would lead to police arrests and clampdown, labor organizations coordinate individualized-forms of action (Fu, 2017a). By doing so, the actions appear spontaneous and uncoordinated, even though behind the scenes they have been purposely designed as such to avoid arrest by authorities.

For example, as part of their activities to celebrate IDAHOT, one unregistered LGBTQ student group had planned a mass bike ride, where participants would hold the rainbow flag while riding their bikes down a road. Like other events for IDAHOT, the symbolism of their act is of greater importance. Taking a group photo and later using it on social media is an important part of the activity in addition to the act itself. The plan was to organize short ride outside of campus to not attract the attention of school authorities. They also wanted to give the impression that it was a spontaneous event that was unplanned, so it would look like they were participating in a flash mob – kuaishan 快闪 (Interview No. 11). The group however ended up cancelling the event

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because there were over a hundred students signed up. They thought it was prudent to not carry out the activity because there were too many participants, and the event would attract too much attention (Interview No. 11). They had also previously organized an event in which they had distributed rainbow flags and pins to students on campus. At the end of the event, she and another student were given a warning by a staff member within her university's Youth League Committee. These warnings and the general risks associated with IDAHOT-related events had made them wary about whether they could organize advocacy-oriented activities in the future (Interview No. 11).

Flash demonstrations have been a common strategy among NGOs and student groups, in which they organize a brief, small-scale activity. The impact and message lies in the symbolism of the performance rather than the size or direct message (Fu, 2017a). To show support for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, an unregistered student group that is mainly focused on gender, organized an event that had several students wear make up to look like victims of domestic violence. They carried placards in support of the international day and handed out information provided by local NGOs (Interview No. 16). It was a small group of participants, with about 3 students in costume and about 9 to10 students helping to distribute information and carry signs (Interview No. 16). Therefore, the impact of a demonstration like this, is not from the size of the group but through the use of performance. While they were successful in the first year of the event, the following year they were stopped by campus security who asked that students provide the names of their political guidance counsellors fudaoyuan 辅导员.

Because of clampdowns, groups have also sought to individualize their public-facing activities, so they do not appear as if they were coordinated. Instead of open celebrations and coordinated displays of the rainbow flag, groups encourage student members to participate individually. For instance, one group encouraged members to change the profile picture of their

social media page to display a photo of themselves with the rainbow flag. Other groups asked members to hang flags or flag pins from their dorm room, clothes, or their school bags (Interview No. 9). Seemingly individualized acts are in fact coordinated by a group beforehand to limit the risks associated with collective action. Groups also used this opportunity to fundraise by selling merchandise items like rainbow flags, pins, face masks which they can wear in celebration of IDAHOT (Participation Observation No. 11). They encourage members to take photos of their newly purchased items and to send their photos to the group's WeChat account, which they use to create a blog post about IDAHOT. Again, it is not always about the act itself, but also how they can use the event to generate content and traction on their social media.

Despite the individualized nature of their activities, students have faced challenges. A student who had hung a rainbow flag from their dorm room window was told to take it down and that by hanging the flag from one of the university's buildings, it would give the impression that the university condones the LGBTQ movement. In an interview, members of the student group believe the university does not want to openly support LGBTQ groups (Interview No. 9)

From overt demonstrations to artistic expressions that resemble a flash mob and individualized acts of participation, student groups are motivated to find ways to engage in advocacy and public-facing events. With clamp downs and universities strongly discouraging students from participating in these types of activities, student groups may be pushed from open, public-facing events to more private, internal neibu 内部 initiatives. Groups might not be dissuaded from observing or organizing altogether but they find ways to organize that is not obvious or in clear violation of university rules. Depending on how effective authorities are in discouraging, disciplining, and deterring students from participating and organizing these types of public-facing events, student groups nevertheless show the desire to engage in them. Therefore,

the potential for these types of student groups to engage in non-compliance and develop such that their activities escalate into public-facing advocacy is ever present. But how visible and overt they are, is a reaction to how well authorities try to stamp them out.

