

**Bedfellows with Different Dreams:  
The Relationship between the Party-State and Private Businessmen in  
the Party Member Recruitment Process in Beijing's Zhejiangcun  
(浙江村 Zhejiang Village)**

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*This paper examines the relationship between the Party-state and private businessmen centering on the Party member recruitment process at the Party organization established by Zhejiangcun's Wenzhou migrant private businessmen. This analysis revealed that private businessmen Party members at the grassroots level have been conducting Party member recruitment in a way that maximizes their personal interests but falls within the guidelines set out by the CCP's Central Committee, including the high political standards for Party members emphasized in the recent Xi Jinping era. By illustrating the dynamics surrounding the Party member recruitment process for private businessmen based on internal Party documents and interviews with Party officials, this study provides a novel insight into an aspect that has so far resisted analysis due to the limited availability of information and presents a unique case for understanding the dynamics between the Party-state and private entrepreneurs.*

**Keywords:** *China, Chinese Communist Party, Private Sector Party-Building, Private Entrepreneurs, Zhejiangcun*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of the private sector and the emergence of private entrepreneurs are two of the most significant socioeconomic changes in China since the economic reform. These changes raised reasonable expectations, which are well-founded on the modernization theory and the historical experience of the third wave of democratization, that China would move closer to democracy (Huntington, 1968, 1991; Lipset, 1959; Rueschemeyer et al., 1992). For this reason, the research on how these changes relate to the Communist Party is imperative for a deeper understanding of China's present and future path.

Many previous studies have assessed that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s inclusion strategy toward the private sector and private entrepreneurs gave it the upper hand in this relationship. That is, the inclusion strategy has been understood as a part of the CCP's flexible adaptation to the political and social changes brought by the reform, which enabled the preemptive removal of potential threats to its political regime by successfully absorbing the private sector and private businessmen into the system (Dickson, 2003; Holbig, 2002; Pearson, 1997; Solinger 2006; Tsai, 2005). For instance, the CCP provided economic and political justification for private entrepreneurs and their business activities by gradually introducing a series of policies geared toward the growth and development of the private sector. Also, through the 'Three Represents (三个代表)' and amendment to the Party Constitution, the CCP recognized the political rights of the private entrepreneurs and even

allowed them to join the Party officially as Party members.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the CCP strengthened its control over the private sector by forming associations such as the Self-Employed Laborers' Association (个体劳动者协会), the Private Enterprises' Association (私营企业协会), and the Industrial and Commercial Federation (工商联). From the standpoint of the Party-state, these associations filled the political gap during the economic reform when the CCP's grip over Chinese society had weakened by preempting the formation of independent organizations and expanding the CCP's reach into the private sector (Dickson, 2003; Nevitt, 1996; Unger, 1996; Yep, 2000). On the other hand, for the private entrepreneurs, these associations represented opportunities to connect with the state system, which even opened doors for them to legally participate in local politics by becoming official members of the People's Political Consultative Conference (Chen, 2015). The CCP also encouraged former Party officials to enter the private sector as a means to further its control over private businessmen, and as a result, the private sector saw a huge inflow of former Party and government officials and executives of state-owned enterprises (Chen and Dickson, 2010; Dickson, 2007; Huang and Chen, 2016).

Recently, the CCP has been attempting to gain direct control over the private sector through Party building. To deal with the rapid expansion of the private sector during the economic reform period, the CCP had opened Party membership to private entrepreneurs and, since then, has been attempting to absorb the private sector more thoroughly into the system by focusing its efforts on providing much-needed services to private businesses and satisfying the private businessmen's desire for political participation through private sector Party building (Han, 2015; Thornton, 2012; Zhang, 2017). The CCP's inclusion strategy for private businessmen through private sector Party building has been viewed as a great success. According to previous studies, the private businessmen as well as the middle class, in general, show high satisfaction towards the CCP and are regarded as supporters of the current CCP rule (Chen and Dickson, 2008; Dickson, 2010). However, recent studies argue that, while the inclusion strategy for the private businessmen and their acceptance into the Party stabilized the system, it is simultaneously a dangerous strategy that can impede the unity of the CCP and potentially expose the Party to conflict by bringing disparate groups into the system who do not share the same values with the CCP (Han 2015). With the inclusion strategy for the private businessmen, the CCP experienced 'the mingling of the good and the bad (泥沙俱下)' phenomenon, where individual members had joined the Party only in terms of the organization and not in terms of thought (组织上入党, 思想上没入党).<sup>2</sup>

Recognizing these problems, the CCP has been stressing the purity of the Party and strengthening its membership standards and investigation process for recruiting new

<sup>1</sup> For the discourse on the official admission of private entrepreneurs into the Party after the "Three Represents," refer to Dickson (2008); Han (2015); Solinger (2006).

