The New Life of the Party: Party-Building and Social Engineering in Greater Shanghai

Patricia M. Thornton

ABSTRACT

While the 2004 introduction of a Party-organized trade union in Wal-Mart’s mainland China-based stores was widely reported, far less is known about official Party branches and committees in the non-state-owned sector. Well over 3.5 million Party members now work in “non-publicly owned enterprises”, a sector of the economy in which the Party has continued to expand. The Party is experimenting with new organizational arrangements and remaking its social agenda in order to increase its popularity, relevance and appeal, particularly among young urban professionals. This article outlines recent Party-building initiatives in the private sector over the last decade. Drawing upon membership and other data from over 1,000 local Party committees in non-publicly owned enterprises in greater Shanghai, I analyze contemporary “Party life” in “two new” branches—new social and new economic organizations since the adoption of market reform—as a reflection of the Party’s possible future as it absorbs the “advanced forces” of an increasingly market-oriented China.

In October 2008, the Intel Shanghai Communist Party branch helped to organize what was probably the largest speed-dating event in history. Working “under the care of” the local Party office in Wujing, which provided a minibus to ferry “educated white-collar employees of foreign enterprises” to and from the event, the Intel Party branch mobilized a coterie of hopeful singles to participate in the “It’s a Fine Time for Love” social mixer. On the day in question, 3,000 eligible bachelors and single women—including 16 Intel Party branch members and “ordinary masses” from Wujing—convened in Luwan Stadium for an afternoon of activities “painstakingly prepared” by a subdivision of the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau. For the afternoon’s first event, the “Great Turntable of Happiness” (xingfu dazhuanpan 幸福大转盘), the assembled singles paraded past one another in gender-segregated columns; at the behest of the organizers, favored partners were either discretely passed “easy on the eyes cards” (shunyan kapian 顺眼卡片) containing personal contact information or invited to “Heart-Unlocking Speed Match” (xinsuo supei 心锁速配) interviews during which participants briefly grilled one another on a range of topics before passing to the next in line. While some disgruntled participants complained that the din in the stadium was hardly conducive to serious courtship, at least one attendee disagreed: “As busy with
work as we usually are, slaving away in our cubicles, our circle of friends is pretty small. With an opportunity like today's to actively take the initiative, I hope I can find someone among these ladies with whom I have that special connection.” Communist Party organizers of the event concurred, expressing their hope on the Intel Party branch website that such sentiments were widely shared.1 In a similar vein, the Zhuanqiao Town Communist Party Committee organized a public pillow fight in March 2010 for young singles working for foreign- and domestically-owned private enterprises, in order to facilitate opportunities for “networking” (jiaoyou 交友) and to “enrich corporate culture” (fengfu qiye wenhua 丰富企业文化) in the district;2 while one of several Party branches at the Shanghai offices of DuPont Chemical hosted a board game night and “Da Vinci Code” trivia quiz at the Zhongshan Park Funbox, in the name of “comprehensively advancing the work of Party-building” (quannian tujin dangjian gongzuo 全面推进党建工作). Reporting on the success of the event, the DuPont organizers claimed that their Party branch activities had “culminated in a high tide of harmonious interaction and enthusiastic engagement” at the Funbox, and expressed their hope that the future would bring more of the same.3

While the 2004 introduction of a Party-organized trade union in Wal-Mart’s mainland China-based stores is well documented in the scholarly literature,4 less is known about the existence and activities of official Party branches and committees in the non-state-owned sector of the Chinese economy. In his recent book on the state of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Shambaugh cites a nationwide survey in 2000 that found that only 1.9 per cent of Party

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members worked in the private sector, prompting the Party to redouble its outreach efforts there. More recently, Dickson has observed that the Party was “virtually absent” from private workplaces in 2003, but the “particularly strong” resistance to the presence of the Party in foreign-invested enterprises during the 1990s had waned by 2005: although fewer than 30 per cent of the firms in his 2005 sample had established Party organizations, the proportion of private sector firms with Party organizations grew a staggering 50 per cent between 1999 and 2005.

This trend has continued. Defying early predictions that the power and relevance of the Communist Party would erode beneath the unrelenting pressures of market reform, Party membership expanded from 3.8 per cent of the population in 1978 to 5.2 per cent in 2002, making the CCP the largest political organization in the world. By the end of 2008, membership increased 1.77 million over the previous year, and by 2009 was purported to be 77.99 million. As Pieke observes, contrary to early expectations, the Chinese Communist Party enjoys a “symbiotic relationship with the market economy”, using it to “to build a broad range of informal ties that are both the lubricant and glue of the administration” of the post-Mao Party-state. Schevchenko concurs, noting that the Party’s “entrepreneurial adaptation” has conjoined “the logic of the market with the logic of the party’s struggle for organizational survival” in a manner both “productive

and socially efficient”. Likewise, Edin finds that the Party “is using market forces to reinvent itself, and has proved to be much more innovative than it is usually given credit for”. Moreover, this new commercialism, as Barmé pointed out more than a decade ago, “includes promotional positioning, or at least posturing, by the Communist Party” through “tactics that encapsulate the unique environment of commodified socialism”.

