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# **China's Move to Mass Higher Education and the Growth of Civil Society: Perspectives from College Students**

**Jun Li**

**OISE/U of Toronto**

**Lijun.ut@gmail.com**

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# Introduction

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This presentation aims at understanding the patterns and interplay of students' political orientation and political socialization toward citizenship and civil society, based on our student survey.

This presentation includes five main parts:

- Research Framework
- Settings
- Methods
- Findings
- Conclusions

## A Departure Point of Framework from Almond and Verba

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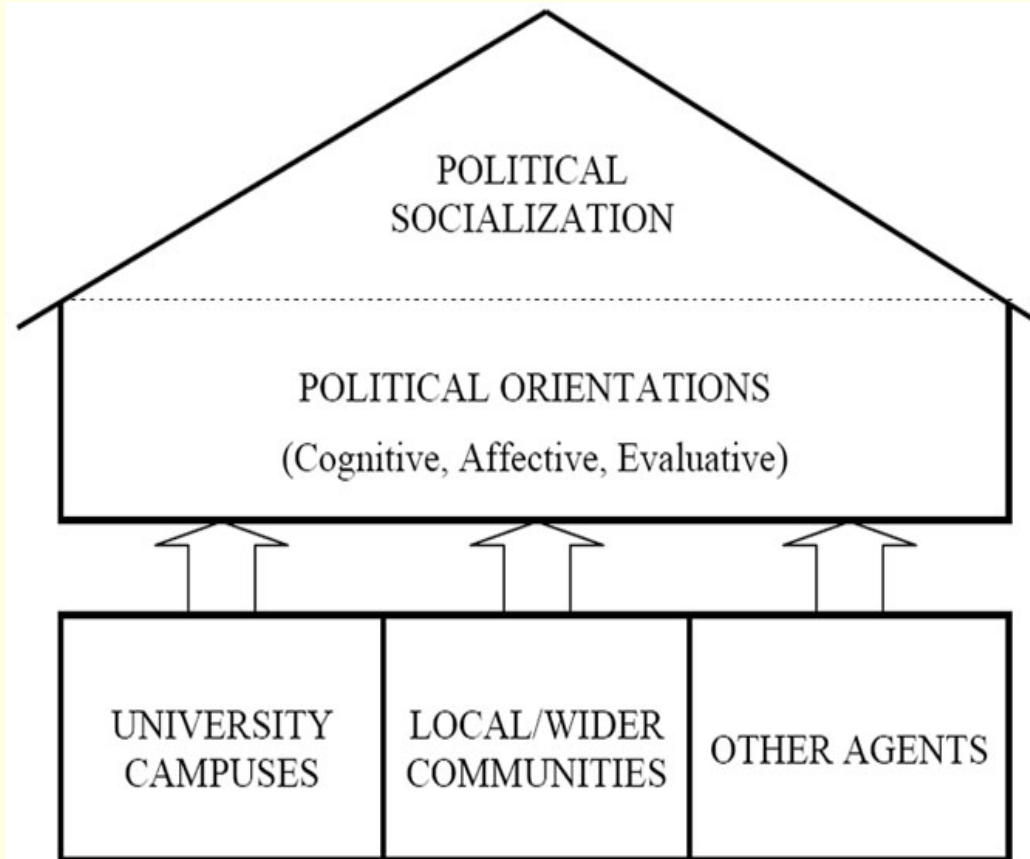


Fig. 1 The Political Socialization Process of Individual Students

## Settings

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- The functional changes of the Chinese government in recent years from traditionally seen as infinite totalism (Tsou, 2000, p. 236) to effectively and efficiently functional governance have made it possible that more public space is allowed for the development of civil society.
- Since the 1990s along with the withering of Marxism, the Chinese government has launched political campaigns for patriotic education (Weatherley, 2006, p. 154-156), to resume civic education programs such as social studies, endorsing the Chinese educational tradition to construct coherent citizenship with an orientation to patriotism for national building.
- At the level of postsecondary education, ideological-political education is mandatorily provided as a required course for all undergraduate students.

## Methods

**Table 1. Summary of Questionnaires Administered**

Category	Sub-categories	Number of Participants	Percentage
University	Public/comprehensive	1030	44.4
	Public/specialized	811	34.9
	Private	480	20.7
Discipline	Natural sciences/technology	871	37.3
	Social sciences	787	33.7
	Humanities	639	27.4
	Other or missing	24	1.0
Gender	Female	1237	53.5
	Male	1073	46.5
	Other or missing	11	0.5
Geographic background	Rural area (township/village)	1194	52.9
	Urban area (city/county)	1064	47.1
	Other or missing	63	2.7
<i>Total</i>	Returned	2332	100
	Valid	2321	99.5

*Source:* The CMHE Database (2007).