<sup>2</sup> "Interpretation of the New 'Rules' for the Development of the Party Members: Strict Control of the Party Members' Entrance (in Chinese)," *Xinhua* [Xinhua Net], [http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2014-06/30/c\\_126690368.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2014-06/30/c_126690368.htm) (Accessed on 1 January 2016); "Doing a Good Job in All Aspects of the Work to Maintain the Purity of the Party (in Chinese)," *Qiushi* [Qiushi Journal], [http://www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2012/201206/201203/t20120315\\_145649.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2012/201206/201203/t20120315_145649.htm) (Accessed on 1 January 2016). It has been pointed out that private entrepreneurs who became Party members may not share the socialist ideals and may be potential elements of conflict within the Party. Refer to Dickson (2003); Han (2015).

members, especially around the 18th Party Congress.<sup>3</sup> Overall, since the Xi Jinping administration, the CCP has been emphasizing the quality of its new Party members by stressing political ideology as a priority in the recruitment process and demanding a continuous investigation of the ideologies of its new objects of recruitment as a way to maintain the Party's purity and advancement.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the number of new Party members has been decreasing since 2013. In 2013, the total number of objects of recruitment was 2.408 million, which was an 825,000 (25.5%) decrease from the previous year,<sup>5</sup> and in 2014, the number decreased by 351,000 (14.6%) to 2.057 million.<sup>6</sup> Will the CCP's establishment of a rigorous recruitment policy successfully lead to the political embeddedness of the private entrepreneurs? What will be the impact of such a rigorous recruitment policy on the relationship between the Party-state and private entrepreneurs? These are the questions that this study will attempt to examine.

To this purpose, this paper examines the relationship between the Party-state and private businessmen centering on the Party member recruitment process for private sector Party organizations. Specifically, this paper presents a case study on the Party organization established for migrant private businessmen in Zhejiangcun, a prime case of how a Party

<sup>3</sup> Hu Jintao stressed the "purity of the Party" at the 7th Plenary Session of the 17th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) (十七届中央纪委七次全会) in January 2012 while Xi Jinping also mentioned that "to develop [and recruit] new members, [the CCP] should carefully analyze their motivation to join the Party and control standards and procedures strictly to ensure their quality and avoid 'joining the Party with disease (带病入党)'" in March 2012. "Hu Jintao: Conscientiously Do Well in All Aspects of Work for Maintaining the Purity of the Party, Deepening the Construction of a Clean and Honest Administration and Fighting against Corruption (in Chinese)," *Qiushiwang* [Qiushi Journal] [http://www.qstheory.cn/zywz/201201/t20120110\\_134027.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/zywz/201201/t20120110_134027.htm) (Accessed on 1 January 2016); "Doing a Good Job in All Aspects of the Work to Maintain the Purity of the Party (in Chinese)," *Qiushiwang* [Qiushi Journal], [http://www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2012/201206/201203/t20120315\\_145649.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2012/201206/201203/t20120315_145649.htm) (Accessed on 1 January 2016). Furthermore, in January 2013, Xi Jinping presided over the Politburo meeting to study the arrangements made to strengthen the development (recruitment) and management of Party members under the new situation. As a result, in February 2013, the Central General Office (中央办公厅) issued the "Opinion on Strengthening the Development and Management of Party Members under the New Situation (关于加强新形势下发展党员和党员管理工作的意见)," providing a directive to maintain the annual increase rate of new Party members to 1.5% of the total number of Party members for the next ten years. Refer to Learning Material for <Rules for the Work of Development of Party Members of the Chinese Communist Party > Writing Team. ed. (2014): 135-144. The Communist Party also announced the "Rules for the Work of Development of Party Members of the Chinese Communist Party (中国共产党发展党员工作细则, hereafter Rules for the Work)" to demonstrate the criteria for the objects of the recruitment and the details of the recruitment process in May 2014. For the full text of the 'Rules for the Work,' refer to China Legal Publishing House, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Due to the policy changes of the Xi Jinping administration, the recruiting process became very strict across the nation. For local authorities' efforts to secure the quality of the recruiting targets, refer to Chen, 2014; Liang, 2015; Wu and Yang, 2014; Yang, 2015; Zhang and Chai, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> "The Statistics of the Chinese Communist Party Communique 2013 (in Chinese)," *Xinhua* [Xinhua Net], [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-06/30/c\\_1111378609.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-06/30/c_1111378609.htm) (Accessed on 1 January 2016).

<sup>6</sup> "Strictly Governing the Party, the Growth of the Total Number of Party Members to Slow Down Once Again (Frontier Observation) (in Chinese)," *Renmin* [People's Daily] <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2015/0630/c1001-27227206.html> (Accessed on 1 January 2016).

organization can meticulously follow the Party's directives despite being primarily made up of migrant private businessmen, based on the information gained from internal Party committee documents and interviews with Party officials. The Party member recruitment process for private businessmen has yet to be illustrated in detail in existing literature due to the limited access to information. The case study presented in this paper thus provides a rare insider view and reveals the dynamics between the Party-state and private entrepreneurs surrounding the Party member recruitment process.

In particular, this study investigates how much Party membership is indeed given to those who meet the requirements outlined by the Party. This examination will show how, despite the CCP's recent implementation of a rigorous recruitment process and rigid political investigation as countermeasures for the various problems arising from the extended scope of Party membership, the motivation for private businessmen to gain Party membership still largely stems from the potential economic benefits rather than political factors. In sum, this study will highlight the difference in the perspectives on potential recruits held by the CCP and the private businessmen Party members and emphasize this difference as an underlying risk that may cause conflict in the relationship between the Party-state and the private businessmen.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. THE PARTY MEMBER RECRUITMENT PROCESS FOR PRIVATE ENTREPRENEURS IN ZHEJIANGCUN

Zhejiangcun (浙江村 Zhejiang Village) surfaced as an enclave for illegal migrants when a large inflow of peasant migrants from Wenzhou (温州) in the south-eastern Zhejiang province - mostly from Wenzhou's two areas of Yueqing (乐清) and Yongjia (永嘉) - started to inhabit the Dahongmen-Nanyuan area in the Fengtai district of Beijing.<sup>8</sup> These Wenzhou migrants engaged in manufacturing and selling low-priced garments, several of them finding enormous success in their clothing business by realizing economies of scale. However, Zhejiangcun gained an even greater attention for the peasant migrant's successful construction of their own Party organization. Since the establishment of Beijing's first Party branch of "floating Party members (流动党员)" in Zhejiangcun on 1 October 1995, the grassroots Party organization of Zhejiangcun's peasant migrants under the Party committee named "the First Working Committee of Floating Party Members of Yueqing City (乐清外出流动党员第一工作委员会, hereafter First Working Committee)" grew enormously to encompass 26 Party branches and more than 1,500 Party members as of 2015 (Jeong and Yoon, forthcoming).

