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## Shades of Red: Changing Understandings of Political Loyalty in the Chinese Communist Party, 1921–2021

Jérôme Doyon and Long Yang

As the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) one-hundredth anniversary approached, General Secretary Xi Jinping (习近平) called on Party members to 'not forget their original aspirations and firmly remember their mission' (*bu wang chuxin, laoji shiming* 不忘初心, 牢记使命). This slogan illustrates the current leadership's focus on Party members' devotion and loyalty to the Party.<sup>1</sup> Regarding party-state officials more specifically, various researchers have noted the increased importance of political criteria in cadre recruitment and discipline under Xi (Li 2018; Snape 2019; Brødsgaard 2019; Doyon 2019).

How to interpret the CCP's focus on 'original aspirations' and devotion to the organisation? For some, the current emphasis on virtue and loyalty contrasts with the declining importance given to political criteria in recruiting Party members and officials in post-Mao China (Snape 2019). Until recently, many viewed the Chinese party-state as moving away from being a 'virtuocracy' (Shirk 1982), a promotion system based on one's

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<sup>1</sup> 'Opinion on Deepening and Consolidating the Results of the "Do Not Forget the Original Aspirations and Firmly Remember the Mission" Educational Subject' (关于巩固深化'不忘初心、牢记使命'主题教育成果的意见), Central Office of the Chinese Communist Party, 15 September 2020.

political virtue understood as the conformity to ideological ideals, and towards a meritocracy or technocracy (Lee 1991; Nee and Lian 1994; Bell 2018). Similarly, surveys conducted by Bruce Dickson (2014) show that while ‘working for Communism’ was one of the main incentives during the Mao era (1949–78), it has been replaced by less ideological motives in the post-Mao era, such as advancing one’s career. By contrast, some research has stressed the continuity between Mao and post-Mao China regarding the mobilisation and disciplining of Party members and cadres (Heilmann and Perry 2011; Koss 2018; Luo 2021). Speaking to the issue of political loyalty more specifically, Andrew Walder (1985) has noted that, while it has taken different forms over time in response to political and economic circumstances, Party members and cadres’ political loyalty has always been central to Party leaders, and the ‘redness’, or virtue, of Party members and officials was never replaced by expertise, or ability, as a recruitment criterion.

Despite the rich literature on the red and expert debate, the actual meaning of ‘redness’ remains elusive. This chapter contributes to this debate by exploring how the Party’s understanding of political loyalty has changed over its 100-year history. Challenging the tendency to treat the CCP’s definition of loyalty as a monolithic and unchanging concept, we stress the complex and pluri-dimensional aspects of the Party’s understanding of this notion. At different times, the question of who must be loyal, emphasising cadres or members more broadly, and how to show it, has changed drastically. When studying the relationship between the Party and the individuals who populate it, amounting now to more than 95 million members<sup>2</sup> and more than 7 million officials (Chan and Gao 2019), a whole branch of literature is dedicated to better understanding how the CCP did and does think about ability and performance, and how this understanding has changed over time. Previous studies have analysed how work performance, understood in various ways, influences political recruitment and promotion (Li and Zhou 2005; Shih, Adolph and Liu 2012; Landry, Lü and Duan 2018). There is, by contrast, very little research on how the CCP understands political loyalty, despite the impact it may have on the Party’s ability to maintain cohesion among its ranks as well as to expand and diversify its membership – key aspects of its resilience (Shambaugh 2008).

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2 ‘Report on Internal Chinese Communist Party Statistics’ (中国共产党党内统计公报), *Xinhua*, 5 June 2021, [www.12371.cn/2021/06/30/ART11625021390886720.shtml](http://www.12371.cn/2021/06/30/ART11625021390886720.shtml).

To better understand what ‘red’ means, we focus on how the CCP itself has discussed loyalty and political virtue throughout its history. We rely on a corpus of central documents, the most critical intra-party documents (Lieberthal 1978; Snape and Wang 2021), spanning 1921–2021: they contain all the Party regulations, orders and directives issued by the CCP Central Committee, focusing explicitly on issues of organisational development and the recruitment and appointment of Party members and officials. While various departments of the CCP, and, in particular, the Central Organisation Department in charge of human resources, have published hundreds of documents on recruitment issues, the central documents issued by the CCP Central Committee are the more authoritative, encapsulating the perspective of the Party leadership at a given time (on the importance of Party rules, see Smith 2021). To historicise and contextualise these central regulations and orders, we also rely on a range of other Party documents and leader speeches.

Throughout this corpus, we focus on three critical notions the Party uses to describe its relationship with its members: ‘loyalty’ (*zhong* 忠), ‘virtue’ (*de* 德) and ‘Party spirit’ (*dangxing* 党性). This chapter not only highlights the close links between these notions as well as their centrality in the CCP’s organisational culture, but also stresses their malleability, which has allowed the CCP to interpret and operationalise them in different ways throughout its history, depending on its needs and objectives. As detailed below, the Party started using the term loyalty at its founding in 1921 and put forward its goal to recruit virtuous (as well as competent) members in the 1930s. We stress that, by the late 1930s, these two notions started to be fused in the CCP’s discourse. In other words, a loyal member is fundamentally a virtuous one. The concept of ‘Party spirit’, understood as an unconditional dedication to the Party also embodies this merging of loyalty and virtue. In line with Kenneth Jowitt’s argument that a unique feature of Communist parties is that they are political organisations based on ‘charismatic impersonalism’ (Jowitt 1992, 23), the notion of ‘Party spirit’ implies a member’s devotion to the organisation itself rather than its cause or leaders. ‘Party spirit’, popularised through Liu Shaoqi’s (刘少奇) famous *How to Be a Good Communist* written in 1939, emerged in the context of the CCP’s struggle against the Guomindang (GMD) and Japan (Sorace 2016; Pieke 2018).

With this long-term survey, we trace not only the changes in the Party's understanding of loyalty at different points in time but also what drove these evolutions. Our central argument is that the Party changed its definition of political loyalty when it aimed at expanding and/or diversifying its membership in response to new social, economic and political circumstances. The first dimension of variation is between ascriptive understandings of loyalty, giving more importance to one's background and personal connections, and behavioural ones, based on one's actions (Walder 1985). Early on, the CCP became reliant on an ascriptive understanding of loyalty based on class labels to ensure its survival as a small, clandestine group in a hostile environment. Yet, this ascriptive definition of loyalty was superseded by a behavioural one when the Party needed to expand its recruitment beyond the so-called revolutionary classes of workers and peasants. For instance, 'Party spirit' emerged in the late 1930s and 1940s as a behavioural approach to political loyalty, when membership went from 25,000 in 1936 to close to 5 million in 1949, and the ratio of members not from a worker or peasant background doubled (Gore 2011). The ascriptive definition of loyalty based on class labels was then abandoned in the early years of the reform era as the Party expanded its recruitment among technocrats and burgeoning economic elites to implement the economic reforms.

The second dimension of variation, focusing on the behavioural element, is tied to the level and form of activism expected from Party members and cadres. While, in some cases, a heightened focus on activism may be accompanied by extreme rectification campaigns and a sharp, albeit short-term, decrease in Party recruitment, we show that overall it is paradoxically at the outset of periods of Party expansion that the CCP becomes more demanding. As we will see in the remainder of the chapter, such insistence on activism can take many forms depending on the historical context, but, all in all, it can be understood as a willingness to mould new recruits whose loyalty remains partially questionable, and to deal with enemies from within – intellectuals seen as close to the GMD in the 1930s, the 1989 'rebels' or, more recently, Party members who would challenge the authority of Xi Jinping as the core leader. More broadly, the political virtue of its membership is a way to maintain the Party's vanguard and charismatic status while it becomes increasingly inclusive (Jowitt 1992).