## Findings 1: Patterns of Students' Orientations toward Civil Society - Students' Cognitive Orientations toward Civil Society

In general, there are 53% of students who believe themselves as bearing a clear idea about the concept of civil society.

**Table 2. Chi-Square Tests for Students' Understanding of Civil Society by Background Characteristics**

Item		Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Institution	Pearson $\chi^2$	3.471	2	.176
	N of Valid Cases	2315		
Discipline	Pearson $\chi^2$	17.190	4	.002*
	N of Valid Cases	2292		
Gender	Pearson $\chi^2$	4.607	2	.100
	N of Valid Cases	2305		
Geographic origin	Pearson $\chi^2$	8.676	2	.013
	N of Valid Cases	2253		
Father's educational attainment	Pearson $\chi^2$	5.088	4	.278
	N of Valid Cases	2307		
Gross family annual income	Pearson $\chi^2$	.704	4	.951
	N of Valid Cases	2292		

Source: The CMHE Database (2007).

Note. All tests are satisfied with the minimum expected cell frequency of 5.

\*  $p < .01$ .

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## Findings 1: Patterns of Students' Orientations toward Civil Society - Students' Cognitive Orientations toward Civil Society

**Table 3. Results for the Pairwise Comparisons Using the LSD Method for Students' Understanding of Civil Society by Disciplines**

Comparison	Pearson chi-square	<i>P</i> value	Cramer's <i>V</i>
Natural Sciences/technology vs. Social Sciences	15.330**	.000	.096
Social Sciences vs. Humanities	6.734	.034	.069
Humanities vs. Natural Sciences/technology	3.260	.196	.046

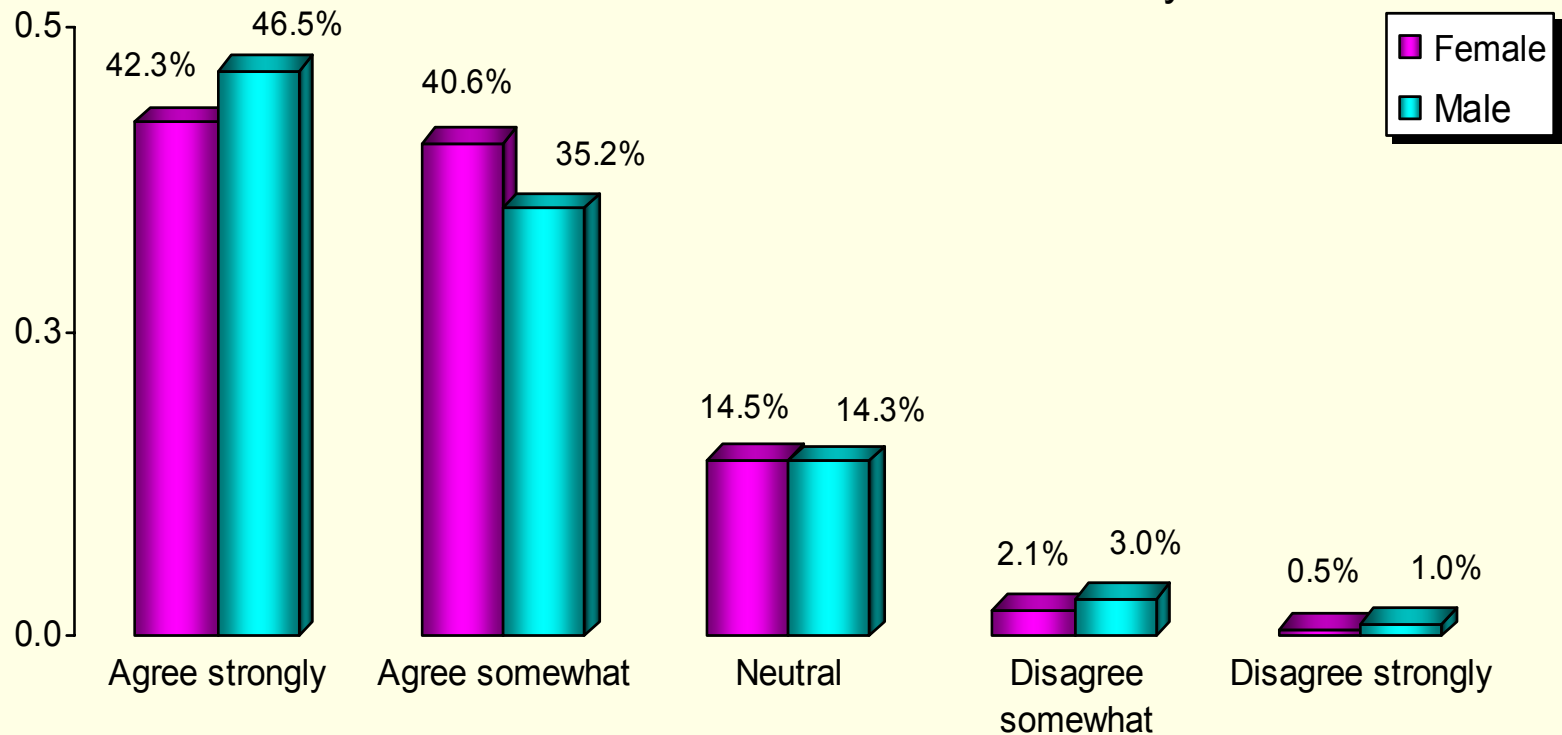
Source: The CMHE Database (2007).

