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China Maritime Report #53: Filling the Ranks: China's Military Recruiting System and the PLA Navy

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Main Findings

- The PLAN manages direct recruitment of some non-commissioned officers, officers, and civilian personnel. However, the recruitment, mobilization, and service assignment of conscripts is centrally managed by the PRC government.
- Each year, the PRC establishes military conscription quotas for provincial-level governments to meet through recruitment. While compulsory conscription can be enforced, the government rarely compels individuals to enter military service due to China's large population and high rates of volunteerism.
- In 2021, the PLA shifted to a twice-a-year conscription cycle by distributing the flow of conscripts into and out of the force across two time periods rather than one. This shift to spring and fall recruitment was designed to achieve higher average unit-manning levels year-round.
- The majority of PLAN manpower requirements are filled through the general military conscription process, and while a conscript's preferences may be taken into consideration, they are ultimately assigned based on their education, fitness, and military quota.
- The PLAN conducts direct recruitment of specific professional and technical personnel through military and civilian cadre recruitment programs. The PLAN also has a special program to recruit pilots separate from the general conscription system, managed by the PLAN Recruitment Office.
- In 2022, China instituted a new program for the targeted training of sergeants (定向培养军士). The program is designed to leverage vocational and technical colleges throughout China to train students to fill technical and professional jobs within the military after graduation.
- The PLAN has five military academies that recruit high school students, as well as university and graduate students, to train to become commissioned officers. The National University of Defense Technology directly recruits high school graduates for the Navy, whereas the Army Special Operations Academy, responsible for training PLAN Marine Corps officers, admits only candidates who have completed two years at another PLA academy and successfully competed for selection.
- Like other services, the PLAN also engages in the direct recruitment of officers from among recent college graduates. Applicants apply to fill specific positions and submit supporting materials to be reviewed by the Navy hiring organization.
- PLA recruitment mechanisms are rapidly transitioning from traditional grassroots outreach to a precision recruitment system, by which recruiting offices prescreen potential conscripts, sergeants, and officers for suitability. These recruiting activities are complemented by an aggressive national defense education program and increasingly sophisticated recruitment propaganda drives.
- In recent years, the PLA as a whole has greatly increased the proportion of new recruits with a college degree. The CMC, State Council, and provincial governments have rolled out a range of policy mechanisms to attract high-quality recruits and retain these individuals after their initial terms of service. These incentives include military pay and entitlements, education and job assistance, and retirement benefits.
- Despite improvements in precision recruiting, pay, and benefits, and general outreach, several challenges continue to hamper efforts by the PLAN and other services to recruit the best possible candidates. These included overburdened recruiting officials, ineffectual support for military recruitment within China's universities, and low physical fitness among potential recruits.

Introduction

This report outlines People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) recruiting processes within the overarching context of China’s military personnel accession systems. Within China, most recruitment, mobilization, and service assignment of military personnel is managed through a centralized national military service system, with individual services retaining some recruitment authorities for officers, sergeants, and civilians. It is not possible to effectively discuss Navy recruitment without understanding this overarching system.

By examining original sources, this report explores the structure and administration of China’s military service system; military accession processes, paths, and sources; outreach mechanisms; and service incentives. Throughout, the authors pay special attention to enlisted personnel recruitment, to provide new insights into the people that operate and maintain the PLAN’s warfighting systems and thereby constitute the human foundation of military readiness. The report also explores the challenges restraining the PLA’s ability to recruit the highest quality personnel, which it needs to realize its ascension to a world-class military, and barriers to overcoming these challenges.

China’s Military Service System

Military service in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is regulated by the “Military Service Law of the PRC” (中华人民共和国兵役法). According to the law, the enlisted force consists of compulsory and volunteer soldiers, with volunteer soldiers as the core.¹ The law dictates that military service is obligatory in times of war, and to achieve this end, the PRC operates a draft registration system requiring all male citizens to register for selective service at age 18. However, compulsory conscription is not enforced due to China’s large population and high rates of volunteerism. In China’s military today, conscripts are volunteers raised as part of a semi-annual levy. The levy itself is compulsory, whereby the PRC establishes conscription quotas for provincial-level governments to meet through recruitment.² By law, if the number of volunteers fails to meet quotas, local governments may compel individuals to enter military service, though no modern examples of this can be found outside cases associated with local official corruption. Citizens with serious physical defects and disabilities are exempt from service, and citizens deprived of their political rights are not permitted to perform military service.³

All male citizens between 18 and 22 may be conscripted to active duty. University students under 24 and graduate students under 26 may also be conscripted. Female students may be conscripted but are not required by law to register for Selective Service. In wartime, the State Council and the Central

¹ 中华人民共和国兵役法 [“Military Service Law of the People’s Republic of China”], 新华社 [Xinhua News Agency], 21 August 2021, <https://www.gfbzb.gov.cn/zbbm/zcfg/byfg/202108/20210821/2100962138.html>; 征兵工作条例 [“Regulations on Conscription”], 新华社 [Xinhua News Agency], 13 April 2023, <https://www.gfbzb.gov.cn/zbbm/zcfg/byfg/202304/20230413/817828215.html>; 全国征兵网 [“National Recruitment Network”], accessed at <http://www.gfbzb.gov.cn>.

² *Yiwubing* (义务兵) is defined as a conscript or compulsory serviceman but refers to all two-year enlisted personnel regardless of whether they were conscripted, recruited, or joined voluntarily. *Zhengbing* (征兵) and *Zhengji* (征集) are terms used synonymously for “conscription,” “enlistment,” and “recruitment” in China, with little to no distinction in meaning. For more information see Kenneth Allen, “The Evolution of the PLA’s Enlisted Force: Conscription and Recruitment (Part One),” *China Brief*, 14 January 2022, [https://jamestown.org/the-evolution-of-the-plas-enlisted-force-conscription-and-recruitment-part-one/#:~:text=Goes%20Global%20C919-.The%20Evolution%20of%20the%20PLA's%20Enlisted,Conscription%20and%20Recruitment%20\(Part%20One\)&text=T his%20article%20is%20the%20first.and%20recruitment%20of%20enlisted%20personnel.](https://jamestown.org/the-evolution-of-the-plas-enlisted-force-conscription-and-recruitment-part-one/#:~:text=Goes%20Global%20C919-.The%20Evolution%20of%20the%20PLA's%20Enlisted,Conscription%20and%20Recruitment%20(Part%20One)&text=T his%20article%20is%20the%20first.and%20recruitment%20of%20enlisted%20personnel.)

³ “Military Service Law of the People’s Republic of China.”

Military Commission (CMC) may, as needed, relax the upper age limit for conscripting male citizens for active service, and may extend the period for active military service.⁴

In 2022, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress adjusted the PLA's enlisted rank structures to consist of conscripts (义务兵) and sergeants (军士).⁵ Navy Private (海军列兵) and Navy Private First Class (海军上等兵) are designated conscript ranks in the PLAN, while Navy Corporal (海军下士) through Navy Sergeant Major First Class (海军一级军士长) are sergeant ranks.⁶ Conscripts are required to serve for two years. They are provided uniforms, housing, subsistence, and paid an allowance, but no salary. Sergeant and officer length of military service vary, and they receive a regular salary. Conscripts may remain in the military after their two-year commitment or attend an institution of higher learning after demobilization, with preferred reenlistment after graduation. The direct recruitment of sergeants and officers is generally limited to graduates of institutions of higher learning with specific qualifications or vocational skills that meet military manpower requirements.⁷

In 2021 and again in 2023, the State Council and CMC revised the national "Regulations on Conscription" (征兵工作条例) to update conscription roles, responsibilities, and standards. Notably, the Regulations align conscription work with overall military manpower requirements rather than the mass accession of personnel to fill entry-level positions, with emphasis on the recruitment of college and university students. Conscription quotas may also be met by prior service soldiers who reenlist and are given an option to continue service in their previous units or be posted in the same type of unit, allowing the military to fill quotas with experienced personnel to enhance readiness and reduce the burden on initial training units. Further, the Regulations also allow conscription quotas to be filled with skilled professional and technical personnel who may be directly recruited as sergeants.⁸

Conscription Roles and Responsibilities

While China's military services manage direct recruitment of some non-commissioned officers, officers, and civilian cadres, in general the recruitment, mobilization, and service assignment of conscripts is centrally managed by the PRC government. The State Council and the CMC jointly manage national conscription work.⁹ In November 2020, the CMC National Defense Mobilization Department (NDMD, 中央军事委员会国防动员部) was directed to establish a national inter-ministerial joint conference system for conscription work (全国征兵工作部际联席会议制度). The joint conference coordinates national conscription activities and forwards relevant policy recommendations to the Party Central Committee, the State Council, and the CMC. The joint

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 全国人民代表大会常务委员会关于中国人民解放军现役士兵衔级制度的决定 ["Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on the Rank System of Soldiers on Active Duty in the PLA"], 新华社 [Xinhua News Agency], 1 March 2022, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-03/01/content_5676163.htm.

⁶ A "Navy Corporal" is roughly equivalent to the U.S. Navy rank of Petty Officer Third Class while "Navy Sergeant Major First Class" is roughly equivalent to the U.S. Navy rank of Master Chief Petty Officer, though duties and responsibilities by rank are vastly different. According to the "Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on the Rank System of Soldiers on Active Duty in the PLA," the rank designation of "non-commissioned officer" (士官) was replaced with the designation of "sergeant" (军士). Ibid.

⁷ "Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China"; "Regulations on Conscription"; "National Recruitment Network."

⁸ "Regulations on Conscription."