According to Yang, Zhejiangcun's First Working Committee's commissioner of organization, since the 'Three Represents,' the recruitment of objects of development (发展

<sup>7</sup> The ethnographic data presented in this paper are drawn from the fieldwork on Zhejiangcun conducted in August 2015, March 2016, and January 2018. Recently, the "Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei (*Jing-Jin-Ji* 京津冀) Coordinated Development" has produced a negative effect on the development of Zhejiangcun's Party organization. However, as the research presented in this paper analyzes the Party member recruitment process for private businessmen and the dynamics surrounding this process involving the Party-state and the private entrepreneurs, it does not touch upon the recent changes in Zhejiangcun that have occurred due to the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Coordinated Development.

<sup>8</sup> For more details on Zhejiangcun, refer to Jeong, 2014; Wang, 1995; Xiang, 2000; Zhang, 2001.

**Table 1.** Key Stages in the Party Member Recruitment Process of the First Working Committee in Zhejiangcun

Stage	Key Process
Application Submission and Determination as an Active Applicant	Submission of application form (入党申请书)
	Submission of recommendation letter
	Party branch's investigation of the applicant and collection of public opinion on the applicant
	Party committee's review and approval of documents that certify the applicant's profession and residence in Beijing
	Determination as an active applicant (入党积极分子)
Investigation of the Active Applicant and Determination as an Object of Development	Designation of trainers (培养联系人) for the active applicant
	Education and evaluation (考察) of the active applicant
	Party branch's collection of public opinion on the active applicant
	Party branch committee's (党支部委员会) review and approval of the active applicant
	Party committee's political investigation of the active applicant
Change of Status to a Probationary Party Member	Determination as an object of development
	Designation of guides for joining the Party (入党介绍人) for the object of development
	Education and evaluation of the object of development
	Submission of the CCP membership application (入党志愿书)
	Party branch committee's review of the object of development's potential change of status to a probationary Party member
Change of Status to a Formal Party Member	Voting conducted at the branch conference (支部大会) on the object of development's change of status to a probationary Party member
	Party committee's review of the object of development's adequacy for change of status to a probationary Party member
	Approval for the change of status to a probationary Party member
	Incorporation of the probationary Party member into a Party (small) group (党小组)
	Education and evaluation of the probationary Party member
Change of Status to a Formal Party Member	Declaration of joining the Party
	Application for the change of status to a formal Party member status
	Party (small) group's submission of opinions on the change of status to a formal Party member
	Party branch's collection of public opinions on the change of status to a formal Party member
	Party branch committee's discussion on the change of status to a formal Party member
	Voting conducted at the branch conference (支部大会) on the probationary Party member's change of status to a formal Party member
	Party committee's review and approval of the probationary Party member's change of status to a formal Party member
	Preservation of the file (档案)

Source: Interviews with the commissioner of organization of the First Working Committee and Party branch secretaries in Zhejiangcun; Yueqing City's Yuecheng Street Working Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, *Manual for the Work of Development of Party Members* (in Chinese) (hereafter YSWC)

对象)<sup>9</sup> through Zhejiangcun's Party organization reached around 600 members over the past ten years, most of which are migrant private businessmen originating from Wenzhou.<sup>10</sup> As shown in Table 1, the recruitment process of Zhejiangcun's Party organization consists of several stages: application submission and determination as an active applicant; investigation of the active applicant and determination as an object of development; change of status to a probationary Party member; and change of status to a formal Party member. The First Working Committee and its Party branches in Zhejiangcun thoroughly examine every step of recruitment in accordance to the recent changes in the recruitment policies of the Central Committee of the CCP. The full process requires a minimum of two and a half years, and throughout the process, the applicant is continuously evaluated and investigated with regard to his/her past political career and current political ideologies. In what follows, this paper discusses the Party member recruitment process of the Party organization in Zhejiangcun in detail, including its different stages and their requirements for potential Party members.

### 2.1. Application Submission and Determination as an Active Applicant

The recruitment process begins with the submission of the Party membership application form (入党申请书) to the Party branch by the migrant private businessman in Zhejiangcun. The information that the applicant is required to fill in the application form includes 1) reasons and motivation for joining the Party, 2) personal information such as personal experience and career, thought, learning, and so on, 3) resolution and determination for joining the Party, and 4) other issues that need to be explained to the Party (YSWC, 1). After filling in the application form, the applicant is required to submit a letter of self-instruction (自传), which should include information on his/her personal career and political views on different periods of the CCP history. In particular, the applicant is required to make clear his/her ideological attitude towards the Cultural Revolution and the 1989 Tian'anmen Incident (YSWC, 4). Meanwhile, the applicant must receive a recommendation letter from one of the Party members and submit it to the Party branch. In the case of Zhejiangcun, applicants generally receive recommendation letters from Zhejiangcun's private businessmen Party members.<sup>11</sup>

