



2024 Military Academic Institution Recruitment Plan

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In June 2024, the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Political Work Department of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and the Training and Administration Department (TAD) of the CMC released the 2024 Military Academic Institution Recruitment Plan (2024 年军队院校招生计划, hereinafter referred to as the “2024 Recruitment Plan”). The plan underscores the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) prioritization of officer candidates' recruitment and education in Chinese military academic institutions, with particular emphasis placed on physical fitness, political background, and academic requirements. The objectives of the 2024 Recruitment Plan are aligned with the PLA's strategic approach to talent development, aimed at fostering a more capable and adaptable military force to address modern defense challenges.

Applicants to undergraduate officer candidate training in PLA military academic institutions can be classified into two categories: high school graduates and active-duty enlisted soldiers. While both categories are eligible to apply to PLA military academic institutions, they have been assigned different recruitment numbers, eligibility criteria, and selection procedures by the CMC TAD. These distinctions are intended to optimize the alignment of officer cadet qualifications with their future roles in the PLA. Furthermore, the CMC TAD has put efforts into enhancing the education and training of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in the PLA. Aiming to improve NCOs' professional competence and overall quality, the CMC TAD has expanded the vocational and technical education for NCOs, ensuring a more balanced and capable NCO force to meet the demands of modernized military.

High School Graduate Applicants to Undergraduate Officer Candidate Training

The 2024 Recruitment Plan represents a continuation of the PLA's efforts to improve its officer corps, with 17,343 high school graduates sent to 27 military academic institutions.¹ The total recruitment number in 2024 remains largely consistent with that of 2023, showing no significant changes between the two years (see Table 1).² From 2020 to 2023, however, recruitment by military academic institutions increased considerably, with an average increase of

approximately 1,800 annually, and a total increase of approximately 5,000 over the span of three years. This difference is largely driven by a broader initiative to cultivate a more proficient and educated officer corps in alignment with PLA modernization objectives.³ In addition, despite a slight decrease of 95 slots in total recruitment in 2024, the number of slots allocated for males decreased by 1.4 percent, while the number of slots allocated for females increased by 15.6 percent. This shift suggests that while the PLA has gradually stabilized the overall number of recruitment slots for military academic institutions, it will continue to adjust the gender ratio of the students it recruits.

According to the MND, the completion percentage of the PLA's annual recruitment quota has remained consistently above 99 percent. However, there are no available reports to explain the discrepancy of 0.03 – 0.4 percent in the recruitment plan. The only relevant information was a report from the CMC's TAD, which indicated that the 2023 recruitment plan was completed at 99.9 percent, with 20 slots remaining unfilled due to physical examination.⁴

Year	Recruitment Quota	Male Slot	Female Slot	Completion Rate
2020	12,000 (Est.)	Unknown	Unknown	99.7%
2021	13,646	12,800 (Est.)	800 (Est.)	99.6%
2022	15,232	14,300 (Est.)	900 (Est.)	Nearly 100%
2023	17,438	16,543	895	99.9%
2024	17,343	16,308	1,035	99.97%

Table 1: Recruitment of High School Graduates to Military Academic Institutions from 2020 to 2024

Recruitment by Military Academic Institutions

In 2024, the number of military academic institutions that accepted officer candidate applications from high school graduates remained at 27, which included one school directly affiliated with the CMC, ten from the PLA Army (PLAA), five from the PLA Navy (PLAN), four from the PLA Air Force (PLAAF), one from the PLA Rocket Force, one from the PLA Aerospace Force, one from the PLA Cyberspace Force, and four from the People's Armed Police Force (PAP) (see Table 2).⁵