⁹ Ibid.

conference is composed of 14 departments: the Propaganda Department of the Party Central Committee, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the Ministry of Transport, the National Health Commission, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, the CMC Political Work Department, the CMC Logistics Support Department, the CMC Training Management Department, the CMC NDMD, and the CMC Political and Legal Commission.¹⁰

The Minister of National Defense serves as the convener of the joint conference, the NDMD Director and the State Council Deputy Secretary General for Liaison Work are deputy conveners, and associated departments contribute members. The Ministry of National Defense (MND) Recruiting Office (国防部征兵办公室) is responsible for managing day-to-day national conscription work and joint conference coordination. Each department of the joint conference assigns one staff member to serve within the MND Recruiting Office, responsible for daily liaison and coordination. The director of the MND Recruiting Office is concurrently the deputy director of the NDMD in charge of military service recruitment.¹¹ The MND Recruiting Office manages the "National Recruitment Network" (全国征兵网), the PRC's official conscription registration website.¹²

Specific recruitment criteria are issued on an annual basis by the MND Recruiting Office, which may vary registration dates, age, physical, and education requirements based on recruitment targets. Leading groups for conscription work at the provincial, municipal, and county levels are responsible for the overall planning and coordination of conscription work in their respective administrative regions. Local people's governments at or above the county level organize subordinate work departments to form recruitment offices.¹³ Military District (MD) and Military Sub-District (MSD) subordinate People's Armed Forces Departments (PAFDs) partner with their corresponding government recruitment offices to jointly manage conscription work appropriate to their hierarchical function.¹⁴ For organizations, such as ordinary colleges and universities, that may not have a PAFD, a local department is designated to manage conscription work. These organizations coordinate conscription tasks and carry out propaganda efforts to encourage citizens to actively apply for conscription.¹⁵

¹⁰ (2020年) 国务院办公厅、中央军委办公厅关于同意建立全国征兵工作部际联席会议制度的函 [“(2020) Letter from the General Office of the State Council and the General Office of the Central Military Commission on Agreeing to Establish a National Inter-Ministerial Joint Conference System for Conscription”], 13 April 2024, People's Republic of China Central People's Government, http://big5.www.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2020-11/16/content_5561866.htm.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “National Recruitment Network.”

¹³ “Regulations on Conscription.”

¹⁴ Military districts (MDs) are military offices subordinate to the NDMD and aligned to provincial-level governments to manage military recruitment, mobilization, and military support work within each province. MSDs are subordinate to MDs and generally aligned to prefectural-level governments, with mirror responsibilities to the MDs at their local level. MSDs manage county-aligned PAFDs which manage recruitment, mobilization, military support, and militia formation and employment. PAFDs are also established within many state enterprises and academic institutions to enable mobilization activities. For more information, see Erin Richter and Benjamin Rosen, “China's National Defense Mobilization System: Foundation for Military Logistics,” PLA Logistics and Sustainment: PLA Conference 2022, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2023, pp. 44–48; “Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China.”

¹⁵ “Regulations on Conscription.”

Conscription Cycle

In 2021 the PLA shifted to a twice-a-year conscription cycle to increase military readiness by distributing the flow of conscripts into and out of the force across two time periods rather than one. This shift to spring and fall recruitment is designed to achieve higher average unit-manning levels year-round. According to a staff officer working for the mobilization bureau of Anhui MD, the spring recruitment meets 45 percent of the annual quota and the fall recruitment meets the remaining 55 percent of the total annual force.¹⁶ In the first half of the year, the focus of conscription is to recruit college and university graduates and individuals with specific professional and technical skills. In the second half of the year, conscription focuses on the recruitment of fresh high school graduates and current college and university students.¹⁷ A quota system has been established to separate recruitment targets for high school graduates and college graduates to ensure adequate availability of both ordinary soldiers and college graduate conscripts in smaller recruitment areas.¹⁸ Under the new twice-a-year system, training schedules are designed to ensure that the military has at least 75 percent of its conscripts at a minimally trained level and available for tasking.¹⁹

General Conscription Process

According to the “Regulations on Conscription,” the general requirements for military conscription include completion of registration and health examinations and political screenings to determine citizens have the physical qualifications, psychological qualities, and education level to perform military duties. Selection is based on military needs.²⁰ Citizens are required to apply for military service in their place of household registration, habitual residence, or educational institution. Local conscription offices will liaise with government offices to conduct preliminary verification of information such as ideological and political proclivities, health status, and educational level. Once preliminary verification is complete, PAFDs will select the most qualified individuals based on annual recruitment targets and identify those individuals for conscription. Conscripted citizens will then undergo comprehensive health examinations and political screenings, coordinated by their local conscription office, followed by pre-service education to further screen for military suitability.²¹

Once the list of conscripted citizens approved for military service is finalized, it is publicly announced and posted for a period of not less than five working days, to cull fraudulent applicants. The list should include the name, place of residence, education, total original college entrance examination score, and comprehensive quality assessment score. After this public disclosure period, conscription offices complete the enlistment of conscripted citizens and coordinate with PAFDs, military service offices, and gaining units to arrange handover of individuals to gaining units.²² In

¹⁶ 张和芸 [Zhang Heyun], 张正军 [Zhang Zhengjun], 郭冬明 [Guo Dongming], 左庆莹 [Zuo Qingying], 柯穴 [Ke Xue], and 范奇飞 [Fan Qifei], “一年两征”，鼓点怎么打[“Two Conscriptions in One Year,’ How to Beat the Drums?”], 29 July 2021, 解放军报 [PLA Daily], http://www.81.cn/gfbmap/content/2021-07/29/content_295219.htm.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Marcus Clay, Dennis J. Blasko, and Roderick Lee, “People Win Wars: A 2022 Reality Check on PLA Enlisted Force and Related Matters,” *War on the Rocks*, 12 August 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/08/people-win-wars-a-2022-reality-check-on-pla-enlisted-force-and-related-matters/>.

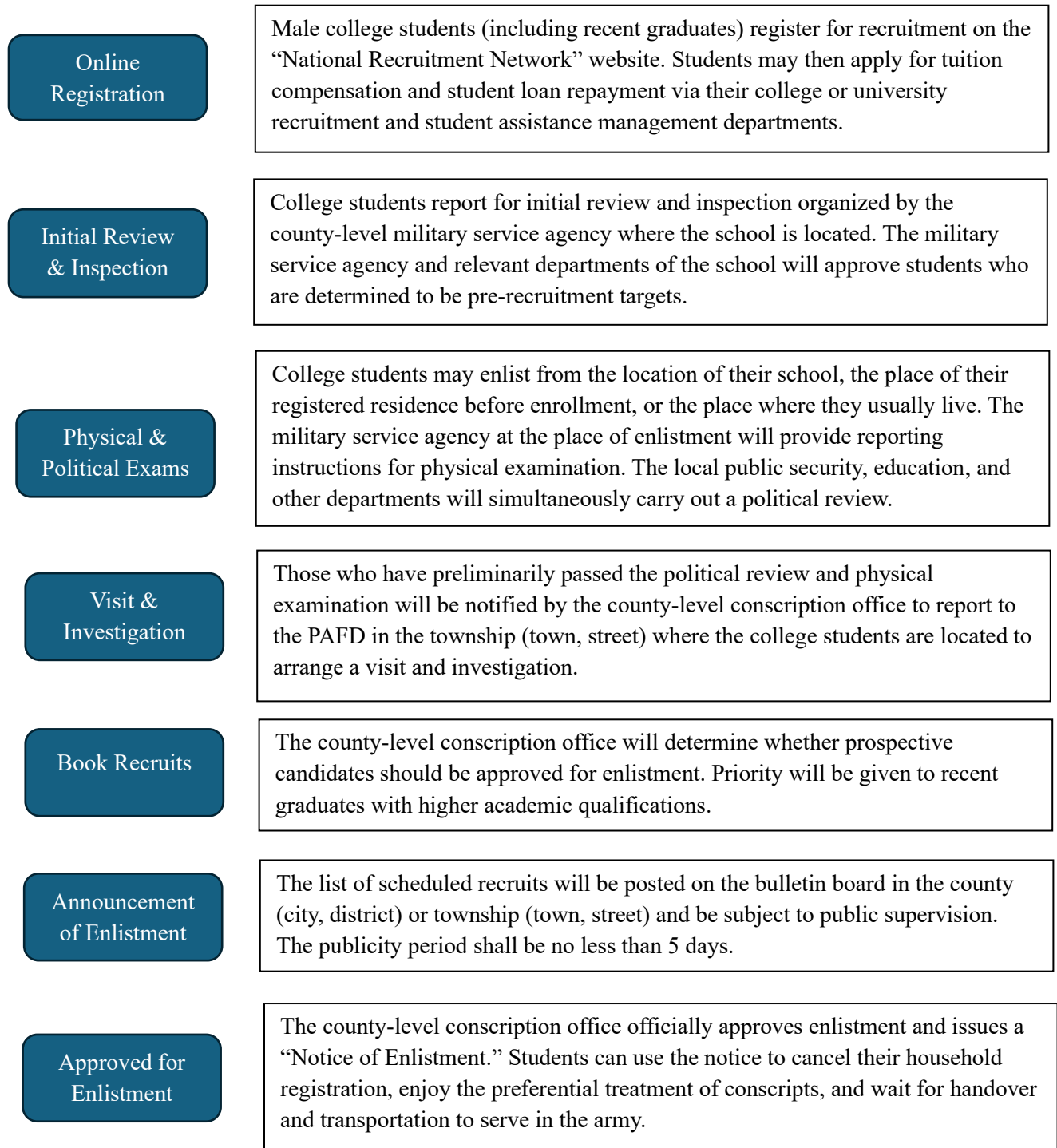
²⁰ “Regulations on Conscription.”

