An important component of the Chinese government’s strategy to modernize China entails enhancing the social and political status of a new moneyed urban middle class, particularly white-collar professionals and private entrepreneurs. In many ways, this strategy has been remarkably successful. In contrast to urban young people of the 1980s, who were often “searching for life’s meaning”, contemporary youth are success-oriented and openly seek “the good life”.¹ A

recent ten-province survey by the State Statistical Bureau among people with income levels above 60,000 yuan a year revealed that the largest cluster was in the 30-40 year old age bracket—China’s yuppies—and they have become the new publicized role models, no longer “model workers” unselfishly serving the Party and the state. The newly affluent have enthusiastically embraced and become eager consumers in the global marketplace, and that has become a core aspiration also of China’s urban young people.

The following pages will examine the effects on popular attitudes of the regime’s emphasis on performance and material success as a source of status—including the acceptance of growing social stratification. I will argue that “value”, in a material sense, has become a key indicator of worth. Thus, as will be seen, upwardly mobile people are reluctant to interact with those from the lower strata, for fear that such contact will tarnish their image. Money has also become essential for success across generations, by way of an increasingly commercialized educational system where access to schooling has become increasingly dependent on one’s family’s wealth. What is striking is the open acceptance of these changes by the government. Parallel to this reshaping of

\[2\] Gaige neican (Inside Information on Economic Reform), No. 20, 2001, p. 45.
regime norms, individuals are now much more willing to acknowledge their selfish motivations, and even more the selfish motivations of others.\(^3\)

**Stratification, Pragmatism, and Materialism**

A decade ago, although they were already engaged in extensive surveys on the topic, social scientists in China were generally restricted from openly publishing revealing details on the increasing stratification of Chinese society. As administrators at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences told me at the time, such public discussion was not considered conducive to social stability. In the last few years, however, there has been a virtual cottage industry of books and articles precisely on the new strata that make up Chinese society, replete with extensive

statistical, survey and public opinion data. A particularly prominent theme has been the rise of the middle class, especially those in white-collar professions. In addition to the academic press, popular magazines have widely reported on the

4 The most authoritative study was supervised by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: Lu Xueyi et al (eds), Dangdai Zhongguo shehui jieceng yanjiu baogao (A Research Report on Social Stratification in Contemporary China) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2001). For an interesting review of this volume and the implications of its findings, see Su Shaozhi, “Shehui jiegou bu heli jiang yinf a shehui dongdang” (The Irrational Social Structure Will Lead to Social Upheaval), Zhengming (Contention) (Hong Kong), No. 5, May 2002, pp. 53-7. An earlier study by Chinese sociologists was Li Peilin (ed.), Zhongguo xin shiqi jieji jieceng baogao (Social Stratification in the Market Transition in China) (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1995). In addition see Xin bailing: dangdai qingnian remen zhiye fangtan shilu (New White-collar: A Record of Interviews and Discussions with Contemporary Youth on the Favoured Professions) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian dang’an chubanshe, 2001, two volumes); Yan Zhimin (ed.), Zhongguo xian jieduan jieji jieceng yanjiu (Research on Class and Strata in China at the Current Stage) (Beijing: Zhongguo zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 2002); Duan Yiping, Gao ji hui: Zhongguo chengshi zhongchan jieceng xiezhen (High Quality Grey: A Portrait of the Urban Middle Class in China) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1999); and Wang Yutan, Wei ren: Zhongguo dangdai shehui ge jieceng shenghuo pinwei baogao (For the People: A Report on the Lifestyles of the Different Social Strata in Contemporary China) (Beijing: Xiyuan chubanshe, 1999). For a good recent overview in English, see Social Sciences in China, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, Spring 2002, special issue on “Social Stratification in Contemporary China”, pp. 42-134.
new stratification patterns, usually with an emphasis on the incomes and lifestyles of the wealthiest strata and individuals.\(^5\) Some scholars, having conducted content analyses of the media, have railed against the extensive coverage of CEOs and general managers of companies on the one hand, and film stars, singers, and sports stars on the other, with an almost complete lack of concern for the common people.\(^6\) Some prominent Chinese sociologists and social critics have gone further, warning that increasing inequalities and skewed patterns of stratification have already begun to produce a “fractured” (duanlie) society, in which people in the same country live in different technological ages.\(^7\)

---

\(^5\) As examples see the special section entitled “The Enigma of Stratification”, in *Xin zhou kan* (New Weekly), 1 January 2002, pp. 30-51, which tries to help readers understand where they fit among the various strata; and *Liaowang* (Outlook Weekly), 10 October 2001, pp. 6-15, which, unlike most of the other reports, also discusses changes in social class as well as social strata under the new conditions. One popular magazine, *Sanlian shenghuo zhoukan* (Sanlian Life Week), published a lengthy cover story entitled “Who Are the Rich People?” on the results of the “first official” survey, covering ten provinces and cities, on the richest people in China (19 March 2001, pp. 16-30), followed by another cover story investigating the property and assets of the rich (7-14 October 2002, pp. 22-34).


\(^7\) Sun Liping, “Women zai kaishi miandui yige duanlie de shehui? (Are We Beginning to Confront a Fractured Society?), *Zhanlue yu guanli*, No. 2, 2002, pp. 9-15; Sun Liping,
This open discussion of stratification patterns, which now includes an authoritative list of the different strata making up Chinese society and their characteristics, has been reflected in the more openly expressed attitudes and behavior of upwardly mobile Chinese youth. As I will show below, in key areas of political and social life, such as recruitment into the Party, finding a job, obtaining and valuing wealth, choosing schools and so forth, youth have become less reluctant to openly acknowledge that instrumental, success-oriented values take precedence. Although the reality is of course more complex, and “nationalistic” impulses will rise to the forefront when it is perceived that China is insulted or threatened, it seems clear that professional and economic concerns are paramount.  

---


8 This has been documented both in interviews and formal surveys, most tellingly after the May 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. For example, Dingxin Zhao’s survey of 1,211 students and interviews with 62 informants conducted at three elite universities in Beijing four months after the bombing revealed that the anger expressed toward the US, while genuine, was more of a “momentary outrage” than a reflection of a long-term development of popular anti-US nationalism. They considered “to counteract US hegemony” the least important among eight national goal statements that were provided. Indeed, as this and other surveys and interviews demonstrated, personal interests in the form of career opportunities—including the taking of TOEFL and GRE exams needed to attend American universities—came to the forefront even when the anger
The Increasing Importance of Money as a Value

Surveys, academic and media reports, and interviews all concur on the increasing roles that money and a moneyed lifestyle play in urban Chinese aspirations. The surveys are of particular interest because they reveal the open willingness to acknowledge the rising value of money, in comparison to other cherished values. Only a small number of many similar published studies will be mentioned.

