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**PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY'S
RECRUITMENT POLICY FOR
CIVILIAN UNIVERSITIES
GRADUATES IN 1990s-2010s**

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In the end of the XX century the PLA faced a challenge of the possibility of the outbreak of a high-tech war, which required it to improve technical capacity and raise the quality of human resources. The latter was ensured by establishing cooperation with civilian universities and colleges used as a source of qualified science and engineering personnel. The PLA strategy to attract highly-qualified personnel has changed over time, including the experiments with the establishment of the model resembling the US ROTC program aimed at combining advantages of military and civilian education.

Notably, though *guofangsheng* or defense students program used to be one of the prominent channels of attracting students from civilian universities and colleges, it has been terminated. The paper focuses on revealing the reasons behind the termination as well as specifics of the program. It is concluded that the program has failed to overcome civil-military divide and successfully integrate *guofangsheng* into the army. It is noted that at the current moment, there is a gradual shift towards recruitment primarily from among university graduates having served in the army, while adapting the enrolment structure of undergraduate students in military academies.

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Introduction

The Chinese Central Military Commission Guidance on the military strategy of the 1993 signified a major transformation of the Chinese military policies, addressing the two major changes of the recent period: the end of the Cold War and the revolution in the military affairs which became evident after the Gulf War. After decades of preparing for a large-scale military conflict against a hostile superpower (first US, then USSR), Chinese military planning started to prioritize the scenarios of the “local wars under modern and especially high technology conditions” (现代技术特别是高技术条件下局部战争)⁴. The need for technological upgrades of the military became evident after the US forces had easily destroyed the Iraqi army of Saddam Hussein relying primarily on their achievements in the C4ISR area and guided weapons. That in turn led to reassessment of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) demand for new talents.

The first steps were undertaken in the sphere of traditional military education. At least some of the military academies and colleges associated with the high-tech aspects of warfare started to get an increased government attention. For example, the Electronics engineering college under the PLA General Staff (Currently – the Electronic Warfare Institute under the PLA University of Defense Technology in Hefei) was visited by the Chinese leader Jiang Zemin as early as December 1991 and the orders on development of the institution were given⁵. The buildup of the military educational institutions related to high tech warfare has started in 1990s and progressed ever since. In 1999 PLA University of Information Engineering was formed.

However, it became evident for the Chinese military leadership that military demand could not be satisfied by the military run universities and colleges solely. Active recruitment in the civilian universities has started immediately and by late 1990s China has introduced a new program closely modelled after the American Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) system. The participants of the program were called ‘defense students’ or *guofangsheng* (国防生).

Apparently, at the beginning of the program the Chinese military leadership has set 40% share of the civilian university graduates among the new officers as target. The goal was likely exceeded during the peak of the program in 2006-2007 when close to 11 thousand students have been enrolled every year.

However, afterwards the number of the *guofangsheng* started to drop and in 2017 the program was discontinued and in fact declared failure. Yet, civilian university graduates have comprised a significant share of the officer’s corp by that time. For example, in 2013 Jinan military

⁴ Ministry of Defense, *China’s Military Strategy* (《中国的军事战略》), 26 May 2015, <http://www.mod.gov.cn/auth/2015-05/26/content_4586723_2.htm>.

⁵ Cui Jian, Zou Peng and Zhang Wenlong, ‘Military Academy Memories | Military Academy Full of Youthful Memories – Electronic Engineering Institute of PLA’ (军校记忆 | 装满青春回忆的军校——解放军电子工程学院), 2 March 2017, Sohu, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170804214536/http://www.sohu.com/a/127706863_371069>.

region (now split between Central and Northern Theater Commands) around 30% of the officers were *guofangsheng* graduates⁶.

PLA has stopped new *guofangsheng* enrollment and started to recruit new officers among the 'ordinary' graduates of the civilian universities. Those who want to become officers can apply for education in the military academies using two mechanisms – going to master's programs of the same specialization from the ranks after getting recommendations from the commanding officers or taking full exams in the military academy. Otherwise they can continue their service and NCOs.

New practice is apparently aimed on creating new stimulus to make the military service more appealing for the university graduates using significant financial benefits such as tuition compensation and additional payments. The PLA policies on using the graduates of the civilian universities will undoubtedly subject to further adjustments largely defining the Chinese military ability to adapt for the new great power military rivalry against the US.

