

Peking University Lost at Least 72 Professors in 2023, Many CCP Members

The birthplace of Chinese communism, in 2023 Peking University mourned dozens who formed and influenced top CCP leadership.

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A mourner carries the cremated remains of a loved one as he and others wear traditional white funeral clothing, during a funeral in Shanghai, China, on Jan. 14, 2023. (Kevin Frayer/Getty Images)

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A A Print

A little over a year after China lifted its draconian zero-COVID measures, abruptly opening a society that had been under extreme lockdowns for more than two years, a fresh spate of obituaries at China's Peking University is a signal that the virus is still around, and still taking a toll on communism's best and brightest.



Last month, the university, revered as the birthplace of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), lost seven professors. And official reports show that in 2023, at least 72 professors died, most of whom were loyal CCP cadres.

CCP authorities have sought to cover up data about infections and deaths since the beginning of the pandemic, leaving epidemiologists and Western media to piece together a picture from a variety of sources such as obituaries. The official obituaries of public figures use oblique language: the cause of death is generally listed as “ineffective medical treatment.” However, it's impossible to ignore the surging death toll at academic institutions such as Peking University (PKU)—a death toll that coincided with the pandemic.

Founded in 1898, PKU was the base for China's earliest communists and Marxists. In July of 1921, when the CCP was officially founded, there were 53 party members nationwide, of which 21—almost half—worked or studied at Peking University, including party leader Mao Zedong.

Over the past several decades, the CCP has nurtured its scholars and experts at PKU, along with political figures like former premier Li Keqiang and Zhao Leji, currently the third-ranking member of the Politburo Standing Committee.

Zero-COVID Ends; PKU Takes a Hit

On Dec. 7, 2022, the CCP [lifted](#) its strict zero-COVID policies, without precautions or medical preparations. In the resulting COVID-19 surge, PKU suffered. In December of 2022 alone, the university's medical school lost 18 staff members; whereas in the previous eleven months combined, it had only had ten deaths. In just one day, Dec. 22, 2022, the university issued three consecutive obituaries.



As of Dec. 22, 2022, PKU had reported 101 deaths among teachers and professors for the year, according to an article on Chinese news portal NetEase.

The trend continued throughout 2023, with 72 professors dying, most of them loyal CCP cadres.

Of the seven who died in December, five had sworn a life-long commitment to the communist cause:

Zhang Wen, a CCP member, renowned jurist, and professor at the Law Institute of PKU, died on Dec. 31 in Beijing. Mr. Zhang had long served as the secretary of the General Party Branch and was party secretary of the Law Institute. The official announcement described him as an “outstanding CCP cadre.”

Zhu Huizhen, a CCP member and an associate professor at the university’s Institute of Computer Science, died on Dec. 22. He had served as director of the university’s computer lab.

Xu Xiaohong, an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan and a visiting scholar at PKU’s Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, died in the United States on Dec. 12. He was only 45.

Xu Jialing, a CCP member and a professor at the School of Basic Medical Sciences’s Department of Biophysics, died on Dec. 9.

Zhou Erliu, nephew of first CCP premier Zhou Enlai and former vice president of PKU, died on Dec. 6 in Shanghai. Mr. Zhou was the director of the China Social Development Research Center, cultural counselor of the Chinese Embassy in the United Kingdom, adviser of the Zhou Enlai