\*\* $p < .001$ .

## Findings 1: Patterns of Students' Orientations toward Civil Society - *Students' Affective Orientations toward Civil Society*

In general, there are 82% of students who believe themselves as being patriotic and loyal to China, as shown in Fig. 2 below.

There are no differences between them in terms of institutional types, disciplines, gender, geographic origins, parental education attainments and socioeconomic status, as shown in Table 6 (p. 5). In other words, Chinese college students have firm loyal feelings toward their nationality and share a strong similar pattern in their affective orientation toward their national identity.



**Fig. 2 Observed Students' Feelings of Chinese Nationality**

## Findings 1: Patterns of Students' Orientations toward Civil Society - Students' Evaluative Orientations toward Civil Society

In general, there are 88% of students who believe themselves as having an obligation to actively participate in activities that benefit their community and society.

**Table 4. Chi-Square Tests for Students' Value of Civic Responsibility by Background Characteristics**

Item		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Institution	Pearson $\chi^2$	2.373	2	.305
	N of Valid Cases	2314		
Discipline	Pearson $\chi^2$	9.292	4	.054
	N of Valid Cases	2291		
Gender	Pearson $\chi^2$	17.243	2	.000**
	N of Valid Cases	2304		
Geographic origin	Pearson $\chi^2$	31.604	2	.000**
	N of Valid Cases	2252		
Father's educational attainment	Pearson $\chi^2$	24.257	4	.000**
	N of Valid Cases	2306		
Gross family annual income	Pearson $\chi^2$	8.623	4	.071
	N of Valid Cases	2287		

Source: The CMHE Database (2007).

Note. All tests are satisfied with the minimum expected cell frequency of 5.

\*\*  $p < .001$ .



## Findings 1: Patterns of Students' Orientations toward Civil Society - Students' Evaluative Orientations toward Civil Society