This article will touch upon the emergence of *guofangsheng* program, its specifics and shortcomings and PLA's shift towards attracting university graduates and changing the system of military academies.

From quantity to quality

The end of the XX century, which saw the Falklands war, the Gulf war and the Kosovo conflict, emphasized the importance of high technologies. Facing new challenges, the PLA initiated a new stage of modernization in the 1990-s to prepare for the conduct of military operations in high-tech war. The main goal was the transition from quantity to quality including improving the quality of military education and attracting qualified personnel in the fields of high technologies, science and engineering⁷.

Reaching this goal implied restructuring the system of military personnel training based on military academies. The latter, by that time, were inferior to civilian universities in the quality of education, especially in teaching staff qualification, curricula content, foreign exchanges, educational equipment and its use in the classroom⁸. As a result, civilian universities came to be regarded as a potential source of required qualified personnel.

⁶ An Baijie, 'From university campus to boot camp', *China Daily*, 19 July 2013, <http://111.13.45.133/china/2013-07/19/content_16796373.htm>.

⁷ Kristen A. Gunness, 'Educating the Officer Corps: The Chinese People's Liberation Army and Its Interactions with Civilian Academic Institutions,' in David M. Finkelstein and Kristen A. Gunness (eds.), *Civil-Military Relations in Today's China: Swimming in a New Sea* (NY: M.E.Sharpe 2006), 188.

⁸ Thomas J. Bickford, 'Searching for a Twenty-First-Century Officer Corps,' in David M. Finkelstein and Kristen A. Gunness (eds.), *Civil-Military Relations in Today's China: Swimming in a New Sea* (NY: M.E.Sharpe 2006), 174-175.

The development of interaction between the PLA and civilian universities underwent several stages. Substantive contacts started with an active recruitment: during the period from 1992 to 1999, about 46000 university graduates joined the PLA⁹.

However, the graduates were still required to go through the military academy to attain officer ranks. Technically they were supposed to be conscripted to the military or could be recruited directly by a military unit request.

This changed after the introduction of a special program of training officers on the basis of civilian universities. Tsinghua University and Peking University became the first participants of the program, as in 1998 they signed letters of intent with the PLA General Political Department on training personnel for the army¹⁰. In 1999, there was published “Notice on the Pilot Work on Selecting and Training Military Personnel in Ordinary Universities”. According to the Notice, each military district, branches of the military, General Staff, General Logistics Department, General Armaments Department and People's Armed Police were to select one or two pilot universities to train personnel for their needs¹¹. Within a year, the program attained a regular status and set an ambitious goal to satisfy the needs of the army for military technical personnel mainly by recruiting officers trained on the basis of civilian universities by 2010¹². Since then, the PLA added defense students – *guofangsheng*.

In the following years, the program expanded considerably. The number of participating universities increased from two pilot universities to 117 at the peak of the program (see Fig. 1).

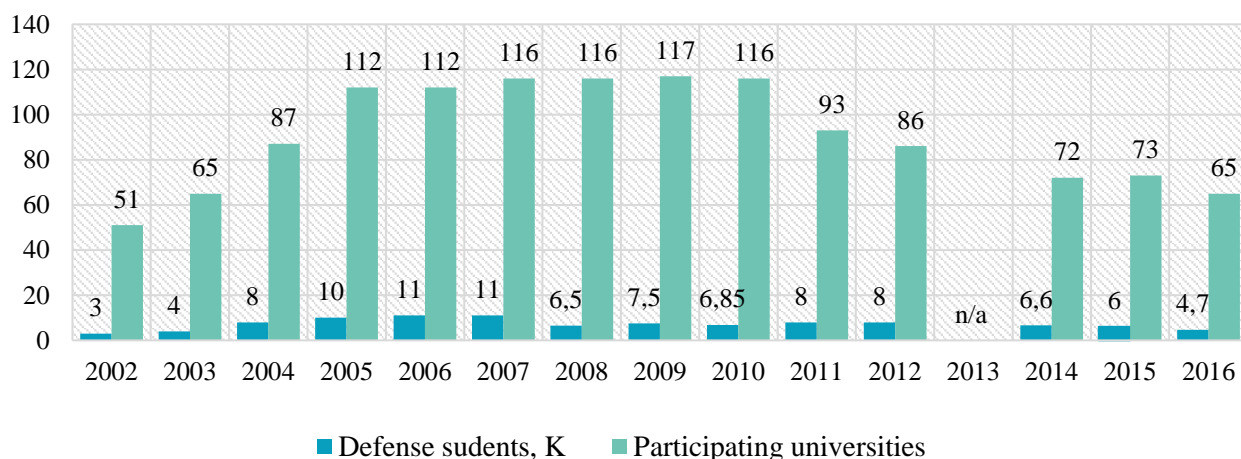


Fig. 1. Plans for defense students' enrollment¹³

⁹ Thomas J. Bickford, 176.