A survey conducted by the Communist Youth League and the National Student Federation in the cities of Shenzhen and Zhuhai in Guangdong Province asked 1,780 students about their ideal aspirations. The first choice was to be a billionaire; the second choice was to be the boss of a multinational corporation;


9 See, for example, the cover story and the survey of seven cities entitled “Qian shi shenma?” (What Is Money?), Xin zhou kan (New Weekly), 15 September 1999, pp. 52-7.
the third choice was to be a provincial or municipal leader. In feature films as well, the importance of money in governing interactions, even in the most backward rural areas of China, has become a major and, at times, comical theme.

The media have played their part in legitimating wealth as a highly positive value, often lionizing the country’s wealthiest citizens. One recent book profiles the 50 richest people in China. One of the most widely circulated popular magazines devoted a cover story and lengthy articles to the report of the first official survey of the richest individuals in ten provinces, with details on age, educational background, annual income, investment strategies, professions, and so forth. Another popular magazine provided thumbnail sketches of the ten best “professions” in which to make money and contrasted them with those in China

---

10 See the Hong Kong magazine Zhengming (Contention), No. 8, August 2000, p. 27. The original source was listed as Xinhua’s Internal Reference, 15 July 2000.

11 For examples, see Zhang Yimou’s Yige dou buneng shao (Not One Less, 1999), Zhang’s Qiu Ju da guansi (The Story of Qiu Ju, 1993), and Zhou Xiaowen’s Ermo (Ermo, 1994).

12 Jin Dan and Li Chunlin (eds), Zhongguo: shi zui fu (China: Who’s the Wealthiest?) (Beijing: Qiye guanli chubanshe, 2001).

13 “Shei shi youqian ren: zhongguo guanfang shouci shi sheng shi furen diaocha” (Who are the Richest People: China’s First Official Investigation from Ten Provinces and Cities), Sanlian shenghuo zhoukan (Sanlian Life Weekly), 19 March 2001, pp. 16-30.
who were poorest.\textsuperscript{14} Recently, there has been a government backlash against the open flouting of wealth, with several high profile celebrities—most notably the actress turned entrepreneur Liu Xiaoqing—arrested and convicted of tax evasion.\textsuperscript{15} Wealthy entrepreneurs have begun to blanch when they find themselves among those ranked in \textit{Forbes}, with one saying he was “disgusted” by his listing, and another protesting that \textit{Forbes} had exaggerated his assets by eightfold.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Baike zhishi} (Encyclopedic Knowledge) No. 5, May 2000, p. 49. “Profession” is used rather loosely since the “small number of businesspeople who violate the law” and “the extremely small number of corrupt officials” place at numbers nine and ten on the list. One internally reported study noted that five per cent of the population held about fifty per cent of the bank deposits. See \textit{Jingji da cankao} (Major Reference on the Economy) No. 18, July 2000, pp. 23-4.


Indeed, the treatment of the rich in the Chinese media has become a contentious issue. In early 2003, after three leading private entrepreneurs were murdered within three weeks of each other, and the media began to speculate on “revenge against the rich” and “politics among the rich” as motives, as well as whether the government should provide “special protection” to the newly rich, the internal journal of the Central Committee’s Propaganda Department, acknowledging the glaring inequalities still existing in China, suggested that such reporting was damaging to social stability. The media were urged instead to offer positive accounts, for example cases of how the newly rich were aiding the poor to become rich themselves.\(^\text{17}\)

Even in youth magazines intended as socialization agents for high school students, the subject of money—and how to make it—is common. *Shandong Youth* organized a discussion forum in February 2002 entitled, “Men, Women and Money”, in which students were asked the different means by which men and women could make money, and the relationship between money and bad

\(^{17}\) *Neibu tongxin* (Internal Communications), No. 7, 5 April 2003, pp. 11-13. For an example of such reporting, focusing on the uneasiness of the rich, see the series of reports on the murders and their implications in *Xinwen zhoukan* (Newsweek) No. 8, 10 March 2003, pp. 22-9.
behavior. The opening comment by the convener of the forum is helpful to understand the nature of the ensuing “debate”:

At present there’s a popular saying: men with money become bad; women who become bad can get money. Does money really have such lethal power? More and more modern people are becoming slaves to money. Every person is linked to money in a thousand and one ways. Today, there are so many businesswomen creating salons for exchanging ideas, I would like to invite everyone to discuss the relationship between men, women and money.  

The responses in this and other discussion forums revealed why money has become such a hot topic for discussion. It has become essential for success in virtually every key area of social life, including schooling, employment, marriage, and health care.

A large number of surveys focus on the new generation of university students—the next generation of China’s professional middle class. One such survey was conducted among 918 university students in Shandong Province from March to June 1995. One question asked whether the ability to make money had become a factor in determining the value of a person in contemporary China. While only 6 per cent claimed that it was now the only standard, another 71 per cent felt that it was at least one of the standards for judgment. When asked about

18 Song Haifeng, “Nanren, nuren he qian (Men, Women and Money), Shandong qingnian (Shandong Youth), No. 2, February 2002, pp. 52-4.
the importance of money in social, economic and personal life, only 3 per cent said that it was not significant, while 86 per cent said that it had great importance and a further 11 per cent claimed that it was all-powerful, enough to “make a ghost turn a millstone” (*shigui tuimo*). In addition, close to 50 per cent felt that money was either as important as or more important than friendship and just over 50 per cent felt that money was either as important as or more important than ideals.\(^\text{19}\)

A more recent survey of 465 respondents at South China Normal University asked students their views on a series of value statements. The statement that drew by far the greatest support (83 per cent) was: “A modern man must be able to make money”. Only 7 per cent disagreed.\(^\text{20}\) In the same survey, 53 per cent found it difficult to agree or disagree when asked whether competition should take into account issues of conscience or morality.

Given such views, the findings of a worldwide behavioural study commissioned by *Reader’s Digest* in 2001 are perhaps not so surprising.


\(^{20}\) Liu Yongqin, “Dangqian daxuesheng sixiang zhengzhi zhuangkuang ji duice” (The Ideological and Political Condition of Contemporary University Students and Our Countermeasures), *Sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu* (Ideological and Political Education), No. 10, October 2001, p. 83.
Originally conducted in large cities and small towns in the United States and later extended to countries on every continent, the experiment placed “lost” wallets with $50, along with a name and a phone number, in such public places as parking lots, office buildings, phone booths, and so forth. The surveyors sought to discover how many of those who found the wallet would make the effort to return it. The results ranged from the high of Norway—where 100 per cent tried to return the wallet—to a low of Mexico, where only 21 per cent (and virtually no one in the large cities) did so. China was the second lowest, with only 30 per cent returning the wallet, just below Italy’s rate of 35 per cent.21

The issue of morality in relation to success or wealth has come up frequently in other surveys, and is of interest because it reveals the complex patterns of youth attitudes and behavior in a previously socialist system in transition to capitalism. One fairly comprehensive study exploring contradictions in youth attitudes was conducted among urban and rural youth in various parts of Shanxi province in 2001. Informants were sampled from enterprises (qiye), government offices (jiguan), and schools. Perhaps the most consistent finding was that youth in all sectors and locales were ambitious, impatient, and dissatisfied with the pace