**Table 5. Students' Value of Civic Responsibility by Background Characteristics**

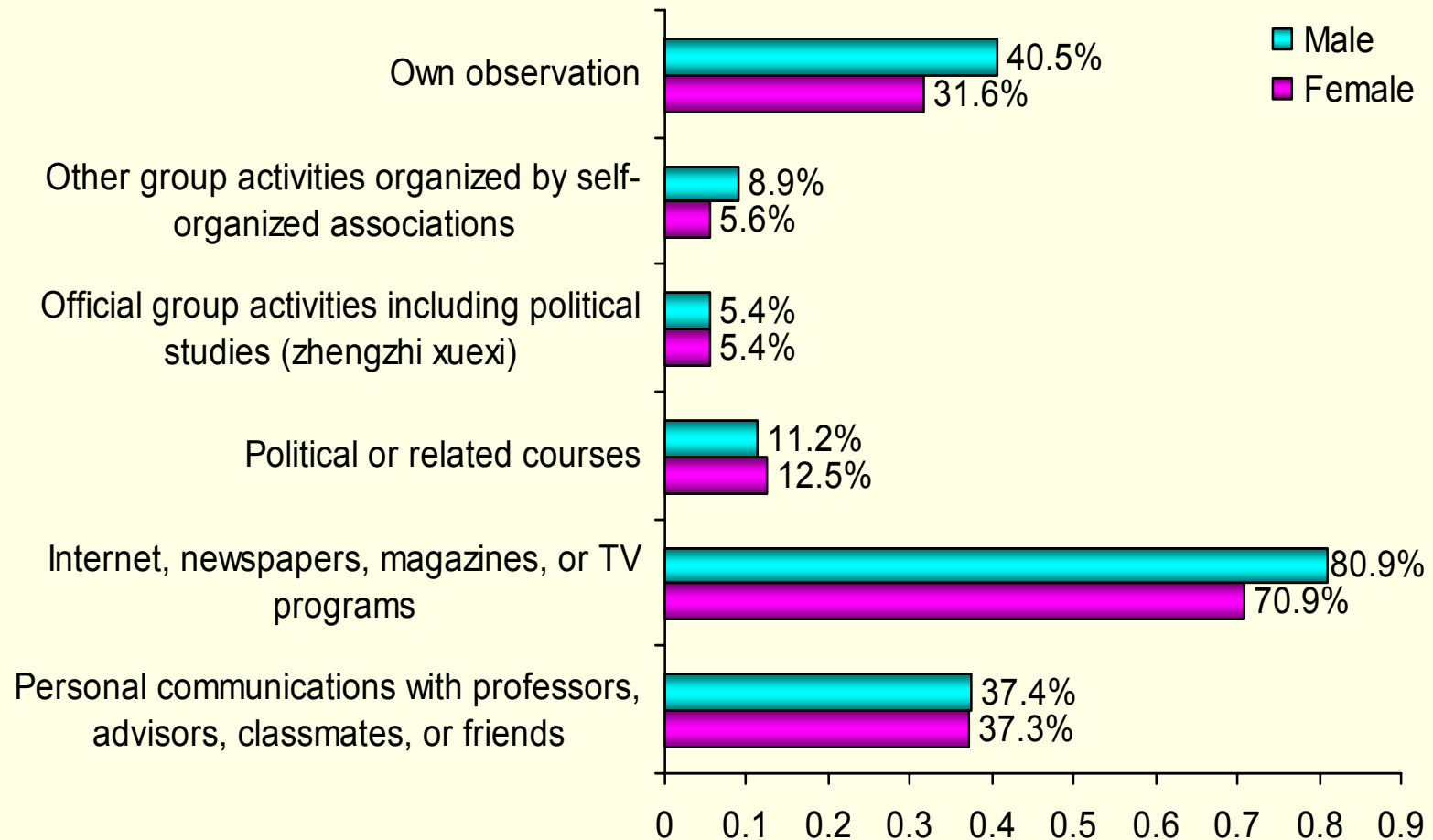
		As a university student, I have an obligation to actively participate in activities that benefit the community and society		
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree
% in total		2.0%	10.5%	87.5%
Count		14	89	1089
Geographic origin (GO)	Rural Area (Township/Village)			
	Expected Count	23.8	122.3	1045.9
	% within GO	1.2%	7.5%	91.4%
	Std. Residual	-2.0	-3.0	1.3
Count		31	142	887
Urban Area (City/County)	Expected Count	21.2	108.7	930.1
	% within GO	2.9%	13.4%	83.7%
	Std. Residual	2.1	3.2	-1.4

Source: The CMHE Database (2007).



## Findings 2: Patterns of Students' Political Socialization toward Civil Society - *The Ways Students Learn of Civic Engagement*