4.3 Conclusion

The rise of unregistered student groups challenges the regime in a few ways. Universities are deeply concerned with student-led mobilization and the politization of student activity. They create a litany of rules and regulations to deter students. But the result is that students willingly violated these rules. Knowing that their group might not gain approval, or if they did, they would be subject to surveillance, students choose to exist as unregistered entities. They devise creative strategies to help them survive outside of the university's confines because they lacked the resources to promote, recruit and fund their events. Their unregistered status also pushed them to seek help outside of the university, namely from private businesses and civil society groups. This allowed students to develop and create a network outside of their school. They in essence became a civil organization, not merely a student organization made up of friends and peers. This is certainly the case for LGBT student organizations that developed inside China's elite universities. They had grown in influence and reach that in July 2021, the regime banned over 15 LGBT organizations on WeChat in a swift act that caught groups by surprise (Gan & Xiong, 2021). The second challenge these groups present is that as they develop the skills to survive outside of the university, they shift from internal events to more external, public-advocacy activities. They become a more activated and organized as their initiatives seek to have greater impact outside of their immediate membership base.

5.0 Conclusion

This project endeavors to introduce a different lens to the study of student activism and contentious politics in China. I assert that in lieu of studying overt political demonstrations, acts of non-compliance and rule-breaking are also pertinent outcomes of interest, especially in authoritarian contexts. Given China's capacity to use repression, large-scale oppositional protests, especially by students, are infrequent. The Tiananmen protests of 1989 marked a significant challenge to the legitimacy of the Party. A number of scholars have argued that university campuses in the post-1989 period are no longer hotbeds of political debate and activity. The claim is that students are also not particularly interested in politics, especially concerning abstract and lofty ideas about democracy and political freedoms. A longstanding view has been that Chinese university students are largely apathetic and have been successfully co-opted by the regime (Lu, 2017; Perry, 2014; Y. Wang, 2016).

This perspective however does not paint an accurate picture given much evidence that students are politically engaged and resist university control. When student members of various university Marxist organizations were arrested for helping factory workers unionize, it precisely challenged the idea that students are politically disengaged. It revealed that contrary to the idea of a subdued and obedient student population, young people are indeed interested in an array of social issues facing China, from labor, gender equality to LGBTQ issues. The incident also suggested that it was not a spontaneous event by students, but rather Marxist student organizations have existed as a group for some time and have been challenging university authorities with their various initiatives. It signaled that rule-breaking and non-compliance on Chinese campuses is not isolated

to these Marxist student groups. Rule-breaking and non-compliance might be more common than previously understood.

The emergence of LGBTQ and women's-based student organizations further demonstrate that students are motivated by social issues. They willingly violate university rules and often receive warnings from political personnel for their activities. They endeavor to create a sense of community and belonging for their peers, actively engage in fundraising efforts and organize public-facing activities to raise awareness. The emergence of these clubs and their use of evasive strategies to survive demonstrate that it would be mistaken to assume the regime is completely successful in securing political compliance.

Non-compliance in an authoritarian context, as James Scott has argued, is a political act (Scott, 1990). Given the coercive capacity of the regime, it is not surprising to observe citizens perform or feign loyalty, but in private they may reject political norms. Outlets to contest power therefore do not occur in obvious ways. This study postulates that the rise of student clubs in Chinese universities is a consequence of what happens when loyalty and compliance is merely performed. Using the example of the Soviet Union, citizens learned to *speak Bolshevik* in public spaces. In doing so, it obscured how gradually instances of non-compliance that were not easily observable contributed to disillusionment with the Soviet system. While young people dutifully participated in state-sponsored activities, the norms associated with being a Soviet citizen gradually eroded. This created a space for informal associations, *neformaly* to emerge, many of which later became politicized and oppositional.

At the heart of this study is a dynamic that reflects a back and forth between the regime and its citizens. The former constructs a myriad of ways to assert control and indoctrinate support. When we see a strong authoritarian regime and the absence of oppositional mobilization, it might

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be easy to deduce that it has effective control over the populace. Citizens may seemingly comply, but beneath the surface, citizens find ways to resist in less overt ways. University campuses in China offer an interesting lens to study this dynamic. There is an environment of intense control, monitoring and indoctrination. The rise of unregistered student clubs is a precise example of non-compliance. The study calls into question the idea that outward and performative loyalty are enough for regime stability. Acting *as if* loyal disguises the extent to which non-compliance occurs beyond the surface.