¹⁰ Zhou Xiangnan, 'Situation in National Defense | Tsinghua Dream – 83 More Defense Students Become a Part of Tsinghua' (国防情·清华梦——又有 83 名国防生走进清华园), *Tsinghua University News*, 11 September 2002, <http://news.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/thunews/9732/2011/20110225231311625391016/20110225231311625391016_.html>.

¹¹ USTC, *Notice on the Pilot work on Selecting and Training Military Personnel in Ordinary Universities* (关于在普通高等学校开展选拔培养军队干部试点工作的通知) (2013), <<https://hbjg.ustc.edu.cn/2013/0726/c10153a118117/page.htm>>.

¹² Tsinghua, *Defense Student Handbook* (国防生手册) (2013), <<https://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/guofang/8439/20130715165810252943554/GFSSC.pdf>>.

¹³ Source: author's compilation based on the data from news sources (Sina, Sohu, Gaokao, People's daily).

Notably, specialties of defense students varied significantly. The example of students' enrollment in Hebei, where the majority of the participating universities were located, demonstrates that, though priority was given to science and engineering, students of humanitarian specialties also participated in the program (see Fig. 2).

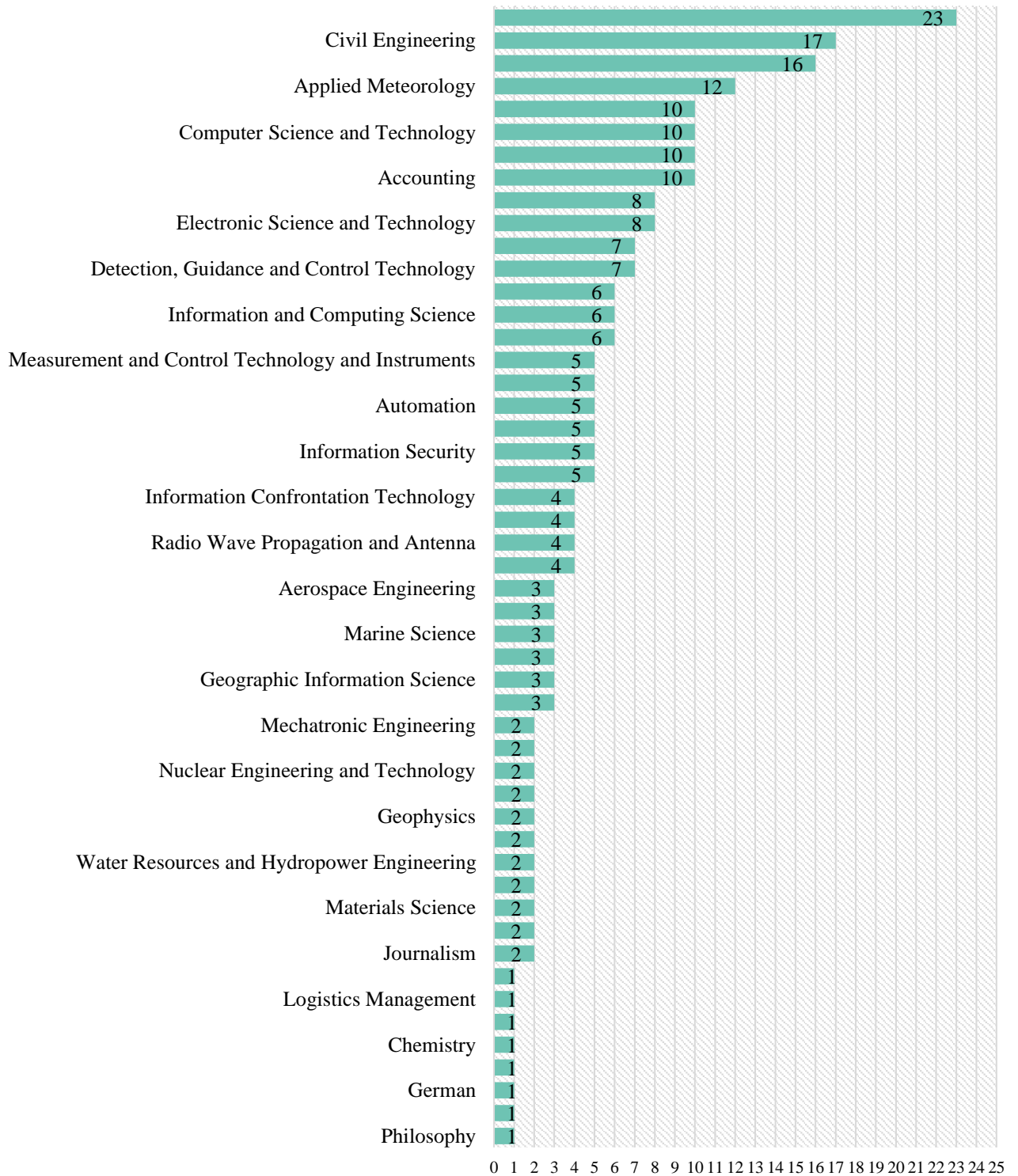


Fig. 2. Specialties of defense students (Hebei, 2015)¹⁴

¹⁴ Source: *Military, Defense Students and Armed Police Academies Enrollment Plan in 2015 (2015年军队、国防生和武警部队院校招生计划)* (2015), <<http://www.hs13z.net/Item/2122.html>>.

Guofangsheng enrolment procedure

The enrolment in the program of defense students training consisted of several additional stages. Apart from entrance examination, it required to go through political testing, interview and medical examination¹⁵. A potential participant of the program should have met certain requirements:

- conformity with the criteria set in “Regulations on political criteria for selecting high school graduates for military academies and recruiting university graduates” (loyalty to the Communist Party, patriotism, respect for the law, clean criminal record, political reliability)¹⁶, a voluntary choice to join the program and serve in the army after the graduation;
- high moral qualities, respect for the law and relevant regulations;
- age below 20 years (as at 31 August of a given year);
- good health status meeting the criteria set in “Standards of medical examination for selecting cadets for the PLA academies”¹⁷.

After being accepted to the program, the defense student signed a tripartite contract with the PLA and the chosen university. According to the contract, the defense student has the following rights and duties:

- to support the leadership of the Communist Party, cherish the homeland and the socialist system, be willing to serve in the army voluntarily, keep the state and military secrets; not to join political organizations apart from the Communist Party and the Communist Youth League, not to join religious associations and criminal organizations;
- to obey the state law, the university's internal rules of procedure and the PLA relevant regulations, be accountable to both the PLA and the university, report on changes in ideological views, educational process and living conditions;
- to take part in activities on political and military training organized by the PLA, be subordinate to the PLA military command, pass mid-term and end-of-course assessments, meet the criteria of medical examination;
- to graduate from university within the allocated time period, receive the necessary amount of credits, get diploma;

¹⁵ USTC, *Interim Regulations on Enrollment of Defense Students in Colleges and Universities (Extract)* (《普通高等学校招收国防生暂行规定(摘录)》(2013), <<http://hbjg.ustc.edu.cn/2013/0723/c10153a118108/page.htm>>.

¹⁶ Gaokao, *Regulations on Political Criteria for Selecting High School Graduates for Military Academies and Recruiting University Graduates* (《关于军队院校招收普通中学高中毕业生和军队接收普通高等学校毕业生政治条件的规定》(2007), <<https://gaokao.chsi.com.cn/gkxx/zcdh/200704/20070409/796388.html>>.

¹⁷ USTC, *ibid.*

– to transfer to another university, change academic program, take a leave of absence, study abroad, get married, enter a master program, live outside the university's campus only after obtaining the PLA approval;

– after the graduation to join the army in accordance with the directives from the PLA and the university;

– to put one of the relatives down as a guarantor to ensure the compensation payment in case of violating the contract;

– to obtain an exemption from the final exams and enter a master program on the recommendation of the PLA (for programs training non-command personnel); to sign up to enter a master program under the enrollment of military personnel after a minimum time of service (for programs training command personnel);

– to receive a scholarship for defense students provided by the PLA (10000¹⁸ yuans per year – 5000 yuans for tuition fees and other study expenses and 5000 yuans for living expenses)¹⁹, compete for scholarships, grants and the university's special scholarships, use educational resources provided by the PLA;

– to convey a request to higher authority or request for pre-trial proceedings in case of violating the contract by the PLA or the university during the term of the contract²⁰.