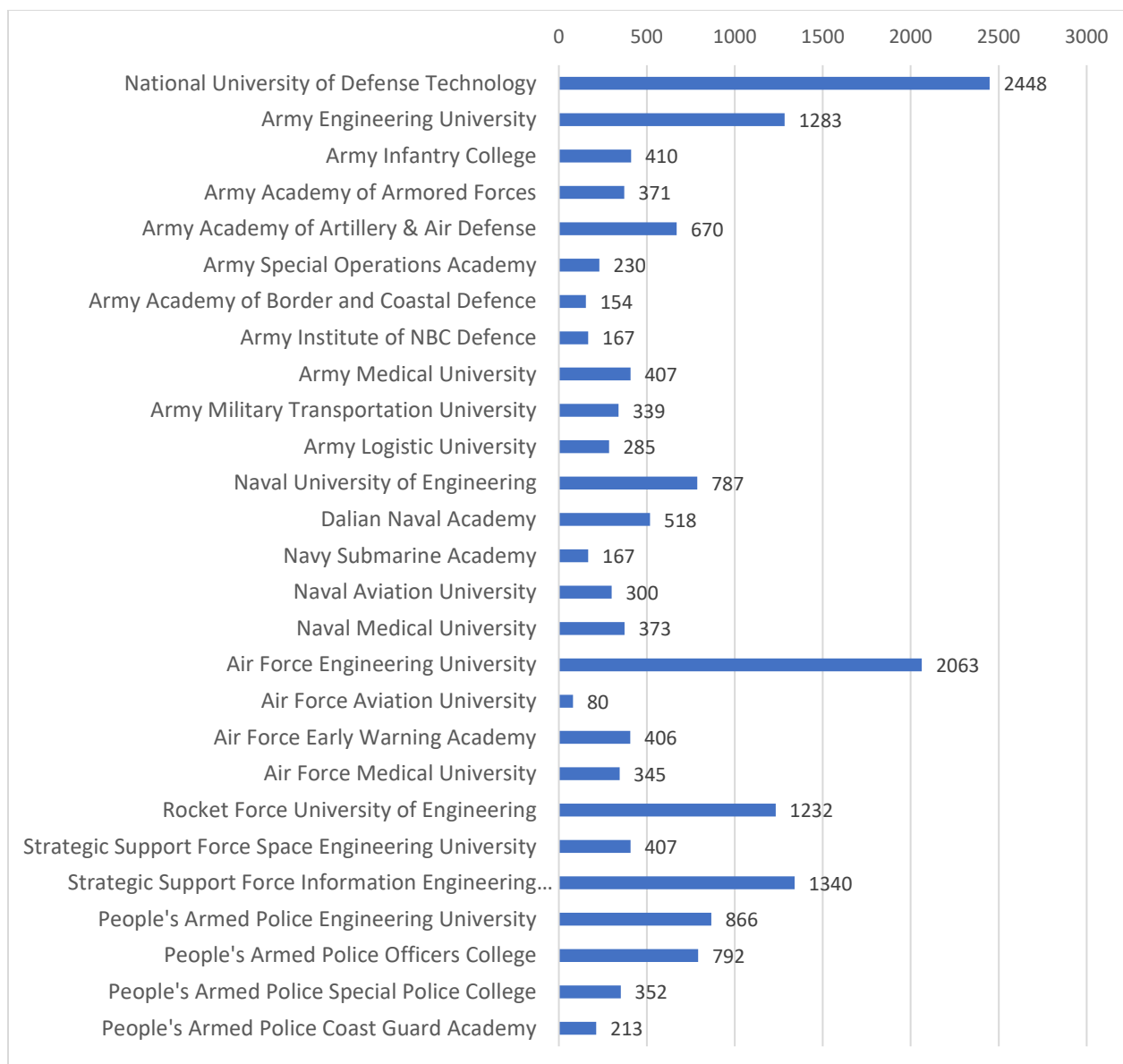


Table 2: Planned Recruitment Numbers of High School Graduates to Military Academic Institutions in 2024

The 2024 Recruitment Plan allocated the largest number of students to the National University of Defense Technology (NUDT). As a corps leader-grade institution directly affiliated with the CMC, NUDT is a comprehensive undergraduate university with an engineering focus, and its primary responsibility is to cultivate scientific, technological, and management personnel needed for military modernization. In 2024, NUDT planned to admit 2,448 undergraduate cadets from high school graduates across 31 provinces, direct-administered municipalities (hereafter just identified as municipalities), and autonomous regions (hereafter just identified as regions). Of these, 2,299 were to be male and 149 were to be female with 2,214 slots for science majors and 234 slots for liberal arts majors.⁶

Similarly, the Air Force Engineering University (AFEU), a corps leader-grade institution under the dual leadership of the PLA Air Force and the MOE, is also prominent in terms of the number of recruitments. The AFEU serves as the premier institution for professional and technical training within the Air Force, with a primary mission of developing highly skilled engineering and technical professionals and command officers in the fields of aviation engineering, surface-to-air missiles, and electronic information.⁷ The MOE and the CMC have approved the AFEU to recruit 2,063 undergraduate officers from high school graduates in 30 provinces (including municipalities and regions) in 2024.