In 2008, well over 3.5 million Party members were employed by “non-publicly owned enterprises” (非公有企业), which have been targeted by the Party in recent years in its effort to “comprehensively cover” (全覆盖) the new economic and social organizations, also known as “two new” organizations (两新组织), which emerged in the wake of market reform. In order to do so, local officials have experimented with new organizational arrangements that straddle traditional boundaries, including “high-rise Party branches” (楼宇支部) combining residents and office workers in multi-story buildings, “business park branches” (园区支部), and even “culture street Party branches” (文化街支部) serving cultural enterprises in designated themed spaces.

The Party’s remaking of its social agenda is central to its ongoing expansion into the private sector. “Party life” (党的生活, 支部生活), described by Lieberthal as “very important in the years before 1966, but [which] declined in vigor during and immediately after the Cultural Revolution”, has been reinvented, and is undergoing a vigorous revival. Once dominated by political study, self- and collective criticism, “Party branch life” in the “two news” increasingly revolves around building a “corporate culture” (企业文化) and “social harmony” by organizing “lively and colorful activities”, including yoga and salsa-dancing classes in the workplace, poker tournaments, “iron man” swimming and tug-of-war competitions, and seminars for young entrepreneurs. Downplaying their role as the “vanguard” of the revolutionary masses, the new joint Party branches present themselves as the “adhesive glue” (粘合剂), “incubators” (孵化器) and “engines” (发动机) of social

harmony. Working with Party branches in new social organizations (shetuan 社团) and social intermediary organizations established by the Party,18 they sponsor a broad range of recreational activities designed to boost the Party’s popularity, relevance and appeal, particularly among the young urban professionals whom they target for recruitment.19

This article outlines recent Party-building initiatives in the private sector over the course of the previous decade. Drawing upon self-reported membership data from over 1,000 local Party committees in non-publicly owned enterprises in greater Shanghai, I offer an analysis of contemporary Party life in “two new” branches as grass-roots manifestations of “commodified socialism”20 or “market Leninism”21—a system in which the Party pursues its shifting political imperatives through market institutions and market-based strategies of accumulation, without renouncing its Leninist principles. Mediating between the commandist hierarchy of the central Party structure and the flexibility and opportunities created by the global marketplace, “two new” Party branches shun potentially contentious discourses of class and power in favor of social-network-building among their increasingly white-collar membership.22 Given the task of implementing a new social “cohesion project” (ningjuli gongcheng 凝聚力工程), these new Party organizations aim to deepen and naturalize the presence of the Party in urban life.

However, the longer-term consequences of such activity for the Party are as yet unclear. Chinese scholars generally agree that the “important thought” of the “Three Represents” has wrought a fundamental transformation for the Party, altering not only its social composition but also its practices on the ground. New joint-venture and foreign-funded enterprises present a particular challenge, insofar as they “already manifest the characteristics of heterogeneous ideas, foreign religious influences, and all sorts of ideological trends that are already in the process of seeping into the Party at various levels”.23 Some critics charge that, in

18. See, for example, the discussion of the Elite Union below, and Patricia M. Thornton, “The Advance of the Party Transformation or Takeover at the Urban Grassroots?”, The China Quarterly (forthcoming, 2013), which refers to social intermediary organizations such as Youth Business China (YBC) and the Shanghai Pudong Non-profit Incubator (Shanghai Pudong feiyinli zuzhi fazhan zhongxin), both of which are registered private non-enterprise units (minban feiqiye).
19. Li Guodi, “‘Louyu zhibu’ shi zhouniande sikao” (Reflection on Ten Years of “High-rise Party Branches”), Shequ (Community) (September 2009), pp. 18–20.
opening up and accommodating to new social forces, the Party has succumbed to “depoliticized politics”, having changed “from a party-state to a state-party”.24 Others argue that social change made the transformation of the Party necessary, in order to avoid the processes of decline or decay, fragmentation and decomposition that Lipset and Rokkan documented among Western political parties in 1967.25 “Two new” Party organizations in Shanghai thus afford a window onto the possible future of the Party as whole, as it adapts to the newfound success of market reform and absorbs into its ranks the “advanced forces” of an increasingly market-oriented Chinese society.

**COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE**

In 1997, when the Fifteenth Party Congress recognized the “non-public” sector as an “important part of the nation’s socialist market economy in which the public sector was the main part”, the transfer of formerly state-owned enterprises to private ownership, internal migration and rising levels of unemployment weakened the Party’s grass-roots organizations. Laid-off workers ceased to be managed by local enterprise Party branches, while others were migrating in large numbers to work in new enterprises that lacked Party committees altogether. When the September 1999 “Central Committee Views on Strengthening and Improving Political and Ideological Work” asserted that the health of the Party as a whole depended upon its grass-roots membership, a mere 1.5 per cent of privately owned enterprises could claim established Party branches; the majority of Party members working in the private sector were considered either “hidden” (*yinxing* 隐性) or “pocket” (*koudai* 口袋) members, not officially registered as such within their places of employment.26

A year later, the Central Committee issued a provisional draft document calling upon private enterprises with three or more Party members to establish a branch (*dang zhibu* 党支部) immediately, and enterprises with fewer than three members to establish joint branches (*lianhe dang zhibu* 联合党支部) drawing together members from different workplaces. Those with more than 50 Party members were enjoined to establish either general Party branch committees (*zong zhibu* 总支部)

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weiyuanhui 总支部委员会) or basic Party committees (jiceng weiyuanhui 基层委员会). Enterprises with too few Party members and no opportunities to join or establish joint branches were to link up with the local Communist Youth League or local trade unions, and await further guidance on Party-building. All Party organizations in the private sector were urged to carry out “activities beneficial to the principles of promoting corporate development, and specifically those of the enterprise with which the Party is affiliated”, and cautioned against agitating in the workplace because “it is necessary to educate and guide the work of private entrepreneurs, and unite them around the Party, so that they support the work of the Party organizations established in their enterprises”.

By 2003, one year after the Party codified its presence in private enterprises in its Constitution, the number of non-public economic organizations in the PRC surpassed 26.76 million (including 22.6 million foreign-invested enterprises), employed than 100 million people and accounted for one-third of the gross domestic product. In many counties and municipalities, the non-public economy had become the Party’s primary source of revenue, notwithstanding the fact that Party organizations had been established in a mere 2 per cent of them. In Shanghai, “two new” organizations numbered as many as 560,000, and employed some 4.21 million people (an estimated 50 per cent or more of the city’s resident full-time labor force), the vast majority in workplaces outside the Party’s purview.

Shanghai Party authorities began promoting “comprehensive coverage” as early as 2001. In 2004, the Municipal Party Committee released a four-year program specifically aimed at reducing “blank areas” (kongbai dian 空白点) and “blind spots” (mangqu 盲区) in the non-public sector of the economy. Two central directives informed the subsequent shape and direction of this effort. The 2004 “Decision on the Enhancement of the Party’s Governing Capability” castigated the Party for its failures to adapt to changing situations and to conform

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to the “important thought” of the Three Represents”, and urged grass-roots activists to target both “new economic and new social organizations” and “advanced elements” in their Party-building efforts.\footnote{Zeng Qinghong, “Jiaqiang dangde jiuzheng nengli jianshede ganglingxing wenxian” (A Programmatic Document on Strengthening the Party’s Governing Capacity), \textit{Renmin ribao} (8 October 2004).} In 2005, the Party also kicked off a campaign to “maintain the advanced nature of Party members”.\footnote{Joseph Fewsmith, “CCP Launches Campaign to Maintain the Advanced Nature of Party Members”, \textit{China Leadership Monitor}, Vol. 13 (Winter 2005), pp. 1–10.} At the grassroots, “outstanding elements” (\textit{youxiu fenzi} 优秀分子) among middle managers and technicians employed by foreign and foreign-invested enterprises were targeted for recruitment, with a view to consolidating the Party’s ruling position in society.\footnote{Chen Hong, “Jiaqiang feigongyouzhi qiye dangjian gongzuo de ruogan sikao” (Some Considerations on Strengthening Party-building Work in Non-publicly Owned Enterprises), \textit{Bianjie jingji yu wenhua} (Borderlands Economy and Culture), Vol. 50 (February 2008), p. 58.}

In extending the elite recruitment drive into foreign-owned and foreign-invested firms, the Party faced resistance both from within its own ranks and from the managers and owners. On the Party’s side, “three fears” persisted among many cadres: that the Party would not be accepted in private enterprises, that such Party branches would have difficult relations with bosses and owners, and that there would be problems initiating and carrying out Party activities. Some owners of private firms also feared that Party organizations could be antagonistic to private business ownership, or that the establishment of an enterprise Party branch would result in “loss, splintering, and/or a struggle for power” (\textit{shiquan, fenziquan, zhengquan} 失权, 分权, 争权), or that the presence of the Party would raise operating costs.\footnote{Ibid., p. 58.} To allay such anxieties, those involved in grass-roots Party-building agreed to pay close attention (\textit{tiejin} 贴近) to four areas of concern: facilitating the management of a company’s productivity, tackling scientific and technical problems, employee training and employee self-improvement. In addition, some adopted the “three not-wavers” in the workplace: unwavering support for creativity and innovation, unwavering support for the deepening of market reform and unwavering support for harmonious relations within their enterprises. As a further signal of their enthusiasm for private industry, municipal Party officials developed elaborate incentive schemes to reward innovation and facilitate employee assessment. Party members whose evaluation scores lagged were ordered to write reports and undergo rectification (\textit{zhenggai} 整改) within three months.\footnote{Zhang Jian, “Mubiao guanli: tuijin feigong qiye dangjian gongzuo xin fazhande youxiao tujing” (Management by Objectives: Advancing an Efficacious Course of New Development for Party-building Work in Non-public Enterprises), \textit{Shanghai dangshi yu dangjian} (December 2009), p. 50.} The Party branch at Shanghai Matsushita, which produces microwave ovens for Panasonic,
provides special mentoring services for new employees: workers receiving poor service ratings are taken under the wing of a designated Party member, “as if the employee were his or her own child”, until performance improves.37 One Wal-Mart toy department manager was informed by her Party branch secretary that “one criterion for evaluating Party members’ advanced nature (xianjinxing 先进性) is whether we have helped to boost sales at the Wal-Mart store where we work.”38