China's history of student-led movements very much informs why the regime has constructed an expansive system of control. Historical student movements have shaped the regime's fears of student activism in several ways. In the discussion of the May Fourth movement, there is a fear that activists can alter the narrative to advance their own agenda. Student activists during the Tiananmen protests evoked the image of the May Fourth movement. Secondly, the various student movements also revealed how the rise of autonomous organizations were critical in mobilizing students and society at large. The rise of student organizations led to the formation of inter-collegiate associations and networks that expanded the size of the demonstrations. Further the origins of these groups were not necessarily political to begin with. They showed how politically innocuous student groups can be destabilizing. What the Tiananmen protests also revealed is how institutional controls built by the CCP unraveled. Therefore, another threat is not only the rise of student groups, but that the emergence of student clubs also signals the rejection of official institutions.

It is because of the destabilizing potential that can arise from a politicized student population that the Chinese regime has sought to strengthen its program of political education and enhance its monitoring capacity. Section 1 described the university ecosystem, which categorized

the different mechanisms of control as *soft* and *hard methods*. The former described how political education is imparted through formal courses. The regime endeavors to inculcate political compliance by linking political obedience with moral virtue. Included in these formal political education courses are also narratives around national humiliation and victimhood, which reflect an effort to strengthen young people's sense of patriotism and decrease the appeal of western ideas. Further, by limiting the autonomy of the Student Union, university authorities can influence the extracurricular space. The regime also expends significant resources on personnel to engineer its system of political control. The monitoring capacity of the regime is enhanced through the deployment of political guidance counselors who also supervise branch level activities by the CYL and CCP. Lastly, there is an extensive set of rules designed to depoliticize the extracurricular space. University authorities have the power to gatekeep clubs, terminate groups, and cancel events. Managing student clubs is therefore key to campus security. The emergence of unregistered student groups therefore raises the question about how they can form given a seemingly tight system of control.

Section 2 identifies the limitations and problems that a university faces in its attempt to secure compliance. While the regime has engineered an extensive system of political control, in practice however, compliance and rule following are not so easy to achieve. Firstly, the CYL and CCP branches might not be effective institutions to ensure political compliance. The incentive structure has changed such that it is unlikely that students engage in peer surveillance. Despite their unofficial status, members of unregistered student group often found support from their peers. A second challenge is that the regime might be limited in terms of which subpopulations it can control. I found that students from elite universities, have a higher proclivity to support demonstrations and disobedient behavior. Even though, the regime heavily recruits party members

from elite universities, they may be more resistant to indoctrination efforts. Further, career aspirations have an impact on whether the regime can secure compliance. Both party members and non-members alike are exposed to considerable ideological education through formal classes and through CYL and CCP branches. But it is only among students, who are interested in a career in the Party-state sector, that are the most politically obedient. In sum, the pool of politically reliable students is particularly narrow for the regime. The CCP can only turn to those who are already have high political attachment, that is individuals who are Party members and who seek a job in the Party-state sector. As such, when it comes to the effectiveness of peer surveillance at the class-level, *ban* (班), university authorities might not be able to count on other students to effectively fulfill their duties and surveil their peers. Even among party members, those who are interested in seeking a career in the research sector, such as in universities, have a slightly higher tendency to support demonstration and disobedience. This does not bode well given the regime relies on staff and faculty to keep students in line.