---

21 Xun Jianli, “Dang ni jiandaole qianbao” (When You Pick up a Wallet), Shehui (Society), No. 12, December 2001, pp. 43-4. The survey found Singapore in second place at 90 per cent, followed by Australia and Japan (70 per cent), the United States (67 per cent), England (65
of reform and its lack of positive effect on their own lives. Rural youth wanted to find non-agricultural jobs; school graduates and dropouts were seeking meaningful employment; everyone was demanding higher salaries, an opportunity to develop their skills, and a higher social status. Thus, while 80 per cent of those surveyed thought that improving the socio-economic status of youth in the province was important, 68 per cent were not very satisfied with their own status. This overriding desire for economic success and status, combined with a general dissatisfaction with current conditions—attitudes which the surveyors termed “realistic and pragmatic”—also influenced their views on morality. Thus, although the students were adamant in their opposition to official corruption and bribery, when asked if they themselves would give a bribe if it would solve an urgent need, 54 per cent said that they “most certainly would” or “they would decide based on the situation”. A recent survey of college students found that only 15 percent would choose not to offer a bribe if they needed someone’s help; another 14 percent were undecided; but 71 percent would go ahead and make the

per cent), France (60 per cent), the Netherlands (50 per cent), Germany (45 per cent), Russia (43 per cent), and the Philippines (40 per cent).

22 Han Yongqing, “Dangdai shanxi qingnian xuqiu maodun de diaocha ji duice yanjiu” (An Investigation and Research on the Countermeasures Required to Address the Contradictions in the Needs of Contemporary Shanxi Youth), Shanxi gaodeng xuexiao shehui kexue xuebao (Social Science Journal of the Shanxi Province Higher Education School), No. 2, 2002, pp. 88-90.
offer. 23 This is a common attitude in China and is congruent with current laws. In
China, as Richard Levy has pointed out, corruption is defined in terms of bribe-
taking by officials, not bribe-giving by people seeking official favours or seeking
to avoid legal restrictions. When Levy asked a lower-level official about
punishing bribe givers as well as bribe takers, the official answered that the law
does not call for arresting bribe givers and, anyway, if they were all arrested,
there would be no one left. 24

The publisher of the popular Chinese magazine Look and the Chinese edition
of Seventeen recently argued that even if Chinese youth have traded in their
character for commercialism it was not necessarily a bad thing. As she put it in a
provocative article, it was good for the Chinese people to indulge in the material
world; in fact, a healthy dose of selfishness would be beneficial in helping to
change the thinking of future Chinese generations: “These days, no one can
persuade the Chinese people to trade their search for a better life with a political
cause”. 25

---

23 Zhang Chi, “Daxuesheng daode xuanze maodunxing yanjiu” (Research into the Contradictions
in the Moral Choices of University Students), Qingnian yanjiu (Youth Studies), No. 6, June

24 Richard Levy, “Corruption in Popular Culture”, in Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a

Money and Education

In contrast to previous generations, China’s young university aspirants—and their parents—are pragmatic, individualistic, even self-centered in their values and strategies. All of them in the urban areas are only children, and their parents are ambitious for them. The most successful book in 2001, selling more than 1.1 million copies, was *Harvard Girl Liu Yiting*, in which proud parents tell how they scientifically prepared their daughter from birth to get into America’s most prestigious university. Liu Yiting’s acceptance into Harvard and three other prestigious American universities in 1999 at the age of 18 made the book required reading and her parents’ strategy a frequent topic on Chinese talk shows and in the media.²⁶ Provincial education departments organized forums for parents on how to learn from Liu’s example. The book was followed by *Harvard Boy*, *Cambridge Girl*, *Tokyo University Boy*, and similar imitations. A literary editor, fed up with the adulation accorded to the obsession with education for material success, published a rebuttal entitled *I’m Mediocre, I’m Happy*, on how he raised his talented daughter to seek happiness above conventional success as

defined by society. But the book sold only 20,000 copies, and he was roundly vilified by parents and educators.\(^\text{27}\)

As parents strive to manoeuvre their children successfully up through the ladder of education and, through this, into secure high-paying jobs, an extensive use of money has penetrated the educational system at every level, from kindergarten on through the PhD. The government has encouraged this. Universities were given the right to determine their own fee structure in 1992, and in 1993 the government issued a major policy document stating that higher education should move gradually from a system under which the government guaranteed education and employment to a system in which students were held responsible for both. As a result, fewer academically qualified students from non-prosperous homes were admitted. Tuition costs today vary widely depending on location, specialization, whether or not the student is in a degree program, and so forth. But a common factor has been the increasing rise in the fees. Most degree-granting universities charge by course credits, and by the year 2000 tuition ranged from 80 to 200 yuan per credit, with most schools in the 100-150 yuan

---

category. For those that charge by the year, the range was between 2,000 and 7,000 yuan, with the majority charging between 4,000-5,000 yuan.\textsuperscript{28}

The fee structure has been complicated by the move to “expanded enrollment” in 1999, offering the universities new opportunities to generate income, while creating different “strata” among the students. Thus, students in the same year and specialization at the same university often find themselves paying widely divergent tuition and fees. For example, the entering cohort of 1999 in the Chinese language and literature specialization at Sichuan Normal University is divided into seven classes. Students in classes 6 and 7 pay 2,300 yuan per year; those in classes 4 and 5 pay 5,000 yuan per year; and those in classes 1, 2 and 3 pay more than 10,000 yuan per year. Those paying the smallest amount were recruited under the national enrollment plan; those in the middle group entered with lower scores, because of the new policy of expanded enrollment; and the highest paying group, called “preparatory students”

(yukesheng), had scores below the university’s minimum standard for admittance.\textsuperscript{29}

In light of this fee system, it is no surprise that there are cautionary tales of swindlers preying on parents desperate to find university places for their children. One exposé published in a widely circulated youth magazine under the title, “‘Just Give Me Money and I Can Find a Way to Get Your Child into University’—Do you Believe This?” reported on one swindler who offered places in a junior college for 5,000 yuan and a four year college for 10,000 yuan.\textsuperscript{30}

Some educators complain that the current tuition fee and subsidy system, which is not means tested, largely subsidizes students from well-off families. One study carried out by the Public Policy Research Center of Shanghai Financial University found that 70 per cent of China’s university students came from families in the two highest income strata, while only 22 per cent came from the two lowest income strata.\textsuperscript{31} According to data for the year 2000, university tuition

\textsuperscript{29} Xiao Hua, “Kuozaohxia de xuefei dengjizhi” (The Tuition Hierarchy Under Expanded Enrollment), Nanfang zhoumo, 10 July 2003, p. A7.

\textsuperscript{30} Shandong qingnian (Shandong Youth), No. 3, March 2002, pp. 42-4.