This chapter is structured in a chronological manner. It traces the evolution of the Party's understanding of loyalty, focusing on turning points, and explores how it interacts with the CCP's recruitment trends. During its early years (1921–35), the CCP developed an ascriptive understanding of the loyalty of its ranks in order to survive the GMD's continuous repression. The notion of 'Party spirit' later emerged as a behavioural approach to loyalty in the context of the post-Long March organisational developments (1935–48). After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and until Mao Zedong's (毛泽东) death in 1976, the CCP oscillated between periods of intense activism and membership expansion, and other periods focused on economic planning. Under Deng Xiaoping's (邓小平) leadership, the Party moved to a behavioural definition of political loyalty, tied initially to one's actions during the Cultural Revolution. As the Party opened its doors to entrepreneurs in the early 2000s with Jiang Zemin's (江泽民) 'Three Represents', the demand for loyalty became increasingly focused on cadres. At the same time, in the context of rising corruption, the CCP's definition of political virtue and Party spirit expanded into the realm of morality, asking officials to be loyal but also exemplary in their personal and familial ethics. Finally, as the CCP under Xi Jinping's leadership further diversifies its membership, we see a push towards activism: the morality and ethics of both Party members and cadres are being increasingly monitored to ensure their loyalty to the Party is genuine.

## **Class Status as an Initial Answer to the Party's Difficulties in Guaranteeing Loyalty (1921–35)**

In its first charter (1921), the CCP stipulated that people who wanted to join the Party had to show their willingness to become 'loyal and honest members' (*zhongshi dangyuan* 忠实党员).<sup>3</sup> However, the Party had difficulties implementing this requirement. The CCP's founding members recruited 'intellectuals' through Marxist study societies or their regional connections at universities. These recruits were mainly loyal to the members they were personally tied to, rather than the organisation as a whole (van de Ven 1992; Bianco 1971). Due to its lack of funds to support its members

3 'The First Program of the Chinese Communist Party' (中国共产党第一个纲领), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party* (中共中央文件选集), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1989), 4.

as professional revolutionaries, the CCP had to allow them to work in government or companies. What is more, in 1923, one year after the CCP joined the Third International, which was under the de facto leadership of the Soviet Union, it received instructions from the latter to cooperate with the GMD (Saich 2020). Accordingly, its members automatically qualified for GMD membership, which further complexified where, exactly, their allegiance lay.<sup>4</sup>

Against this background, the CCP developed organisational tools to solve this issue. In 1923, it standardised the screening process for recruiting members. Since then, a recruit has to be introduced by two Party members and remain a ‘candidate member’ (*houbu dangyuan* 候补党员) for months of screening before becoming a full member.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as its membership expanded from around 50 in 1921 to about 50,000 in 1927, the Party lacked the financial means and ideological support to shape members’ loyalty in a complex environment (van de Ven 1992, 181). Facing this challenge, the Party could not do much more than ask its new members to read Karl Marx’s work.<sup>6</sup>

In 1927, the breakup of the cooperation between the CCP and the GMD led to a reduction of about 80 per cent of the CCP’s membership, with many members finding themselves at odds with the Party.<sup>7</sup> This pushed the CCP to investigate why they betrayed the organisation and how to ensure its members’ loyalty.<sup>8</sup> To solve this issue, and following the Third International’s orders, the CCP increasingly relied on its members’ class status to assess their loyalty. The investigation into the breakup with the GMD revealed that most of those who betrayed the Party were ‘petty intellectuals’ and their actions were said to have led many local Party organs to be destroyed by the Nationalist government. In response to this, the CCP put a great deal of effort into replacing Party secretaries, from the provincial to the county levels, with members labelled as ‘workers’ and ‘poor peasants’.<sup>9</sup> For example,

4 ‘Resolution on the National Movement and the Guomindang’ (关于国民运动及国民党问题的决议案), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 1, 147.

5 ‘First Amendment to the Statute of the Chinese Communist Party’ (中国共产党第一次修正章程), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 1, 158.

6 ‘Decision on Organisation Problems’ (组织问题决议案), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 1, 472–7.

7 ‘Comrade An Ziwen of the Central Organisation Department’s Report about the General Situation of Party Organisation to Chairman Mao’ (中央组织部安子文同志关于党的组织概况向毛主席的报告), *Construction* 32, 1949. For a detailed survey of the break-up, see Yang (2008).

8 ‘Decisions on Party Organisation Problems’ (党的组织问题决议案), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 3, 304.

9 ‘Resolution on the Important Task of Organisation Issues’ (最近组织问题的重要任务决议案), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 3, 468–72.

Mao Zedong was instructed to reshuffle the Hunan Provincial Committee he headed. Among its nine new committee members, at least three had to be selected from among workers and poor peasants, and three had to be specifically responsible for mobilising workers and peasants.<sup>10</sup> In 1930, the Third International ordered the CCP to further reduce the proportion of intellectuals among its members: more than 80 per cent of its members had to be workers and poor peasants. The Third International's view, which the CCP adopted, was that the 'proletarianisation' of the CCP could help the Party maintain its members' loyalty.<sup>11</sup>

This ascriptive approach to loyalty, relying on class status as a proxy, resulted in a great purge in the Jiangxi revolutionary base. Between late 1930 and 1934, many members labelled as 'rich peasants' were arrested and executed for spreading rumours against Mao Zedong and complaining about his military decision-making (Chen 1994). According to the CCP, the Nationalist government's military operations had shaken their faith in the Party, and the rumours they spread were meant to subvert the Party from the inside.<sup>12</sup> The CCP then ordered the examination of the class status of all members in an attempt to further purge intellectuals and rich peasants. The official view was that members with the correct class background (i.e. workers or poor peasants) would never waver in their determination to support the Party.<sup>13</sup> This examination of members' class status ended as the Nationalist government destroyed the Communist bases in Jiangxi. The CCP's Central Committee had to evacuate from Jiangxi in 1934, and its membership plummeted from 300,000 to 40,000 after the Long March in late 1935.<sup>14</sup>

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10 'Party Centre's Letter to the Hunan Provincial Committee' (中央致湖南省委信), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 3, 309.

11 'Resolution on the Development of the Party Organisation' (关于发展党的组织决议案), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 6, 163–6.

12 'Party Centre's Resolution on the Cadre Question' (中央关于干部问题的决议), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 6, 338.

13 'Political Bureau's Directive on Decision by the Twelfth Plenary Session of the Executive Committee of the Comintern' (中共中央政治局关于共产国际执委第十二次全会决议的决定), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 8, 571–9; 'Resolution of the Central Bureau of the Soviet Areas on the Strength of Party Organisation and Leadership' (苏区中央局关于巩固党的组织与领导的决议), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 9, 14.

14 'Comrade An Ziwen of the Central Organisation Department's Report about the General Situation of Party'.