If a defense student breaches their obligations under the contract, there happen the termination of the contract and the deprivation of the defense student status. Besides, the student is obliged to return all scholarship received and pay a compensation for violating the contract (expect for resigning the program for health reasons)²¹.

Notably, *guofangsheng* who graduated from the major universities in Beijing but came to study from the other cities had their registration (*hukou*) transferred to Beijing – a very important benefit by Chinese standard, giving better access to the social services and job market after retirement²².

The program of training defense students includes, in addition to university classes, political and military training. The theoretical part comprises studying basics of the PLA organization, military ideology, national security, the theory of building up armed forces and national defense, basics of military high technologies, knowledge from different branches of the

¹⁸ Note: since 2008.

¹⁹ XJTU, *Defense Scholarship Regulation (国防奖学金管理办法)* (2009), <<http://pla.xjtu.edu.cn/info/1017/1605.htm>>.

²⁰ USTC, *Defense Student Training Agreement: 2019 (国防生培养协议：2009年)* (2013), <<https://hbjg.ustc.edu.cn/2013/0723/c10150a114001/page.htm>>.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² An Baijie, 19 July 2013.

military, the science of military leadership and military psychology. The total amount of studying hours is 120, 80 of them are for classroom study²³. The practical part consisted of:

- no less than 15 days of basic political and military training organized during the first semester of the first year;
- daily exercises (about 3 hours per week) based on military-type exercises and drills (for third-year students and above);
- no less than 25 days of intense training on the military base during summer vacations (for first-year students);
- no less than 3 weeks of military training in the army unit during summer vacations (for third-year students and above trained for non-command positions); no less than 3 weeks of practice as a commander of a squad or a platoon (for fourth year students trained for command positions);
- no less than 50 days of training in a military academy after the graduation from a civilian university;
- from 1 to 3 months of on-the-job training to learn the work responsibilities before being admitted to the service²⁴.

The civil-military divide

The program has still fallen short of expectations. In 2017, the Ministry of Defense announced that defense students would no longer be selected from among high school graduates and students, and that there would be a gradual shift towards a direct recruitment of university graduates²⁵. This decision has been largely influenced by the fact that a number of defense students demonstrated poor results during training, in particular:

- *Guofangsheng* program graduates' quality appeared to be inferior compared to other students. They possessed the minimum knowledge of the educational program only sufficient to pass exams with low marks.
- Their professional military training was also found lacking. They had difficulties in mastering the professional military skills, had a generally poor understanding of the military affairs and that weaknesses were frequently exposed during the drills.
- They lacked organizational and management skills, determination and initiative.

²³ USTB, *Opinions on Implementation of Measures to Strengthen Military and Political Training and Vocational Training of Defense Students* (关于加强国防生军政训练和任职培训工作的实施意见) (2008), <<http://gfs.ustb.edu.cn/gfs/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=27&id=953>>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ 'Ministry of Defense: Defense Students to be no Longer Recruited from among High School Graduates' (国防部：不再从普通高中毕业生中定向招收国防生), *Xinhua*, 26 May 2017, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-05/26/c_1121040642.htm>.

– *Guofangsheng* displayed a poor understanding of military manners, the relevant behavioral norms and the binding character of obeying orders.

– *Guofangsheng* graduates displayed inability to withstand strong psychological pressure and difficulties of life in the army and needed a long period of psychological adaptation²⁶.

As a consequence of the mentioned above, defense students were unable to integrate into the army. A poor understanding of military culture and a low level of military training resulted in difficulties in establishing contacts with a unit mates and a low probability of getting promotion²⁷. The civil-military divide appeared to be deep enough to prevent the program from achieving the expected results and to highlight the necessity to restructure the existing system. Notably, the problems were identified long before the program termination, but the attempts to solve them were not successful.

Some of the reported difficulties with the *guofangsheng* officers closely resembles general complains about the new generation of recruits coming mainly from the cities and consisting mainly from the only children in their families. General attitude towards such soldiers, well educated but less prepared for military hardships and military culture was that special methods were needed to fully unitize their potential. However, the same set of problems with the officers was considered to be unsolvable.