The Party’s deeper involvement with private enterprises has created a new blend of Communist Party aims and commercial business interests, with the common goal of fostering “corporate culture”.39 Party branch secretaries in the private sector now form “joint management teams” with managers, “link Party-building to production” and recommend themselves to private enterprises as human resource centers, talent agencies and recruitment specialists with the ability to supply temporary skilled workers or freelance employees to local businesses in need.40 Likewise, catering specifically to young educated white-collar professionals, “two new” Party branches offer a range of networking opportunities designed to facilitate the “flow” (liudong 流动) of talent between individual firms, as well as job-training to help Party members upgrade their skills and keep abreast of new technological developments.41 Local Party activists now consider efforts to “establish the Party-building brand (dangjian pinpai 党建品牌) as mandatory”, and focus on developing a service brand (fuwu pinpai 服务品牌), a democracy brand (minzhu pinpai 民主品牌) and a culture brand (wenhua pinpai 文化品牌) for their Party-building activities.42 Some seek to “open up the product brand market while at the same time opening up the Party-building

brand market by promoting the societization (shehuihua 社会化)” of the Party, by publicizing its presence in local communities through public “fora, training sessions, brain quizzes and speech contests . . . that will generate an atmosphere thick with brand creation”43. The formula of “Party-building + brand” is marketed to private enterprises as a way of supporting “the sustainable development

Table 1. Composition of sample of 1017 listed grass-roots party branches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise type by United Nations Statistical Division International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities [ISIC v. 4]</th>
<th>Number (% of total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A - Agriculture, forestry and fishing</td>
<td>4 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B - Mining and quarrying</td>
<td>2 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C - Manufacturing</td>
<td>622 (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D - Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply</td>
<td>8 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E - Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities</td>
<td>4 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F - Construction</td>
<td>74 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G - Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles</td>
<td>33 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H - Transportation and storage</td>
<td>17 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I - Accommodation and food service activities</td>
<td>15 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J - Information and communication</td>
<td>35 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K - Financial and insurance activities</td>
<td>12 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L - Real estate activities</td>
<td>51 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M - Professional, scientific and technical activities</td>
<td>27 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N - Administrative and support service activities</td>
<td>25 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O - Public administration and defense; compulsory social security</td>
<td>4 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P - Education</td>
<td>9 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q - Human health and social work activities</td>
<td>3 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R - Arts, entertainment and recreation</td>
<td>4 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S - Other service activities</td>
<td>9 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X - Joint Branches of Mixed Type</td>
<td>22 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z - Diversified Conglomerates</td>
<td>37 (4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of an enterprise's core competitiveness as well as to struggling state-owned enterprises, to promote market-friendly reform.

“TWO NEW” PARTY BRANCHES IN GREATER SHANGHAI

In 2007, the one-stop Shanghai Municipal “Two New” Interactive Web (http://www.shlxhd.gov.cn) designed by Shanghai Municipal Party’s Social Work Committee went online. This comprehensive web-based information platform and interactive communication hub for “two new” Party organizations provides self-reported data on the membership and recruitment activities of thousands of “two new” Party organizations, as well as virtual classrooms, teaching and conference space, and a digital archive of documents relating to grass-roots Party building. In 2009, when the website served over 8,000 members of “two new” Party organizations in Xuhui District (65 per cent of whom were under the age of 35, and at least 63 per cent of whom were college graduates), the web portal was extended to include “two new” Party organizations throughout Shanghai municipality. The current sample of 1017 “two new” branches registered in greater Shanghai draws upon self-reported data published on the linked websites of Party branches established in medium- to large-scale non-publicly owned enterprises. Thirty-three per cent of the firms (331) are located in or subordinate to one of the nine districts in central Shanghai (Changning, Hongkou, Huangpu, Jing’an, Luwan, Putuo, Yangpu, Xuhui and Zhabei); 64 per cent (646) are in Pudong (including Pudong New District, Baoshan, Fengxian, Jiading, Jinshan, Minhang, Qingpu, Songjiang) and 40 are located in Chongming County.