\textsuperscript{31} “Wo guo gaodeng jiaoyu shoufei zhengce you shi gongping” (Our Fee Policy for Higher Education is Unfair), Gaige neican (Inside Information on Economic Reform), No. 9, 2002, p. 47.
amounts to 23 per cent of an average urban family’s annual income, but would comprise 60.5 per cent of the income of a rural family.\textsuperscript{32}

A study using data from the year 2000 suggested that the average annual expense for a university student, including tuition fees, was between 8,000-10,000 yuan. As the report noted, if one adds the cost of primary and secondary education, the financial burden to parents of seeing a child through university graduation in Shanghai, Beijing or Guangzhou is on average 100,000 yuan; in smaller cities such as Zhengzhou in Henan Province it is 70,000 yuan; in Ji’nan in Shandong Province it is 60,000 yuan.\textsuperscript{33}

Highly competitive specializations, like the graduate MBA degree, are far more expensive. For example, at Beijing University tuition for an MBA degree had reached 70,000 yuan by 2001.\textsuperscript{34} Despite this, the competition to enter is fierce, and thus the acceptance rate for such elite MBA programs has been low, with


\textsuperscript{33} Huang Zhijian, “Qingnian xiaofei wu da qushi” (Five Major Trends in Consumption Patterns of Youth), Liaowang xinwen zhoukan (Outlook Weekly), No. 35, 27 August 2001, pp. 38-40. For more details on the expenses of university students, see Zhang Zhixiang, “Dangdai daxuesheng xiaofei de tezheng ji qushi” (The Characteristics and Trends in Consumption by University Students), Zhongguo qingnian yanjiu (China Youth Study), No. 5, 2002, pp. 33-6.

\textsuperscript{34} Gaige neican (Inside Information on Economic Reform) No. 23, 2001, p. 47.
Beijing University taking only 8 per cent in 2002, and both Qinghua and People’s
University taking 11 per cent.\textsuperscript{35} Success puts one on the fast track and has helped
ensure lucrative job offers upon graduation.\textsuperscript{36}

The Chinese media, as in so many of the current hot trends, has helped fuel
the MBA fever, with books and articles on the wealth accumulated by graduates
of MBA programs in the United States, accounts of Chinese students who have
received MBA degrees at leading American universities, and extensive coverage
of Chinese programs which have prestigious foreign partners.\textsuperscript{37} Despite a number
of critical press reports arguing against the over-expansion of MBA programs in
China, the crash program to train Western-style MBAs is likely to continue.
Adherents are fond of noting that “Western observers” have suggested that “even

\textsuperscript{35} Chen Long, “MBA: taojin shidai” (MBA: The Age of Panning for Gold), \textit{Xin zhoukan} (New
Weekly), No. 12, 2002, pp. 68-76; for a negative view of the “MBA fever” see Jing Linbo,
“Shei zai hemou sucheng MBA” (Who Is Conspiring to Create Crash Courses for the

\textsuperscript{36} “Qinghua MBA de jilei” (Qinghua MBA’s Chicken Ribs), \textit{Nanfang zhoumo} (Southern

\textsuperscript{37} For example, see Wu Yijun, “MBA: zaoyu wangluo jingji” (MBA Meets the Internet
Economy), \textit{Shehui} (Society) No. 8, August 2000, pp. 25-7 and \textit{Hafo MBA: zhongguo ren ziji
de gushi} (Harvard MBA: Chinese People Tell their Own Stories) (Beijing: Zhongguo jingji
chubanshe, 1999), a collective effort by members of the 1999 Harvard MBA class.
if China admits 2,000 MBA students every year, it will take 170 years to meet today’s needs”.

In a further example of the commercialization of education, even to discover the annual results on the all-important university entrance examination is getting expensive. Until recently all it took was thirty fen (about 4 cents) to buy a newspaper or two or three yuan to make a phone call to discover provincial examination scores. In 2001, however, to the great consternation of nervous students and parents, the system in Guangxi Province was changed and individuals were now required to buy a special “Golden Number One Scholar Card” for 40 yuan from the Guangxi Branch of the Agricultural Bank of China to access these scores. The bank, having purchased the information from the Guangxi District University Recruitment and Examination Office for as much as 800,000 yuan, was given the exclusive rights to release it. The situation is similar in many other provinces.

In the past, the standard route to success for the brightest and most ambitious students included entrance to a key high school (and perhaps a key primary

---

38 Zhao Yan, “Jinzi dazao MBA” (Gold-Plated MBA), Beijing qingnian zhoukan (Beijing Youth Weekly), No. 30, 24 July 2000, pp. 38-9.


school as well), followed by entrance to a key university. Upon graduation the fortunate student would be allocated a job in the state sector of the economy in a major city and spend the rest of his/her life with an “iron rice bowl”. In recent years, because of the differential effects of economic reforms on different localities, there is no longer a “standard route” up the educational ladder. The diversity of the educational system has required parents and students to formulate diverse strategies depending on the locality. For example, in less developed areas of the country the most intense competition is often over entrance to a technical school, not a key academic high school that prepares the student for university. Since only a small number will go on to university anyway—and university tuition has become prohibitive for many families—it is much more practical to seek education which ensures employment, and to do so as early in one’s educational career as possible.41 Indeed, one survey of junior high students and their parents in the rural areas of Hunan Province found that students were dropping out in large numbers because of a lack of family finances, and that 65 per cent saw migrant labour, not further study, as their “ideal career choice”.42


42 Xinhua meiri dianxun, reported in the Hong Kong magazine Qianshao yuekan (Frontline Monthly), No. 10, October 2002, p. 140.
In large cities like Beijing, by contrast, the competition to enter the best schools is intense at the lower levels, which are popularly seen as essential stepping stones into the most prestigious universities and professions. The government has sought, through public policy, to reduce the competitive fires by abolishing key schools below the senior high school level and compelling parents to send their children to primary and junior high schools based on neighbourhood patterns. But particularly since 1993, there has been a virtually complete flouting of the law.\textsuperscript{43} Parents have been able to use power, connections or money to get their children into schools beyond the neighbourhood catchments. Indeed, by the mid-1990s, in elite junior high schools in Beijing such “school-selecting students” (zexiao xuesheng) often accounted for more than 50 per cent of enrollments, and the phenomenon had also spread to lower-ranked schools.\textsuperscript{44}

In the intervening years, money in the form of “tuition donations” has become the standard method—and often the only way—for parents to get their children into the schools of their choice. Tuition costs vary considerably depending on a student’s marks, the quality of the school, the connections the parents have to a school, and so forth. In the mid-1990s these costs ranged from


\textsuperscript{44} Zheng Li, “A Preliminary Exploration into the Phenomenon of ‘Memo Students, Connections Students, and Banknote Students’ among Middle and Primary School Enrollees in the Capital City”, \textit{Neibu wengao} (Internal Manuscripts), No. 12, 1996, pp. 26-9.
about 10-60,000 yuan per year for a top school. One key primary school in Beijing reportedly charges 140,000 yuan for six years of education.\footnote{Jing Lin, “Stratification of Educational Opportunities: The New Middle Class in China and their Impact on Education”, Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, New York City, March 27-30, 2003, pp. 10-11; Jing Lin, \textit{Social Transformation and Private Education in China} (Westport: Praeger, 1999), pp. 41-4.}