²¹ Ibid.

²² “National Recruitment Network.”

wartime, the State Council and the CMC may, within the scope prescribed by law, adjust the conditions and methods for recruiting citizens for active service.²³

Male College Student Conscription Process²⁴



²³ “Regulations on Conscription.”

²⁴ “National Recruitment Network.”

Military Accession Paths

There are several paths to joining China’s military. The MND Recruitment Office identifies annual recruitment targets for local recruitment offices to fill based on military manpower requirements as well as the specific selection and vetting criteria.²⁵ The majority of PLAN manpower requirements are filled through the general military conscription process, and while a conscript’s preferences may be taken into consideration, they are ultimately assigned based on their education, fitness, and military quota.²⁶ However, the PLAN conducts direct recruitment of specific professional and technical personnel through military and civilian cadre recruitment programs. The PLAN also has a special program to recruit pilots separate from the general conscription system, managed by the PLAN Recruitment Office.

Selective Service, Conscription, and Enlistment

Male citizens who have reached the age of 18 before December 31 of the same year are required to register for military service. Initial Selective Service registration may be completed on the National Recruitment Network website or in person at their local PAFD office. Citizens between 18 and 26 may be selected for conscription, screening, and potential compulsory service or voluntary enlistment based on military manpower requirements. Deferment can be requested yearly with a new application.²⁷ Age brackets for conscription vary by level of education and gender.²⁸ See **Table 1** (below).

Table 1. The Relationship Between Conscription Age and Level of Education

Gender	Level of Education	Conscription Age
Male	Junior High School Graduates	18 to 20
Male	High School Graduates	18 to 22
Male	College and University Graduates	18 to 24
Male	Graduate Students/Advanced Degree Program Graduates	18 to 26
Female	College and University Graduates	18 to 23
Female	Graduate Students/Advanced Degree Program Graduates	18 to 26

Currently, female enlistment is restricted to those with a college education. High school graduates are directed to post-secondary military education programs. Priority for female enlistments includes those with technical and professional degrees that meet the recruitment needs of the military, children and siblings of martyrs, and children of military cadres stationed in remote locations.²⁹

²⁵ “Regulations on Conscription.”

²⁶ Kenneth Allen and Morgan Clemens, “The Recruitment, Education, and Training of PLA Navy Personnel,” China Maritime Studies Institute, August 2014, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-red-books/10/>.

²⁷ “Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China.”

²⁸ “National Recruitment Network.”

²⁹ Ibid.

Pre-Conscription and Pre-Reserve

The Pre-Conscription and Pre-Reserve (预征预储) program is designed to identify and prepare students in institutions of higher learning, particularly technical colleges, for later military service. PAFDs coordinate with colleges to establish military interest clubs which conduct national defense education, military training, and physical fitness programs and prepare students to pass health examinations and political screenings. This program allows recruitment offices to identify potential conscripts for future conscription periods. Upon graduation, students are encouraged to enlist in the military, though enlistment is not compulsory. The program also prepares students to enlist while in college and facilitates their return to studies after demobilization. Students who associate with these organizations, referred to as part of a National Defense Reserve Class (国防后备班),³⁰ may receive a range of benefits including tuition assistance, enlistment priority, preferential consideration for direct recruitment as a sergeant or admission to a military academy, preferential admission to post-graduate institutions, and employment assistance.³¹

Since around 2019, colleges throughout China have established National Defense Reserve Battalions (国防后备营), which function in a manner similar to U.S. Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) programs.³² Also referred to as School Guard (校卫队), these Battalions provide military training to students and provide services for the colleges such as performing color guard duties, conducting daily patrols, standing guard, and supporting receptions. They may also support military recruitment propaganda activities and local public security bureau crowd control requirements when needed. Battalions are often led by officers associated with the local municipal or college PAFD office, with demobilized soldiers, including former students of the college, serving as instructors.³³

Many National Defense Reserve Class students fill high-demand military technical jobs post-graduation, including in maintenance, communication, and engineering. These students are becoming a core source of conscripts for recruitment offices. The recruitment staff of Jilin Province reported in a 2022 *China Military Online* (中国军网) article that since the establishment of National Defense Reserve Battalions in 2019, the number of college reserve companies in the province had grown to 97, and was the source of 75 percent of college student conscripts.³⁴

³⁰ The pre-conscription and pre-reserve program (AKA National Defense Reserve Class) is distinct from the National Defense Student Program which was disestablished by the PLA in 2017. Students associated with National Defense Reserve Battalions do not have the status of reserve officers, do not sign training agreements after enrollment, do not enjoy national defense scholarships, and voluntarily sign up for the army through conscription procedures after graduation.

³¹ "Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China."

³² 昆明理工大学举行国防后备营授旗仪式 ["Kunming University of Science and Technology Held a Flag Awarding Ceremony for the National Defense Reserve Battalion"], 昆明理工大学 [Kunming University of Science and Technology], 16 March 2021 <https://xsc.kmust.edu.cn/info/1187/1583.htm>; 王少亭 [Wang Shaoting], 点燃青年从军梦 打造人才蓄水池 ["Ignite the Dream of Young People to Join the Army and Create a Talent Reservoir"], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 31 August 2022, <http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/gffw/rw/4919871.html>; 国防后备营简介 ["Introduction to the National Defense Reserve Battalion"], 云南商务职业学院 [Website of the Yunnan Business Vocational College], 21 June 2024, accessed at https://wzb.ynbvc.com/rwfc/202406/20240621_6154.html.

³³ "Introduction to the National Defense Reserve Battalion."

³⁴ 张恺 [Zhang Kai], 燃旺从军报国的青春之火 ["Ignite the Flame of Youth to Serve the Country in the Military"], 中国军网 [China Military Online], 11 January 2022, http://www.81.cn/gfbmap/content/2022-01/11/content_307033.htm.

Targeted Training of Sergeants

In 2022, China instituted a new program for the targeted training of sergeants (定向培养军士), based on a previously established non-commissioned officer technical training program. The program is designed to leverage vocational and technical colleges throughout China to train students to fill technical and professional jobs within the military after graduation.³⁵ As of 2024, this program is available for unmarried graduates of senior secondary education programs between 16 and 20 years of age with acceptable college entrance exam scores.³⁶ Applicants will select their vocational colleges of choice, sign a training agreement, and volunteer for at least five years of military service post-graduation. Students are selected based on college entrance exam scores and the results of health examinations and political screenings. Priority is given to members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), outstanding student cadres, children of military personnel, and children of “heroic martyrs.”³⁷

The training period for directional sergeants is three years. The first 2.5 years are dedicated to technical and military training at the vocational institution, after which students complete enlistment and a six-month military internship. Students are not paid during the first 2.5 years of training, though some financial assistance may be available depending on the vocational college. During the six-month internship period students are paid conscript soldier allowances; however, once students graduate the program, they are awarded the rank of sergeant, with a monthly salary of about 6,000 yuan as of late 2024. Graduates of the program are also compensated for tuition fees paid to the school or to the national student loan program. The standard tuition reimbursement for junior college students was 12,000 yuan per year in 2024.³⁸

As of 2024, 48 vocational institutions across China supported the targeted training of sergeants, with quotas determined by each province.³⁹ Male and female applicants are treated differently, with significantly higher minimum standards for females than males. In 2022, male to female quota ratios ranged between 33:1 in Jiangsu province to 82:1 in Henan province.⁴⁰ The year 2024 saw an overall

³⁵ 2025 届高考生注意：定向培养军士报考指南来了！["Attention to the 2025 College Entrance Examination Candidates: The Application Guide for the Targeted Training of Sergeants is Here!"], 中山手机台 [Zhongshan Mobile Station], 11 December 2024, <https://zsrapp.zsnews.cn/home/content/newsContent/532/672409>; 2025 整理江西定向培养军士报考，圆梦军旅梦，一文揭秘流程+技巧 ["2025 Jiangxi Targeted Training Program for Military Soldiers: A Guide to Fulfilling Your Military Dream - This Article Reveals the Process and Tips"], 网易 [NetEase], 14 February 2025, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/JOBTGMJH0518HHFF.html>.

³⁶ "Attention to the 2025 College Entrance Examination Candidates: The Application Guide for the Targeted Training of Sergeants is Here!"

³⁷ Ibid.; "2025 Jiangxi Targeted Training Program for Military Soldiers: A Guide to Fulfilling Your Military Dream - This Article Reveals the Process and Tips."

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ 辽宁招生考试之窗 [Liaoning Admissions and Examination Information Website], 2024 年招收定向培养军士专业和招生院校分拨表 ["2024 Enrollment of Targeted Training Sergeants and Enrollment Colleges and Universities Allocation Table"], 高考网 [Gaokao Network], 3 June 2024, <https://www.gaokao.com/e/20240607/666301c408ad5.shtml>; "Attention to the 2025 College Entrance Examination Candidates: The Application Guide for the Targeted Training of Sergeants is Here!"