## After the Long March (1935–48): The Emergence of ‘Party Spirit’

As the CCP reflected on its failure in Jiangxi, its understanding of loyalty took a behavioural turn. In December 1935, the CCP convened a Politburo meeting to review the Third International’s policy concerning recruiting members (Sheng 1992). The resulting resolution stated that members’ class status should not be the primary criterion for assessing their loyalty and that intellectuals could be faithful ‘allies’ (*tongmeng zhe* 同盟者). The result was that intellectuals could join the Party again, and their behaviour and work performance became the basis for demonstrating their loyalty.<sup>15</sup> In the following years, the CCP managed to expand its territory and set up a new power base in these areas. As it did not have enough capable Party members and cadres (Lee 1991, 26), it indeed pushed to recruit many university students and leftist intellectuals.<sup>16</sup> Mao Zedong also realised the importance of intellectuals in mobilising villagers to support the Party and its military. He said that if intellectuals were ‘relatively loyal and honest’ (*bijiao zhongshi* 比较忠实) to the Party, they were qualified to be Party members.<sup>17</sup> In Mao’s words, these Party members should be ‘both virtuous and expert’ (*decai jianbei* 德才兼备).<sup>18</sup> Among these intellectuals, schoolteachers, in particular, played a crucial role in the Chinese Communist revolution. They helped the CCP take root in the countryside and to further create and sustain base areas in central and north China (Liu 2009).

Along with this practical turn regarding its views on loyalty, a certain distrust of intellectuals, particularly recent recruits, emerged in the late 1930s and early 1940s when the CCP claimed to have discovered the infiltration of traitorous members into its organisations. All members came under examination and their class backgrounds and connections with the GMD were checked (Lee 1991, 36). As per the Nationalist government’s

15 ‘Party Centre’s Resolution on the Current Political Situation and the Party’s Tasks’ (中央关于目前政治形势与党的任务决议), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 10, 605–21.

16 ‘Party Centre’s Resolution on the Recruitment of Large Numbers of Members’ (中央关于大量发展党员的决议), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 11, 466–7; ‘Party Centre’s Resolution on the Recruitment of Large Number of Intellectuals’ (中央关于大量吸收知识分子), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 12, 207.

17 Mao Zedong, ‘Recruiting Large Numbers of Intellectuals’, 1939, accessed 18 April 2023, [www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist.org-chinese-mao-19391201.htm](http://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist.org-chinese-mao-19391201.htm).

18 Mao Zedong, ‘The Current Situation and the Party’s Tasks’, 10 October 1939, [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_21.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_21.htm).

regulations on the release of prisoners, between 1934 and 1935 more than 60 per cent of Party members were said to have filed statements of repentance, renouncing their membership in the Party and opposing communism (Liu 2004). While some of them later managed to reinstate their CCP membership, and even take up important positions within Party organs, their loyalty was always under suspicion. Recently recruited intellectuals, in general, were also suspected of working for the GMD.<sup>19</sup>

As the CCP's membership significantly increased during the war with Japan (1937–45), intellectual members again accounted for a substantial proportion of its membership, and the Party viewed them as self-interested. Hence, the Party attempted to remould them and cultivate their loyalty to consolidate its strength. Liu Shaoqi's *How to Be a Good Communist* (1939) exemplified this turn towards a behavioural understanding of loyalty. According to Liu, being loyal required members to subordinate their interests to those of the organisation, whatever the circumstances, and even sacrifice their life for the Party. Self-sacrifice, self-cultivation and a shared acceptance of the Party's centrality were seen as crucial in forging a suitable morality among members. Consequently, 'morality' increasingly meant being loyal to the Party and serving its interests. In Liu's words, when Party members have 'only the Party's interests at heart', their unwavering 'Party spirit' is established.<sup>20</sup> As stressed by Timothy Cheek in his chapter in this volume, undertaking self-cultivation in the decades that followed shaped the relationship between the Party and intellectual cadres in particular.

The Yan'an Rectification Movement (1941–45) was launched based on this understanding of loyalty, aiming at rectifying Party members and cadres, and remoulding them into loyal servants of the organisation, as well as consolidating the centrality of Mao's leadership.<sup>21</sup> While this behavioural take on loyalty and Party spirit was still merged with ascriptive elements – the 'proletariat' being seen as reliable and loyal – these efforts to remould members through political education, criticism and self-criticism meant that even disloyal ones could be transformed into 'the awakened vanguard fighters of the proletariat'.<sup>22</sup> To ensure that Party organs remained under

19 'Party Centre's Instruction Concerning Cadre Examination' (中央关于审查干部问题的指示), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 12, 444–7.

20 Liu Shaoqi, 'How to Be a Good Communist', July 1939, [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/liu-shaoqi/1939/how-to-bel/](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/liu-shaoqi/1939/how-to-bel/).

21 'The Party Centre's Decision on Strengthening Party Spirit' (中央关于增强党性的决定), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 13, 144–6.

22 Liu Shaoqi, 'How to Be a Good Communist'.

the management of ‘loyal, honest, and reliable’ (*zhongshi kekao* 忠实可靠) members,<sup>23</sup> the Party initiated the Cadre Examination Campaign in 1943. This first massive inner-party rectification campaign aimed at remoulding unreliable individuals deemed to have infiltrated its organs. Through this campaign, the CCP’s members and cadres had to demonstrate their unwavering loyalty to the Party. As the historian Gao Hua suggested, the campaign used ‘ideological persuasion and coercion to forge an ideal Communist “New Man” who combined loyalty and obedience’ (Gao 2018, 326). In the CCP’s words, these members had ‘two hearts’ (*liangtiao xin* 两条心): one was towards the Party in public, and the other was towards the GMD under the cloak of secrecy. The campaign thus aimed to transform members with ‘two hearts’ into ones with ‘one heart’.<sup>24</sup> As a result, many intellectual members were investigated due to their past relationships with members of the GMD when studying at university. As the historian Chen Yung-fa argues, the investigation was also accompanied by the re-education of these intellectuals to ensure their loyalty to Mao and the Party (Chen 1990, 4–5). But Mao realised that this radical practice could lead to new great purges: he ordered local Party leaders not to kill any intellectual members and initiated a Re-examination Campaign to investigate their cases.<sup>25</sup> In the end, the CCP proclaimed that the re-examination in Yan’an had shown that only 20 per cent of intellectual members were, to different degrees, unreliable or disloyal.<sup>26</sup> In parallel, the CCP also institutionalised cadre evaluation to avoid adverse selection by strengthening the organisational departments at each level and institutionalising ‘virtue’ as a key criterion in the recruitment and promotion of officials. This overall move to a partly behavioural view on loyalty, and the Rectification Campaign that accompanied it, set the basis for the expansion of the CCP. In 1945, when the war with Japan ended, CCP membership increased to more than 1.2 million, paving the

23 ‘Decision by the Politburo Concerning Strengthening the Party’ (中央政治局关于巩固党的决定), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 12, 157–8.

24 ‘Decision by the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Concerning Cadre Examination’ (中共中央关于审查干部的决定), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 14, 93.

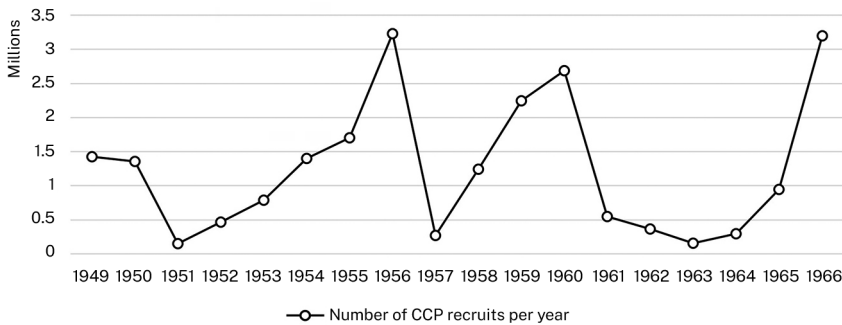
25 ‘Central Secretariat’s Instruction on the Work of Cadre Examination and Anti-Spy to Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Sub-Bureau’ (中央书记处关于审干反奸工作给晋察冀分局的指示), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 14, 402–3.