Following the dissolution of the PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF) in April 2024, the 2024 Recruitment Plan re-affiliated the SSF Space Engineering University to the Aerospace Force (ASF) and the SSF Information Engineering University to the Cyberspace Force (CSF). However, both universities have not officially changed their names, and they remain listed in the 2024 Recruitment Plan, with their recruitment numbers adjusted according to their new affiliations.⁸

Recruitment by Military Service and Force

The 2024 Recruitment Plan reflects the CMC's recruitment of high school graduates into the undergraduate officer candidate training programs of the 27 military academic institutions. It highlights the educational priorities of officer undergraduate education training, and it shows the institutional training of officers per military branch. However, the 2024 Recruitment Plan does not reflect the total number of new officers in each military service and force in 2024 because high school graduates are just one source for undergraduate officer candidates. Military academic institutions also recruit active-duty enlisted soldiers; however, it is a very small percentage. In addition, although military academic institutions are the largest source of commissioned officers, they are only one of four paths to becoming a PLA officer. Other sources of PLA officers include direct recruitment from university graduates, direct commission from active-duty enlisted personnel, and direct commission from military civilian personnel or technical personnel.⁹

The 2024 Recruitment Plan also introduces a significant strategic shift to improve the academic majors and educational tracks for high school graduates admitted to military academic institutions. In practice, this means the PLA now places greater emphasis on establishing a comprehensive foundation in military and political competencies, scientific literacy, and academic specializations. This approach, which is not solely based on academic requirements, aims to align students' academic development with the long-term operational needs of the military, thereby fostering their potential for future career advancement within the armed forces.

The 2024 Recruitment Plan emphasizes the PLA's focus on science and engineering education for officer cadets. While recruits from regions such as Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Shandong, and Hainan are not affected by specific subject-based categories, the remaining 22 regions are required to divide their planned recruitment slots between two main academic categories: physics and history. The four-year undergraduate programs of these military academic institutions typically offer three types of professional categories: Command,

Technical, and Command-Technical Integration. The CMC TAD places significant emphasis on the physics category, which is associated with technical and science-based training essential for more technologically advanced military roles. The stark contrast in preference is evident in the ratio of science to liberal art students admitted to the schools, which stands at approximately 51:1, demonstrating the PLA's clear prioritization of technical and engineering expertise over humanities-related disciplines.

It should be noted that officers from NUDT may be assigned to all military services and forces. They may then choose to become command and administrative officers or special technical officers. Consequently, although the PLAA military academic institutions were allocated the most slots in the 2024 Recruitment Plan, this does not necessarily indicate that the PLAA will ultimately receive the most officer candidates. Furthermore, PLAA aviation pilots, PLAN fighter pilots, and PLAAF pilots are recruited through a distinct recruitment pathway, which started in September of 2023.

In light of the aforementioned, it is evident that the 2024 Recruitment Plan reaffirms that the PLAA has received the largest allotment of officer candidates from high school graduates (see Figure 1). Additionally, the PLAAF has surpassed the PLAN as the service with the second largest number of officer candidates. At this time, there is still not sufficient information to support an assessment of the total number of newly added officer candidates to each military service and force. Furthermore, although the CMC has affiliated the two SSF military academic institutions under the PLA Aerospace Force and Cyberspace Force, the officer candidate recruitment plan for the three newly established forces, especially the PLA Information Support Force, remains vague.