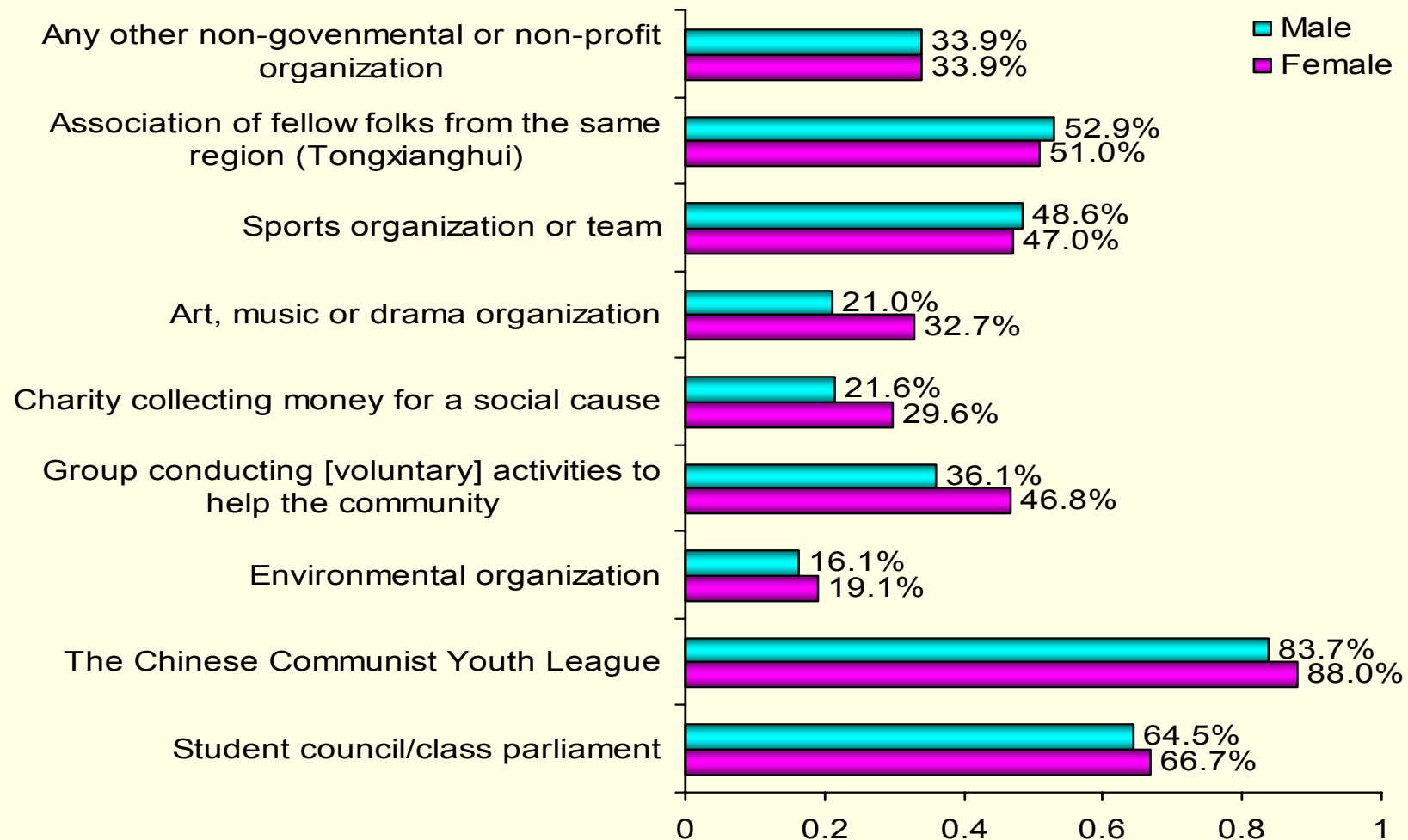
Mass media play a powerful role in the process of students' political socialization. Contrastingly, university official learning programs have a relatively low profile.



**Fig. 3 The Most Effective Channels for Students to Learn of Social Events**

## Findings 2: Patterns of Students' Political Socialization toward Civil Society - *The Ways Students Learn of Civic Engagement*