While these trends had begun earlier, driven by anxious parents seeking the best possible education for their only child, they were intensifed after the government issued a major document in 1985 that sought to restructure the educational system. Under the new guidelines, school administration and funding were effectively decentralized, and state schools saw their public funding drop from around 80 per cent of their budget to 50 per cent or even less today. By 1999, some public schools were reporting that only 20 to 30 per cent of their budget came from government spending.\footnote{Jing Lin, “Stratification of Educational Opportunities …”} They made up the rest by increasing tuition charges. In the city of Tianjin, an ordinary six-year primary school education costs parents 9,600 yuan; three years of junior high costs 9,990 yuan; and three years of senior high costs 6,000 yuan. Other cities have similar fees.\footnote{Li Jing, “Shixi zhongxiao xuesheng zexiao xianxiang” (A Preliminary Analysis of the Phenomenon of Choosing Primary and Secondary Schools), \textit{Qingnian yanjiu} (Youth Studies), No. 4, April 2000, pp. 27-31.}
For administrators, this additional tuition income has become essential not just to run the schools but also to retain qualified teachers, who often choose to leave the teaching profession for higher-paying jobs. To combat this problem, school authorities have sought to ensure that a reasonable amount of school funds are passed on to teachers and other staff members in the form of benefits. The Vice-Director of the Research Office of Beijing Municipality has recognized, in effect, that the schools cannot survive solely on the limited budget allocations they receive from the state. Thus, as he noted in an internal report, although the government does not approve of such practices, it is unable [and probably unwilling] to prevent them.\footnote{The problems relating to the use of money in the educational system are frequently addressed in the Chinese press, and include criticism of the new elite private schools set up for the nouveaux riches, as well as the efforts of public schools to emulate them by “collecting fees at random”.}

The growing inequalities in basic education and the resultant phenomenon of “selecting schools” is now so widespread that it is openly discussed in academic journals and the popular press. In addition to extensive surveys reporting on the inequalities, the costs of selecting schools in various cities have been regularized—and published—to make it easier for parents to calculate educational expenses. Parents know, though, that schools routinely ask for far more than the published fee. In Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, the Provincial
Education Commission has sought to guarantee that every primary school graduate can get a free junior high education at their neighbourhood school. In reality, fewer than 10 per cent are able to do so.\textsuperscript{49} At some of the best primary schools in Guangzhou, only half the students in some classrooms come from the neighbourhood.\textsuperscript{50} With expanded enrollment also occurring at lower levels, key primary and secondary schools may recruit a few classes of top-notch students and fill the remaining classes with students paying high fees. Elitist educators have been concerned that the distinction between the quality of students at the key and ordinary schools has become blurred.\textsuperscript{51}

In less developed western China, which has been under pressure to achieve nine year compulsory education and provide more educational opportunities for rural youth, an intriguing pattern has developed in which the educational authorities meet their responsibilities, while still disadvantaging the rural areas and the urban poor. Chongqing is a particularly interesting and well-publicized case, attracting attention because of the city’s high rate of promotion from senior high to university. In 2002, this promotion rate surpassed 85 percent, which was 15 percentage points higher than Beijing and five percentage points higher than Shanghai. They were able to do this by limiting the number of senior highs and

\textsuperscript{49} Neibu canyue (Internal Reference), No. 49, 27 December 2002, pp. 30-1.

\textsuperscript{50} Nanfang zhoumo, 12 June 2003, p. A7.

placing the large majority in the main centers of the city. Thus, most districts and counties had only one or two senior highs. Chongqing had expanded schooling at the lower levels, but then closed it off for most beyond junior high. Such limited opportunities fueled the competition to enter even lesser quality senior highs, with each school setting high entry charges.

At an elite first-category school in the city, the starting price (in the form of a “contribution” or “public construction” fee) is 40,000 yuan; for those with scores on the municipal entrance examination below 490 points, an additional 5,000 yuan must be added for each ten points. At Chongqing No. 7 High School, a category 2 school, the starting price is 16,000 yuan; for each point below the required admission score the applicant must add 100 yuan. Lower quality schools require lower fees. For example, the starting price for Nanping High is 9,500 yuan, with an additional 80 yuan required for each point below its admission requirements.

Spending money has even become important in finding employment in an increasingly competitive job market where the individual is often dependent on his or her own initiatives. For example, to be successful an applicant commonly

52 Gaige neican, No. 12, 20 April 2003, p. 48, citing Zhongguo jingji shibao.

is compelled to make a large number of phone calls, hence the purchase of a cell phone, and to send many faxes. It is not uncommon to put together a “booklet” advertising one’s skills. One informant who is a graduate from a non-key university, fearing that she would not be competitive, put together 20 résumé booklets with each page made from expensive art paper, at a cost of 3,000 yuan. Indeed, the Chinese press reports that 2,000-3,000 yuan is the average expense for college graduates looking for employment. Some applicants, seeking to make a good impression, purchase expensive leather briefcases, showing their “professionalism”. Since everyone wants a job in a big city such as Shanghai or Shenzhen, frequent trips to be interviewed may also be required (add several thousand more yuan). As one popular magazine noted in describing this scenario, “this kind of expense by graduates seeking jobs is common and represents only the middle level of expense”.

Given the pervasiveness of money throughout the educational system, from gaining admission to finding employment, it is perhaps not surprising that within the schools and universities money has entered student politics as well. Even to win office as a student cadre in college now requires some expense, first to invite

54 From Yangzi wanbao (Yangzi Evening News), reprinted in Qianshao yuekan (Frontline Monthly) (Hong Kong), No. 2, February 2002, p. 140.

the relevant people to lunch or dinner in pushing your candidacy, and then to hold a celebration after being elected. Moreover, it is not uncommon to offer gifts or even cash to classmates in seeking their vote. To take one reported case in which there were 500 potential voters, the candidate spent an average of 30 yuan per person to ensure 100 votes, for a cost of 3,000 yuan. As he put it, spending that amount of money to become a chair or vice-chair really isn’t very much.  