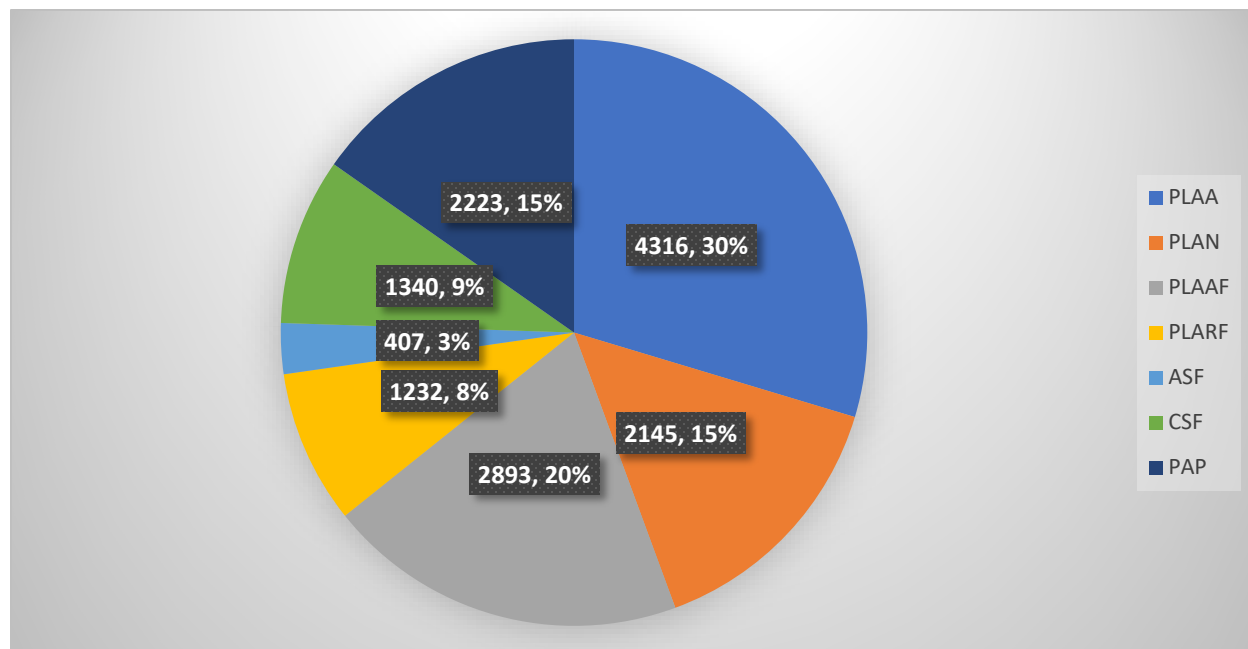


Figure 1: 2024 Planned Recruitment of High School Graduates by Military Branch and Force (Excluding NUDT)

Recruitment by Region

The 2024 Recruitment Plan outlines the number of recruits allocated to the military academic institutions across China's various regions (see Figure 2). The Plan specifies that only high school graduates from 28 out of China's 33 provincial-level administrative divisions, including 20 provinces, four regions, and four municipalities, are eligible to apply to military academic institutions in 2024.