Once it receives the application, the Party branch investigates the applicant's motivation behind the application, political thought, career, family situation, and learning situation through a personal interview. After the interview, the Party branch collects opinions about the applicant both from the Party members of the applicant's future Party organization and outside the Party to determine whether it will accept the application and acknowledge the applicant as an active applicant for Party membership (入党积极分子, hereafter the active applicant). The Party branch submits the applicant's file, meeting records, and other related documents to the First Working Committee, upon which the First Working Committee begins the investigation into the applicant to see whether he/she meets the standards and requirements to become a Party member. If the applicant passes the First Working

<sup>9</sup> An object of development refers to a Party membership applicant who is waiting to become approved as a probationary Party member. Further information on the different stages of Party member recruitment process in Zhejiangcun can be found in the following pages.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Yang on 10 August 2015. Most of the interviewees' names in this paper are pseudonyms to protect the subjects' identities.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Yang on 10 August 2015.



Committee's investigation, he/she becomes an active applicant. This stage, in which an applicant is approved to become an active applicant, usually takes 3-5 months.<sup>12</sup>

## **2.2. Investigation of the Active Applicant and Determination as an Object of Development**

In this stage, the First Working Committee and its Party branches in Zhejiangcun evaluate the active applicant from multiple angles to see if the applicant is qualified to become an object of development. The Party branch, in particular, is responsible for educating the active applicant and evaluating the applicant's qualification as an object of development, while the First Working Committee investigates the active applicant's political ideology. In terms of education, the Party branch teaches the active applicant on the important thoughts in Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Three Represents, and the recent Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想), as well as the basic information about the Party. In addition, the Party branch designates two Party members as 'trainers who are in charge of cultivation and contact (培养联系人, hereafter trainers)' for the active applicant, who are also required to provide opinions on whether the active applicant is qualified to become an object of development. In terms of evaluation, a bi-annual examination on the active applicant is conducted by the Party branch based on the reports of the 'trainers,' public opinion, and discussions at the Party branch committee to evaluate progress of the active applicant in several categories such as political consciousness, ideological and moral character, motivation for joining the Party, capacities for working and learning, and social performance (YSWC, 9). To be specific, the Party branch conducts the political evaluation of the active applicant, including the active applicant's attitude toward the Party's central directives, principles, and policies; the applicant's political record and performance during major political struggles (政治斗争) such as the Cultural Revolution and the 1989 Tian'anmen Incident; and the political backgrounds of the active applicant's family and close social relations. After a year or more of training, the Party branch passes the active applicant on to the First Working Committee for a review of his/her adequacy as an object of development.

The First Working Committee then begins the political investigation which involves direct conversations with the active applicant, a review of related files and materials, conversations with relevant personnel, and verification through correspondence (函调) (YSWC, 11-12). Since most of the applicants are Wenzhou migrant private businessmen in Zhejiangcun, the First Working Committee sends correspondence to the active applicant's native place in Wenzhou for further information and opinion. Once he/she passes the political investigation, the active applicant is required to participate in collective training and to take a written examination conducted by the First Working Committee. If the active applicant gets more than 80 points in the exam, the First Working Committee approves the active applicant as an object of development. It usually takes more than a year and a half for the active applicant to become an object of development, during which the active applicant is constantly put under the investigation of the First Working Committee and its Party branches in Zhejiangcun.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Yang on 10 August 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Yang on 10 August 2015.

### 2.3. Change of Status to a Probationary Party Member

Once the active applicant passes the First Working Committee's political investigation and becomes an object of development, the First Working Committee sends the CCP membership application form (中国共产党入党志愿书) to the object of development for the applicant to fill and submit, to start the process to change the applicant's status to a probationary Party member. Meanwhile, the Party branch continues its education and monitoring of the applicant even after the applicant is officially announced as an object of development, to ensure he/she is ready to be approved for the next stage of the recruitment process. First of all, the Party branch designates two formal Party members as 'guides for joining the Party (入党介绍人, hereafter guides)' to educate and supervise the object of development. The guides play almost the same role as the trainers mentioned above - on the one hand, they educate and train the object while on the other hand, they evaluate the applicant on whether they can be qualified Party members or not. More specifically, the guides are required to find out the object's motivation of joining the Party, political consciousness, ideological quality, practical performance, personal experiences, and situations of his/her family members and other close social relations, and to report this information to the Party organization.<sup>14</sup>

Second, the Party branch determines whether the object is the right person to become a Party member or not, through a Party branch committee discussion and branch conference (支部大会). The Party branch committee collects the opinions of the various personnel within and outside the Party on the object of development through multiple channels, such as forums and individual interviews, and reviews the application form and other related documents. Also, the Party branch committee conducts discussions on the object of development, and if there are no objections, holds a branch conference to put the change of status of the object of development to a probationary Party member to vote by all Party members within the branch.<sup>15</sup> Only the object of development who gains votes from more than half of the Party members attending the branch conference can proceed to the next stage and become a probationary Party member.

Once the object of development is accepted as a probationary Party member through the branch conference, the Party branch submits the required documents to the First Working Committee.<sup>16</sup> The First Working Committee evaluates the application form and its supplementary documents, collects the opinions of the Party and the public, and dispatches

<sup>14</sup> In addition, the guides are required to fill in their opinions about the object of development in the 'Opinion of the Guides' section of the application form, thereby influencing the object's change of status to a probationary Party member. Generally, the trainers are given the role of guides, or the role is given to someone who is well versed in the basic ins-and-outs of the Party. Interview with Yang on 10 August 2015

<sup>15</sup> At the branch conference, the object of development's thoughts about the Party, motivation for joining the Party, personal records, family and social relations, and other issues that need further explanation are discussed. This discussion also engages the guides, who are given a chance to explain the object's situation and express their opinions about the object's suitability for Party membership.