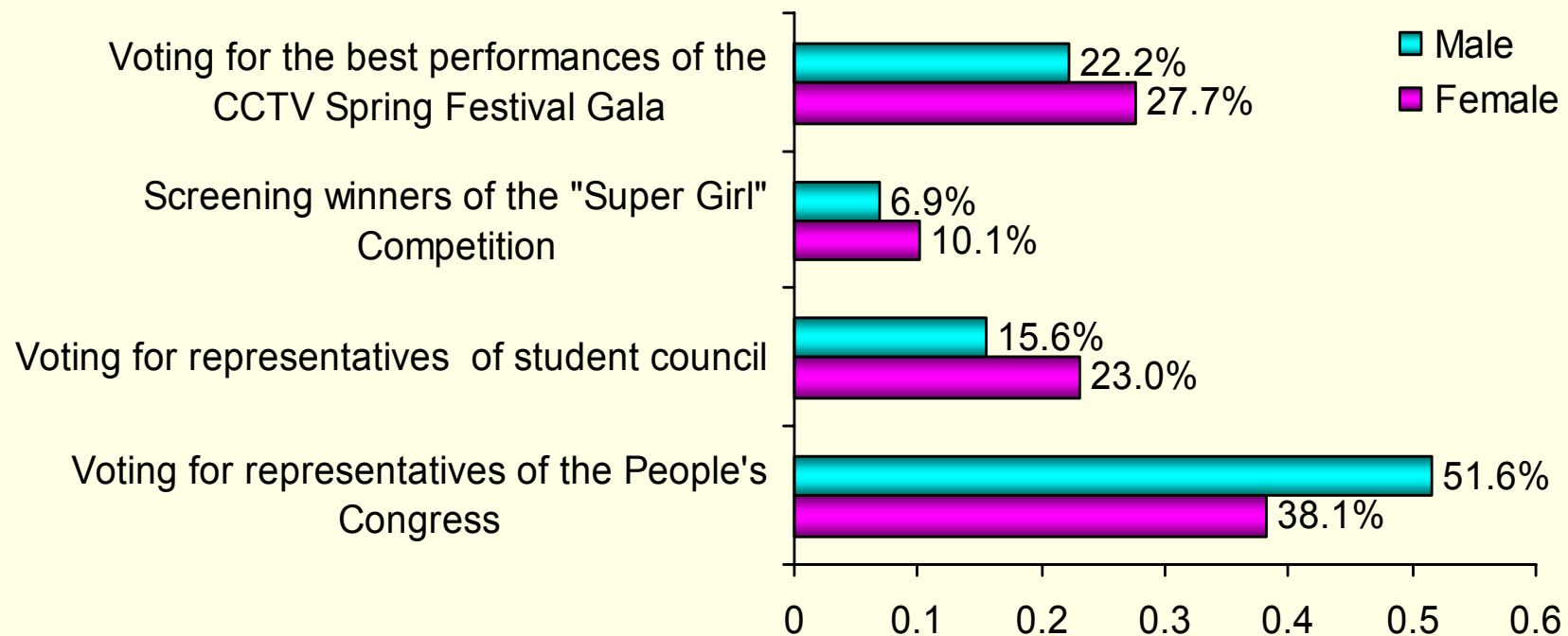
Most students are intensively involved in political parties or memberships, and there are more than one-third of them involving NGOs or NPOs.



**Fig. 4 Students' Engagement in Memberships or Associations**

## Findings 2: Patterns of Students' Political Socialization toward Civil Society - *The Ways Students Learn of Civic Engagement*

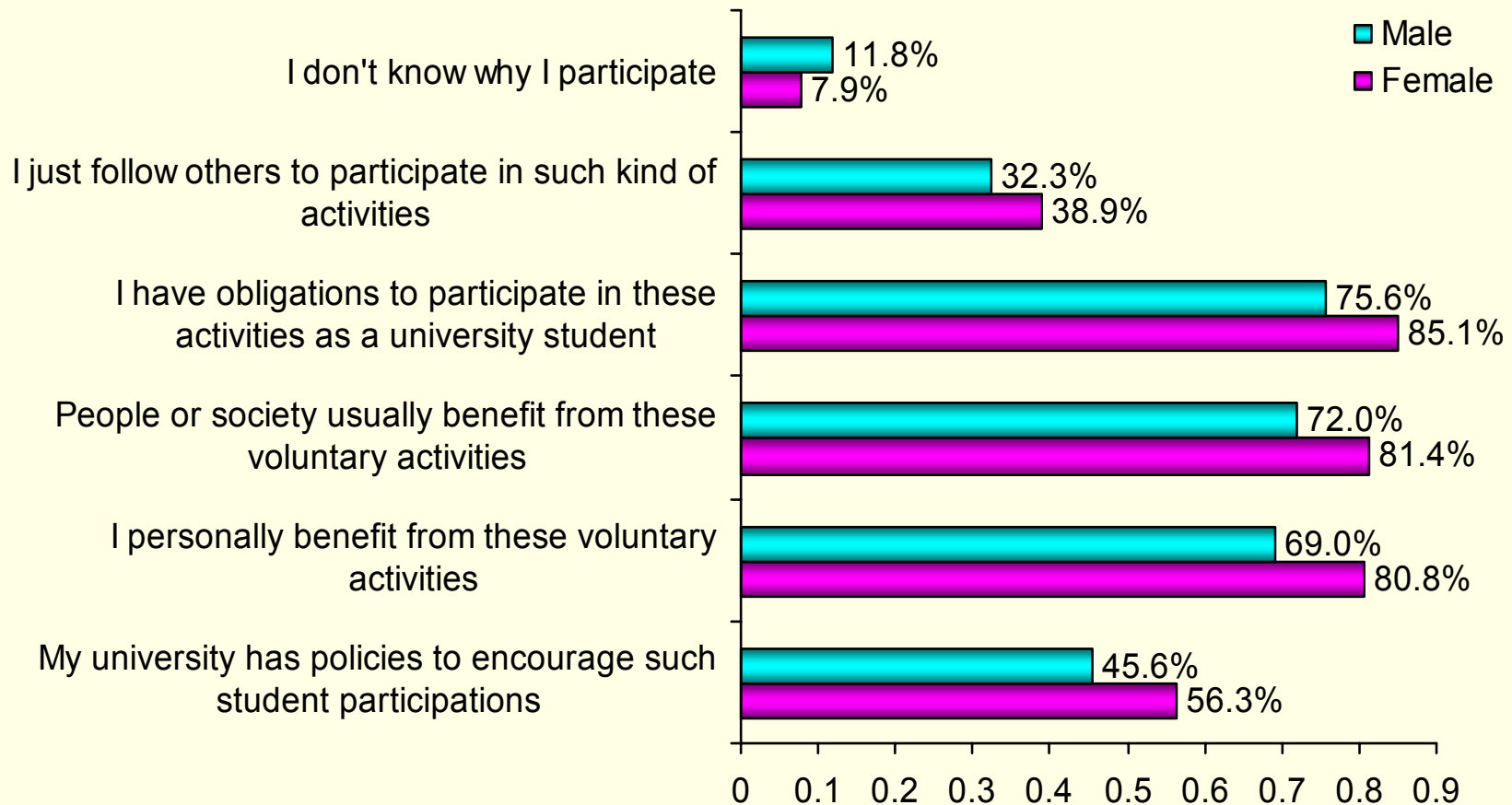
More than half of males would like to vote for representatives of the People's Congress while there are only around one-third of females would like to do so.