⁴⁰ 招 2572 人！河南 2022 年定向培养军士招生政策发布 ["Henan Province Releases 2022 Recruitment Policy for Target Training of Military Sergeants – Aiming to Recruit 2572 People"], 澎湃 [The Paper], 23 June 2022, https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_18710372; 2022 年重庆市定向培养军士招生须知 ["2022 Chongqing Targeted Training Sergeant Enrollment Instructions"], 搜狐 [Sohu], 16 June 2022, https://www.sohu.com/a/557696124_121106884; 高考生 定向培养军士，考虑下？ ["High School Graduates, How

recruitment ratio of 108:1.⁴¹ Male students are organized by the military recruitment office at the place of household registration (or place of habitual residence) and female students are organized by the provincial military recruitment office.⁴²

Targeted training of sergeants degree programs are divided by specialty and service, supporting the PLA Army, Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force, Joint Logistics Support Force, Information Support Force, Cyberspace Force, Aerospace Force, and the People’s Armed Police (PAP).⁴³ Each degree program is limited to 50 students.⁴⁴ For the PLAN, after completion of the 2.5 year academic curriculum, internships are generally conducted as part of a sergeants course at one of the PLAN’s military academies.⁴⁵ **Table 2** (below) lists the colleges and degree programs supporting the PLAN.⁴⁶

Table 2. Colleges Participating in the Targeted Training of Sergeants for the PLAN

Institution	Degree Programs
Beijing Vocational and Technical College of Industry (北京工业职业技术学院)	-Mechatronics Technology - Electronic Information Engineering Technology
Binzhou Vocational College (滨州职业学院)	-Navigational Technology
Bohai Ship Vocational College (渤海船舶职业学院)	-Marine Electrical Engineering Technology -Marine Engineering Technology
Changsha Aeronautical Vocational and Technical College (长沙航空职业技术学院)	-Aircraft Electronic Equipment Maintenance
Chengdu Aviation Vocational and Technical College (成都航空职业技术学院)	-Drone Application Technology -Aircraft Digital Manufacturing Technology -Aircraft Electronic Equipment Maintenance

About We Consider a Targeted Military Training Program?", 央视军事 [CCTV Military], https://m.cyol.com/gb/articles/2022-07/01/content_K78axfBA3.html.

⁴¹ "Attention to the 2025 College Entrance Examination Candidates: The Application Guide for the Targeted Training of Sergeants is Here!"

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "2024 Enrollment of Targeted Training Sergeants and Enrollment Colleges and Universities Allocation Table."

⁴⁴ 定向培养军士报考攻略（附 24 年各高校录取最低分）["Targeted Training Sergeant Application Strategy (with the Lowest Score for Admission to Each University in 24 Years)"], 微信 [WeChat], 27 November 2024, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/?_biz=MzI5Njk3NTA5NA==&mid=2247498236&idx=2&sn=28352f9e8a79841598925e455d65c044&chksm=edfd8340c54ac715d2cb30a2d1fef1887cb284f3bb8d3a067fd6f658a03a640b939b60ad8b48&scene=27.

⁴⁵ 2023 年定向培养海军军士招生简章 ["2023 Targeted Training of Naval Sergeants Enrollment Guide"], 东华理工大学 [East China Institute of Technology], 19 June 2023, <https://www.mshao.com/2023/0619/24613.html>; 龚国茂 [Gong Guomao], 海军士官学校探索优化预选军士培养模式 ["The Naval Non-Commissioned Officer School Explores and Optimizes the Training Mode of Pre-selected Sergeants"], 中国军网 [China Military Online], 20 February 2025, http://www.81.cn/yw_208727/16370417.html.

⁴⁶ 关注！山东交通职业学院 2024 年定向培养海军军士招生指南 ["Attention! Shandong Jiaotong Vocational College 2024 Targeted Training of Navy Sergeant Enrollment Guide"], 山东交通职业学院 [Shandong Transportation Vocational College], 18 June 2024, <http://sdjtzxy.v.360eol.com/web/brochure/brochureDetail.do?enrollId=52162&appPrefix=>; "2024 Enrollment of Targeted Training Sergeants and Enrollment Colleges and Universities Allocation Table"; "Attention to the 2025 College Entrance Examination Candidates: The Application Guide for the Targeted Training of Sergeants is Here!"; 东华理工大学 2024 年定向培养海军军士招生简章 ["East China University of Technology 2024 Targeted Training of Naval Sergeant Enrollment Guide"], 东华理工大学国防教育学院 [National Defense Education Institute of the East China University of Technology], 13 June 2024, <https://hjxy.ecut.edu.cn/dc/9c/c465a122012/page.htm>.

Chongqing Aerospace Vocational and Technical College (重庆航天职业技术学院)	-Drone Application Technology -Applied Electronics Technology
East China Institute of Technology (东华理工大学)	-Electrical Automation Technology
Hubei Transportation Vocational and Technical College (湖北交通职业技术学院)	-Ship Electrical and Electronic Technology
Hunan Automotive Engineering Vocational University (湖南汽车工程职业大学)	-Automotive Inspection and Repair Technology [Marine Corps] -Computer Network Technology [Marine Corps]
Jiangsu Maritime Vocational and Technical College (江苏海事职业技术学院)	-Marine Engineering Technology
Jiangxi Aviation Vocational and Technical College (江西航空职业技术学院)	-Digital Manufacturing Technology for Aircraft -Missile Maintenance Technology
Lanzhou Vocational and Technical University of Resources and Environment (兰州资源环境职业技术学院)	-Applied Meteorological Techniques
Nanchang Institute of Technology (南昌工程学院)	-Applied Electronics
Nanjing Information Vocational Technical College (南京信息职业技术学院)	Computer Network Technology
Shandong Vocational College of Transportation (山东交通职业学院)	-Navigation Technology -Marine Engineering Technology -Ship Electronic and Electrical Technology
Taishan Vocational and Technical College (泰山职业技术学院)	-Mechatronics Technology -Electrical Automation Technology
Wuchang Vocational College (武昌职业学院)	-Electronic Information Engineering Technology
Wuhan Vocational and Technical College of Shipbuilding (武汉船舶职业技术学院)	-Electrical Automation Technology
Xian Aviation Vocational and Technical College (西安航空职业技术学院)	-Electronic Information Engineering Technology
Yan'an Vocational and Technical College (延安职业技术学院)	-Navigational Technology -Marine Engineering Technology -Information Security Technology
Zhejiang Transportation Vocational and Technical College (浙江交通职业技术学院)	-Marine Engineering Technology -Intelligent Control Technology

Direct Recruitment of Sergeants (直接招收军士)

Graduates of ordinary colleges and universities with specific professional qualifications and students with specific vocational qualifications, not more than 24 years of age, may be directly recruited as sergeants. In 2024, sergeants were directly recruited in more than 400 specialties, such as road transportation, automobile manufacturing, electronic information, communications, computers,

mechanical and electrical equipment, machinery, and medicine. Specific recruitment priorities are based on annual military manpower requirements issued by the MND Recruiting Office.⁴⁷

Graduates of ordinary colleges and universities enlisted through this program are awarded the rank of corporal on enlistment and the rank of sergeant after serving for one year. Graduates of vocational (junior) colleges are awarded the rank of corporal on enlistment and the rank of sergeant after two years' service. All directly recruited sergeants are required to enlist for at least five years and are entitled to tuition reimbursement and national student loan repayment up to 16,000 yuan for undergraduate students and 20,000 yuan for graduate students.⁴⁸ Direct recruitment of sergeants usually starts in August of each year and finishes at the end of September.⁴⁹

Military Academies

China has 44 military academies divided into those directly under the CMC and those subordinate to the PLA and the PAP. Of these, the PLAN has five military academies that recruit high school students aged 17 to 20, as well as university and graduate students up to 24 years of age, to train to become commissioned officers. High school graduates may also attend the CMC-subordinate National University of Defense Technology, which graduates officers to serve in all military services, including the Navy. Outstanding conscripts with a high school degree or an incomplete college degree can also apply to military academies by participating in the all-military undergraduate admissions examination.⁵⁰ Enlisted personnel with at least two years of college education selected to attend an officer academic institution are only required to attend the institution for two years.⁵¹

The following academies support the direct recruitment of high school students for the Navy, in addition to providing advanced technical training for sergeants.

- National University of Defense Technology (国防科技大学)
- Naval University of Engineering (海军工程大学)
- Dalian Naval Academy (海军大连舰艇学院)
- Navy Submarine Academy (海军潜艇学院)
- Naval Aviation University (海军航空大学)
- Naval Medical University (former Second Military Medical University, 海军军医大学)

The Army Special Operations Academy (陆军特种作战学院), which trains officers for special operations as well as the Army's reconnaissance units, the Navy's Marine Corps, and the Air Force's

⁴⁷ "National Recruitment Network."

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ 2024 年直招军士征兵指南与注意事项 ["2024 Direct Recruitment Sergeant Recruitment Guide and Precautions"], 百度 [Baidu], 17 January 2025, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1821434588068275623&wfr>.

⁵⁰ 徐小刚 [Xu Xiaogong] and 吴旭 [Wu Xu], 2022 年度全军士兵考学文化统考于 6 月 7 日至 9 日举行 ["The 2022 All-Army Soldier Examination and Cultural Examination Was Held From June 7 to 9"], 中国军网 [China Military Online], 2 June 2022, <http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0602/c1011-32437119.html>.

⁵¹ 2024 年大学生入伍流程及优惠政策汇编 ["A Compilation of the 2024 College Student Enlistment Process and Preferential Policies"]. 广州大学 [Guangzhou University], <https://bwc.gdufs.edu.cn/info/1107/4618.htm>; Jie Gao and Kenneth Allen, "PLA Officer Cadet Recruitment: Part 1, *China Brief*, 20 November 2023, <https://jamestown.org/program/pla-officer-cadet-recruitment-part-1/>.