While some university students are willing to pay to become “officials”—it looks good on one’s résumé when applying for a job—at the lower levels it is often difficult to find people to take on what are generally perceived to be unrewarding and unrewarded tasks. When a minban (non-government-run) school in Henan Province began to provide remuneration to students from fourth year of primary school through junior high school to encourage students to take on student officer roles—offering from 5 yuan to 45 yuan a month depending on performance—it led to a debate in educational circles on whether such material incentives were appropriate. More traditional educators felt that student cadres were learning valuable organizational and leadership skills, such as public speaking, so payment was unnecessary and even counterproductive. One leading educator noted that the development of the market economy was an assault on the  

traditional concept of moral education, and that such traditional concepts would have to be re-evaluated on a continuing basis. While he acknowledged that new educational models might be needed, he concluded that under these new conditions it was more important than ever to strengthen traditional moral education.\textsuperscript{57}

**Political Pragmatism and Party Recruitment**

Surveys have commonly shown a decline of interest in politics among Chinese citizens. One study, for example, compared data from surveys conducted in 1987 and 1996 and discovered that interest in politics among citizens in Beijing had dropped by 21 percentage points over that decade. Moreover, it found that the level of interest varied directly with age. The older the citizen the more interested she or he was in politics.\textsuperscript{58} Another survey in five districts of Ji’nan, the capital of Shandong Province, found a very high correlation between age and interpersonal trust. At every age level, the older the age cohort, the more the respondents trusted other people. Those over fifty were most trusting; those under 20 were

\textsuperscript{57} “Xu\textsuperscript{sh}y\textsuperscript{e}ng gan\textsuperscript{bu} mei yue zh\textsuperscript{e}ng ‘\textgong\textsuperscript{zi}’” (Student Cadres Earn a “Monthly Salary”), \textit{Beijing yule xinbao} (Beijing Entertainment News), 8 November 2001, p. 4.

least trusting. In addition, surveys have shown that young and middle-aged Party members have little interest in doing “Party work” (dangwu gongzuo). One such study, published in a restricted-circulation journal, was conducted in Haining City, Zhejiang Province, and asked Party members what work they preferred. Among those questioned, 83 per cent said “economic work”, 14 per cent said “political and legal work”, two per cent chose “other work”, and not a single person picked “Party work”.

Given such problems, it might be expected that the Party would have trouble recruiting members among the cream of the younger generation. In fact, however, the situation is just the reverse. There is increasing interest among upwardly mobile educated young people in joining the Party. According to data released


60 “Yixie zhongqingnian ganbu qingshi dangwu gongzuo qingxiang yanzhong” (The Tendency of Some Young and Middle-Aged Cadres to Look Down on Party Work Has Become Serious), Neibu canyue (Internal Reference), No. 3, 21 January 1998, p. 22.

61 Ibid.

62 Bruce Dickson has probably done the most extensive analysis of Party recruitment. See Red Capitalists in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for Political Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Bruce J. Dickson and Maria Rost Rublee, “Membership Has Its Privileges: The Socioeconomic Characteristics of Communist
by the State Education Commission (now the Ministry of Education), as of 1990, 0.8 per cent of university students were Party members; but as of 1996, 2.3 per cent were, rising to 5.3 per cent in graduating classes.\textsuperscript{63} By the end of 2000, 3.8 per cent (210,000) of China’s undergraduates were Party members, and among graduate students, 28.2 per cent (77,000) were Party members. Almost one-third of university students were applying for membership.\textsuperscript{64} It should be clear, however, that these aggregate figures conceal important variations. Party membership is concentrated at key universities and in specific departments.\textsuperscript{65} At Qinghua University in Beijing, by mid-2002 fully 12 per cent of undergraduates were Party members.

This in turn reflects the Party’s decision to concentrate its recruitment efforts on the elite of the younger generation. As a study of Party-sponsored mobility

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{63} Duan Xinxing, “Daxuesheng ‘liuxingre’ toushi” (A Perspective on What is ‘Hot’ among University Students), \textit{Qingnian tansuo} (Guangzhou) (Youth Studies), No. 3, 1997, pp. 32-4.

\textsuperscript{64} Xinhua News Agency online, 1 June and 5 June 2001.

\textsuperscript{65} Wu Bangjiang, “Xianzai daxuesheng rudang weishenme” (Why University Students Are Now Joining the Party), \textit{Xin shiji} (New Century) No. 11, November 1997, pp. 54-7.
\end{flushright}
into the administrative elite by Bobai Li and Andrew Walder has concluded, in the 1988-96 period there was “a dramatic shift toward a ‘technocratic’ pattern, in which individuals from red households are abandoned in favour of young college graduates”.

This trend has been documented in many local studies, revealing that workers and peasants—even among the younger generation—have not been interested and/or have not been cultivated as Party recruitment targets. Thus, an internal report on Party recruitment among the younger generation in Heilongjiang Province noted that province-wide the number of “activists” \((jijifenzi)\) declined from 595,000 in 1995 to 427,000 in 1999, a decline of 28.2 per cent; the decline was particularly prominent among the young workers and peasants. The average age of peasant Party members in the province was 48.7 years, with only 19 per cent 35 years old or younger.

Thus, despite the well-

---


67 Han Guizhi, “Yao zhu zhong peiyang fazhan qingnian dangyuan” (It is Necessary to Cultivate and Recruit Youth into the Party), Lilun dongtai (Theoretical Trends), No. 1524, 20 April 2001, pp. 17-23. This is a restricted circulation journal published by the Central Committee’s Higher Party School. One observer has argued that there was a “crisis of recruitment” in the Jiang Zemin era, encompassing not just workers and peasants but also intellectuals, which contributed to the “radical step” of allowing private entrepreneurs to join
documented increase in Party members among university students, particularly among those at elite schools, there has been a slight overall decline of Party members 35 years old or younger over the last few years. In 1998, such members constituted 23.1 per cent of the Party; in 1999 the equivalent figure was 22.5 per cent; and by the end of 2000, the figure had dropped further to 22.3 per cent, suggesting the losses came from among the less favoured, less educated classes. Indeed, the Chinese press has proudly reported in detail on the increasingly impressive educational credentials of Party members.68

The seeming paradox—a declining interest in politics and trust coupled with a greater desire to enter the Party—can be explained by looking more closely at the motivations for joining. Fortunately, Chinese authorities also have an interest in this issue and have conducted a number of surveys, particularly on the link

---

68 The figures for 1998 are from People’s Daily Online, 28 June 1999; for 1999, see Dangjian wenhui (Collection of Materials on Party Construction), No. 8, 2000, p. 43; for 2000, see Dangjian wenhui, No. 7, 2001, p. 7. For statistics on the changing educational level of Party members from 1956-2000, see Cao Wenzhong and Feng Yincheng, “Quanguo dangyuan xueli niannian dou zai tigao” (The Level of Formal Schooling of Party Members Has Been Rising Every Year), Beijing qingnian bao (Beijing Youth Daily), 30 June 2001, p. 2.
between Party membership and employment prospects. One university surveyed Party members who were students or intellectuals and discovered that close to half of them had joined because it would help them find a good job. A very popular slogan among them was: “Before you enter the Party you’re sweating all over; after you enter the Party you can relax. Before you enter the Party you’re full of revolution; after you enter the Party you meld into the crowd”. According to this report, Party membership was also popular because foreign invested companies sought out such individuals to recruit. They reasoned that students who had joined the Party must have been on good terms with their instructors, which meant they were likely to be compatible as employees. Such companies also liked to recruit student cadres because it was felt that they had some organizational skills.

One imaginative study surveyed newly graduated students who had already signed employment contracts with their work units, and recent graduates with

---

69 Another survey found that when university students who had already joined were asked why they sought membership, 30 per cent admitted that it would enable them to find a good job after graduation. They were also asked their opinion of the following statement: “Entering the Party is a bargaining chip that can increase one’s chances in the competition to find a good job”. 70 per cent chose the response, “It’s not completely accurate, but it’s definitely reasonable to think that”. Pan Duola, “Ye tan ‘ru dang dongji’” (More on ‘Motivations for Joining the Party’), Nanfang zhoumo (Southern Weekend), 27 September 1996.