Sixty-one per cent (622) of the “two new” Party branches in the sample were established in enterprises primarily engaged in manufacturing, followed by those specializing in construction (74, or 7 per cent), real estate activities (51, or 5 per cent), information and communications (35), wholesale and retail trade (33), and professional, scientific and technical activities (27) or administrative and support service activities (25). Of the 622 manufacturing firms, 20 per cent (125) produce computer, electronic, and optical products; 15 per cent (96) produce machinery and equipment; 8 per cent (51) are engaged in textile manufacturing; 7 per cent (46) produce chemicals or chemical products; and 7 per cent (46) manufacture fabricated metal products (see Figures 1 and 2).

47. “Medium- to large-scale” enterprises are defined by the Party as firms employing three or more registered Party members that have established an official Party branch in the workplace.
48. The sample includes every “medium- to large-scale” enterprise Party branch or committee listed online, as of 28 March 2010.
49. The coding of industry type follows the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) of All Economic Activities, Revision 4, maintained by the United Nations Statistical Division, available online at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/cr/registry/registcr.asp?Cl=27&Lg=1, with two necessary additions: “joint branches” merging employees of one or more enterprises with residents are coded as X, and enterprises that listed themselves as diversified conglomerates spanning more than one ISIC classification were coded as Z.
Of the 790 “two new” branches in the sample providing information on the dates of their founding, only one was established before the reform era. “Two new” branches grew at a modest rate beginning in the mid-1990s, with sharp annual increases beginning in 2004, and peaked in 2007, gradually declining thereafter. The largest of the 882 branches that reported membership figures was the Shanghai division of Price Waterhouse, which boasts 723 members; the mean branch size is 20.93, and the mode branch size is six. Of the 195 Party branches reporting both the total size of the enterprise workforce and the Party organization, the percentage of Party members ranged from a high of 56.25 per cent of the workforce at Liang Cereals and Oil in Chongming to a low of 0.12 per cent of the workforce and residents in Xuhui’s Maple Street Joint Party Committee. On the average, members of “two new” Party branches involve nearly eight per cent of the workforce or residents in the enterprises or districts that they represent; approximately 10 per cent of the “two new” Party branches in the sample emphasized on their websites that their most recent recruitment activities specifically targeted prospective Party members from within the ranks of middle-management, scientific and technical personnel, employees with post-graduate degrees and those with professional training.

**“PARTY LIFE” IN SHANGHAI’S “TWO NEWS”**

According to Whyte, “political rituals and mutual criticism” formed the core of Bolshevik “Party life”, and the CCP expanded such practices to include the base area population in Yan’an, allowing them to maintain “leadership over the masses with less reliance on hierarchical command and external manipulation than had been the case in Stalinist Russia”.  


A new generation of Party strategists decided that traditional Party-building methods—“monotonous in form and boring in content—reading newspapers or studying dossiers”—resulted in “simplistic, rigid, and hollow” responses from élite prospective members in the private sector. “Two new” Party branches
instead organize more engaging activities that promote “team-building” and “advanced” and “corporate culture”, and raise the “political quality” (zhengzhi su-zhi 政治素质) of their members. For example, the Communist Party branch in Century 21 Realtors recently pioneered a training seminar to foster “scientific development” and the “sense of service” that involved Department of Justice representatives fielding questions regarding new real estate regulations. The branch further implemented a customer satisfaction survey system to increase staff professionalism, prevent corruption and improve service. The Party Committee at Shanghai Alliance Investment Advisory Services, Ltd., organized a “Who Moved my Cheese?” seminar at the Shen Garden Hotel that brought some of Shanghai’s most successful entrepreneurs together with local business school students. The forum began with the students introducing themselves in turn, articulating their future aspirations, and recounting their past successes and failures in the business world; according to the branch report, some were “visibly moved” by the concern expressed for them by the senior entrepreneurs in the room, with a few “unable to stop themselves from breaking down in tears” of gratitude and joy for the opportunity to participate in the seminar.

A premium is placed on activities that are “interactive”, “small-scale”, “diverse”, “outside the workplace” and “informative”, and on “methods of socializing [that] would vigorously advance Party-building work toward ‘comprehensive coverage’”, and transform “two new” organizations into “incubators bringing fresh blood into the Party”. When members of the Hongkou District Organization Department complained that “traditional, close-ended, monotonous forms of member education and Party life” including “being force-fed and parroting Party...
texts” were ill-suited to their needs, the district responded by adopting “open-themed Party organizational life” to “diversify monotonous methods, use fresh and lively themes, new and novel forms, and enhance the focus and pleasure of educational activities”. Participating branches were given a menu of possible issues to address, and encouraged to come up with “themed” events and new formats. Party members were given swipe cards that allowed the district to monitor participation, and were asked to fill out surveys rating various activities.58