Section 3 presented a close look at student organizing by examining the emergence of unofficial student clubs, specifically ones that are concerned with LGBTQ and women's-based issues. I assert that when acts of non-compliance go unnoticed, the emergence of student clubs can pose a threat in two ways. Firstly, as they are pushed further away from the university, student groups develop creative strategies to survive. For example, they seek sponsorship and support from outside organizations, particularly from businesses and NGOs. In doing so, they violate the very rules designed to control student clubs. They are in turn able to survive outside the walls of the university and therefore can morph into a civil society organization. Secondly, as student groups engage in non-compliance, they develop the skills and capacity to move beyond internal events to public advocacy and external-facing activities. A paradox is that the university's strict rules

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designed to manage student clubs, pushes them further away from the university. As a result, they develop the skills and capacity to become an autonomous organization and it becomes difficult for university authorities to gain control over them.

This study makes important contributions to the study of civil society, political control, contentious politics, and student activism. The rise of unofficial student organizations calls into question the narrative that Chinese students are apathetic and co-opted, and that the university's system of control is unmatched. It provides a crucial lens to study a more realistic dynamic that occurs in an authoritarian country

There are many ways to expand on this project. One avenue is to consider longitudinally whether student groups experience lifecycles. For instance, civil society groups in China are sometimes short lived because they are often forced to shut down. But sometimes groups reemerge in a different form and with a different name. My study postulated that student non-compliance can escalate and become a challenge for the regime. Specifically, as unregistered student clubs develop the skills to survive outside of the university, they have the potential to become a node in the wider network of civil society organizations. However, in July of 2017, a number of LGBTQ student organizations faced a significant setback (Gan, 2017) The public WeChat accounts of fifteen groups were shut down. With China's crackdown on feminist activists, Marxist student groups and more recently LGBTQ student groups, an interesting question arises about their lifecycle. Cursory evidence shows that many of these groups strive to continue with their mission; they have reverted to email newsletter systems and Github accounts, which are not so easily censored in China. Does political repression, lead to the demise of these groups or do they reemerge in a different form? Lastly, is there variation in terms of which clubs had their accounts removed. There may be interesting implications about the political importance of the university,

in which the group is based, or the size and scale of the group's activities that might have attracted the attention of authorities. The recent pressure civil society and student groups have faced raises important questions about their sustainability and to what extent acts of non-compliance becomes threatening to the regime.

Appendix A Non-Linear Regression Models

Table 7 Ordered Logistic Regression Model

Variables	(1) Support for Demonstrations	(2) Disobeying Authorities
Political Status: Plan to Apply	0.824*	0.694***
	(0.0932)	(0.0769)
Political Status: CCP Member	0.702***	0.607***
	(0.0953)	(0.0822)
Career Choice: Private Sector	1.373***	1.098
	(0.153)	(0.120)
Career Choice: Public Service Inst.	1.339**	1.024
	(0.180)	(0.135)
Plan to Apply x Private Sector	0.853	1.102
	(0.120)	(0.152)
Plan to Apply x Public Service Inst.	0.766	0.976
	(0.130)	(0.162)
CCP Member x Private Sector	0.846	1.083
	(0.162)	(0.203)
CCP Member x Public Service Inst.	1.074	1.188
	(0.231)	(0.249)
CCP Parent	0.949	0.939
	(0.0513)	(0.0497)
Class rank percentile	1.094	0.827*
	(0.124)	(0.0925)
Junior/Sophomore	0.933	1.080
	(0.0540)	(0.0608)
Strata 2: Renmin	0.915	1.115
	(0.114)	(0.137)
Strata 3: Tsinghua	0.878	0.868
	(0.110)	(0.106)
Strata 4: Project 211 Schools	0.596***	0.754***
	(0.0622)	(0.0761)
Strata 5: Non-Project 211 Schools	0.487***	0.830
	(0.0591)	(0.0975)
Strata 6: Beijing Min. of Edu. Schools	0.530***	0.859
	(0.0581)	(0.0911)
/cut1	0.0994***	0.00139***
	(0.0148)	(0.000480)
/cut2	0.427***	0.119***
	(0.0622)	(0.0174)
/cut3	1.605***	0.259***
	(0.233)	(0.0373)
/cut4	7.203***	0.448***
	(1.082)	(0.0640)
/cut5		0.630***
		(0.0898)
/cut6		1.569***
		(0.223)

Table 7: Logistic Regression Model (Continued)