<sup>16</sup> The Party branch makes notes in relevant sections of the object of development's application form, then sends the application form, political evaluation records, registration form for the training and investigation of the active applicant (入党积极分子培养考察登记表), and other materials as well as a separate general report on the object of development to the First Working Committee for review.



a commissioner of organization to interview the object of development to check his/her suitability as a probationary Party member. After the conversation with the commissioner of organization, the First Working Committee decides on the object's change of status to a probationary Party member through a collective meeting and voting. The notes from the First Working Committee's discussions are recorded on the application form, and the results are notified to the Party branch. The object of development approved by the First Working Committee then becomes a probationary Party member.

#### **2.4. Change of Status to a Formal Party Member**

After the First Working Committee approves the object of development's change of status to a probationary Party member, he/she is assigned to a Party branch. The Party branch, in turn, makes an official announcement at the branch conference and assigns the probationary Party member into a Party (small) group (党小组) within the branch. It usually takes a year for the probationary Party member to become a formal Party member, during which time the Party organization in Zhejiangcun conducts training and monitoring of the probationary Party member while proceeding with the process for his/her change of status to a formal Party member. The guides are required to report to the Party branch every three months to share their observation and evaluation of the probationary Party member's ideology, work ethic, training, and fulfillment of Party member duties. The probationary Party member is also required to provide self-written reports to the Party branch once every six months during this period, while the Party organization in Zhejiangcun subjects the probationary Party member to political ideology education, group training, and participation in Party activities to strengthen his/her socialist beliefs and motivation for Party membership and deepen his/her loyalty to the Party.

After the one-year probation period, the Party (small) group submits its opinions on approving the formal membership of the probationary Party member to the Party branch, and the Party branch publically collects opinions from within and outside the Party. The Party branch committee reviews the opinions of the Party (small) group, and based on the evaluations accumulated thus far, discusses the probationary Party member's change of status to a formal Party member. If no problems are found, the issue is referred to the branch conference. At the branch conference, the probationary Party member's status is put to vote.<sup>17</sup> If the probationary Party member receives votes from more than half of the Party members who hold ballots and are present at the Party branch conference, he/she can continue onto the next steps for becoming a formal Party member. Once the decision on the probationary Party member's change of status is made at the Party branch conference, the application form and other materials are sent to the First Working Committee for further evaluation. The First

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<sup>17</sup> The Party branch conference proceeds as follows: 1) the probationary Party member evaluates his/her own performance during the probation period; 2) the guides report on the education and evaluation of the probationary Party member and submit their opinion on his/her change of status to a formal Party member; 3) the Party (small) group presents its evaluation of the probationary Party member's performance during the probation period; then 4) the Party branch committee presents its opinions on the progress in the education and evaluation of the probationary Party member and on his/her change of status to a formal Party member. After these presentations, a collective discussion, followed by a vote, is conducted to decide on the probationary Party member's change of status to a formal Party member. Interview with Yang on 10 August 2015. Also, refer to YSWC, 28-30.

Working Committee reviews the documents on the probationary Party member submitted by the Party branch, and once again sends correspondence to the probationary Party member's hometown in Wenzhou to check whether there is any reason to reject the probationary Party member. If he/she does not have any problems, the probationary Party member is approved to become a formal Party member. In general, it takes about a year for a probationary Party member to become a formal Party member.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. STRICT BUT STRICTLY FOR US: THE FINE LINE MAINTAINED IN THE PARTY MEMBER RECRUITMENT PROCESS OF ZHEJIANGCUN'S PARTY ORGANIZATION

The Party member recruitment process of Zhejiangcun's Party organization shows a number of important characteristics. First, although Zhejiangcun's Party organization was established by floating Party members who were mostly migrant private businessmen originating from Wenzhou, its Party member recruitment process adheres strictly to the CCP Central Committee's guidelines and is conducted with rigor, following the CCP's new emphasis on strengthening the standards for and verification of newly recruited Party members. In particular, the Party branches in Zhejiangcun take charge of educating their applicants from the very beginning and throughout the whole Party membership process, so as to avoid the 'joining the Party with disease (带病入党)' phenomena, which is a concern of the Central Committee.<sup>19</sup> The Party branches involve their applicants in the branches' training and work and continuously investigate and evaluate the applicants until the moment they become formal Party members. According to Li, a Party branch secretary who was called the chief (村长) of Zhejiangcun, if an applicant does not cooperate or complete his/her duties, or contribute to society, the branches consider him/her to be 'ideologically unsound (思想不端正).' If an applicant criticizes state policies or makes negative commentaries about Chinese society, for example, that there is severe social inequality in China or that corruption is rampant, the Party branches consider the applicant to have an 'unsound mouth' and give a negative evaluation. Those who are considered unsound by the branches cannot become formal members even after six to seven years.<sup>20</sup>

The First Working Committee also performs a thorough review of the supplementary documents on the applicant sent by the Party branches, such as his/her business registration, motor vehicle registration, real estate ownership, and social security registration within Beijing, to confirm the applicant's status in Beijing. The documents for verifying the applicant's status in Beijing are given particular emphasis at Zhejiangcun's Party organization because it is a Party organization of floating Party members who have left their hometowns to live and work in Beijing. Because of the Party organization's unique characteristic, there are

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Yang on 10 August 2015.