In Pudong New District, the Jiaxing Building joint Party organization—a newly established “high-rise Party branch”—purportedly unites (ningju 凝聚) and activates (jifa 激发) young white-collar Party members, and facilitates their integration into the local community by organizing charitable relief and “new style civilization-enhancing activities”, including a variety of sports and recreational events.59

In Changning District, the Party Member Service Center (Dangyuan Fuwu Zhongxin 党员服务中心) aims to “establish a standard, project distinguishing characteristics, and build the brand” (lizu guifan, tuchu tese, gouzhu pinpai 立足规范, 突出特色, 构筑品牌) through activities that apply marketing techniques to public service.60

According to one Party journal, the variety of activities on offer in Songjiang District was apparently so desirable that “fake Party members” infiltrated branch events, illicitly availing themselves of the joys of Party life; the problem became so acute that the District was forced to issue an official “Party activities card” for its bona fide members to show at certain Party-organized events.61

The increased mobility of the professional urban labor force presents a particular challenge for Party life in “two new” organizations, which include high numbers of “floating Party members” (liudong dangyuan 流动党员) who have left their original work units to seek more lucrative positions elsewhere, without transferring their Party branch membership. One 2010 survey conducted in Shanghai’s Songjiang District found that 88 per cent of its “floating Party members” were employed by “two new” enterprises. The district responded by issuing special “floating Party member activities cards” that permitted them to participate in Party-organized activities in multiple locations.62

58. Shanghaishi Hongkou qu xiaojiao disi dangzongzhi (Shanghai Hongkou District Primary Education No. 4 General Party Branch), “Tansuo danyuan jiaoyu de youxiao tujing—kaifangxing zhuti dang zuzhi shenghuo de shijian” (Exploration of Effective Methods of Party Member Education—The Open Topic Practice of Party Organizational Life), Shanghai dangshi yu dangjian (July 2006), pp. 38–40.


Party branches in the current Shanghai-based sample reporting both total and mobile membership numbers, “floating members” averaged 52.59 per cent of total branch membership. Construction or manufacturing enterprises prone to seasonal fluctuations accounted for the highest percentages; however, a few high-tech firms, like Kingdee International (金碟软件) and Hinge Software Company (和勤软件), likewise reported that 50 per cent or more of their membership “floated”. One solution to this problem has been to provide job-seeking and professional training services to temporarily unemployed workers.63

More broadly, however, much of the recent effort to build the Party’s “brand” is designed to increase the visibility of the Party and its members in daily life. Joint residential and commercial “two new” branches organize regular rounds of events and performances in plazas and other public places to convey broad expressions of popular support for local and central Party committees.64 For example, on 20 May 2011, “two new” Party branches in Minhang District organized a “sing red songs” competition in Xinzhuang Zhongsheng Square to mark the 90th anniversary of the founding of the CCP. The Wuqing Town Group Party Committee selected three teams to participate in the semi-finals, with each of three “two new” Party organizations putting forth its best vocalist. The Party branch website reported that, “beneath the flickering light of the red star and basking in its splendid warmth”, the three competitors regaled the public with one well-loved red classic after another, “rekindling everyone’s passionate memories of their years under the red flag . . . with all recalling with great emotion the tortuous and moving road trodden by the Chinese Communist Party since its founding 90 years ago”.65 In 2009, the Hongqiao District (Street-level) Party Committee organized a daily “Red SMS” text message aimed at younger Party recruits, sending single-line messages “introducing the Party’s concept and theory of ‘scientific development’, promoting the exemplary methods and deeds associated with practice and study, and circulating news of the practice and study activities of ‘two new’ Party branches” in order to “penetrate deeply into the hearts of every single ‘two new’ Party member” in Hongqiao.66 The 142 members of the

63. Li Dongxiao, “Yong pinpai xiaoying tisheng jiceng dangde jianshe shuiping”.
Kongjiang Road and Enterprise Joint Party branch participated in a branch work conference in July 2011 that included break-out sessions on developing their “Party-building brand” with online tools like electronic bulletin boards aimed at “normalizing, standardizing and enriching” their virtual “Party branch life”. Members who had participated in an earlier “seeking red footsteps, knowing the history of the Party and the state of the nation, standing fast in conviction, looking forward to a glorious future’ red tour activity” at a former anti-Japanese resistance base area in Zhejiang were encouraged to post their memories, thoughts, reflections and photographs of the activity on the Party branch website—“an interactive platform that will gather the strength of Party members”—to build the distinctive brand of the Kongjiang Road and Enterprise Joint Party branch.