/cut7		2.369***
		(0.339)
/cut8		3.760***
		(0.542)
/cut9		8.225***
		(1.226)
/cut10		15.10***
		(2.364)
h9b		
Observations	4,514	4,513

seEform in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 8 Generalized Logistic Model (Support for Demonstrations)

Variables	1	2	3	4
Political Status: Plan to Apply	0.915	0.748**	0.880	0.786
	(0.161)	(0.0974)	(0.129)	(0.187)
Political Status: CCP Member	0.980	0.654***	0.665**	0.273***
	(0.218)	(0.103)	(0.123)	(0.106)
Career Choice: Private Sector	1.463**	1.140	1.613***	1.461*
	(0.267)	(0.147)	(0.224)	(0.314)
Career Choice: Public Service Inst.	1.298	1.200	1.438**	1.617**
	(0.289)	(0.189)	(0.236)	(0.394)
Plan to Apply x Private Sector	0.761	0.997	0.766	0.909
	(0.172)	(0.161)	(0.137)	(0.260)
Plan to Apply x Public Service Inst.	0.654	0.821	0.880	0.538*
	(0.177)	(0.161)	(0.186)	(0.187)
CCP Member x Private Sector	0.640	1.006	0.790	1.954
	(0.201)	(0.222)	(0.201)	(0.942)
CCP Member x Public Service Inst.	0.747	1.118	1.340	2.056
	(0.260)	(0.277)	(0.363)	(1.034)
CCP Parent	0.960	0.958	0.914	1.022
	(0.0841)	(0.0595)	(0.0618)	(0.111)
Class rank percentile	1.457**	1.101	1.011	0.867
	(0.267)	(0.144)	(0.142)	(0.194)
Junior/Sophomore	0.917	0.912	0.922	1.143
	(0.0851)	(0.0607)	(0.0665)	(0.131)
Strata 2: Renmin	1.514*	0.925	0.870	0.838
	(0.348)	(0.138)	(0.125)	(0.175)
Strata 3: Tsinghua	1.312	0.923	0.845	0.729
	(0.294)	(0.138)	(0.121)	(0.155)
Strata 4: Project 211 Schools	0.809	0.655***	0.543***	0.496***
	(0.140)	(0.0802)	(0.0651)	(0.0872)
Strata 5: Non-Project 211 Schools	0.772	0.495***	0.459***	0.391***
	(0.153)	(0.0696)	(0.0670)	(0.0907)

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Table 8 Generalized Logistic Model (Support for Demonstrations) (Continued)

Strata 6: Beijing Min. of Edu. Schools	0.735*	0.565***	0.498***	0.462***
	(0.133)	(0.0721)	(0.0636)	(0.0887)
Constant	5.794***	2.476***	0.630***	0.160***
	(1.389)	(0.416)	(0.110)	(0.0432)
Observations	4,514	4,514	4,514	4,514

Table 9 Generalized Logistic Model (Disobeying Authorities)