<sup>19</sup> "Hu Jintao: Conscientiously Do Well in All Aspects of Work for Maintaining the Purity of the Party, Deepening the Construction of a Clean and Honest Administration and Fighting against Corruption (in Chinese)," *Qiushiwang* [Qiushi Journal] [http://www.qstheory.cn/zywz/201201/t20120110\\_134027.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/zywz/201201/t20120110_134027.htm) (Accessed on 1 January 2016); "Doing a Good Job in All Aspects of the Work to Maintain the Purity of the Party (in Chinese)," *Qiushiwang* [Qiushi Journal], [http://www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2012/201206/201203/t20120315\\_145649.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2012/201206/201203/t20120315_145649.htm) (Accessed on 1 January 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Li on 5 August 2015.

in fact quite a number of applicants who attempt to become a Party member of Zhejiangcun's Party organization even though they are not physically living or working in Beijing. Thus, after a thorough and rigorous review of these documents, any applicant who does not have any real estate or registered business within Beijing is rejected so that anyone who is not physically residing in Beijing are unable to gain Party membership. Through this process, the First Working Committee blocks off the 'fly over the sea (飞过海)' phenomena, which means skipping over standard procedure.<sup>21</sup>

The Party organization in Zhejiangcun also carefully conducts the political investigation of the applicant. First, the First Working Committee investigates the active applicant's political aptitude during the stage of determining whether he/she is to become an object of development. As the main recruitment prospects of Zhejiangcun's Party organization are Wenzhou private businessmen in Beijing, the First Working Committee sends a correspondence regarding the investigation of the active applicant's personal experience and background (函调证明材料信) to his/her original domicile in Wenzhou to request a detailed investigation into the active applicant. The investigation process at this stage involves largely three levels and four departments. To begin, the village Party branch in Wenzhou is asked to confirm its approval of the active applicant's political performance at the village before he/she started to conduct business in Beijing, which is given in the form of the approval stamp of the village Party branch and the signature of the village Party branch secretary. Then, the active applicant is subjected to the evaluation of the hometown's township or streetship office, which looks into whether the active applicant had diligently followed the policies of the Party and the government in the past. More specifically, an official document is sent to the family planning office to evaluate whether the applicant followed the state's family planning policy and to the police office to investigate whether the applicant caused any problems such as drug abuse or public disturbance.<sup>22</sup> Any illegal activities are reported to the First Working Committee in writing. Next, the town Party committee or sub-district Party committee in Wenzhou performs a review. The town Party committee or sub-district Party committee puts up a notice about the active applicant's Party membership at a public area open to all residents in the applicant's hometown for ten days. If there are no objections made during the period, the town Party committee or sub-district Party committee in Wenzhou approves the active applicant and sends official documentation to the First Working Committee in Beijing. Only the active applicants who have passed these stages gain approval. Active applicants whose hometown investigation is completed are required to take a Party membership qualification exam under the evaluation (考察) of the First Working Committee. Through this process of investigation as well as active participation in learning, work, and social contribution, the active applicant can become an object of development who can apply to become a probationary Party member.

This political investigation is repeated again when the probationary Party member faces evaluation to become a formal Party member. The First Working Committee once again sends an official correspondence to the original domicile of the probationary Party member in

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Yang on 10 August 2015.

<sup>22</sup> According to Yang, before the family planning policy was lifted, the policy stipulated that a family with a son cannot have another child but a family with a daughter can have one more child four years after the birth of the first daughter. If a Wenzhou private entrepreneur in Zhejiangcun who violated this policy applies for Party membership, he/she must pay a fine and can only apply for Party membership after five years. Interview on 10 August 2015.

Wenzhou for investigation through the same approval process that was conducted when the probationary Party member was an active applicant. The purpose of repeating this process is to double-check whether the probationary Party member caused any problems during his/her term as an active applicant. According to Li, the Party branch secretary mentioned previously, due to this twice-held, complex and intricate political investigation process, it takes a minimum of two and a half years for an applicant to become a formal Party member, and many probationary Party members are yet to become formal Party members even after seven to eight years.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, Zhejiangcun's Party organization strictly controls the quota for new Party members as per the guideline provided by the CCP's Central Committee. This quota limitation makes it more difficult for the migrant private entrepreneurs in Zhejiangcun to become Party members. After it was elevated to a first-class Party committee in 2009, the First Working Committee gained the official authority to select the private businessmen they wish to register as Party members. In the past, the First Working Committee had admitted 50 to 70 private businessmen in Zhejiangcun every year without causing any trouble with upper-level Party organizations, and as a result, the Party organization in Zhejiangcun had recruited a total of 600 objects of development since the 'Three Represents.' However, since 2013, the total quota for Party member recruitment was distributed equally across the country, consequently limiting the number of newly-admitted Party members in Zhejiangcun. Thus, the number of recruits allowed through Zhejiangcun's Party organization was strikingly reduced to 22 in 2013 and 27 in 2014.<sup>24</sup> In 2015, the number of recruits allowed by upper-level Party organization in Yueqing under Wenzhou was 25.