Chinese experts did conduct the analysis of the reasons for the program failure after the termination. The main shortcomings which resulted in this failure were identified in the Chinese scholarly publications:

– a poor planning of personnel training and its future use, a lack of effective mechanisms to evaluate ongoing performance and ensure continuity in the training process, a lack of constant working on the development of a feedback mechanism;

– a lack of clear guidance on ideological education, political and military training, daily routine, goals of training, etc;

– a discrepancy between the program's content and distinctive characteristics of defense students: obsolescence, a lack of interaction between the educational resources of civilian universities and military academies, unified educational materials on political and military training, training facilities, military cadres in teaching staff;

– a lack of the elements of militaristic education – instilling an understanding of the biding nature of obeying orders, cultivating a military lifestyle;

²⁶ Yuan Juntang, Zhang Yongchun and Gao Beilei. 'Deepening Reform of the Training Model of Defense Students: Raising New High-Quality Military Talents' (深化国防生培养模式改革: 造就高素质新型军事人才), *China University Teaching (中国大学教学)* 2 (2011), 26.

²⁷ Lin, Ying Yu, 'One Step Forward, One Step Back for PLA Military Education', *China Brief*, 18/7 (2018), <<https://jamestown.org/program/one-step-forward-one-step-back-for-pla-military-education/>>.

– a divide between the program’s content and its goals due to a greater focus on fellow university graduates as a role model rather than on the army²⁸.

Another problem facing the program was to attract students with a proper motivation. Students more often joined the program for pragmatic reasons – to get financial support or avoid difficulties related to job searching²⁹ (Corbett, O’Dowd & Chen, 2008, 164). A lack of a deeply rooted motivation in building a military career and a good knowledge of the program’s content also had a negative impact on the program’s results.

Students’ recruitment as a priority

The main focus is shifting towards how to recruit the maximum number of qualified personnel among the university graduates. A program to enlist the university graduates existed since 2001 in parallel with *guofangsheng* program playing a secondary role.

An annual increase in university graduates’ number has sharpened a necessity to work out more effective mechanisms of selecting talents among them. In practice, this goal has been translated into action through attracting more students to enlist. The maximum rate has been achieved in Beijing reaching 93% of students among conscripts in 2019 (see Fig. 3).

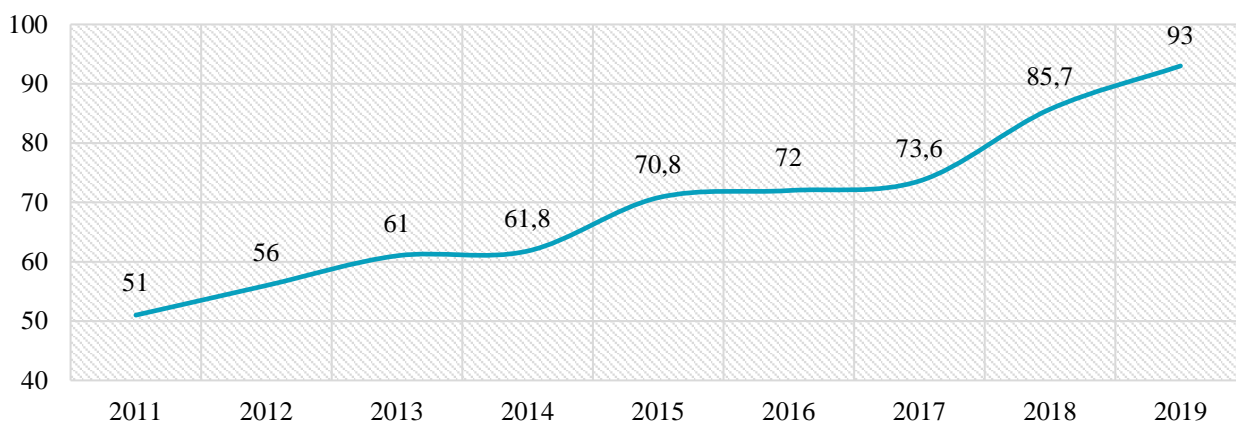


Fig. 3. The percentage of students among conscripts, Beijing (%)³⁰

A number of general stimulating measures have been used to make the enlistment more attracting for the graduates:

- compensation for tuition fees or student loan repayments (no more than 12000 per year);
- separate enrolment into several master programs for the demobilized graduates;

²⁸ Zhang Xu, ‘Impact of the Adjustment of Defense Students System on Education of Reserve Officers’ (国防生制度调整对后备军官任职教育的启示), *Continuing Education (继续教育)* 12 (2017), 78.