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Political Status: Plan to Apply	0.984	0.680**	0.767*	0.750**	0.700***	0.658***	0.684**	0.629***	0.482***	0.315***
	(1.268)	(0.121)	(0.109)	(0.0980)	(0.0894)	(0.0905)	(0.104)	(0.113)	(0.126)	(0.109)
Political Status: CCP Member	1.028e+06	0.735	0.629***	0.554***	0.510***	0.656**	0.693*	0.691*	0.774	0.459*
	(1.470e+09)	(0.156)	(0.106)	(0.0874)	(0.0800)	(0.112)	(0.132)	(0.155)	(0.232)	(0.187)
Career Choice: Private Sector	0.387	0.996	1.104	1.017	1.008	1.118	1.197	1.295	1.508*	1.193
	(0.430)	(0.179)	(0.158)	(0.132)	(0.127)	(0.146)	(0.171)	(0.209)	(0.325)	(0.321)
Career Choice: Public Service Inst.	1.895e+06	0.986	1.061	0.991	0.921	1.009	1.060	1.195	1.412	1.141
	(2.716e+09)	(0.211)	(0.182)	(0.154)	(0.139)	(0.159)	(0.183)	(0.231)	(0.358)	(0.357)
Plan to Apply x Private Sector	4.867	1.323	1.071	1.103	1.072	1.171	1.058	1.024	1.236	1.708
	(8.022)	(0.292)	(0.190)	(0.179)	(0.170)	(0.199)	(0.199)	(0.226)	(0.384)	(0.709)
Plan to Apply x Public Service Inst.	4.70e-07	1.277	0.904	0.954	0.999	0.939	0.924	1.001	0.798	0.935
	(0.000673)	(0.337)	(0.191)	(0.185)	(0.190)	(0.195)	(0.213)	(0.265)	(0.311)	(0.503)
CCP Member x Private Sector	3.527	1.258	1.324	1.395	1.294	0.782	0.763	0.548*	0.512	0.763
	(8,630)	(0.378)	(0.317)	(0.308)	(0.283)	(0.193)	(0.208)	(0.184)	(0.225)	(0.444)
CCP Member x Public Service Inst.	5.58e-07	1.188	1.372	1.380	1.481	0.889	0.811	1.059	0.784	1.243
	(0.00163)	(0.393)	(0.366)	(0.339)	(0.359)	(0.242)	(0.246)	(0.360)	(0.362)	(0.769)
CCP Parent	1.080	0.898	0.962	0.985	0.955	0.909	0.912	0.970	0.902	0.934
	(0.693)	(0.0741)	(0.0644)	(0.0608)	(0.0581)	(0.0607)	(0.0673)	(0.0827)	(0.105)	(0.141)
Class rank percentile	5.581	0.977	0.859	0.846	0.823	0.765*	0.822	0.663**	0.686	0.427***
	(7.128)	(0.171)	(0.121)	(0.110)	(0.106)	(0.108)	(0.128)	(0.118)	(0.164)	(0.136)
Junior/Sophomore	1.394	0.945	1.082	1.132*	1.153**	1.045	1.081	1.101	1.157	1.261
	(0.941)	(0.0828)	(0.0769)	(0.0744)	(0.0747)	(0.0740)	(0.0845)	(0.0995)	(0.142)	(0.198)
Strata 2: Renmin	4.66e-07	1.085	1.114	1.054	0.975	1.185	1.189	1.250	1.448	1.775*
	(0.000587)	(0.215)	(0.176)	(0.153)	(0.137)	(0.173)	(0.187)	(0.222)	(0.339)	(0.541)
Strata 3: Tsinghua	2.79e-07	0.997	0.949	0.810	0.878	0.818	0.786	0.900	0.966	0.961
	(0.000351)	(0.195)	(0.148)	(0.116)	(0.123)	(0.123)	(0.129)	(0.166)	(0.238)	(0.316)

Table 9 Generalized Logistic Model (Disobeying Authorities) (Continued)

Strata 4: Project 211 Schools	6.79e-07	0.769*	0.837	0.744**	0.704***	0.764**	0.739**	0.754*	0.693*	0.717
	(0.000854)	(0.122)	(0.107)	(0.0884)	(0.0813)	(0.0935)	(0.0984)	(0.115)	(0.145)	(0.202)
Strata 5: Non-Project 211 Schools	3.24e-07	1.063	1.034	0.797	0.757**	0.719**	0.743*	0.771	1.035	0.847
	(0.000408)	(0.202)	(0.157)	(0.110)	(0.102)	(0.105)	(0.118)	(0.140)	(0.241)	(0.272)
Strata 6: Beijing Min. of Edu. Schools	8.04e-07	1.003	1.001	0.840	0.882	0.790*	0.693***	0.706**	0.781	0.996
	(0.00101)	(0.171)	(0.137)	(0.105)	(0.107)	(0.102)	(0.0982)	(0.114)	(0.171)	(0.283)
Constant	2.849e+08	7.300***	3.107***	2.152***	1.695***	0.720*	0.449***	0.287***	0.117***	0.0940***
	(3.586e+11)	(1.674)	(0.566)	(0.360)	(0.276)	(0.123)	(0.0836)	(0.0609)	(0.0346)	(0.0354)
Observations	4,513	4,513	4,513	4,513	4,513	4,513	4,513	4,513	4,513	4,513