In addition to controlling the number of new recruits, the First Working Committee also specifies the quota for new recruits by different backgrounds under strict directions from upper-level Party organization. For instance, Yueqing Party committee allows the First Working Committee to recruit 25 personages from the non-public ownership economic sector, 11 of which should be youths under 35 years old, 9 who have college degrees or above, and 8 who are female. Thus, it has gotten increasingly difficult for the migrant private businessmen in Zhejiangcun to become formal Party members through the First Working committee. Consequently, the number of newly admitted Party members at Zhejiangcun's Party organization has been significantly reduced, and the number of applicants has declined as well. While in the past, the Party branches in Zhejiangcun received approximately 100 applications each, now these 26 branches receive only 60 to 70 applications. The ratio of successful to total applicants is around 1:3, where only 20 out of 70 applicants successfully move on to the next stage of the recruitment process.<sup>25</sup> The strengthened rigidity in Party member recruitment for private businessmen in Zhejiangcun has led to a decrease in voluntary applicants from the private sector. Although many Wenzhou private entrepreneurs in Zhejiangcun wish to become a member of the Party, the growing number of existing applicants who are yet to become formal Party members, the complex recruitment process, and the decreasing recruitment quota have been causing hesitation among the Zhejiangcun's migrant businessmen in applying for Party membership. This hesitation along with the

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Li on 15 March 2016.

<sup>24</sup> The quota for new recruitment in 2013 was originally 18, but after consultation with the organization department of the Yueqing Party committee, four more were allowed to bring the quota up to 22. Interview with Yang on 10 August 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Yang on 10 August 2015. Also, refer to YSWC.

reduction in Party member recruitment, in the long run, may weaken the CCP's inclusion strategy for private businessmen.

Last and most importantly, alongside the seeming adherence to the CCP's guidelines for new Party member recruitment as exemplified by the two characteristics illustrated above, the migrant private businessmen Party members in Zhejiangcun have restructured the Central Committee's efforts to maintain the purity of the Party to suit their own needs, prioritizing applicants who will be beneficial in terms of networking and future business development. As illustrated above, Zhejiangcun's First Working Committee and its Party branches have been performing important roles throughout the whole Party member recruitment process from the application to determination as a formal Party member. In particular, the Party branches have the decision-making power on whether or not to recommend the applicant to the First Working Committee, and therefore, have enormous influence on deciding 'who is to be accepted as a fellow Party member.' The Party members under the Party branches in Zhejiangcun also have the authority to write recommendations for the applicants, which they perform by being the primary reviewers of the applicant to give a recommendation to the First Working Committee. Therefore, the secretaries and Party members of the Party branches under the First Working Committee have strong power over the recommendations.

According to Wu, one of the six Wenzhou migrant businessman spearheading the launch of Zhejiangcun's Party branch in 1995, the most important qualification for choosing applicants from the perspective of the Party branches in Zhejiangcun is the size of the applicant's business and his/her reputation within Zhejiangcun.<sup>26</sup> Generally speaking, Wenzhou private entrepreneurs who have sufficient capital, to be specific, of more than 10 million Chinese yuan (about 1.5 million USD), are considered as the object of preferential recommendation while other standards such as filial piety to elders, integrity in business, and trustworthiness are also considered.<sup>27</sup> Since, apart from the size of business, standards such as propriety, diligence, trustworthiness, and merit are difficult to evaluate objectively, leaving room for subjective evaluation by the recommender, unofficial networks and relations with the recommender play a large role. Thus, it is easy to find cases where Party membership is approved based on the applicant's relationship with the Party branch secretary in Zhejiangcun.

In some cases, Party membership was approved through the applicant's relationship with the Party branch secretary although s/he is not even from Wenzhou. For instance, Wang owns a business within the district under the ZH Party branch where Zhu, with whom Wang had maintained a close relationship for ten years, is a Party branch secretary. Although Wang is not originally from Wenzhou but an original Beijing resident, Zhu recommended Wang for Party membership, presenting him as an outstanding businessman in Zhejiangcun. Thanks to Zhu's recommendation, Wang was able to become a formal Party member and is now a floating Party member of the First Working Committee. For Wang, the Party branch in Zhejiangcun was the alternative for gaining Party membership, despite not having Wenzhou as his home region, as he was unable to become a member of a Party organization for original Beijing residents due to some personal problems he had in the past.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Interview on 10 August 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Li, a Party branch secretary, on 5 August 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Wang on 4 August 2015. The Party organization in Zhejiangcun accepts Party membership applications mainly from those originally from Wenzhou, but sometimes it also accepts applications from those who do not originate from Wenzhou. For instance, the ZH Party branch

The close relationship with a Party branch secretary became an important factor for Party membership approval, especially because, in the case of the Party branches in Zhejiangcun, the secretaries are often owners of the shopping malls within the Party branches' districts and the Party members, retailers with shops in those malls. The private businessmen who are potential objects of recruitment are also often small stallholders in the malls owned by the Party branch secretaries of their districts.<sup>29</sup> However, reviewing the applicants' character, diligence, and trustworthiness is not up to the Party branch secretary's sole discretion, but the opinions of Party members are also importantly considered since the Party members of the Party branches are the ones who make the final vote at the branch conference whether to accept the applicant as a member. As a result, while the door to Party membership is open to all as a principle, applicants can be rejected if they do not meet the standards of or are not preferred by the Party branch secretaries or Party members.<sup>30</sup>

On the other side of the desire among private businessmen Party members to recruit persons of social and business success into their Party organization in Zhejiangcun is the intention to keep the benefits that come from Party membership contained among successful businessmen. Many Wenzhou migrant private businessmen in Zhejiangcun still hope to become Party members to secure their status in Beijing and protect their economic interests and rights. Through Party building, the migrant private businessmen of Zhejiangcun have been transforming themselves from illegal floating population to legal entrepreneurs, and so, for these businessmen, Party organization is "the Second Life (第二个生命)" for survival in Beijing (Jeong and Yoon, forthcoming). According to Wang mentioned previously, as their business grew, many private entrepreneurs in Zhejiangcun felt the need to maintain the legality and guarantee the protection of their businesses, and as the most efficient and legal means to do so, chose to become Party members.<sup>31</sup>