26 ‘Central Secretariat’s Instruction to Deng Xiaoping, Rao Shushi, Lin Feng, and Cheng Zihua on the Work of Re-examining Confession Elements’ (中央书记处关于对坦白分子进行甄别工作给邓小平, 饶漱石, 林枫, 程子华的指示), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 14, 159.

way to seizing national power.<sup>27</sup> Over the following three years, the Party's membership increased 3.5 times, and the CCP continued relying on the cultivation of members' loyalty as a source of its cohesiveness.<sup>28</sup>

## The Mao Era (1949–76): Expertise, Activism and the Display of Loyalty

Between 1949 and 1976, the CCP membership increased from 4.48 to 35 million and its understanding of its members and cadres' loyalty changed along with the Party's political agenda. The issue of CCP members' and cadres' loyalty also became increasingly entangled with their behaviour and job performance, oscillating between periods of intense activism and others focused on economic planning. These oscillations marked changes in recruitment strategies, as reflected in Figure 5.1, with activism being underscored when the Party expanded.



**Figure 5.1: Trends in CCP Recruitment (1949–66).**

Source: *Compilation of Internal Statistical Material of the Chinese Communist Party (1921–2010)* (中国共产党党内统计资料汇编 [1921–2010]), Organisation Department of the Chinese Communist Party, Beijing: Dangjian duwu chubanshe, 2011.

27 Mao Zedong, 'Resolution on Certain Historical Questions' (关于若干历史问题的决议), 1945, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (毛泽东选集), vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), 952–1003.

28 Liu Shaoqi, 'Liu Shaoqi's Speech at the Chinese Communist Party's First National Organisational Work Conference' (刘少奇在中国共产党第一次全国组织工作会议上的报告), 1951, *Reference and Educational Material on the History of the Chinese Communist Party* (中共党史教学参考资料), vol. 19 (Beijing: Neibu chuban, 1986), 260–9.

During the early years of the PRC, particularly before 1951, the lack of CCP members and cadres to administer the country and manage industries compelled the Party to change its criteria for defining its members' loyalty, leaning towards a behavioural approach. Loyalty increasingly had to do with members' ability.<sup>29</sup> To demonstrate their loyalty, members had to acquire the scientific knowledge and skills necessary to serve the Party's new political agenda (Schurmann 1971, 5). In early 1949, An Ziwen (安子文), then deputy director of the CCP's Central Organisational Department, reported to Mao that the Party was in dire need of recruiting new members who could manage industries and cities.<sup>30</sup> The existing members, coming mainly from a rural background, lacked the knowledge and skills to establish economic stability and carry out industrialisation (Gao 2004). The Party's organisation departments at different levels focused on recruiting individuals with higher education or technical skills, and existing members had to show their political zeal by undergoing further training. As shown in Figure 5.1, this led to a decrease in CCP admissions because the total number of experts and intellectuals was small compared to the rural population that constituted the bulk of the membership.

To counter this trend, the CCP started expanding again in the early 1950s, while closely monitoring the recruits' political loyalty. The CCP recruited intellectuals, yet it still distrusted their loyalty in the Cold War context and initiated political campaigns to examine their virtue and loyalty (Oksenberg 1968). In early 1950, the CCP launched a rectification campaign among Party members and cadres to secure their loyalty by cultivating their 'virtue'.<sup>31</sup> Two years later, Liu Shaoqi said it was wrong to prioritise members' expertise over their virtue and loyalty. In Liu's analysis, many educated members had studied and worked under the Nationalist government, which put their dedication to the Party in doubt. They might be in touch with officials of the Nationalist government in Taiwan. Liu thus ordered organisation departments to cultivate their political virtue through criticism and self-criticism sessions.<sup>32</sup> In that context, the Central Organisation Department

29 'Party Centre's Decision on the Preparation of 53,000 cadres' (中共中央关于准备五万三千个干部的决议), *Selected Central Committee Documents of the Chinese Communist Party*, vol. 17, 426–31.

30 'Comrade An Ziwen of the Central Organisation Department's Report about the General Situation of Party'.

31 'Party Centre's Instruction on Developing and Strengthening the Party Organisation' (中央关于发展和巩固党的组织的指示), *Selected Documents on Organisational Work* (组织工作文件选编), 1949–52 (Beijing: Neibu chubanshe, 1980), 221–3.

32 Liu Shaoqi, 'Struggling for Becoming Better Communists' (为更高的共产党员的条件而斗争), 1953, *Liu Shaoqi's Writings since the Founding of the People's Republic of China* (建国以来刘少奇文稿), vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2005), 245–64.

standardised ‘virtue’ and ‘expertise’ as the critical criteria in Party member and cadre recruitment. Here virtue referred to the acceptance of the Party’s ideology and regulations and was, therefore, indistinguishable from political loyalty.<sup>33</sup> Expertise meant that members should learn the necessary scientific knowledge and skill to perform their duty effectively. Meanwhile, the new technical cadres were instructed to work under the supervision of ‘old revolutionaries’ to ensure their virtue and loyalty towards the Party.<sup>34</sup> The CCP thus ordered local units to cultivate these new Party members: if they were relatively loyal, provincial authorities had to promote them, even if it bypassed the normal promotion process.<sup>35</sup>

Starting from 1955, the CCP’s top leaders became increasingly concerned about collusion between the American camp and the alleged Chinese domestic ‘enemies’.<sup>36</sup> Against this background, the mid-1950s witnessed both high levels of recruitment and the purge of allegedly disloyal Party members. The Party initiated a campaign to examine the individual histories of its members, ranging from the rank and file to provincial Party secretaries.<sup>37</sup> According to official statistics, between 1955 and 1960, more than 51 million cadres, Party members and public sector staff members were investigated. Around 630,000 of them were identified as ‘hidden enemies’ (*yincang de diren* 隐藏的敌人), most of them intellectual Party members.<sup>38</sup>

The Party’s distrust of intellectuals peaked with the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957–58 and the Great Leap Forward (1958–61). More than half a million intellectuals were forced into manual labour or banished to frontier regions. Living a life of hardship became a means for them to show their willingness to subordinate their individual interests to the socialist cause

33 ‘Party Centre’s Decision on Strengthening Cadre Management’ (中央关于加强干部管理的决定), *Selected Documents on Organizational Work*, 1953–54 (Beijing: Neibu chuban, 1980), 101–6.

34 An Ziwen, ‘Struggling for Removing Negative and Unhealthy Phenomena in the Party’s Organisation’ (为消除党组织内的消极的和 unhealthy 的现象而斗争), *People’s Daily*, 12 February 1953.

35 ‘Party Centre’s Decision on the Unified Allocation of Cadres, the Reforming of the Technicians, and the Cultivation and Training of a Large Number of Cadres’ (中央关于统一调配干部, 团结, 改造原有技术人员及大量培养, 训练干部的决定), *Selected Documents on Organisational Work*, 1953–54, 98–101.