Appendix B Description of Fieldwork

I conducted fieldwork between February 2016 to December 2017 and I returned to China in the summer of 2018. During my first visit, I was a visiting student through the Confucius China Studies Program PhD Research Fellowship. My project originally began as an investigation about political socialization in Chinese university campuses, and how the incentives to join the Communist Party membership among students have changed. In an effort to study this question, I sat in on political education classes. There, a student noticed that I had jumped the Great Firewall to access websites like Google and Facebook, which are censored in China. It was from this interaction that the student shared information about a student club he was a part of. He told me the name and asked if I understood its meaning, to which I replied I did not. While the name did not explicitly include the word rainbow (*caihong* 彩虹) he explained it was a reference to a rainbow, which symbolizes the LGBTQ movement. It intrigued me that a student group would refrain from using the word *caihong* explicitly in their name and that there existed LGBTQ student groups in China. Their unregistered status began my journey to understand the question of student participation and efforts to control and indoctrinate students. In Beijing I participated in a number of events, where I could develop personal contacts through which I could learn more about these types of student organizations and recruit subjects to interview. I relied on a snowball method to expand the pool of my interview subjects. I would ask interviewees if they can recommend an organization or provide a contact person. The other way that I recruited interview subjects was by directly contacting groups through their social media page. Many of these student organizations have a public WeChat page. There, they often post information about upcoming and past events, background about the group as well as blogs or essays usually written by their members. For

organizations in which I did not have a contact, I reached out to organizations directly through their WeChat page to participate in my study as an interview subject.

Given the political sensitivity around unregistered student clubs, I did not record my interviews and relied on semi-structured interviews. Along with taking notes during my interviews, upon finishing my interviews, I would write down the contents of our conversation. My interviews are therefore paraphrases of the events and experiences shared by members of student clubs, NGOs, and university personnel.

Table 10 Participant Observations

No	Description	Region	Date
1	Documentary screening of *Rainbow Papa*, Q&A with director Fan Popo hosted by Yenching Academy at Peking University	Huabei	23-Nov-16
2	Peking University singing competition to commemorate December Nineth student movement	Huabei	9-Dec-16
3	Public event by Group 20: group discussion about bullying	Huabei	16-Dec-16
4	Bcome production of *Vagina Monologue* (*Yindao Zhidao* 阴道之道)	Huabei	30-Dec-16
5	Women's-based NGO workshop for internal members	Huabei	15-Jan-17
6	International Girl's Day (observation of student banners on university campus)	Huabei	7-Mar-17
7	Panel discussion with female creators and directors: *Women's Theater Invitational Exhibition* (*nuxing xiju yaoqing zhan* 女性戏剧邀请展）	Huabei	8-Mar-17
8	Peking University Marxist Student Association guest lecture: *Women and Contemporary China: Three Phenomena and Three Periods* (*Nuxing yu dangdai zhongguo: san ge xianxiang yu san ge shiqi* 女性与当代中国三个现象与三个时期)	Huabei	19-May-17
9	BCome production of Vagina Monologue (*Yindao zhidao* 阴道之道)	Huabei	28-Mar-17
10	Guangzhou Gender and Sexuality Education Center presentation: *Report on Sexual Harassment on Chinese College Campuses* (*Zhongguo daxue zai xiao he biyesheng zaoyu xingsaorao zhuangkuang diaocha* 中国在校和毕业生遭遇性骚扰状况调查)	Huabei	12-Apr-17
11	Group fundraiser by Group 6: students pick-up pre-purchased fundraiser items (i.e., face masks)	Huabei	15-May-17
12	Internal event "Neibu Huodong" by Group 6: debate on "Cooperative Marriages" to mark 5.17	Huabei	20-May-17
13	WOW Women in the World Arts Festival (*Shijie nuxing yishu jie* 世界女性艺术节): BCome presentation about Vagina Monologue initiative	Huabei	22-Sep-17
14	Public event by Group 20: film night and group discussion. Title of film: *Iron Jawed Angels*	Huabei	14-Oct-17
15	Panel discussion *Visual Queer Activism in China and Africa* as part of *Intersections: Love Queer Cinema Week* (*Ai ku dianying zhou* 爱酷电影周）	Huabei	4-Nov-17
16	Internal event "Neibu Huodong" by Group 19: "Know your Identity" Discussion group	Huabei	5-Nov-17
17	Peking University Center for Human Rights: Guest lecture by LGBTQ NGO on SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression) and transgender discrimination	Huabei	22-Nov-17
18	*100 Hands, 1000 Households 2017 Domestic Worker Arts Festival and Photo Exhibit* (*Bai shou cheng jia 2017 nian jiazheng gong yishu jie yu yingxiang jihua kaimu* 百手撑家 2017 年家政工艺术节与影像计划开幕）	Huabei	25-Nov-17
19	Film screening of *Summer's Desire* (*Zai yushui chongbu de jijie* 在雨水充沛的季节） and director Q&A hosted by Vagina Project	Huabei	1-Dec-17
20	Public event by Group 14: Raising awareness about feminine hygiene products	Huabei	9-Dec-17
21	Internal event "Neibu Huodong" by Group 15: Discussion and group activities on the topic of domestic violence	Huabei	10-Dec-17