Airborne Corps, ended direct recruitment of high school graduates in 2025. It has since adopted a “2+2” training model, under which prospective officers complete their first two years at a general Army academy before competing for selection into the specialized program.⁵²

All prospective officer cadets must take the annual national undergraduate admission exam commonly called the “gaokao” (高考), held in early June each year, and complete a high school physical fitness test. After receiving their “gaokao” scores, students complete a political assessment through their local PAFD office and submit applications for admission to military academies, identifying order of preference. Based on submitted materials, the Provincial Military District Enrollment Office (省军区招生工作办公室), in conjunction with the Office of the Provincial Admissions Committee (省级招委会办公室), will select applicants for interview and physical examination. Candidates who have passed the political assessment, interview, and physical examination and whose scores have reached the minimum admission score of the preferred colleges will be forwarded to the colleges for selection.⁵³

PLA Navy Flight Cadet Program

Established in 2015, the PLAN Flight Cadet Program (中国人民解放军海军招收飞行学员工作办公室) recruits ordinary high school graduates to serve as carrier-based aircraft flight cadets. In 2025, the program concentrated its recruit inspections in Beijing, Zhengzhou, and Changsha, but selected recruits from across China based on exam scores and the results of preliminary health examination and political screenings.⁵⁴ The program focused recruitment on male ordinary high school graduates between 17 and 20 years of age, with emphasis on science students with English language proficiency and good college entrance exam scores. In addition, the program recruits unmarried male recent undergraduate and master’s program graduates in science and engineering disciplines, no more than 24 and 26 years of age, respectively.⁵⁵ All applicants to the program are required to apply via the Navy Recruitment Network (www.hjzf.mil.cn). The program targeted women for recruitment for the first time in early 2023; however, it did not accept female recruits in 2024 or 2025.⁵⁶

⁵² Joshua Arostegui, “Adapting to Future Wars: The Reorganization of the PLA Army’s Special Operations Forces and the Move Toward Professionalization,” *China Military Studies Review*, 25 September 2025, <https://www.usmcu.edu/Outreach/Marine-Corps-University-Press/China-Military-Studies-Review/CMSR-2025-Adapting-to-Future-Wars/>.

⁵³ 徐小刚 [Xu Xiaogang] 2023 年军队院校招生政策解读 [“Interpretation of the Enrollment Policy of Military Colleges and Universities in 2023”], 解放军报 [*PLA Daily*], 15 June 2023, <http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/gffw/zs/16231378.html>.

⁵⁴ 中国人民解放军海军招收飞行学员工作办公室 [Website of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy Flight Cadet Recruitment Office], <http://hjzf.mil.cn>.

⁵⁵ 2025 年度海军招飞初检预选工作通知 [“Notice of the Pre-Selection of the 2025 Navy Recruitment Preliminary Inspection”], 中国海军招飞网 [China Navy Aviation Recruitment Network], 25 September 2024, <https://gaokao.chsi.com.cn/gkxx/hjzf/202409/20240925/2293329682.html>.

⁵⁶ 首次！2023 年度海军面向地方大学生选拔飞行学员，男女生均可报名 [“For the First Time Ever! The Navy is Selecting Flight Cadets From Civilian University Students in 2023; Both Male and Female Students are Welcome to Apply”], 央视军事 [*CCTV Military*], 20 February 2023, <https://military.cctv.com/2023/02/20/ARTIvRkXwGRwOeYEAHNYAoQT230220.shtml>.

Direct Recruitment of Officers (直接选拔招录军官)

China's military maintains a system for the direct recruitment of officers for professional and technical positions in naval units, research institutes, and training institutions. All applicants must have at least one bachelor's degree. These officers are mainly selected from China's top-tier (双一流) academic institutions and prestigious foreign universities that fall in the top 200 of the QS World Rankings. The maximum age of undergraduates, master's students, and doctoral students for recruitment are 24, 29, and 34 years of age, respectively. This maximum age may be relaxed by one year for doctoral students with urgently needed skills, as well as ethnic minorities and veterans.⁵⁷

The direct recruitment of officers is managed by each military service. All positions are advertised on the Military Talent Network website, generally twice a year. Applicants apply to fill specific positions and submit supporting materials to be reviewed by the Navy hiring organization. Applicants will then undergo physical examinations, political screenings, and education and professional skills evaluations. Once selected, the PLAN will refer applicants to Military District offices to complete commissioning processes.⁵⁸

In 2024, the Naval Engineering University (NEU) published an announcement on the direct recruitment of postgraduate students. NEU solicited graduates of "double first-class" universities in science and engineering disciplines who were planning to join the military to apply through this program and study for a master's degree at NEU. While completing postgraduate studies, students would maintain the rank and privileges of a professional and technical second lieutenant and be exempt from tuition, education, and housing expenses.⁵⁹

Civilian Personnel

Civilian personnel (文职人员), who are not part of the active-duty force, serve across the military services and wear a uniform referred to as "Peacock Blue" (孔雀蓝). Civilian staff assigned to the PLAN hold a variety of professional and technical positions, such as medical technicians, training instructors, finance specialists, equipment repair and information technology specialists, transportation specialists, and supply managers.⁶⁰ Civilian personnel are a resource to increase scientific and technological innovation in the military, which the PLA currently views as insufficient. In January 2023, the regulations on the management of civilian personnel within the military were

⁵⁷尚晓敏 [Shang Xiaomin], 2024年下半年海军直接选拔招录军官公告["Announcement on the Direct Selection and Recruitment of Officers by the Navy in the Second Half of 2024"], 中国军网 [China Military Online], 4 November 2024, http://www.81.cn/hj_208557/16349450.html.

⁵⁸ 800余个! 直招军官, 退役军人可优先!! ["More than 800 of Them! Direct Recruitment of Officers, Retired Military Personnel are Preferred!!"], 清镇市退役军人事务局 [Qingzhen Municipal Veterans Affairs Bureau], 8 November 2024, https://www.gzqz.gov.cn/jgsz/zfbm/tj/rj/gzdt/202411/t20241108_86045006.html.

⁵⁹ 海军工程大学2024年直接选拔招录入伍研究生公告 ["Announcement on the Direct Recruitment of Postgraduate Students from the Naval University of Engineering in 2024"], 海军工程大学 [Naval University of Engineering], 2 August 2023, <https://www.nue.edu.cn/index/document/detail/id/734/cid/35/pid/33.html>.

⁶⁰ 王艳明 [Wang Yanming] and 李王鹏 [Li Wangpeng], 联勤保障部队举行机关直附属单位文职人员入职宣誓仪式 ["The JLSF Held an Oath-Taking Ceremony for Civilian Personnel of Directly Affiliated Units"], 中国军网 [China Military Online], 9 September 2020, http://www.81.cn/wz_208577/jdt_208578/9899923.html; 我是孔雀蓝, 我在联勤保障部队成长成才! ["I am Peacock Blue, and I Have Grown Up in the JLSF!"], 知乎专栏 [Zhihu Column], 24 November 2022, <https://zhuankan.zhihu.com/p/586390970>.

revised to improve recruitment, career development, incentives, and retirement.⁶¹ Many of these positions are filled with retired or demobilized soldiers.⁶²

The PLA Professional and Technical Personnel Network (中国人民解放军专业技术人才网), AKA Military Talent Network (<http://www.81rc.mil.cn> or <http://81rc.81.cn>), is used by the PLAN as well as China's other military services for the direct recruitment of personnel to fill civilian professional and technical positions. In general, applicants should be between 18 and 35, meet the desired educational and experiential qualification for the specific position, and meet the physical qualifications outlined in the "Standards for Physical Examination of Officers and Civilian Personnel in the Selection and Promotion of the Army" (军队选拔军官和文职人员体检标准).⁶³ These standards establish minimum height, body mass, blood glucose, physical deformity, injury, disease, and physical appearance standards for all officers and civilian personnel, with some variance allowed for individuals over 40 years of age and specific work roles.⁶⁴

Outreach Mechanisms

PLA recruitment mechanisms are rapidly transitioning from traditional grassroots outreach to a precision recruitment system, by which recruiting offices prescreen potential conscripts, sergeants, and officers for suitability. These recruiting activities are complemented by an aggressive national defense education program and increasingly sophisticated recruitment propaganda drives.

National Defense Education

According to China's "National Defense Education Law," every public, party, military, and business organization is responsible for strengthening national defense education through propaganda, study, and enthusiast activities to carry forward the spirit of patriotism, promote national defense, and further socialist cultural and ethical progress. National defense education content must be incorporated in primary and junior secondary school curricula and extracurricular activities. Institutions of higher education and senior secondary schools are required to combine classroom instruction with military training.⁶⁵ While much of this training is superfluous, consisting of the basic rudiments of drill, military enthusiast activities, and a heavy dose of propaganda, the overarching program is intended to inculcate the responsibility of the whole of society for China's national defense.

⁶¹ 发挥文职人员在作战支援保障任务中的重要作用 ["Give Full Play to the Important Role of Civilian Personnel in Operational Support Missions"], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 20 January 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-01/20/content_332257.htm.

⁶² 机会难得！联勤保障部队面向退役士兵招聘文职人员 网上报名已经开始 ["The JLSF Recruits Civilian Personnel for Retired Soldiers Online Registration has Begun"], 腾讯网-央广网 [Tencent - CNR], 24 November 2022, <https://new.qq.com/rain/a/20221124A0954000>.

⁶³ 海军 2024 年面向社会公开招考专业技能类文职人员公告 ["The Navy will Open the Recruitment of Professional and Technical Civilian Personnel to the Public in 2024"], 军队人才网 [Military Talent Network], http://81rc.81.cn/sy/gzdt_210283/16300919.html.

⁶⁴ 军队选拔军官和文职人员体检标准 ["Medical Examination Standards for Military Officers and Civilian Personnel"], 搜狐 [Sohu], 11 June 2023, https://www.sohu.com/a/734166821_121107000.

⁶⁵ "Law of the People's Republic of China on National Defense Education," Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, 29 June 2021, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/Publications/LR/4888380.html>.