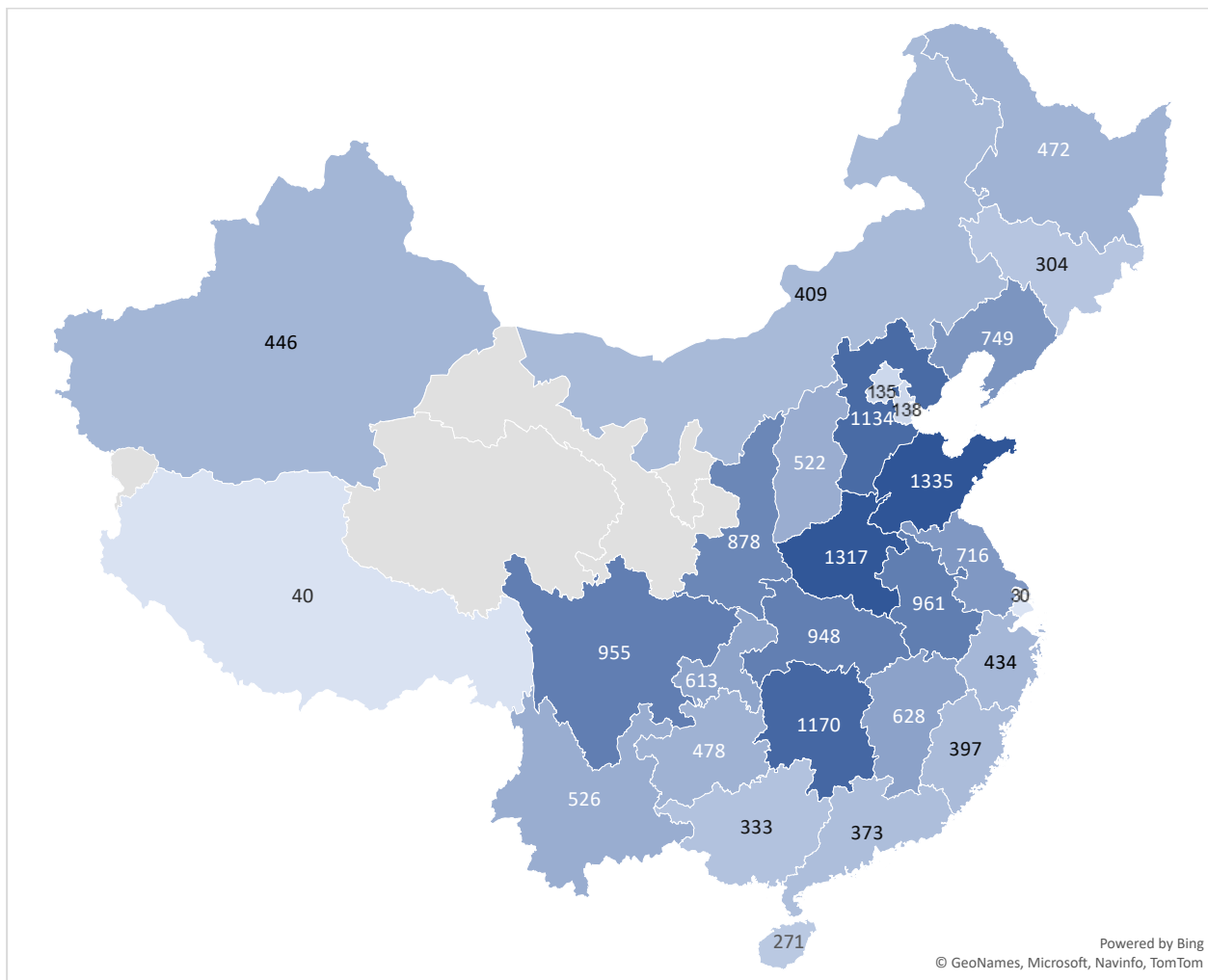


Figure 2: 2024 PRC Military Academic Institution Recruitment Allocations by Region

In addition, the distribution of slots in this plan does not adhere to population figures. According to the most recent National Population Census Report released in May 2021, Guangdong Province has the largest population in China but ranked only 21st in the terms of allocated recruitment slots.¹⁰ In contrast, Shandong Province has a population of 25 million less than Guangdong Province, but was allocated 1,335 slots to military academic institutions, more than three times of that in Guangdong Province. Shandong Province has traditionally been the largest source of soldiers in China and contributes almost 10 percent of PRC military forces.

Henan Province and Hunan Province follow closely behind with 1,317 slots and 1,170 slots, which also correspond to the provinces with the largest contribution of conscripts.

A number of factors may contribute to the unbalanced distribution of recruitment allocations to military academic institutions, with historical conscription patterns likely being the most significant. Provinces such as Henan, Shandong, Hebei, Anhui, Sichuan, and Hunan, which consistently rank as the top sources of conscripts, also receive the highest number of recruitment slots. This correlation can be attributed to these regions' under-developed economies, large military-age populations, and the willingness of young people to enlist.

On the other hand, the Tibet Autonomous Region, with a population of less than 10 million, was allocated just 40 slots, while the Shanghai municipality, which has a much larger population of 25 million, received only 30 slots. In another striking comparison, the Qihai, Gansu, and Ningxia regions in northwest China did not receive any military academic institution recruitment slots for high school graduates, primarily due to the historic low number of candidates and applicants. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) and Macau SAR were also excluded from the plan. The official explanation is that the PRC Military Service Law (2021 Revision) does not apply to SARs due to the implementation of One Country, Two Systems. In addition, the PRC government encourages young people to contribute to the economic and social development of Hong Kong and Macau instead of carrying the burden of annual military recruitment requirements. The more likely explanation is that young people in Hong Kong and Macau have long been educated in Western capitalist culture and have a freer mindset that may make them incompatible with China's Communist ideology and the regimentation of the PLA, especially its strict militarized management, political and ideological education, and unconditional obedience to command.