Table 11 Individual-Level Subject Interviews

IND. NO/INTV NO	REGION	TYPE	GROUP NO.	FOCUS	APPROVED STATUS	NO. MTGS	NO IN ATTENDANCE	DATE
1	HUABEI	Student	1	INTL_VOLUNEERISM	No	1	1	1/1/2017
2	HUABEI	Student	2	INTL_VOLUNEERISM	Yes	1	1	3/17/2021
3	HUANAN	Student	3	LGBTQQ	Yes	1	1	5/13/2017
4	HUANAN	Student	4	LGBTQQ	No	1	1	5/11/2017
5	HUABEI	Student	5	LGBTQQ	No	1	1	12/22/2016
6	HUABEI	Student	6	LGBTQQ	No	1	1	12/13/2016
7	HUABEI	Student	6	LGBTQQ	No	1	1	12/7/2016
8	HUABEI	Student	7	LGBTQQ	Yes	1	1	12/1/2017
9	HUABEI	Student	8	LGBTQQ	No	1	1	6/19/2018
10	JIANGNAN	Student	9	LGBTQQ	No	1	2	6/17/2018
11	JIANGNAN	Student	10	LGBTQQ	No	1	3	6/16/2018
12	JIANGNAN	Student	11	LGBTQQ	Yes	1	2	6/14/2018
13	JIANGNAN	Student	12	LGBTQQ	Yes	1	1	6/16/2018
14	JIANGNAN	Student	13	LGBTQQ	Yes	1	1	6/14/2018
15	HUABEI	Student	14	Women	Yes	1	1	11/26/2017
16	HUABEI	Student	15	Women	No	1	1	12/8/2016
17	HUABEI	Student	15	Women	No	2	1	1/7/2017
18	HUABEI	Student	15	Women	No	1	1	4/26/2017
19	HUABEI	Student	16	Women	No	1	1	11/26/2017
20	HUABEI	Student	17	Women	No	1	1	11/27/2017
21	HUABEI	Student	17	Women	No	2	1	12/15/2016
22	HUABEI	Student	18	Women	No	1	1	3/19/2017
23	HUABEI	Student	19	Women	No	1	1	12/28/2016
24	HUABEI	Student	19	Women	No	2	1	1/3/2017
25	HUABEI	Student	19	Women	No	1	1	11/19/2017

Table 11 Individual-Level Subject Interviews (Continued)

26	HUABEI	Student	20	Women	No	1	1	12/24/2016
27	HUABEI	Social Organization	21	Women	No	1	1	12/20/2017
28	HUABEI	Social Organization	22	LGBTQ	No	1	1	12/2/2017
29	JIANGNAN	University Personnel	23			1	1	6/15/2018

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