Given the recent focus on brand promotion and brand creation, it is hardly surprising that the new life of the Party has become a highly commercialized affair. Journals published by provincial Party Committees, like Party Life (Dangde shenghuo) and Party Branch Life (Zhibu Shenghuo), have recently been redesigned, to sport glossy covers and rich online content; a monthly “Party Life” television program regularly broadcasts on Shanghai Education TV (SETV). In downtown Shanghai’s bustling Jing’an District, the district Party committee, with the support of the local district government, established a community and activity center to cater to the specific needs of downtown white-collar workers. The Bailing Yijia (白领驿家), which goes by the English name “Élite Union”, provides “bundled” entertainment and leisure services for professionals, including a dinner reservation booking service, cybercafé with coffee bar, drop-in counseling center, fitness center and an in-house tourist agency. White-collar professionals employed by over 400 enterprises in Jing’an are eligible to receive an Élite Union VIP card that allows them to use the center and a “hotline priority booking” for concessions throughout the city. Special events organized in its first year include “white-collar lunches”, a “Take Back the Night” concert and an “International Shopping Festival”. The District Organization Department head boasted at the center’s opening day celebration that “the ‘Élite Union’ provides services to white-collar professionals, is a window for white-collar cohesion, and will become a white-collar spiritual home (jingshen zhijia 精神之家)”. The secretary of the Municipal Party Committee’s Social Work small group concurred, observing that “the establishment of the ‘Élite Union’ has altered the traditional model of Party-building work in the ‘two new’ realm, and opened up a new road

through which to explore strengthening Party-building work among ‘two new’ organizations.\(^6\) In a similar vein, Xuhui District’s Xietu Community Joint Party Branch established a “white-collar friendship club” that oversees six “salons” (the “OK salon”, an automobile salon, a salon for singles, and one each for badminton, basketball and bridge players) that serve as “a platform for exchange and service between the Party and white-collar youth, enriches the after-hours lives of white-collar workers, and expands the influence and cohesive power of the Party”. In 2009, the club sponsored a masquerade ball and amateur talent show for young white-collar singles which culminated in the release of colorful paper sky lanterns designed to “represent how white-collar aspirations are drawn aloft” through the work of the Party.\(^7\)

**A NEW BEGINNING FOR, OR THE END OF, PARTY LIFE?**

As the foregoing demonstrates, the CCP has defied predictions that the deepening of market reform would hasten its demise, and is breathing new life into its grass-roots organizations in precisely those areas in which the forces of commercialization and marketization have developed most rapidly. While the Party journals and branch activity reports cited here may well overstate the degree of enthusiasm for new Party life, statistics demonstrate that the Party is penetrating private- and foreign-funded enterprises at an impressive rate. As of 2010, the number of Party members in Shanghai topped 1.7 million, 7.61 per cent of the city’s population and 1.75 per cent higher than the national average. Slightly more than half of the city’s Party members in 2010 boasted a college or university degree, compared to 13.13 per cent of Party members nationwide. In addition, according to one 2011 Party report, by the end of 2010 99.69 per cent of the city’s medium to large-scale enterprises in the non-publicly owned sector of the economy deemed eligible to host internal Party organizations had established them,\(^7\) demonstrating that the antipathies that once roiled between the Shanghai Communist Party and its resident capitalist class have been relegated to the dust-bin of history.

The Party’s more inclusive positioning nonetheless involves potential dangers that threaten the existing order. As Zhou Jianyong noted, one major hurdle is

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the sheer size of the Party: as the largest political organization in the world, the Chinese Communist Party moves into the future without historic precedents or models to provide guidance on managing, mobilizing and coordinating a Party organization of its scale and scope. A second concern is the erosion of its traditional mass base among the so-called “revolutionary classes”: Party members broadly defined as “working on the frontlines to develop production”—a category that includes farmers, herders, fishermen, migrant and seasonal laborers, managers and other types of wage-earners—were said to constitute 45.4 per cent of the national membership of the Party in 2010; however, the number of blue-collar working class members is not known, and evidence suggests that it is in serious decline. Third, by expanding recruitment, the Party could conceivably either import the contradictions now plaguing Chinese society into its core, endangering Party unity and the functioning of inner-Party democracy, or trivialize the Party’s mission in its drive to woo the professional white-collar class, thereby undermining its “fighting strength” (zhandouli 战斗力) and vanguard role with respect to Chinese society as a whole.

The shifting composition of the Party’s membership has furthermore raised fears among some that the CCP is in danger of becoming a diluted “catch-all party” (jianrongxing zhengdang 兼容性正党) such as, for example, the German Christian Democratic Union, which, according to one flagship Party journal, blithely aims “to represent everyone”. Writing in 1966, Kirchheimer described the rise of “catch-all” parties as a result of both internal and externally-derived pressures in post-war Europe: as electoral competition in liberal democracies pushed parties to broaden their electoral “catchments”, specific class-based constituencies and core ideological appeals eroded, and dominant parties became more closely amalgamated with the state apparatus. In the denuded political environment that resulted, “catch-all parties” aimed less to integrate citizens into the body politic than to appease them in their role as largely uncritical and apathetic.