**Fig. 5 Students' Expected Inclination of Voting**

## Findings 2: Patterns of Students' Political Socialization toward Civil Society - *Students' Political Motivations and Benefits of Civic Participation*

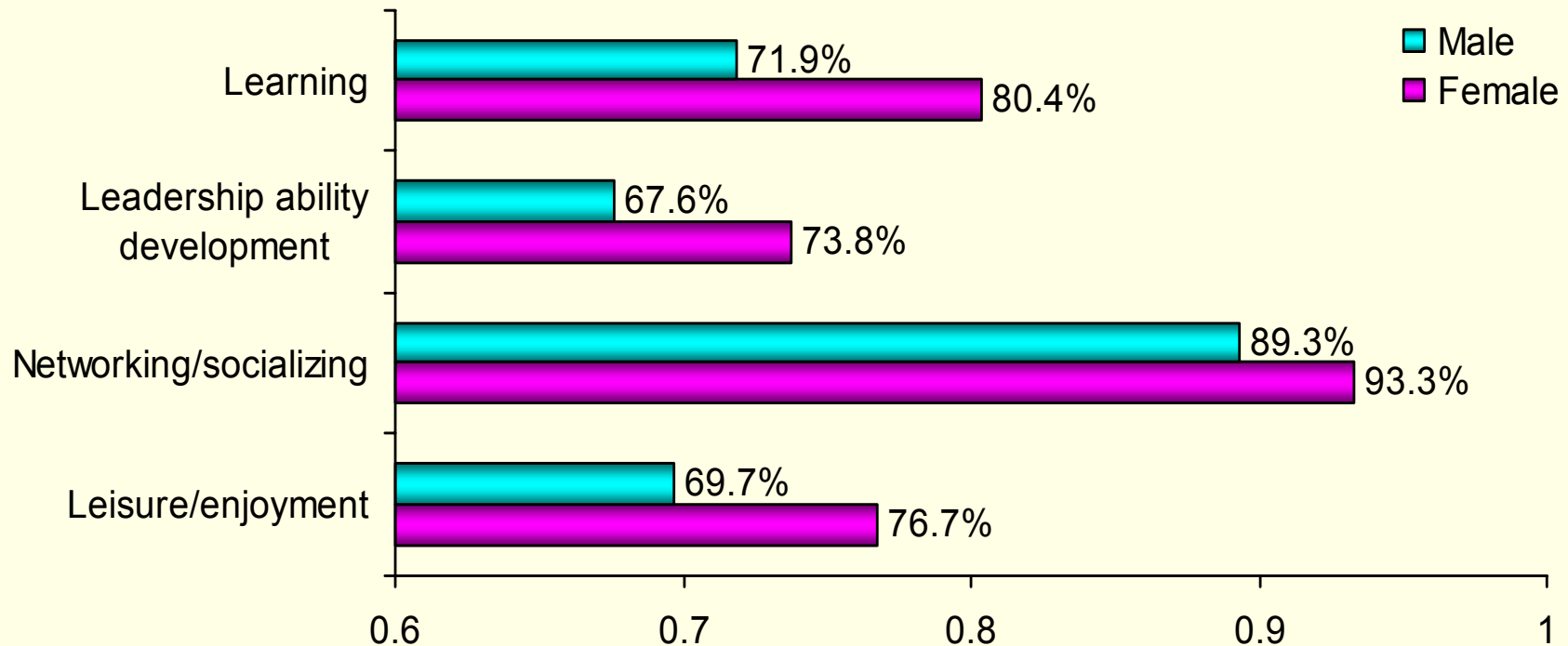
Students' civil participations are motivated mostly by their judgments of civic responsibility with both females and males' endorsement, but there are still around one-third of them are blinded to participate in civic activities.