70 Duan Xinxing, “Daxuesheng…”
around five years of work experience behind them to determine what the graduates felt were the key factors that enabled them to obtain their jobs. Of the ten factors studied, Party membership came in sixth, although 94 per cent felt that it was either of great importance (35 per cent) or of some importance (59 per cent). In the overall rankings, the factors considered more important than Party membership were, in order, academic specialization, good grades, the reputation of the university attended, prizes awarded at school, and the oral exam with the employer. Interviewees, however, noted that the value of Party membership varies enormously. For some jobs, such as in the sensitive area of media, it is essential; for others it is unnecessary. At Fudan University’s Graduate School of Journalism about 70 per cent of the (mostly female) students are Party members.

Still another study used a stratified random sample of 60 probationary Party members and 60 non-Party students at Central China Agricultural University and asked them to assess the motivations of the probationary Party members. Not surprisingly, the probationary Party members offered a far more positive

\footnote{Zhang Shujiang, Wang Kaiye, and Liu Guanghui, “Gaoxiao yao zhudong wei daxuesheng jiuye pulu” (Universities Need to Take an Active Part in Paving the Way for Student Employment), \textit{Zhongguo daxuesheng jiuye} (Chinese University Students’ Career Guide), Nos. 2-3, 2002, pp. 21-2. The survey is more complicated than suggested by the brief results presented here. The results were weighted based on the intensity of views, but this does not change the overall findings.}

\footnote{Interviews in Shanghai, November 2002.}
assessment of themselves. Among the non-Party students, 47 per cent felt that probationary Party members displayed their activism only until they were certified as members, or were active neither before nor after membership. Only 14 per cent acknowledged the probationary Party members as models able to lead them in activities. Still, only 25 per cent said that the probationary members were joining the Party just to get a job or accumulate personal capital.\(^73\)

Hong Kong magazines, quoting from classified mainland sources, have reported minimal interest in communist ideals. In one survey of over 800 graduating Party and Communist Youth League members at 16 universities in Beijing, reportedly only 38 students expressed a belief in communism. One political education instructor at Beijing University, interviewed by the magazine, said he had never met a student who really believed in communism.\(^74\)

At the same time, studies have found a strong desire to become an official. For example, a sample survey of 2,599 respondents in 63 cities who were 16 years of age or older asked them to rank 69 professions in order of job preference.

\(^{73}\) Wang Hongbo, Yan Wanchun, and Xiang Yizhi, “Daxuesheng yubei dangyuan sixiang zhengzhi zhuangkuang diaocha fenxi” (An Investigation and Analysis of the Ideological and Political Conditions among University Students who are Probationary Party Members), Qingnian yanjiu (Youth Studies), No. 4, April 2002, pp. 43-9.

\(^{74}\) For the first survey, see Dongxiang (Trend), No. 7, July 2000, p. 27; for the second survey, see Kaifang yuekan (Open Monthly), No. 8, August 2000, p. 22.
The most favoured choice was mayor, followed by government minister, university professor, computer/Internet engineer, judge, public prosecutor, lawyer, high-tech enterprise engineer, leading official in the Party or government, and natural scientist.75

**The Social Implications of the New Stratification Patterns**

The Party had long taught that the working class was to be admired. But the new stratum of upwardly mobile urban Chinese who have become the role models for society do not share this view—even among those of them who enter the Party. The new viewpoint can be examined by way of a discussion forum that was carried in *Zhongguo qingnian* [China Youth], the widely circulated journal published by the Communist Youth League. Established initially in October 1923, just two years after the founding of the Party, the magazine has long espoused the values that the regime has sought to instill in the country’s youth. For those among us who remember the ideological orthodoxy of the Maoist period, the

---

75 “Zhongguo chengshi jumin zui xiang ‘dang guan’” (Residents of Urban China Would Most Like to “Become Officials”), *Qianshao yuekan* (Frontline Monthly), Hong Kong, No. 1, January 2001, p. 131; originally published in *Henan ribao* (Henan Daily).
discussion forum in Zhongguo qingnian in mid-2002 may seem a bit shocking. Arguably, it demonstrates the regime’s recognition and acceptance of the implications of China’s emerging stratification for human relationships.

The subject of the forum—“Can Friendship Transcend Stratum?”—was introduced with an editorial note inquiring into the basis of friendship. The editor asked what the outcome would be if two close friends were suddenly separated by changing lifestyles and different mobility paths. Could friendship continue if one of the friends entered a higher social stratum (shehui jieceng) than the other?

The opening salvo in the discussion was an open letter to the magazine from “Young Bo”, in which he described the history of his relationship with his closest friend, Li Xijun, from his senior year in high school in Gansu Province. Even after Bo was accepted at a key university in Xi’an and his classmate failed the university entrance examination, the two friends swore that they would remain like brothers for the rest of their lives. After graduation Bo was able to find a good job in Beijing but his friend remained at home as an ordinary worker. Inviting Li to Beijing and sneaking him in to live in the work unit’s housing, they tried several ways to arrange for Li to find a steady job in the city, including an unsuccessful attempt to purchase a bogus college degree. Bo also began to realize

76 “Women de youyi neng fou kuayue jieceng?” (Can Friendship Transcend Stratum?), Zhongguo qingnian (China Youth), No. 9 (pp. 48-9), No. 10 (pp. 48-50), No. 11 (pp. 44-6) and No. 12 (pp. 38-40).
that Li was not well enough educated to appreciate the work Bo was doing. They were drifting further apart and, though still living together, hardly speaking at all. When the leadership discovered Li’s presence, Bo was faced with a tough choice: his continued career in the organization depended on his friend’s departure. Li was able to find very inexpensive housing in a county outside Beijing, but with no heat or electricity. Although he provided some material support, more and more Bo would find excuses to avoid meeting Li. In the end Li felt he could not make it in Beijing and went home to work in the fields. Thus, in spite of his best efforts, Bo felt that the relationship could not last. The concluding sentence of the letter is the crucial one for the forthcoming debate. Bo agonized over whether the friendship foundered because of a personality flaw of his own, or because society prevented the friendship from continuing.\footnote{\textit{Zhuihui bu yi de youyi} (A Lost Friendship I’ll Regret Forever), \textit{Zhongguo qingnian}, No. 9, 2002, pp. 48-9. It is interesting to note that \textit{Zhongguo qingnian} itself is a victim of the market economy. It has seen its circulation drop from more than four million in 1982 to less than 300,000 by 1994, with a corresponding decline in profits. In 2003 it went to a full color magazine and a greater emphasis on popular culture to increase circulation. See \textit{Meijie} (Media), December 2002, pp. 17-21.}

The next three issues of the magazine contained 25 published responses to this opening contribution. Most were from the rising urban middle class. Those who felt that friendship across strata could not be maintained based this conclusion largely on changing economic and living conditions. It was suggested
that individuals from different strata were no longer able to exchange thoughts and feelings successfully. As they are no longer classmates and in effect have no common interests or topics to share and discuss, the friendship must end. At best they should cherish the memory of this formerly close friendship. A middle school teacher, for example, felt that he could not have any relationship with a member of the *nouveaux riches*.