Beginning with some pilot institutions in 2018 and 2019, the CCP has slowly implemented a program called “Three-Dimensional Education” (三全育人) into its colleges and universities to integrate the Party’s views on morality, political work, culture, and social constructs into course curricula.⁶⁶ As part of this program, universities in China have improved their traditional national defense education work by collaborating with PLA educational institutes like the National Defense University to ensure appropriate compulsory and elective courses are included in school curricula, while also making use of those traditional military skills training events that have been a part of such programs for several decades.⁶⁷

Many schools credit the “Three-Dimensional Education” program with helping improve recruitment, especially as PAFD officials work closely with those universities to engage students early in their education. For example, in mid-March 2025 the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law noted that eight of its students joined the military in the first recruitment cycle of the year, exceeding the quota requirement for the period. The university credited the Qingpu District PAFD’s communication and coordination with the school and its own efforts to adhere to “Three-Dimensional Education” as the driving factors behind its success in meeting recruitment goals.⁶⁸

To better connect the military and society, military units are charged with social outreach, focused predominantly on students and veterans groups. Media outlets are required to program national defense content into their daily distributions, and communities are encouraged to open national defense related museums, science and technology halls, and cultural centers. On National Day (1 October), PLA Day (1 August), and National Defense Education Day (third Saturday of each September), military barracks are opened to the public for tours and outreach activities.⁶⁹

Recruitment Propaganda

Recruitment propaganda is prepared under the supervision of the NDMD in partnership with professional media designers. Gone are the days of PLA flash mobs dancing to the tunes of Michael Jackson on CCTV. Current recruitment advertisements are digital and glitzy, styled after action films, and designed to entice and excite with varying formats focused on the adventure-seeking young man, the aspiring professional or technical student, and parents with aspirations of advancement for their child. Different types and styles of recruitment propaganda are played in public spaces and on public transportation, on university campuses and conscription sites, on public television, on streaming networks, on websites inside and outside China, and on various social medial platform such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin.

Military recruiters also visit high school and college campuses and conduct outreach, education, and pre-screening events, focusing on current and future conscripts, tailoring engagements based on

⁶⁶ 武贵龙 [Wu Guilong], 奏响“三全育人”最强音 [“Playing the Strongest Voice of ‘Three Dimensional Education’”], 中国共产党新闻网 [CPC News], 26 February 2019, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0226/c40531-30901931.html>.

⁶⁷ 过勇 [Guo Yong], 把国防育人融入“三全育人” [“Integrate National Defense Education into ‘Three-Dimensional’ Education”], 清华大学 [Tsinghua University], 19 January 2020, <https://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/info/1182/50922.htm>.

⁶⁸ 我校圆满完成 2025 年上半年征兵工作任务 [“Our School Successfully Completed the Conscription Mission in the First Half of 2025”], 上海政法学院 [Shanghai University of Political Science and Law], 18 March 2025, <https://www.shupl.edu.cn/bwc/2025/0318/c2034a137970/page.htm>.

⁶⁹ “Law of the People's Republic of China on National Defense Education.”

student aptitude and interest.⁷⁰ Recruiters also leverage national defense education sites to capitalize on the interest and military enthusiasm generated by facility displays. The Navy Museum in Qingdao not only supports national defense education and popularization, but also facilitates military conscription. According to a February 2025 article, the recruiting office of the Shibe District in Qingdao city has set up a conscription consultation station in the museum to recruit, predominantly for the PLAN.⁷¹

Precision Recruitment

Since 2021, Xi Jinping has increasingly stressed that the development of the military should be based on precision, referring to planning, implementation, deployment, inspection, and recruitment.⁷² According to a 2024 article in *China Militia* (中国民兵), the military should implement targeted recruitment to optimally align conscription to military requirements. At all levels, recruiting offices should be able to leverage government data to identify individuals available for recruitment and review their basic physical condition, hobbies, academic expertise, and professional skills. Based on this information, recruitment offices should be able to match the manpower supply with military demand and precisely align recruits to units with the greatest need for their individual skills. Through this method, the military may be able to shorten the period required to train soldiers and increase their combat effectiveness as soon as possible.⁷³

To achieve precision recruitment, since 2021 the NDMD, MD, and provincial and below recruitment offices have developed methods to mine local government and education data resources and applied big data tools to enable more precise conscription work.⁷⁴ Guizhou province, for example, claims to have built a big data recruitment application platform to promote “cloud” comparison and select individuals with the greatest potential for recruitment, while Zhejiang province claims to use big data systems, and language models to identify the physical and political status of conscripted youths to shorten conscript review processes.⁷⁵ Shandong province claims to leverage “digital government” construction to extract relevant data from education, human resources, and social security departments, and obtain the basic information of candidate college entrance examinations and

⁷⁰ 朱军 [Zhu Jun], 德超 [De Chao], and 牛耘 [Niu Yun], 为推进强军事业贡献力量——国防动员系统扎实做好新时代征兵工作综述 [“Contributing to the Promotion of the Cause of Strengthening the Military—A Review of the National Defense Mobilization System to do a Solid Job in Conscription in the New Era”], 中国军网 [China Military Online], 5 December 2024, http://www.81.cn/dy_208579/16356257.html.

⁷¹ 山东省青岛市结合海军博物馆国防教育活动开展征兵宣传 [“Qingdao City, Shandong Province, Carries Out Conscription Propaganda in Conjunction with the National Defense Education Activities of the Navy Museum”], 华夏经纬网 [Huaxia Jingwei Network], 12 February 2025, <https://www.huaxia.com/c/2025/02/12/2002190.shtml>.

⁷² Zhang et al., “‘Two Conscriptions in One Year,’ How to Beat the Drums?”; 叶梦圆 [Ye Mengyuan], 为强军兴军提供高素质兵员支撑 [“Provide High-quality Military Support for Strengthening the Army and Rejuvenating the Army”], 中国军网 [China Military Online], 5 December 2024, http://www.81.cn/dy_208579/16356255.html; 林嘉 [Lin Jia], 盛辉辉 [Sheng Huihui], and 林琳 [Lin Lin], 精准征兵有了“智慧助手” [“Precise Recruitment Has a ‘Smart Assistant’”], 中国军网 [China Military Online], 24 February 2021, http://www.81.cn/gfbmap/content/2021-02/24/content_283341.htm.

⁷³ Ye, “Provide High-Quality Military Support for Strengthening the Army and Rejuvenating the Army.”

⁷⁴ 《解放军报》头版头条刊发：山东省征兵办下大力把优秀大学生送到部队！ [“The Front-page Headline of ‘People’s Liberation Army Daily’ Was published: Shandong Provincial Recruiting Office Makes Great Efforts to Send Outstanding College Students to the Army!”], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 19 September 2024, https://www.1921.org.cn/jrgz/2024/09/19/detailed_2024091939624.html.

⁷⁵ Zhu et al., “Contributing to the Promotion of the Cause of Strengthening the Military—A Review of the National Defense Mobilization System to do a Solid Job in Conscription in the New Era.”

unemployed university graduates to inform recruitment planning.⁷⁶ The personal information of potential recruits is used to disseminate conscription propaganda, consultation services, and registration instructions to not only those individuals, but their social network within recruiting parameters. Individuals who interact with delivered content are then targeted for one-on-one engagement with recruiting officials who provide additional consultation services to streamline recruitment administrative activities.⁷⁷

Military Service Incentives

The PLA is focusing significant efforts to recruit college students and technical professionals. According to one source, the proportion of college students recruited rose from less than 30 percent in 2013 to more than 80 percent by 2023.⁷⁸ The CMC, State Council, and provincial governments have rolled out a range of policy mechanisms to attract high-quality recruits and retain these individuals after their initial terms of service. These incentives, which are widely advertised as part of recruitment propaganda campaigns, include military pay and entitlements, education and job assistance, and retirement benefits.

Military Pay

Military pay remains low compared to those jobs not subject to government salary controls. As of 2024, Chinese military members earn the following approximate base salaries:⁷⁹

Table 3. Approximate Salaries of Chinese Military Personnel (2024)

Rank	Monthly Salary (yuan)	Monthly Salary (USD) ⁸⁰
First Year Conscript (Private)	1,000+ yuan	\$139+
Second Year Conscript (Private First Class)	1,100+ yuan	\$153+
Junior Sergeant (Corporal)	5,500+ yuan	\$766+
Junior Sergeant (Sergeant)	7,500+ yuan	\$1,044+
Intermediate Sergeant (Second Class)	9,000+ yuan	\$1,253+
Intermediate Sergeant (First Class)	10,000+ yuan	\$1,393+
Senior Sergeant (Third Class)	12,000+ yuan	\$1,671+

⁷⁶ Zhang et al., “Two Conscriptions in One Year, How to Beat the Drums?”

⁷⁷ Lin et al., “Precise Recruitment Has a ‘Smart Assistant’”; Zhu et al., “Contributing to the Promotion of the Cause of Strengthening the Military—A Review of the National Defense Mobilization System to do a Solid Job in Conscription in the New Era.”

⁷⁸ Zhu et al., “Contributing to the Promotion of the Cause of Strengthening the Military—A Review of the National Defense Mobilization System to do a Solid Job in Conscription in the New Era.”