36 Mao Zedong, ‘Speech at the Chinese Communist Party’s National Congress’ (在中国共产党全国代表会议上的讲话), 1955, [www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist-org-chinese-mao-195503.htm](http://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist-org-chinese-mao-195503.htm).

37 Zhongyang pizhuan, ‘Central Organisation Department’s Report Concerning the Situation of Cadre Examination Conference’ (中央组织部关于审干工作会议的情况的报告), *Selected Documents on Organisational Work*, 1957, 323–9.

38 ‘Party Centre’s Summary Report Concerning the Campaign to Wipe Out Hidden Counterrevolutionaries’ (中共中央十人小组关于肃清暗藏反革命分子运动的总结报告), *Collection of Documents from the Campaign to Wipe Out Hidden Counterrevolutionaries* (肃清暗藏反革命分子运动文件汇编) (Jinan: Neibu chuban, 1961), 32.

(Cheek 2015). Cadres with intellectual class status were said to have become a privileged class as they had indulged in a 'bourgeois lifestyle'. In the early 1960s, millions of cadres were sent to villages to live, work and eat together with villagers.<sup>39</sup> Making them more like villagers and cultivating their sense of the 'proletariat' became one of the main ways of ensuring they would be loyal to the Party.<sup>40</sup> To showcase their political loyalty, they had to share the villagers' daily routine.<sup>41</sup> While the emphasis on monitoring the behaviour of Party members and cadres to ensure their loyalty took place at a time when the CCP membership was increasing rapidly (1951–60), as shown in Figure 5.1, the extreme form taken by the Anti-Rightist Campaign led to a disruption of recruitment in 1957.<sup>42</sup> The following years saw a decrease in recruitment as the CCP blamed rural cadres for the failure of the Great Leap Forward and curtailed its expansion in the countryside.<sup>43</sup>

CCP recruitment started to pick up again in 1964 and peaked in 1966 in the wake of the Socialist Education Movement and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Once again, CCP urban Party members and cadres were sent to the countryside to change their lifestyle to resemble that of villagers, their ability to adopt a 'proletarian' lifestyle being a sign of their loyalty.<sup>44</sup> About 3.5 million officials and university students were sent to the countryside to carry out the Socialist Education Movement (1962–66) (Perry 2019, 552).

The Cultural Revolution (1966–76) was a unique period as personal loyalty to Mao Zedong was placed above loyalty to the Party. With the Party apparatus virtually collapsing, Mao sustained his reign through a personality cult (Wu 2014). While Party spirit as an organisational view

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39 'Central Organisational Department's Notification Concerning Sending Cadres at the Central Level Down to Villages' (中央组织部关于从中央一级抽调干部下放农村基层的通知), *Selected Documents on Organisational Work*, 1960, 360–1.

40 'Party Centre's Notice on the Methods of Cadre Work in the Future' (中央关于今后干部工作方法的), *Selected Documents on Organisational Work*, 1957, 290–4.

41 'Central Organisational Department's Notification Concerning Sending Cadres at the Central Level Down to Villages'.

42 'Party Centre's Instruction on the Work of Recruiting Members during the Second Five-Year Plan' (中央关于第二个五年计划时期接收新党员工作的通知), *Selected Documents on Organisational Work*, 1957, 259–61.

43 'Party Centre's Urgent Instruction Letter Regarding the Current Policy Problem of People's Communes' (中共中央关于农村人民公社当前政策问题的紧急指示信), *Selected Important Documents since the Founding the People's Republic of China* (建国以来重要文献选编), vol. 13 (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1996), 675–6.

44 'Party Centre's Instruction on the Control and Priority of Recruiting New Members' (中共中央关于领导有控制有重点地接受新党员的指示), *Selected Documents on Organisational Work*, 1964, 102–7.

of loyalty became less relevant, it was during this period that a behavioural approach to loyalty became central within the CCP. Mao's personality cult translated into repeated and ritualistic demonstrations of loyalty that pervaded everyday life, art and culture (Leese 2011). While Figure 5.1 shows a net increase in CCP recruitment in 1966, the disruption of the CCP bureaucracy and the lack of data or archival material make it impossible at this point to systematically analyse how this personalised view on loyalty was operationalised in the Party's recruitment policy in subsequent years.

## The Deng Xiaoping Era (1978–97): Party Spirit against Factionalism and Rebellion

After the beginning of the reform and opening following Mao Zedong's death, the Party's approach to political loyalty changed drastically, moving away from ascriptive criteria. Class labels gradually disappeared as a criterion to join the Communist Youth League and the CCP and to enter school or receive job assignments. Individuals were no longer to be referred to by their earlier class designation (Lee 1991). The CCP also changed its policy concerning individuals' overseas connections, as such links were no longer a legitimate reason to bar someone from joining the Party (Lee 1991, 191). Overall, one's family background or social relations became less important in evaluating one's loyalty when admitting them into the Party or getting them promoted.

The implementation of economic reforms required technically skilled individuals and, as a result, educational qualifications became increasingly important in recruiting CCP members and officials (Lee 1991). In 1980, Deng Xiaoping called for the recruitment and promotion of individuals who were 'revolutionary, younger, more educated, and more technically specialised' (*geminghua, nianqinghua, zhishihua, zhuanyehua* 革命化、年轻化、知识化、专业化).<sup>45</sup> The 'productive forces standard' (*shengchan li biao zhun* 生产力标准) became central in cadre management as recruiting and promoting officials was increasingly based on their technical skills and work performance (Takahara 2018). Yet, Deng still emphasised revolutionary qualities, referring to CCP members' and cadres' adherence to the current Party line and their behaviour during the Cultural Revolution.

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45 Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping Selected Works* (邓小平文选), vol. 2 (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2014), 316.



The Party line was defined by the ‘Several Principles of Political Life in the Party’, a landmark central document of the reform era issued in 1980.<sup>46</sup> It criticised the previous poor implementation of collective leadership and stressed the leadership’s opposition to ‘personal arbitrary rule’. It called on Party members to ‘study diligently, be both red and expert’, and revived the notion of ‘Party spirit’ after it was set aside during the Cultural Revolution, presenting it as a remedy against factionalism.

This definition of Party spirit directly targeted the individuals who had advanced their political careers under the protection of the ‘Gang of Four’:

There are still a number of cadres and Party members relatively deeply influenced by Lin Biao (林彪) and the ‘Gang of Four’ that are still factionalist, and are even still conducting factionalist activities ... ‘there are no visible mountains but there are hidden rocks’.<sup>47</sup>

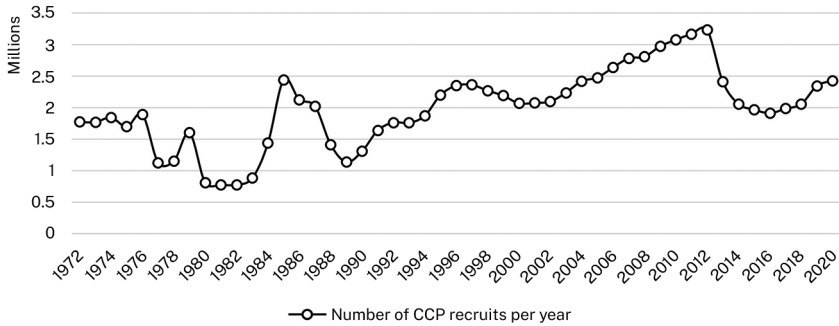
A notice on the selection of cadres more specifically was issued in 1986, calling for a careful investigation of their behaviour during the Cultural Revolution and since the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee held in December 1978. Against this background, a rectification campaign was implemented (1983–87) to deal with the ‘three kinds of people’ who obtained Party membership and advanced their political careers during the Cultural Revolution (Ch’i 1991; Baum 1994).