²⁹ John F. Corbett, Edward C. O’Dowd and David D. Chen, ‘Building the fighting strength: PLA officer accession, education, training, and utilization,’ in Andrew Scobell, Roy Kamphausen and Travis Tanner (eds.), *The “People” in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Educations in China’s Military*, (PA: Strategic Studies Institute 2008), 164.

³⁰ Source: author’s compilation based on the data from news sources (Sohu).

- exemption from final exams for the demobilized students, who demonstrate high academic performance, and from entrance examination for master programs for outstanding performance during the army service;
- ten bonus points for admission in master programs (valid during three years after the graduation)³¹.

Such stimulating measures can vary among the regions of the country and even be different among various prefectures within one province.

For example, the university graduates enlisting from the Guangdong province conscription benefits are described as follows:

- Allowance. In the army, the total is about 20,000 yuan in two years, the pay is increased for the troops deployed in the remote areas. (Nationwide policy)
- Retirement payment. It is issued by the army when retiring, about 10,000 yuan. (Nationwide policy)
- Family preferential payment. It is issued to the soldiers' families by the local government for a total of 2 years, and is issued each year at a standard of no less than 40% of the per capita disposable income of the permanent residents of the city in the previous year. (Nationwide policy)
- One-off economic subsidy. It is issued by the local government to conscripts who have retired from active service (Policy differs in various regions).
- Tuition subsidy for students which enlist in the military for compulsory military service. Undergraduate students get such subsidies in the amount not exceeding 8000 yuan, graduate students – up to 12000 yuan. (Nationwide policy)
- Enlistment subsidies for college graduates. From 2018 to 2020, full-time undergraduate (including higher vocational), postgraduate and second bachelor degree graduates from ordinary colleges and universities enlisted in 19 prefecture-level cities in our province except Guangzhou and Shenzhen, and General colleges and universities (including higher vocational colleges) recruited by (previous) graduates, and have served for 2 years, master (doctorate) graduates 30,000 yuan per person, undergraduate graduates 25,000 yuan per person, junior college Each graduate is 20,000 yuan. (Policy differs in various regions)³²

The latter measures show that PLA, like the US military is practicing short term financial incentives for the graduates enlisting in the particular years. It appears, that since 2018 against the

³¹ WNU, *Enlistment Policy for University Students in 2019 (2019 年大学生应征入伍政策)* (2019), <<http://wzb.wnu.edu.cn/info/1014/1223.htm>>.

³² Guangdong Higher Education Graduates Career Center, 'Graduates, Look at the Policies Related to University Graduates Joining the Army in 2020' (毕业生, 2020 年大学毕业生参军入伍有关政策看过来), 2020, <http://job.gd.gov.cn/jiuyezhidao/guanzhujiuye/content/post_2996817.html>.

backdrop of the worsening US China relations PLA tried to speed up the recruitment of the educated personnel.

COVID-19 appeared to give additional momentum to the PLA efforts to recruit more university graduates. Judging by the size of the program to provide the retired university graduates who had served in the military as NCOs, the recruitment scale rose from not less than 5000 to not less than 8000 for bachelor degree holders only³³.

University graduates enlisting into the PLA become corporals (下士), bachelor degree's graduates get the next rank of sergeant within 2 years, soldiers with higher degrees (master etc.) get the next rank in one year. Further, depending on their service record such soldiers could be directly promoted to officer ranks. They also can take exams for entering the military academies master's programs³⁴.

At the same time, a graduate can take exams for a military academy master's program directly after getting a bachelor's degree.

In parallel to these, the system of military academies has also undergone several changes. Since 2017, the enrolment campaign aims at decreasing the number of vacant places and optimizing the enrolment structure (see Fig. 4). Notably, while the system is being reformed, the enrolment of civilian university graduates in military academies' master programs is suspended³⁵. Defense students may continue the education in military master programs (except for programs training personnel for command positions) as well as get a master degree in civilian universities after dissolving a defense student contract³⁶.