⁷⁹ 2025 年男女兵应征报名已展开，2、5、8、12、16、18 年兵的区别！ [“The 2025 Male and Female Conscription Applications Have Begun, the Difference Between 2, 5, 8, 12, 16, and 18 Soldiers!"]. 百度 [Baidu], 14 March 2025, https://mbd.baidu.com/newspage/data/landingsuper?context=%7B%22nid%22%3A%22news_9520727616521636973%22%7D&n_type=1&p_from=4; 盘点：2024 年部队里，各级军官，士官，士兵，工资与待遇 [“Inventory: In the Army in 2024, Officers, Non-commissioned Officers, Soldiers, Salaries and Benefits at All Levels”], 百度 [Baidu], 14 January 2025, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1821149970538185713&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

⁸⁰ USD conversion based on the average exchange rate for 2024 (7.1812 RMB per 1USD). See World Currency Exchange Rates and Currency Exchange Rate History, <https://www.exchange-rates.org/exchange-rate-history/usd-cny-2024>.

Senior Sergeant (Second Class)	13,500+ yuan	\$1,880+
Senior Sergeant (First Class)	16,000+ yuan	\$2,228+
Platoon Leader	8,500+ yuan	\$1,184+
Company Commander	10,000+ yuan	\$1,393+
Battalion Commander	12,000+ yuan	\$1,671+
Regiment Commander	14,000+ yuan	\$1,950+
Brigade/Division Commander	16,000+ yuan	\$2,228+
Army Commander	18,000+ yuan	\$2,507+
Theater Commander	20,000+ yuan	\$2,785+

As a very rough comparison, according to *Salary Explorer*, in 2024 the average factory worker salary in China was 8,370 yuan/month (~\$1,166), a mechanic made 11,500 yuan/month (~\$1,601), a computer programmer made 28,3000 yuan/month (~\$3,941), and a guidance navigation and control engineer made 31,666 yuan/month (~\$4,410).⁸¹

Conscript pay is delivered in the form of allowances, while sergeants and above earn a monthly salary. These base salaries do not include other allowances and subsidies, housing, special duty and hardship allowances, bonuses, or retirement and health benefits. In addition, military members are paid an extra month's salary in December.⁸²

Entitlements

In order to attract college and university educated talent, the military works to entice prospective recruits through a range of additional entitlements. As soon as conscripts are enlisted, they are entitled to various preferential payments and subsidies for themselves and family members, to include transportation, access to health facilities, accident insurance, and tuition compensation.⁸³ After marriage, usually for intermediate sergeants and above, military spouses receive a spousal stipend of 500 yuan/month, and if geographically separated, a separation payment of 1,000 yuan/month. Spouses receive free medical treatment and parents and parents-in-law enjoy preferential medical treatment. If either parent reaches the age of 60, a parental support subsidy of 600 yuan will be paid every month. Children receive free medical treatment and priority admission for treatment, and parents will receive a monthly childcare allowance of 500 yuan for children under the age of six. Spouses and children separated from military members are exempt from travel expenses for approved visits.⁸⁴ Retirement resettlement programs for sergeants and officers are also designed to ensure co-location of families.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Salary explorer accessed at <https://cdn-0.salaryexplorer.com/>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "Regulations on Conscription."

⁸⁴ "Targeted Training Sergeant Application Strategy (with the Lowest Score for Admission to Each University in 24 Years)."

⁸⁵ 退役军人安置条例 ["Regulations on the Resettlement of Veterans"], 中国政府网 [China Government Network], 29 July 2024, https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/202408/content_6965764.htm.

Retirement Benefits

In China, “retired servicemen” (退役军人) refers to officers, non-commissioned officers, conscripts, and other personnel who have retired from active service.⁸⁶ Retirement benefits vary greatly by time in service, rank, and military performance. The preponderance of discussions regarding retirement benefits correlate to U.S. concepts of veterans benefits.

Conscripts are entitled to veteran resettlement after their period of enlistment is complete. There are three main resettlement tracks: returning to their hometowns for independent employment, participating in government resettlement, and enrolling in an education program.⁸⁷

- As of 2024, the majority of conscripts opt to return to their hometowns for independent employment. These veterans receive a one-time financial subsidy and are also eligible for free vocational skills training to enhance their employment competitiveness.⁸⁸ Conscripts recruited or hired by a private company or public institution while conscripted will be given priority for employment by the same organization after the military service obligation is complete.⁸⁹ Conscripts and sergeants also receive a one-time payment for awards received, the value of which depends on level and number of awards.⁹⁰
- Government resettlement is mainly available to conscripts who have been awarded second-class merit or above or rated as “outstanding soldiers” during their service. They may be given priority to work in government organizations, enterprises, and institutions.⁹¹
- For conscripts willing to continue their studies, the state provides a variety of preferential policies for further education, including bonus points on their general college entrance examinations and preferential admission to vocational colleges. Students who completed active service while enrolled in an education program will retain their enrollment qualifications or student status during the period of active service, and be allowed to return to school within two years of discharge.⁹²

Sergeants are entitled to the same retirement benefits as conscripts, but after 12 years of service they are also entitled to government-assisted resettlement and employment, and may receive a monthly retirement pension, if eligible. Sergeants are entitled to full retirement benefits if they are over the age of 55, have completed 30 years of service, or are assessed as having a line of duty disability.⁹³ Retired officers receive a monthly pension and government-assisted resettlement and employment. Priority is given to retired servicemen who participated in combat; demobilized officers who commanded division, brigade, regiment, and battalion-level combat units; children of martyrs; exemplary meritorious servicemen; and retired servicemen who served on active duty for a long time

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “The 2025 Male and Female Conscript Application Have Begun, the Difference Between 2, 5, 8, 12, 16, and 18 Soldiers!”

⁸⁸ “Regulations on the Resettlement of Veterans.”

⁸⁹ “Regulations on Conscript.”

⁹⁰ “Regulations on the Resettlement of Veterans.”

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² “Regulations on Conscript.”

⁹³ “Targeted Training Sergeant Application Strategy (with the Lowest Score for Admission to Each University in 24 Years).”

in difficult and remote areas or in special posts such as aviation, aboard naval vessels, and nuclear-related positions.⁹⁴ Service members with line of duty disabilities meeting certain criteria are to be supported by the state for life.⁹⁵

Recruitment Challenges

Despite the improvements the CCP has made in precision recruiting, pay, and benefits for all ranks, and general outreach, many problems continue to hamper efforts by the PLAN and other services to recruit the best possible candidates. The following section outlines three specific problems that plague the PLA's recruiting efforts, all of which inherently affect the quality of personnel entering the Navy.

Overburdened Recruiting Officials

Conscription work is used as an important metric in the evaluation and incentive system for leading cadres. Provinces have incorporated conscription work into target performance appraisal system of local officials, increasing pressures to deliver.⁹⁶ China's recruiting officials, including PAFD cadres, likely remain overworked based on the number of concurrent responsibilities they have in recruiting, supporting civilian leadership, and mobilizing and leading militia forces. As Marcus Clay, Dennis Blasko, and Roderick Lee noted in August 2022, the civilian cadre were historically underpaid and overworked prior to the PLA's restructuring.⁹⁷ Official Chinese publications such as *China's Militia* (中国民兵) have published articles as recently as 2024 that denote the struggles PAFD cadres face when balancing too many "part-time jobs" that are often unrelated to their primary roles. Those officials performing grassroots armed forces work not only must focus on recruiting but often have other jobs that can range anywhere from three to ten, including demolition, agriculture, environmental protection, and comprehensive management.⁹⁸

Other Chinese media sources have publicized the difficulties PAFD officials face as they move from having to handle civilian-levied requirements like poverty alleviation and firefighting during most of the year to recruitment and mobilization of militia responsibilities, particularly since personnel and finance for PAFD offices is handled by local governments.⁹⁹ While publications never explicitly reference an inability of PAFD cadre to perform their recruiting roles, such personnel likely do not spend much of the year dedicated to recruitment efforts.

University Indifference to Recruitment

While PLA media and Chinese universities and colleges often boast about the level of commitment campuses have to improving coordination with PAFD offices in recruiting future PLA officers and

⁹⁴ Ibid.; "Regulations on the Resettlement of Veterans."

⁹⁵ "Regulations on the Resettlement of Veterans."

⁹⁶ Zhu et al., "Contributing to the Promotion of the Cause of Strengthening the Military—A Review of the National Defense Mobilization System to do a Solid Job in Conscription in the New Era."

⁹⁷ Clay, Blasko, and Lee, "People Win Wars: A 2022 Reality Check on PLA Enlisted Force and Related Matters."

⁹⁸ 唐要求 [Tang Yaoqiu], 专武要专“武” [“Armed Forces Department Should Specialize in ‘Armed’”], 中国军网 [China Military Online], 2024, http://www.81.cn/rmjz_203219/zgmb/2024nd3q/tssl_249172/16300362.html.

⁹⁹ 专职人民武装干部不专武，基层专武干部兼职过多的问题如何破局？ [“PAFD Cadre are Not Specialized in the Armed Forces, and Grassroots Specialized Armed Forces Cadres Have Too Many Part-time Jobs?”], 搜狐 [Sohu News], 2 March 2023, https://www.sohu.com/a/648421889_121462881.