In line with what we have seen during previous periods, this turn to a definition of loyalty based on members’ current and past behaviour took place at a time of Party expansion. As shown in Figure 5.2, the number of yearly Party recruits started to increase again in the early 1980s after a decade of overall stagnation and decrease, and it peaked during the Rectification Campaign.

The definition of political loyalty based on members’ behaviour during the Cultural Revolution became obsolete once the Party had weeded out what it perceived as factionalist elements. As a result, Party recruitment progressively became routinised and procedural in the late 1980s. Figure 5.2 in fact shows a clear drop in recruitment after 1985–86. In addition to the decrease in recruitments, widespread inactivity among Party members has been widely seen as a sign of political decay, leading to the 1989 movement (Ch’i 1991; Rosen 1990).

46 ‘Several Principles on Political Life in the Party’ (关于党内政治生活的若干准则), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1980.

47 Ibid.



**Figure 5.2: Trends in CCP Recruitment (1972–2020).**

Source: *Compilation of Internal Statistical Material of the Chinese Communist Party (1921–2010)* (中国共产党党内统计资料汇编 [1921–2010]), Organisation Department of the Chinese Communist Party, Beijing: Dangjian Duwu Chubanshe, 2011; 'Internal Chinese Communist Party Statistical Reports', 2012–21, accessed on 12 April 2022, news.12371.cn/dzybmbdj/zzb/dntjgb/.

The June 1989 mobilisations, in which many CCP members took part, pushed the Party to rethink its approach to recruitment. A central notice published in August 1989 criticised the low quality of Party members and the tendency to rely mainly on age and diplomas in appointing and promoting cadres. It noted that the Party could not rely on 'the productive forces' standard as a substitute for the principle of having both virtue and talent, and that recruiters 'must be prevented from paying more attention to talent and less to virtue'.<sup>48</sup> In 1990, the Party drafted, for the first time, a separate central document dedicated to the process of recruiting CCP members.<sup>49</sup> To limit adverse selection, it stressed the screening and training of individuals before their admission to the Party. It set a minimum training requirement of 40 hours for new recruits and a compulsory biannual evaluation of every cell's recruitment work. The political education of Party members and cadres to strengthen their Party spirit was further stressed by a 1994 central decision on Party-building.<sup>50</sup> This emphasis on loyalty and political education was accompanied by another wave of Party expansion, as shown in Figure 5.2. This post-1989 recruitment drive has been widely documented and was particularly strong among students: the Party wanted to ensure they developed a stake in the regime's survival (Rosen 2004; Gore 2011).

48 'Notice on Strengthening Party Construction' (关于加强党的建设的通知), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1989.

49 'Chinese Communist Party's Working Rules for Recruiting Members (Provisional)' (中国共产党发展党员工作细则 (试行)), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1990.

50 'Decision on Few Important Issues Regarding the Strengthening of Party Building' (关于加强党的建设几个重大问题的决定), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1994.

## The ‘Three Represents’ (2000): A Moral Turn in the Party’s Understanding of Loyalty

As China further liberalised its economy, Jiang Zemin initiated the Three Represents policy to coopt an emerging middle class within the Party. Jiang Zemin first introduced this policy during an inspection tour of Guangdong Province in February 2000. In practice, the policy lifted the ban on recruiting private entrepreneurs into the CCP (Dickson 2003), as the Party was to represent not only the three revolutionary classes – workers, farmers and soldiers – but also the ‘advanced productive forces’ (*xianjin shengchanli* 先进生产力), the ‘advanced culture’ (*xianjin wenhua* 先进文化) and the ‘interest of the vast majority of the Chinese people’ (*zhongguo zui guangda renmin de genben liyi* 中国最广大人民的根本利益).<sup>51</sup> This policy was included in the Party charter in 2002. This change was accompanied by a new push in Party recruitment after 2002, as shown in Figure 5.2. It also accelerated the sociological transformation of the CCP towards a middle-class Party: while workers and peasants still represented more than 50 per cent of its membership in 1997 (Gore 2011, 19), they represented less than 35 per cent in 2019.<sup>52</sup>

Due to high levels of corruption (Wedeman 2012), which resulted in the masses increasingly objecting to Party members’ morality,<sup>53</sup> discussions of members’ and cadres’ ethics became increasingly important in the late 1990s and 2000s. A 2001 central document called for the improvement of the Party’s ‘workstyle’ (*zuofeng* 作风) to limit ‘formalism’, ‘bureaucratism’ and ‘hedonism’, and to prevent disconnection from the masses. The issue of ‘workstyle’ is directly linked to the Party’s image, and therefore political loyalty: ‘Some cadres do not have excellent moral integrity, and their behaviour is not checked carefully, which impacts the image and prestige of the Party.’<sup>54</sup> This expanded definition of what constitutes virtue, and by extension loyalty, became the norm in the early 2000s, and remained so under Hu Jintao (胡锦涛). Issues of workstyle and Party spirit were effectively

51 Jiang Zemin, ‘Comrade Jiang Zemin’s Work Report at the 16th Party Congress’ (江泽民同志在党的十六大上所作报告), 8 November 2002, [www.mfa.gov.cn/chn/pds/ziliao/zyjh/t10855.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.cn/chn/pds/ziliao/zyjh/t10855.htm).

52 ‘Chinese Communist Party Internal Statistics 2019 Report’ (2019年中国共产党党内统计公报), Organisation Department of the Chinese Communist Party, June 2020.

53 Li Yuanhao, ‘Uphold the Standard of Being Equipped with Both Virtue and Talent but Virtue Comes First in Choosing People’ (坚持德才兼备以德为先用人标准), *Qiushi*, 16 October 2008.

54 ‘Party Centre’s Decision on Strengthening and Improving Workstyle Building’ (中共中央关于加强和改进党的作风建设的决定), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 2001.

conflated in a 2009 central document on Party-building: ‘strengthening the cultivation of Party spirit provides important foundations and impetus for developing a fine workstyle’.<sup>55</sup>

In that context, Party cadres became the main focus of attention, instead of mere members. In a 1995 speech, Jiang asked cadres to ‘pay attention to politics’, study ideological texts and exemplify Party spirit.<sup>56</sup> As the Party increasingly fused the question of political virtue with personal and family ethics, Jiang Zemin also asked cadres to ‘take the lead in establishing a good family style’.<sup>57</sup> The educational campaign of the ‘three stresses’ launched in 1998 also called on Party cadres to ‘stress study, stress politics, stress righteousness’ (Luo 2021).

Beyond such campaigns, it was through the institutionalisation of recruitment, evaluation and promotion mechanisms that cadres were to be kept in check. This process started under Deng Xiaoping, as central regulations structured an assessment system based on the cadres’ ‘virtue’ (*de* 德), ‘ability’ (*neng* 能), ‘diligence’ (*qin* 勤) and ‘achievement’ (*ji* 绩).<sup>58</sup> The Party regularly reviewed cadres’ behaviour and performance, asking them to conduct criticism and self-criticism sessions focusing on their behaviour, ideology and adherence to Party policies and regulations (Manion 1985; Lee 1991, 315). Jiang Zemin went one step further with the issuance in 1995 of the first complete and systematic central document on the management of leading cadres, specifying that they were to be held responsible for the performance of their units.<sup>59</sup> These mechanisms were further defined as the 1995 provisional document was replaced in 2002 by the full-blown ‘Regulations on the Promotion and Appointment of Leading Party and Government Cadres’ (for an analysis of the different versions of this document, see Doyon 2019).