**Fig. 6 Observed Political Motivation of Students' Civic Participation**

## Findings 2: Patterns of Students' Political Socialization toward Civil Society - *Students' Political Motivations and Benefits of Civic Participation*

Most students view their civic participation as a process in which both society and the students are mutually beneficial. Particularly, there are more than 91% of students consider networking or socializing as their major benefit out of their civic engagement.



**Fig. 7 Observed Benefits of Students' Civic Participation**

## Findings 3: The Relationship of Students' Political Orientation and Socialization

**Table 6. Predictors for Students' Political Socialization (PS Index)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	-.629	-1.170	-1.813
Number of cases	2278	2277	2276
$R^2$	.028	.044	.072
Adjusted $R^2$	.027	.043	.071
Change in $R^2$	.028**	.016**	.028**
Correlation between each predictor and the students' PS Index	.166**	.166**/.162**	.166**/.162**/.233**
Correlation between each predictor and the students' PS Index , controlling for all other predictors	.166**	.134**/.129**	.108**/.065**/.171**

Source: The CMHE Database (2007).

Note. Predictor: Model 1: Q.31; Model 2: Q.31, 34; Model 3: Q.31, 34, 43; Dependent Variable: Q.60 (z-score).

\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .



## Conclusions – *Rethinking Almond & Verba's Model*

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First of all, the “making of citizens” (Hughes, 1902; Merriam, 1931) depends largely on how the apprentice citizens are politically socialized with their cognitive, affective and evaluative orientations. As our findings have shown, the political orientation of Chinese college students plays a crucial role in the process of their political socialization.

## Conclusions – *Implications for Civil Society*

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The Chinese college students offer a great opportunity to better understand the concept of citizenship and civil society in Chinese sociopolitical context, with unique Confucian elements pertaining to civil rights and social responsibilities. While the Western tradition provides the original elements of the two important modern terms, it is obvious that the East Asian tradition, especially the Confucian heritage, also contributes to them with quite diverse cultural resources.

## Conclusions – *Implications for Policymakers and Educational Practitioners*

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We have heard too much about the silent generation that are “bowling alone”, are “politically disengaged”, or are simply “hating politics”, but we have barely heard that much about how universities have taken substantial steps to take their responsibilities in reversing the downward trend. In China, particular problems may be even worse at the era of the radical higher education expansion. Chinese college students probably take it for granted for the gender differences in the exercises of civic participations. They may have unbalanced political orientations toward citizenship and civil society. They probably have been exposed too much to ideological-political education instead of civic education. They probably also have an overcharged patriotism, or distorted nationalistic affective orientation.

## Conclusions – *Implications for Policymakers and Educational Practitioners*

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If we recall Confucian values of learning as a perfection of moral self-cultivation and a participation process of public engagement (*The Great Learning*), and Deweyan view of education as a democratic way of social life, associated living and devoted community (Dewey, 1916, p. 87), we may have a better and more comprehensive understanding of the ultimate goal of higher education institutions for modern civil societies. We may have an urgent need to redesign civic curricula and programs, to renovate teaching strategies and approaches, to reconstruct campus cultures, and to change political environment as well. We may also have to call for an integrated encouragement for civic education among families, communities, schools and society, with particular considerations of cultural traditions.