Zhu, the ZH Party Branch secretary, said that there was a time during the Xi Jinping era when withdrawing from the Party was 'recommended' as a policy, but emphasized that none of the private businessmen wished to withdraw their Party membership nor was there anyone who actually withdrew. He asked, "Who will throw out their Party member status when it had so much influence in maintaining and fostering their business?"<sup>32</sup> The migrant private businessmen Party members of Zhejiangcun are especially keen on sharing information on the changes in the business environment, real estate prices, and important investment opportunities at various gathering, strengthening their social networks, and promoting the growth of their own businesses. Therefore, it is almost natural that these Party

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mentioned above approved Party membership to private businessmen from Hangzhou, Jiangsu, and Beijing who sell fabric from rented stalls within malls owned by the ZH Party branch secretary. The department of organization of the Yueqing Party Committee under Wenzhou city, which is the upper-level organization of the First Working Committee in Zhejiangcun, technically does not allow admission of non-Yueqing outsiders as Party members but places an exception for those who are outstanding in terms of ideology, behavior, and potential. This logic comes from the idea that the CCP is a nationwide Party and thus, comrades who are of high quality can be accepted. Such outsiders amount to about 20 to 30 among the 1,500 Party members under the First Working Committee as of 2015. Interview with Zhu on 5 August 2015

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Li on 5 August 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Li on 15 March 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Interview on 4 August 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Interview on 5 August 2015.



members considered private entrepreneurs who will benefit them in terms of networking and business growth as of first priority in Party member recruitment. Consequently, the Central Committee's emphasis on the purity of the Party and the quality of its Party members and its efforts to strengthen standards and investigation of new recruitments have been restructured in the grassroots level by the private businessmen Party members in Zhejiangcun, in a way that reflects their own needs.

#### 4. PARTY-STATE AND PRIVATE BUSINESSMEN AS BEDFELLOWS WITH DIFFERENT DREAMS

This paper presented an analysis of the Party member recruitment process at the Party organization established by Zhejiangcun's Wenzhou migrant private businessmen. This analysis revealed that private businessmen Party members at the grassroots level have been conducting Party member recruitment in a way that maximizes their personal interests but falls within the guidelines set out by the CCP's Central Committee, including the high political standards for Party members emphasized in the recent Xi Jinping era. By illustrating the dynamics surrounding the Party member recruitment process for private businessmen based on internal Party documents and interviews with Party officials, this study provides a novel insight into an aspect that has so far resisted analysis due to the limited availability of information and presents a unique case for understanding the relationship between the Party-state and private businessmen in China.

The First Working Committee and its Party branches in Zhejiangcun have been rigorously evaluating its Party membership applicants from the private sector based on the procedures outlined by the upper-level Party organization, to recruit only a few highly selective people into the Party. The CCP's Central Committee closely controls and distributes the quota for new Party member recruitment, and the Party organization in Zhejiangcun approves formal membership to only the carefully selected few who have the same ideological base as the CCP. At the same time, applicants undergo a strict evaluation process that spans over a minimum of two and a half years and involves a thorough review of their past records and current ideology, in adherence to the Party's directions. Only a handful of private businessmen who are found to be politically sound with ideological purity – thereby being appropriate and suitable objects of development for the CCP – are allowed into the Party. However, this strict verification process and restrictions on the new recruitment of Party members are weakening the inclusion of private businessmen, while the heightened entry barrier has led to a greater number of private businessmen either giving up entering the system or actually being rejected in the process of entering the system.

At the same time, despite the strict control over Party member recruitment, the unofficial networks of the grassroots level have the potential to wield more significant influence in the recruitment process. As illustrated above, in the case of the Party organization in Zhejiangcun, only those who receive recommendations from either the secretary or Party member of the Party branch can submit their application form, and the members of the Party branch hold the power to decide whether to accept the applicant as a fellow Party member. Thus, social reputation, financial success, and unofficial relationships of the applicants operate as critical factors for gaining Party membership. In other words, the current Party member recruitment process in Zhejiangcun enables private businessmen Party members to expand recruitment based on their preference at the grassroots level while the requirement

set by the Central Committee on the purity of new Party members is pushed aside to the back burner.

From the perspective of the migrant private businessmen in Zhejiangcun, Party membership is a decisive factor in guaranteeing the protection of their businesses in Beijing, and the Party organization is a space for solidarity and networking with other qualified migrant private businessmen. Private entrepreneurs at the grassroots level can bring stability and growth to their business by becoming a Party member and networking with other businessmen in the Party. The current Party member recruitment process satisfies the needs of private businessmen in Zhejiangcun for status protection and network expansion, which can positively impact the relationship between the Party-state and the private businessmen in the short run. However, the differences in who the CCP's Central Committee and the private businessmen in Zhejiangcun see as "suitable recruits" (where the Central Committee considers as first priority the applicant's ideological purity, and the private businessmen, the applicant's financial success), together with the increasing rigidity in the requirements for gaining Party membership and the strict limit in the quota for new Party members, are all potential factors that may cause conflict between the Party-state and the private businessmen in the long run. These factors may lead to an increasing number of private businessmen who demand greater political participation from outside the system. In this context, the relationship between the Party-state and the private businessmen cannot be described as a solid alliance but rather, as bedfellows lying in the same bed but with different dreams.

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