55 ‘Party Centre’s Decision on Some Important Issues Related to Strengthening and Improving Party Building under New Circumstances’ (中共中央关于加强和改进新形势下党的建设若干重要问题的决定), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 2009.

56 Jiang Zemin, ‘Leading Cadres Must Pay Attention to Politics’ (领导干部一定要讲政治), 27 September 1995, [www.reformdata.org/1995/0927/4391.shtml](http://www.reformdata.org/1995/0927/4391.shtml).

57 Jiang Zemin, ‘Leading Cadres Must Take the Lead in Establishing a Good Family Style’ (领导干部要带头树立好的家风), 21 July 1998, [www.reformdata.org/1998/0721/5758.shtml](http://www.reformdata.org/1998/0721/5758.shtml).

58 ‘Notice on Selecting and Appointing Cadres Strictly According to Party Principles’ (关于严格按照党的原则选拔任用干部的通知), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1986.

59 ‘Provisional Work Regulations for the Promotion and Appointment of Leading Party and Government Cadres’ (党政领导干部选拔任用工作暂行条例), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1995.

New cadre management regulations adopted the expanded definition of loyalty mentioned above, fusing political virtue and personal ethics. Contrasting with the Deng era's understanding of virtue as 'upholding socialism and Party leadership',<sup>60</sup> the 2007 Provisional Regulations on Civil Service Assessments defined virtue as 'referring to political and ideological quality as well as displays of personal integrity, professional ethics and social virtue' (quoted in Snape 2019). This trend is in line with Jowitt's argument regarding the evolution of Communist systems: as they become more inclusive in dealing with society, Communist party-states must maintain discipline among their officials so as not to lose their charismatic impetus and legitimacy (Jowitt 1992). In parallel to the widespread cooption of social actors through Party membership, it implies the training and mobilisation of officials to maintain their 'Party spirit' (Pieke 2009; Sorace 2016) as well as the standardisation and expansion of the discipline apparatus to ensure the cadres' compliance (Brødsgaard 2012; Li 2018).

## **The Xi Jinping Era (Post-2012): Combating Fake Loyalty**

The domain of political virtue and Party spirit expanded under Xi Jinping in the context of a massive anti-corruption drive (Fu 2014). Not only has the meaning of virtue further expanded into the realm of ethics and personal relationships, but also, and by contrast to what has been the norm under his two predecessors, Party members are once again the focus of the CCP's calls for loyalty, alongside cadres.

As we have seen, political criteria never disappeared from cadre selection and promotion in the reform era. They have, however, become increasingly crucial under Xi Jinping as his administration has criticised the tendency to select cadres based on artificial indicators of ability, such as GDP growth (Doyon 2019). Virtue is once again seen as more important than ability in selecting officials. The 2014 and 2019 versions of the Work Regulations for the Promotion and Appointment of Leading Party and Government

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60 Deng Xiaoping, 'Reform of the Party and State Leaders System' (党和国家领导制度的改革), 18 August 1980, *Deng Xiaoping Selected Works*, vol. 2.

Cadres put forward ‘political quality’ (*zhengzhi suzhi* 政治素质) and ‘political standard’ (*zhengzhi biao zhun* 政治标准) as essential criteria for cadre recruitment and evaluation.<sup>61</sup>

The emergence of these vague notions of political quality or standard go hand in hand with an extensive understanding of virtue and Party spirit. Going one step further in the direction of fusing political virtue and personal ethics, recent regulations ask for the ‘strengthening of (cadre) monitoring outside of the workplace, inquiring about (their) social morality, professional ethics, family virtue, personal integrity etc.’<sup>62</sup> Confirming the fusion of the two notions that emerged under Jiang Zemin, for Xi Jinping, ‘workstyle issues are fundamentally Party spirit issues’.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, cadres’ relationships, particularly with family members, have become increasingly important in judging their loyalty. Official criticisms of ‘naked officials’ (*luoguan* 裸官) illustrate this tendency well. As officials whose immediate families live abroad, they are perceived as at risk of defecting or using their overseas connections to facilitate corrupt behaviour.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, this broadening of the definition of virtue does not concern only cadres: according to the revised Party disciplinary regulations, both cadres and members can be sanctioned for violating social or family morals.<sup>65</sup>

Against this background, cadres, as well as mere Party members, must be increasingly active in performing their political loyalty. According to the ‘Several Principles on Political Life in the Party under the New Situation’, a revised version of the landmark document of 1980 discussed above, Party members must ‘unswervingly implement the Party’s basic line’ and they cannot have an ‘ambiguous’, ‘aloof or indifferent’ stance on ideological issues. These guidelines also note that:

61 ‘Work Regulation for the Promotion and Appointment of Leading Party and Government Cadres’ (党政领导干部选拔任用工作条例), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 2014; ‘Work Regulation for the Promotion and Appointment of Leading Party and Government Cadres’ (党政领导干部选拔任用工作条例), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 2019.

62 ‘Work Regulation for the Promotion and Appointment of Leading Party and Government Cadres’ (党政领导干部选拔任用工作条例), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 2019.

63 Xi Jinping, ‘Steadfastly Promoting the Construction of the Party’s Integrity and the Fight Against Corruption’ (坚定不移推进党风廉政建设和反腐败斗争), 12 January 2016, [theory.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0103/c416126-29743028.html](http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0103/c416126-29743028.html).

64 ‘Notice Regarding Improving the Reporting of Leading Cadres’ Personal Matters’ (关于进一步做好领导干部报告个人有关事项工作的通知), Organisation Department of the Chinese Communist Party, December 2013.

65 ‘The Chinese Communist Party’s Disciplinary Regulations’ (中国共产党纪律处分条例), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, August 2018.

when the people's interests are harmed, when the image of the Party and the state is damaged, or when the Party's ruling position is threatened, one must stand up for them with a clear stance and take the initiative to wage the struggle resolutely.<sup>66</sup>

Party members who do not actively show their loyalty risk being accused of being 'two-faced individuals' (*liangmian ren* 两面人). This term, reminiscent of the 'two hearts' intellectuals of the 1930s–40s, did not appear in the 1980 version of the document. According to a central document on Party-building issued in 2019, the term refers to individuals who challenge the authority of the leadership by 'complying in public with the centre's orders while opposing them in private'.<sup>67</sup> Along these lines, Party members are forbidden to 'openly express viewpoints and opinions that run counter to the lines of theories, guiding principles and policies, as well as the implementation of major decisions of the Party Centre'.<sup>68</sup>

These different forms of unsanctioned behaviour fall under the umbrella term of 'fake loyalty' (*wei zhongcheng* 伪忠诚).<sup>69</sup> As detailed by a provincial Party school team, fake loyalty can take a variety of forms, illustrating the Party's encompassing definition of loyalty:

First, the ones who pay lip service to Marxism, while in reality they have faith in Feng Shui masters and have only personal promotion and wealth in their hearts. Second, the ones who look diligent on the surface but eat, drink and are merry in private. Third, the ones who pretend to focus on economic development but abuse their power for personal gain behind the Party's back. ... Fourth, the ones who behave like they are dedicated to the public but under the table mix up officialdom and business ... Fifth, they are Party members or leading cadres on the surface but ... they see foreign countries as escape routes and are always preparing to 'jump ship'.<sup>70</sup>

66 'Guidelines on the Political Life within the Party under the New Situation' (关于新形势下党内政治生活的若干准则), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 27 October 2016.