These figures indicate that in addition to population and geographic factors, the province's loyalty and reliability to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is another factor when assigning the office candidate slots. For example, Shandong, Henan, and Hebei Province top the list with the largest recruitment allocations to military academic institutions, and these provinces are all located in the central region surrounding Beijing. The CCP has implemented strict patriotic education among these provinces, especially those surrounding Beijing. Patriotic education was enforced in compulsory education, especially in elementary schools and middle high schools.¹¹ The Han ethnic groupⁱ constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population in these provinces, averaging 97.9 percent, which contributes to a lower likelihood of ethnic instability in the region.¹² This indicates that the CMC uses caution when allotting officer candidate slots to the public and that the allocation of military academic institution recruits is

ⁱ There are 56 ethnic groups in the PRC. The Han ethnic group represents largest population proportion, comprising for approximately 91.5 percent of the total population. The remaining 55 ethnic groups collectively constitute a relatively small proportion of the population, accounting for 8.5 percent.

driven by factors beyond population, potentially reflecting strategic, political, or regional development priorities.

Recruitment Standards and Procedures for High School Graduates

According to the director of the CMC TAD Military Education Bureau, the 2024 Recruitment Plan reflects the PLA's strategic commitment to developing well-rounded officer cadets with both military and academic competencies and emphasizes the importance of strengthening military and political qualities, scientific and cultural knowledge, and fundamental expertise in academic discipline to create a foundation for potentials in military career development.¹³

The *Measures for the Recruitment of High School Graduates to Military Academic Institutions*, originally published in December 2023, serve as the basis for the 2024 recruitment process, outlining the specific criteria and process for candidates:¹⁴

- Applicants must be unmarried.
- Applicants must be at least 16 years old and no older than 20 as of August (2024).
- Applicants must have passed the physical fitness test in high school.
- Applicants must participate in the (2024) National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao, 高考) and achieve the admission score of key universities of the province. Both first-time and repeat graduates are eligible to apply to military academic institutions.

The measures also stipulate five steps in the recruitment basic process for the candidates of military academic institutions:

1. The applicant will go through a political assessment at the military service agency of the applicant's registered residence, permanent residence, or the application location. The political assessment will examine the applicant's political and ideological performance, as well as the political background and crimes of family members and siblings who do not live with the applicant.
2. The applicant will fill out the application form according to the requirements of the college recruitment work of the province, region, or municipality.
3. The provincial military district recruitment office and the provincial recruitment committee office will set the minimum Gaokao score for each military academic institution and release it to the public.
4. Candidates who have obtained a minimum score on the military examination will be interviewed and given a physical examination according to the requirements of the local provincial military district recruitment office. The interview will be conducted at the provincial military district recruitment office, aiming to understand the candidate's motivation for applying and to test the candidate's ability to analyze and judge problems, verbal expression, body coordination, and reaction. After the interview, the candidate will receive the interview result of the interview.

5. The provincial recruitment committee office will rank the candidates based on their political evaluation, interview, physical examination, and the recruitment scores of the military academic institutions the candidates applied to. The military academic institutions then admit the students after inspecting their files.¹⁵

The physical requirements for high school graduates are consistent with the *Standards for Physical Examination for Military Officers and Civilian Personnel Selection*. The general standards for vision, height, and weight are as follows:

- The applicant must have an uncorrected vision of at least 20/63 in each eye.
- Male applicants must be at least 162 cm tall, and female applicants at least 158 cm.
- Male applicants must have a body mass index (BMI) between 17.5 and 30, and female applicants between 17 and 24.

Military academic institutions, such as NUDT, will continue to expand the integrated recruitment and training of students in both command and technology disciplines. Students in the integrated command and technology major will be admitted and trained through a unified system, with specialization in either the command or technology track occurring after graduation. In contrast, students admitted to the command major and technology major will follow distinct educational tracks from recruitment to graduation.

Active-Duty Enlisted Forces Applicants for Undergraduate Officer Candidate Training and NCO Transition

The 2024 Recruitment Plan also lists the new requirements and procedures for PLA active-duty enlisted soldiers to apply to military academic institutions to become an NCO or an officer. In 2024, the CMC TAD Military Education Bureau approved approximately 14,000 enlisted soldiers to enroll in vocational and technical education programs at 32 military academic institutions to transition to NCOs. It also approved approximately 3,700 enlisted soldiers to apply for full-time undergraduate officer education programs at 27 military academic institutions.¹⁶

The most significant feature of the 2024 Recruitment Plan is the introduction of undergraduate vocational and technical education programs for junior college-level NCOs. The pilot programs, which were launched at eight military academic institutions, represent a pivotal shift in the PLA's talent management strategy. These programs address the evolving structure of the PLA's military personnel by encouraging NCOs to pursue education at the same level as that of officers. The PLA's objective is to bridge the gap between operational and technical expertise. This initiative also indicates that the PLA will cultivate a more professionalized NCO workforce, and that the PLA will place greater significance in NCO's roles and responsibilities, especially in the modernized military.