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73. Song Yingshuai, "Shishibande huihuang jubian—90 nianlai Zhongguo Gongchandang dangyuan shuliang ju jieguo de bianhua yu fazhan" (Glorious and Epochal Changes—The Development and Transformation in the Number and Composition of Chinese Communist Party Members over Ninety Years), Guangming ribao (Guangming Daily) (5 July 2011), p. 15.
75. See, for example, Liu Yong, “Zunzhong dangyuan zhuti diweide yiyi tansuo” (An Exploration into the Meaning of Esteeming the Distinctive Role of Party Members), Weishi (From Reality), No. 4 (2010), p. 18.
76. Zhan Hongfeng and Li Zhiming, “Lun shehuizhuyi fazhi linian zai Zhongguo minzhu jianshezhong de zuoyong—cong fazhanzhong guojia minzhu jianshe lishi jingyan” (Theorizing the Utility of the Socialist Concept of Rule of Law in Constructing Chinese Democracy—Speaking of the Historical Lessons and Experience of Building Democracy in a Developing Country), Qiushi (Seeking Truth), No. 5 (2010), p. 52.
consumers of “political products”. As public administration scholar Gao Qiqi noted, when the CCP began absorbing “advanced productive forces” across the social spectrum, both the Party’s connection to its original mass base and the “distinctive features” of its formerly left-wing ideological orientation weakened significantly, and the CCP began more closely to resemble Western “catch-all parties”. However, Liu Yong contends that the lack of electoral competition in the Chinese case actually produced a different outcome: instead of becoming a “catch-all party”, the CCP more closely approximates a “socialist cartel-type political party” (shehui zhuyide kate'erxing zhengdang 社会主义的卡特尔型政党).

Extending Kirchheimer’s insights, Katz and Mair recently argued that Western “catch-all parties” set the stage for the emergence of “cartel parties”, which not only collectively reorient their focus away from grass-roots civil society and towards the state apparatus and transform career party activists into professional state bureaucrats, but also collude to prevent potential challengers from competing. In the Chinese case, Liu finds that the lack of inter-party competition and control over state-owned assets exacerbates these tendencies. The CCP’s exclusive control enhances its risk of ossification and could erode the Party’s governing capacity as it involutes, becoming bogged down in the management and control of state-owned resources. According to Liu, only further development of inner-Party democracy—“whether through perfecting the existing system, expanding the channels, and/or promoting the quality of inner Party democracy by valuing the role of Party members as both the origination and terminus” of the political process—can rejuvenate the vitality of the Party as a whole and interrupt the process of further cartelization.

The crux of the current challenge facing the Party, in the view of the participants in this unfolding debate, is how to accommodate the disparate needs and interests pressing in from the grass-roots via “two new” organizations, without losing control of the Party’s explicitly political mission at the center. In order for the CCP to avoid going the way either of Western “catch-all parties” or involuting cartelized ones, it must intensify the political nature of Party life, particularly in


“two new” organizations, where both substantive politics and anchoring ideologies have been displaced by more market-friendly practices and rhetorics.

However, the active repoliticization of its grass-roots membership is not on the agenda of either CCP central or local leaders: the new life of the Party instead fuses commercial and social forces as an instrument of competitive commercial advantage, and actively markets the Party’s capacity to manage its workforce to a receptive—and increasingly transnational—corporate audience. In so doing, the Party has arguably become more flexible without abandoning its hallmark rhetoric of social assistance and social equality. As Tomba observes, one indication of the success of “tailor-made governance” is that members on the lower rungs of the socio–economic hierarchy continue to view the Chinese Party-state “as the last defense against the deregulation of the market”, whereas the upwardly-mobile middle classes see central leaders “as the champions of newly acquired ‘rights’”.

The current coexistence of multiple framing arguments within the Party to contain, manage and regulate different constituencies appears to be at odds with the Mao-era tactic of overtly entitling some groups while excluding and attacking others. However, as Perry observes, the Party’s unifying rhetorics have long been “tempered by a politics of division”: the “divide-and-conquer” strategies of previous decades have in fact been refashioned as “divide-and-rule” tactics, used to stimulate political participation that bolsters the political hegemony of the Party and undercuts the potential for fundamental challenges to the regime.

This dynamic can be seen as well in the recent reinvention of Party life: while catering to the interests and proclivities of new socio–economic élites, the Party also emphasizes discourses and practices of charity, volunteerism and social assistance to vulnerable groups. Yet, in spurning the bitter pill of revolutionary transformation for the palliative of what some have dubbed “philanthrocapitalism”, the Party has arguably already sanctioned the country’s movement toward becoming an increasingly unequal and potentially unstable society in which the force of the market, and not the Party, is the real driver of historical change.

QUERY TO THE AUTHOR

q1: Citations of Figures 1 and 2 were given but Tables were provided, instead of Figures? Should we change these citations to Tables 1 and 2? Based on our understanding, these citations should have been for Tables. Please advise.