NCOs, Chinese journal articles have painted a different picture that demonstrates several remaining challenges in motivating young people to join the service. In a 2024 edition of *Defense Industry Conversion in China* (中国军转民), two professors from the Henan Institute of Technology conducted a survey and found that even as undergraduate institutions continually improved defense and national security integration into the “Three-Dimensional Education” program, four major problems existed that limited its effectiveness in recruiting:

1. Insufficient publicity and inaccurate policy interpretation. Many Chinese students’ understanding of conscription/recruitment policies are significantly different from actual policies. The professors assessed that campuses often fail to convey such policies to students in a timely and accurate manner, or campuses have subjective assumptions when interpreting those policies and do not accurately explain them to students. Additionally, some colleges only use traditional media like campus radio and digital screens to provide that information, instead of using more popular social media platforms.
2. Students are unwilling to join the military. The survey found that many students believed military life would be monotonous and boring, thus leading to a lack of enthusiasm to join the PLA. Some also viewed the military as an “alternative choice” that was not regarded as a good career development path. This was considered a failure of recruitment propaganda, though the survey also noted that students join or do not join for several other reasons, including family financial issues and employment pressures, as well as their own career aspirations.
3. The recruitment mechanism for colleges and universities is imperfect and the process is cumbersome. Survey results found that, as a result of poor information flow and coordination, some universities and colleges have many processes and complex steps in handling recruitment affairs. Students felt troubled when participating in the process, which then increased the administrative burden of the campus workers, leading to an overall lack of enthusiasm for people to make the effort.
4. The lack of professional service teams to implement recruiting processes. The survey found that many schools’ teams responsible for recruitment lack patience and exhibit their own biased understanding of policies. When students encountered various problems during recruitment, staff members often could not support them in a timely manner, affecting the process timelines.¹⁰⁰

In another 2024 article from *Defense Industry Conversion in China*, the Party Committee Deputy Director of the Student Affairs Department Education Management Section at Longdong University (a college in eastern Gansu province), Cheng Yang, uses his own institution to examine how local colleges and universities continue to deal with problems concerning recruitment of highly qualified individuals. Cheng assesses that, despite being a high priority for the CCP, schools do not attach enough importance to national defense education work. His research found that, as of 2024, the following problems still existed at many colleges and universities:

¹⁰⁰ 万林宾 [Wan Linbin] and 潘锐强 [Pan Ruiqiang], “三全育人”视域下的高校征兵工作质效提升探究 [“Research on Improving the Quality and Efficiency of College Conscription Work from the Perspective of ‘Three-Dimensional Education’”], *中国军转民* [*Defense Industry Conversion in China*], no. 5 (2024), pp. 148-150.

- There is a lack of full-time departments and staff members focused on military education and research. Additionally, PAFD officials often share offices with other campus departments like student affairs and security, lowering the priority placed on those cadre coordinating recruitment work at the schools.
- There is insufficient teaching staff and a large gap in curriculum construction when it comes to implementation of national defense education. Article 44 of the “Military Service Law” states that colleges and universities should establish military training institutions and be staffed with military instructors with a certain level of theoretical knowledge and practical experience to teach students. However, there is a clear lack of sufficient instructors that can meet that experience level on campus, especially when the full-time faculty is also required to have a doctorate degree.
- There are insufficient training facilities at most campuses. Despite requirements found in the “Syllabus for Military Courses in Regular Colleges and Universities” (普通高等学校军事课教学大纲) for activities like weapons firing and tactical training, which are typically the subjects of highest interest among students, schools often lack adequate training venues and equipment.

Cheng also describes the reasons his university has witnessed problems with recruitment in recent years. His analysis found that at Longdong University, college students were not enthusiastic about joining the military. Many students were only children that came from wealthier families, leading to concerns that joining the military would affect their studies and future development. In contrast, he found that those who joined the military often did so because of family economic difficulties or their own academic or employment difficulties. Finally, he concluded a major problem with recruitment was that college students often have poor physical fitness as a result of inadequate outdoor exercise. According to his school’s statistics over a three-year period, more than 55 percent of students failed physical examinations as a result of myopia and obesity. Additionally, varicose veins and some other diseases affected the pass rate of physical examinations. Cheng assessed that despite the number of military service applicants each year, the proportion of physically qualified candidates remains low.¹⁰¹

Physically Unfit Recruit Pool

Poor physical fitness remains a widespread problem among college students in China, and it drastically affects the general population eligible for military service. In an article from *Jiangmen Daily News* in August 2023 that included an interview with Yu Xuchu, a doctor responsible for physical examinations of military service applicants in the region, the medical professional stressed the need for hopeful recruits to pay attention to their fitness, diet, and physical well-being. Doctor Yu, director of the Jiangmen People’s Hospital physical examination center, noted that recruitment physical requirements are often unknown to applicants trying to join the service. Many of the applicants are disqualified because of past surgeries, poor vision, and a host of medical issues

¹⁰¹ 程洋 [Cheng Yang], 新时期下高校国防教育和征兵工作存在的问题及对策研究--以陇东学院为例 [“Research on the Problems and Countermeasures of National Defense Education and Conscription in Colleges and Universities in the New Era—Taking Longdong University as an Example”], 中国军转民 [Defense Industry Conversion in China], no. 6 (2024), pp. 29-31.

ranging from hemorrhoids to flat feet. Yu also stated that obesity and poor flexibility are often disqualifying factors.¹⁰²

Chinese media has publicized the country's problems with recruiting physically qualified military personnel for several years now. In 2017, the PLA's official WeChat account cited data from a Chinese city where 56.9 percent of candidates failed their physicals, blaming problems with alcohol, carbonated beverages, sedentary lifestyles, screen time, hygiene, and other issues.¹⁰³ The PLA has made efforts to limit the negative effects of a less healthy population on recruitment goals. A May 2021 article from *South China Morning Post* noted that, since 2014, conscription requirements had been adjusted to lower the bar for applicants that were slightly overweight or had less than perfect vision.¹⁰⁴ It also appears that PAFD recruiters are spending additional time helping unqualified applicants get into passing condition.¹⁰⁵

As a result of relaxed physical standards for recruiting, new PLA personnel are often accepted despite not being fully prepared for military training. The issue was enough of a problem for the PLAN that members of the PLAN Medical University Second Hospital's Department of Nutrition surveyed Navy conscripts going through their first three months of recruit training at the Eastern Theater Navy Comprehensive Training Base (91045 Budui) in 2024 to better understand how informed personnel truly were on topics of nutrition and health. Of 699 recruits surveyed, 177 were deemed overweight, although none were considered obese. The survey also found that many recruits lacked knowledge on obesity-related diseases like diabetes and osteoarthritis and also lacked an understanding of how to calculate body mass index. The journal article concluded that the Navy needed to improve education on these topics and encourage sailors to make healthier food choices. This was especially important for the PLAN as its personnel would often only have limited opportunities for physical activity, inhabit small cabin spaces, and spend long periods in confined environments at sea. This directly related to its sailors typically being more overweight and having higher rates of obesity compared to ground force components.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² 凌雪敏 [Ling Xuemin] and 郑发 [Zheng Fa], 我市陆续开展秋季征兵男兵初审初检工作 医生提醒：均衡饮食、保持锻炼、稳定作息、调整心态 ["Our City has Gradually Carried Out the Preliminary Examination of Male Soldiers in the Autumn Conscription. Doctors Reminder: Eat a Balanced Diet, Keep Exercising, Keep a Stable Work and Rest Schedule, and Adjust Your Mentality"], 江门人民政府 [Jiangmen People's Government], 1 August 2023, http://www.jiangmen.gov.cn/home/bmdt/content/post_2907419.html.

¹⁰³ Kerry Allen, "No Fizzy Drinks: Chinese Army Tells Recruits to Shape Up," *BBC*, 24 August 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-41039233>.

¹⁰⁴ Minnie Chan, "Chinese Military Faces Challenge from Falling Fertility Rate," *South China Morning Post*, 30 May 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3135342/chinese-military-faces-challenge-falling-fertility-rate>.

¹⁰⁵ An August 2024 article on *China Military Online* noted that staff members at PAFD recruiting stations are spending more time helping college students and other candidates with training plan development to improve fitness and help with weight loss. 跑出兵役征集“加速度” ["Running Out of the 'Acceleration' of Military Service"], 中国军网 [*China Military Online*], 19 August 2024, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/gfbszbxq/index.html?paperName=zggfb&paperDate=2024-08-19&paperNumber=01&articleid=937807.

¹⁰⁶ 王嘉铭 [Wang Jiaming], 苏立铭 [Su Liming], 郭蓉 [Guo Rong], 向云学 [Xiang Yunxue], 肖世梁 [Xiao Shiliang], 黄珍珍 [Huang Zhenzhen], and 李娟 [Li Juan], 海军某部新兵肥胖相关营养知识-态度-行为调查分析 ["Obesity-Related Nutrition Knowledge, Attitude, and Behavior of Recruits in a Certain Naval Unit"], *海军医学杂志* [*Journal of Navy Medicine*], no. 6 (June 2024), pp. 586-590.

Conclusion

Despite widely published challenges in recruiting, the PLAN overall does not appear to have problems meeting quantitative recruiting goals. Based on social media discussions, the navy presents a good opportunity, particularly for young people in rural areas, to advance economically and bring pride and additional income to their families. Students from lower economic classes can pursue technical training and de facto apprenticeships that yield career opportunities otherwise unavailable to them. Veterans benefits, while meager by U.S. standards, nevertheless yield education and career opportunities, financial assistance, and health care. For the highest performers, military service can be a path to alter one's destiny through government sponsored changes to household registration and the promise of higher paying jobs and access to better educational opportunities that this brings.

The PLAN, however, continues to face qualitative challenges that affect overall force readiness and proficiency, though these likely vary across the service. Recruiting in urban areas is much harder and tends to attract recruits lower on the socio-economic ladder, with poor performance in formal educational settings. The PLAN struggles to attract students with high performance in science and technology disciplines as these students often are on a path to relatively high wage jobs upon completing their education. Military service, notorious for low pay, service far from home, physical rigor, and austere lifestyles, contrasts sharply with the material comforts and liberties to which many urban youth have become accustomed. The expansion of technical training opportunities for young students at ordinary colleges and aggressive national defense education programs focused on forming physically and politically strong youth are likely responses to these challenges.

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The opinions and views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Government, U.S. Department of War or its components, to include the Department of the Navy or the U.S. Naval War College.