67 'Opinion on Strengthening the Party's Political Construction' (关于加强党的政治建设的意见), Central Office of the Chinese Communist Party, 31 January 2019.

68 'The Chinese Communist Party's Regulations on the Protection of Party Members' Rights' (中国共产党党员权利保障条例), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 4 January 2021.

69 'Opinion on Strengthening the Party's Political Construction' (关于加强党的政治建设的意见), Central Office of the Chinese Communist Party, 31 January 2019.

70 'Firmly and Clearly Oppose "Fake Loyalty"' (旗帜鲜明反对'伪忠诚'), *Qiushiwang*, 25 January 2018, [www.qstheory.cn/dukan/hqwg/2018-01/25/c\\_1122313690.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/hqwg/2018-01/25/c_1122313690.htm).

The Xi Jinping administration relies on encompassing definitions of political virtue and Party spirit as tools to strengthen Party cohesion, with issues of corruption and disloyalty being closely monitored and sanctioned by the Party disciplinary apparatus. Going beyond the institutional checks on cadres developed in the past 40 years, Party cadres and members have been asked since the Mass Line Education Campaign launched in 2013 to take part in criticism and self-criticism sessions, called ‘democratic life meetings’ (*minzhu shenghuohui* 民主生活会) (Doyon 2014). They should also join regular training sessions, on CCP history or the CCP’s charter, for example, to rectify their workstyle and strengthen their Party spirit.<sup>71</sup> The explicit willingness to rectify Party cadres, but also members, through education and self-criticism is reminiscent of Liu Shaoqi’s views on the relationship between the Party and its members, as exposed in *How to Be a Good Communist* (Liu 1939), and of practices of the Mao era. They are, however, more about ensuring organisational discipline and obedience to the leader than instilling a revolutionary ideology within the Party ranks. This is reflected in the slogan of the ‘Two Safeguards’, included in the Party’s charter in 2022 at the occasion of the Twentieth National CCP Congress: to safeguard the ‘core’ status of General Secretary Xi Jinping within the CCP and to safeguard the centralised authority of the Party.

The emphasis on rectification and active loyalty of Party members has been accompanied by a change in recruitment policy. A revised version of the Working Rules for Recruiting Members was published in 2014, giving more weight to the screening and education of recruits and calling on recruiters to stress quality over quantity.<sup>72</sup> While we see in Figure 5.2 a clear drop in the number of annual CCP recruits between 2012 and 2016, numbers have risen again since then. The turn to a voluntaristic take on political loyalty has, in fact, gone together with the growth of Party cells in social organisations and private businesses, further expanding beyond the CCP’s traditional support bases and among potentially less reliable publics (Koss 2021; Doyon 2021).

The pressure put on Party cadres and members has the potential to create adverse effects. Cadres appear reluctant to take new initiatives for fear of being disciplined, leading to bureaucratic inaction (Ang 2020). Also,

71 ‘Opinion on Deepening and Consolidating the Educational Results of the “Do Not Forget the Original Aspirations and Firmly Remember the Mission” Theme’ (关于巩固深化‘不忘初心、牢记使命’主题教育成果的意见), Central Office of the Chinese Communist Party, 15 September 2020.

72 ‘Chinese Communist Party’s Working Rules for Recruiting Members’ (中国共产党发展党员工作细则), Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 11 June 2014.



despite the increase in Party recruitment, the emphasis on activism further limits debates within the Party. While diverse views still coexist within the CCP under Xi Jinping, they have less space to be expressed (Cai 2021): the limited venues for political competition within the CCP, or ‘intra-party democracy’, have been curtailed (see Jean-Pierre Cabestan, Chapter 1, this volume), and channels for internal communications are also increasingly controlled.<sup>73</sup> Over time, this may further restrict the Party’s capacity to attract new recruits and lead to its elite being increasingly disconnected from what goes on at the grassroots.

## Conclusion

With the objective of contributing to a better understanding of the CCP’s evolution, this chapter draws on a corpus of central documents spanning the 100 years of the CCP to show the malleability of the CCP’s understanding of its members’ and cadres’ loyalty. Far from monolithic and unchanging, the CCP has shown its adaptability and ability to rethink its relationship with its membership in response to the evolving political, social and economic circumstances.

Tracing these evolutions, we show that the CCP’s understanding of political loyalty has evolved mainly along two dimensions. First, it fluctuated between ascriptive interpretations of loyalty and behavioural ones. While, in its early years, the CCP primarily relied on an ascriptive view of loyalty linked to class labels, it quickly realised the importance of recruiting more intellectual members to expand its territory and influence. It is in that context that the Party popularised the notion of ‘Party spirit’, as developed in Liu Shaoqi’s *How to Be a Good Communist*. Beyond the question of class background, Party members’ loyalty could be cultivated by transforming their ‘two hearts’ into having ‘one heart’ towards the Party. In that context, the issue of political loyalty became fused with that of virtue to justify the necessity of subordinating their individual interests to those of the Party’s. This behavioural approach to political loyalty continued to play an essential role in the following decades. It became hegemonic with the disappearance of class labels in the early years of the reform era and with the policy of the Three Represents that marked the end of the Party’s class nature.

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73 Dave Kang, ‘In Xi’s China, Even Internal Reports Fall Prey to Censorship’, Associated Press, 31 October 2022, [apnews.com/article/health-china-beijing-covid-wuhan-3c199e3f1a084013da18fc9e6061e775](https://apnews.com/article/health-china-beijing-covid-wuhan-3c199e3f1a084013da18fc9e6061e775).

Second, as part of the behavioural approach to loyalty, the level of activism expected from CCP members and cadres varied drastically over time. This activism took the relatively narrow form of a personality cult under Mao; however, as the CCP's understanding of virtuous behaviour expanded to personal and family ethics in the later reform era, it also assumed more encompassing ones. The Party's call for activism at times focused specifically on CCP cadres – seen as the key political elite whose loyalty really matters – as was the case under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. At different times, this extended to the broader CCP membership to ensure the organisation's mobilisation capacity, as under the Xi administration.

This chapter also shows that the CCP emphasises behavioural notions of loyalty and, in particular, high levels of activism when it wants to expand and diversify its membership. Rather than a pure sign of atrophy, emphasising political activism is, hence, part of the CCP's inclusion strategy, as it aims at ensuring the loyalty of new and diverse members and can contribute to the adaptability and resilience of the CCP as an organisation (Shambaugh 2008; Nathan 2003; Saich 2021). This push for Party expansion can, however, be disrupted by extreme rectification campaigns when the leadership becomes highly suspicious of new members and tries to govern every aspect of their lives. In line with Liu Shaoqi's approach to loyalty and Party spirit, every element of Party members' behaviour must then reflect their dedication to the organisation. We saw that CCP recruitment dropped during the Anti-Rightist Campaign of the 1950s and during the anti-corruption and mass line campaigns of the early 2010s. Beyond limiting its inclusiveness, such campaigns can also limit internal debates, preventing the CCP from tapping into the diversity of its membership to ensure its adaption to changing social developments.

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