One participant in the discussion, a reporter for a Beijing newspaper, offered a particularly graphic response in arguing against friendships across widely divergent socio-economic strata, “at least in today’s China”, as he put it. He noted that a newspaper in Qingdao had reported that some people proposed that a separate section of public transportation be set aside for migrant workers (*min gong*) on the grounds that “neat and tidy” urban residents could not tolerate the smell of these outsiders. This proposal, he felt, suggested that China was becoming worse than the United States in terms of discrimination. If people feel this way, how could one possibly make friends with these migrants? He also noted that many of his friends felt they could have cross-strata friendships, until he pressed them and then they changed their minds. In an exchange with a chat room friend who felt that he could be friends with a migrant worker, the reporter responded: “I don’t believe you! Do you mean you wouldn’t be put off by the bad body odor, the shabby clothes, or the diminished image you would have walking next to such a person?” The chat room friend reluctantly agreed, suggesting that not only couldn’t he be friends with a migrant worker, but that if his classmates
or friends dressed badly or smelled badly, he wouldn’t spend time with them either.\textsuperscript{78}

Those more optimistic agreed that the major impediment to friendship was China’s increasing stratification, but they felt that a person should not be bound by social role and status. With sincerity and enthusiasm, individuals could transcend social distinctions. It was important to recognize of course that social roles are changing and that this will require a reassessment of the relationships one has, but for a psychologically healthy person there should be a rational way to solve these problems without abandoning former friends (there seemed much less likelihood of making new friends across strata).

Indeed, there is a saying that students on university campuses are divided into “five big tribes” (\textit{wu da buluo}), based on wealth, consumption patterns, and housing. The poorest students live in shabby dorms; the richest students occupy the new apartments on campus. As one student told a \textit{China Youth Daily} reporter,\marginpar{78 Wang Chong, “Bu tong jieceng bu keneng jianli xinde youyi” (New Friendships Cannot Be Established with Those from Different Strata), \textit{Zhongguo qingnian}, No. 11, 2002, pp. 44-5. Reports in the Chinese media on discrimination against rural migrants are common. For examples, see \textit{Banyuetan neibuban} (Semi-Monthly Talks, Internal Edition), No. 6, June 2002, pp. 8-11 and \textit{Zhongguo qingnian yanjiu}, No. 5, 2002, pp. 56-9. For an example of university students playing a practical joke on gullible migrant workers seeking to earn some money, see \textit{Qianshao yuekan}, No. 4, April 2003, p. 61, original report in \textit{Zhongguo qingnian bao}.}
“We only hang out with friends in our circle. If a member of our group went looking for romance with an apartment dweller, s(he) would be mocked for “trying to climb above their station” (pan gao zhi).”

Conclusion

China has begun to produce an upwardly mobile white-collar stratum of yuppies, a status that other urban people openly aspire to. Surveys have revealed important distinctions that differentiate this upwardly mobile and materialistically-motivated group in areas such as values and friendships.

The path to upward mobility is becoming increasingly skewed by the triumph of the new money-driven values and practices. In the past, education had been relatively inexpensive, and talented young people and their parents had reason to hope that diligence would be rewarded with good prospects for upward mobility, even for the poor. However, changing public policies and the differential effects of the economic reforms mean that today parents with the ability to pay can virtually ensure places for their children in elite schools; and graduates must be entrepreneurial in tracking down good jobs. Those without money and connections have found it difficult to compete.

79 Wang Hui, “Lixiang zhuyizhe vs. xinxin renlei” (Idealism vs. New Mankind), Zhongguo qingnian bao, December 26, 2002, p. 7. Pan gao zhi literally means “climbing to a higher branch of a tree”.

How much of the new materialism has in fact been driven by public policies, as the state moved away from earlier models of socialism and in the direction of a capitalist market economy? How much has come from the bottom up, with state initiatives largely a response to popular demands and pressures? There are clearly elements of both purposeful state policies—particularly in response to the loss of public support following the events of 1989—and the resurgence of long-suppressed desires on the part of the populace.

Indications of the latter are abundant in the daily lives of urbanites. For example, there has been a wave of nostalgia in China’s large cosmopolitan cities, such as Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai. The cities have witnessed the return of elaborate weddings, with photos taken in traditional costumes; mothers who have purchased pre-revolution feminine dresses such as the elegant qipao for their daughters; advertisers have appealed to the growing desire for privacy and luxury housing; and the popular media provide lurid thrills recounting the fascinating and deviant lifestyles of the nouveaux riches. In interviews, young women have suggested that their parents—particularly their mothers—have sought to compensate for the many years of personal privation they themselves had faced in Mao’s China, offering their daughters opportunities for the “good life” they had been denied.  

80 Based on interviews. Also see Deborah Davis (ed.), The Consumer Revolution in Urban China (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000). Virtually every
In a perceptive discussion of what she labels “the post-communist personality”, Xiaoying Wang notes how the powerful societal reaction against the “extreme asceticization” of Chinese life under Mao became combined with the Party’s orchestrated ideological campaign—with the full mobilization of the media—to redirect individual and societal energies toward the post-communist struggle for wealth and pleasure. While the regime’s intention was to promote a competitive ethos and develop a market economy that would promote rapid economic development, an unintended consequence—in the absence of a comprehensive, internally consistent ideology—has been the arousal of a burning desire to get rich, linked to a suspicion of all moral values.81

To be sure, the Party has in turn sought to temper the rampant materialistic impulses described in this paper in a number of ways. For example, there is the familiar emphasis on promoting “spiritual civilization”. However, since this emphasis is of necessity tied to official, discredited socialist or communist

---

values—including periodic reappearances of such hoary communist icons as Lei Feng—spiritual civilization campaigns have had little resonance among the populace.\(^{82}\) In spring 2000, Jiang Zemin introduced the “Three Represents” slogan, an attempt to redefine the Party’s relationship to society. The Party now represents the advanced productive forces (i.e., the growing upper middle class), the promotion of advanced culture (in contrast to rampant materialism, as well as “feudal” culture), and the interests of the majority of the Chinese people. This “Three Represents” theme has been associated with and used to justify the recruitment of private entrepreneurs into the Party.\(^{83}\) Thus, rather than tempering materialistic pursuits, the “three represents” initiative is far more likely to exacerbate them, while further calling attention to the gulf between a “communist” Party and the increasingly capitalistic economic order. So long as the economy continues to grow at a reasonably high rate the disjuncture between politics and economics and state and society is not likely to produce an unmanageable crisis for the regime in the near term. In the long run, however, there are obvious dangers if the Party increasingly embraces money-making elites

\(^{82}\) Ibid., pp. 15-17.

yet is unable to harness the focus on materialist values to a new and acceptable moral discourse.