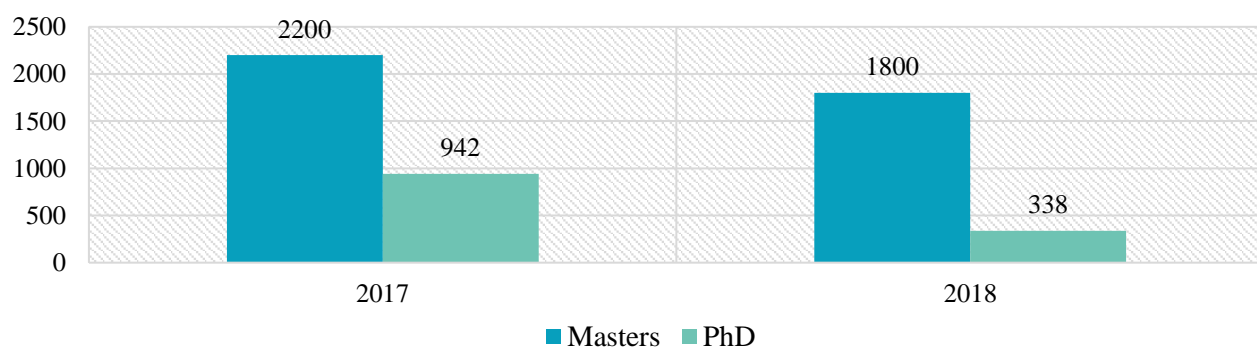


Fig. 4. Enrolment structure in military academies³⁷

³³ 'Chinese military plans to recruit more university graduates in 2020', *Xinhua*, 2 June 2020, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/02/c_139108492.htm>.

³⁴ Ministry of Education, *Announcement of Enlistment for University Graduates in 2020 (2020年普通高等学校毕业生应征入伍公告)* (2020), <http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/s5743/s5744/A15/202007/t20200730_475895.html>.

³⁵ China Military, 'PLA Adjusts Policies on Graduate Student Enrolment', 19 September 2016, <http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2016-09/19/content_7269233.htm>.

³⁶ China Military, 'The 2020 Military Graduates Enrollment Policy is Released, Here is a Detailed Explanation' (2020军队研究生招生政策出台, 这里有详细解读), 11 October 2019, <http://www.chinamil.com.cn/201311jxjh/2019-10/11/content_9648098.htm>.

³⁷ Source: China Military, 'What are the Changes in Military Graduates Enrollment in 2018' (2018年军队研究生招生有哪些新变化), 24 October 2017, <http://www.81.cn/zggfs/2017-10/24/content_7798579.htm>.

The ultimate goal of all changes is to increase the efficiency of military postgraduate education in training highly qualified military personnel. In 2020, further work would concentrate on:

- carrying out an experimental reform on the introduction of military master programs on a part-time basis to bridge the gap between scientific and technological training of staff officers and military commanders;

- enhancing new models of military personnel training with a focus on intelligence development and the conduct of joint operations;

- tightening criteria for medical examination³⁸.

The exact numbers of the university graduates which are enrolled to the NCO positions into the military is unknown. Number of recruits among the university graduates now appears to be more than 8000 per year counting the holders of bachelor degree only (judging by number benefits provided to them to further join master's programs after the retirement). That number is more or less comparable with the yearly enrollment of the *guofangsheng* students in 2000s. The military academies enrollment stood at 12000 per year with planned graduation rate above 99%³⁹.

Conclusion

After three decades of experimenting with various approaches to the civilian universities graduates recruitment the Chinese have adopted a new system which appears to be more or less stable. Under this system no civilian graduate is able to apply directly for the officer's position in the military. Each year close to ten thousand Chinese graduates enlist through normal conscription mechanisms getting the NCO ranks.

After completing two years of service some of them are directly promoted to the officers positions, others are given opportunity to further study at the military academies master's programs, but significant number chooses to stay at the NCO positions and use their post-retirement benefits for further career. Another channel for a civilian graduate is directly taking an entrance exam for a military academy after obtaining a degree from a civilian university.

University graduates joining the military as NCOs are eligible for significant benefits both exactly after enlistment and especially after the retirement. They can use them to significantly boost their careers and cover part of their tuition fees.

³⁸ China Military, 2019.

³⁹ China Military, 'Ministry of Defense: Military Academies Successfully Complete the 2020 Enrollment Goal' (国防部: 军队院校安全顺利完成 2020 年度招生任), 27 August 2020, <<https://twitter.com/anshu217/status/1299640936775868416>>.

The benefits for such soldiers can vary significantly between various provinces and in different years. The benefits appear to have been boosted after the confrontation with the US since 2018 and especially after the COVID-19 outbreak.

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