Active-duty enlisted soldiers are not required to take the Gaokao. Instead, applicants take a military common subject examination and a culture subject examination, which are reviewed by the CMC's National Defense Mobilization Department's Mobilization and Recruitment Bureau in a manner analogous to the review process employed for the Gaokao. The results of the examination were released at the beginning of July. Once enrolled in undergraduate officer candidate programs, enlisted soldiers will become officer candidates of military academic institutions and undergo the same college education as those enrolled through the high school graduate application process.

The requirements for the education programs designed to facilitate the transition of enlisted personnel to NCOs are more flexible and are typically determined by the political committee directly affiliated with applicant's unit, the CMC departments, service and branch, and theater command. Those pursuing full-time undergraduate officer education and vocational and technical NCO education programs may receive additional credits under the following conditions:¹⁷

- The applicant has been awarded third-class military merit, second-class merit, or third-level commendation or above.
- The applicant has been stationed in special areas for a certain number of years.
- The applicant's parent is a martyr or died in the line of duty.
- The applicant's parents have been awarded second-class military merit or above.
- The applicant's parents have been stationed in special areas or special posts for a certain number of years.
- The applicant's parent is an active-duty service member.

The number of enlisted personnel admitted to academic institutions represents a small percentage of the overall enlisted force. The PLA is comprised of 850,000 NCOs and 700,000 junior enlisted soldiers.¹⁸ However, the number of enlisted personnel admitted to military academic institutions with the objective of becoming an officer in 2024 was only 3,700, reflecting a mere 0.2 percent of the total number of enlisted personnel. Consequently, only a limited number of enlisted soldiers are afforded the opportunity to attend military academic institutions and pursue a career as an officer. This is a markedly lower number of allocated slots than that of other direct commission paths.

Conclusion

The 2024 Recruitment Plan delineates the CMC's officer recruitment goals from high school graduates and from the ranks of active-duty junior enlisted. Additionally, it outlines the educational programs offered by military academic institutions for junior enlisted personnel to pursue careers as officers or NCOs. The document identifies high school graduates as the principal source of officer candidates for the PLA military academic institutions. In 2024, the CMC TAD placed greater emphasis on the development of military and political qualities,

scientific and cultural knowledge, and fundamental expertise in academic disciplines, with the objective of creating a foundation of personnel capable of meeting the demands of PLA modernization. Officers who graduate from military academic institutions often demonstrate a competitive advantage in terms of military professionalism and skills. They are more likely to be assigned to positions at the forefront of operations and at the grassroots levels as commanding officers, but they can also be assigned to non-commanding positions as special technical officers like the directly commissioned officers.

In comparison to previous years, the 2024 recruitment cycle evidenced a notable increase in the popularity of military academic institution applications. The economic downturn after the COVID-19 pandemic and the concomitant rise in the youth unemployment rate have given rise to a heightened interest in the more stable career paths offered by the PLA. In China, the attainment of a college diploma has traditionally been regarded as a means of achieving economic and social advancement. Furthermore, the path to becoming a PLA officer is often perceived as an entry point into the bureaucratic class. Compared with conscription, the admission to a military academic institutions and subsequent appointment as an officer is becoming an increasingly popular career path in Chinese society. Consequently, the competition to be admitted to military academic institutions has intensified, with the average score achieved by admitted candidates on the Gaokao now being nearly 90 points higher than the admission score of key universities in each province.¹⁹

The PLA Military Academic Institution Recruitment Plan has reached a stabilized annual quota of approximately 17,000 for both 2023 and 2024, following a consistent annual increase of 1,800 since 2020. This stabilization, coupled with a 99.97 percent completion rate for the 2024 recruitment quota as announced by the MND in July, represents a significant milestone in the PLA's military reform. It demonstrates the success of the PLA's efforts to enhance officer education and restructure the force. Furthermore, it underscores the critical role of military academic institutions as a foundation of the PLA's modernization strategy and a compelling career option for China's youth.

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Endnotes

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