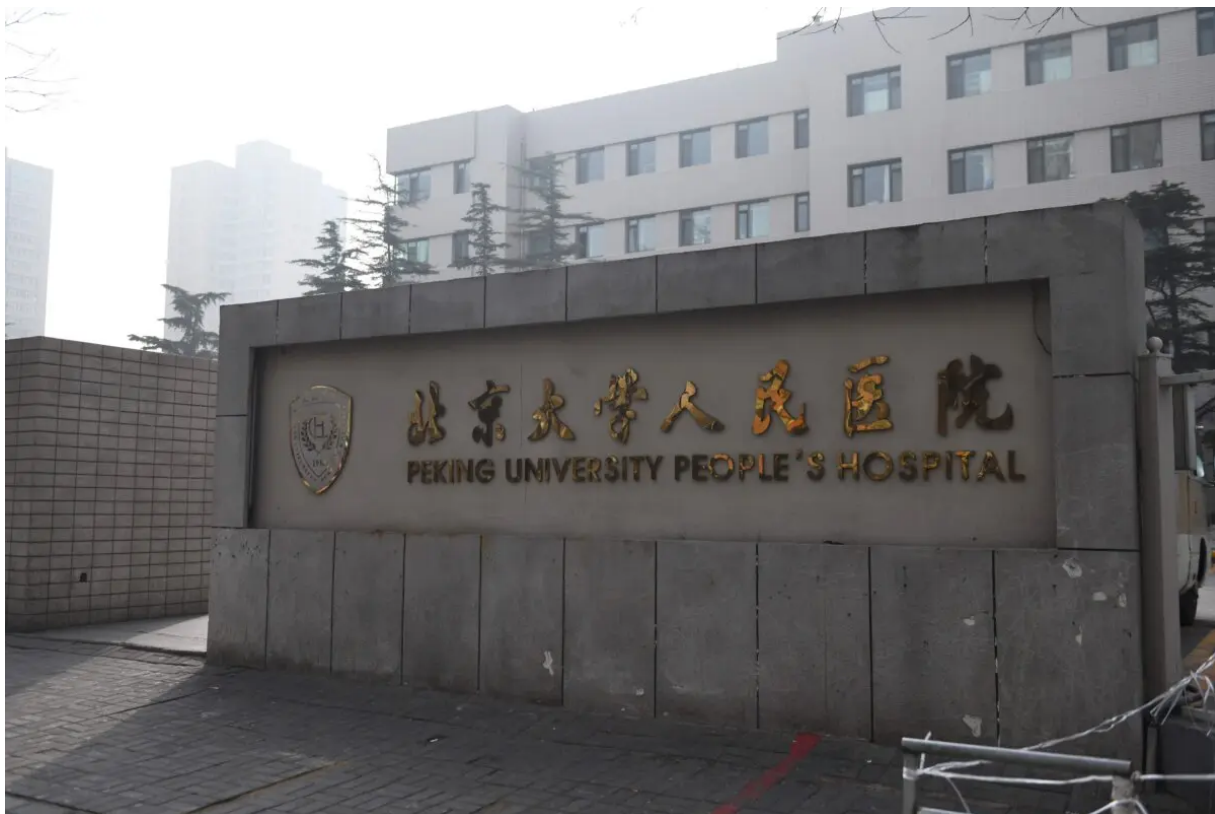
Research Center at Nankai University, and had held leading positions in the Central Committee's Foreign Liaison and Cultural Department.

Ma Mochen, a CCP member and former Director of the Teaching and Research Department of the History of the Chinese Revolution at Beijing Medical University (now PKU School of Medicine), died on Dec. 4. Ms. Ma was the first to compile the "History of the CCP" into the "History of the Chinese Revolution."

Wang Minzhong, professor of mechanics and engineering science at PKU's College of Engineering, died on Dec. 2. Mr. Wang was an adviser to the Eighth Degree Evaluation Committee of the Chinese Society of Mechanics and an executive director of the Beijing Mechanics Society. He was included in the 2015 book "Overview of the Achievements of Famous Chinese Scientists in the 20th Century."

Dozens of Professors Dead in 2023

Of the dozens of PKU professors who died in 2023, at least 44, or 61.1 percent, were CCP members. The list of the dead spanned the university's medical fields, law school, international relations, Marxism study, language college, and others.



The Peking University People's Hospital is seen in Beijing on Feb. 21, 2020. (Greg Baker/AFP via Getty Images)

It is worth noting that PKU's medical and health faculties lost the most professors in 2023, compared to other departments.

The dead included Zheng Junhua, a professor at PKU's Department of Natural Pharmacology, and one of China's academic leaders in biopharmaceuticals, who died in October.

Also deceased: Zhai Zhonghe, a renowned cell biologist, professor of the School of Life Sciences, and a member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, who died in February 2023. Zhai's list of honorary posts and achievements is lengthy; his obituary described him as an "excellent CCP member" and one of the founders of cell biology and bio-electron microscopy in China.

The list of obituaries in medical fields included professors of surgery, pharmacy, medical humanities, public health, pathology, immunology, embryology, infectious disease, psychiatry, and psychology.

Obituaries from the international relations and languages faculty included Hao Keming, adjunct professor and wife of former politburo member Hu Qili, Chen Zhan'an, former dean of the School of Marxism; and international relations theorist Liang Shoude. Dead at the young age of 46 was Lu Ting'en, former Vice Dean of the School of International Relations.

Another significant loss was constitutional scholar Wei Dingren, also a CCP member, and a professor at PKU's law school, who died on Oct. 6 in Beijing. Wei was involved in the drafting of the 1982 Constitution, the revision of the 1979 Election Law, and the drafting of the Hong Kong Basic Law and the Macao Basic Law.

Like Wei, renowned economist Li Yining was extremely influential throughout his long life, both through direct service to the party and by forming top CCP officials. Li died in February. He had served as deputy director of the Finance and Economics Committee of the National People's Congress, and Deputy Director of the Economic Committee for the Political Consultative Conference. He was a doctoral adviser to former premier Li Keqiang; his students also included former Vice President Li Yuanchao, current Central Committee member Lu Hao, and other top officials.

Other departments that lost faculty members included physics, atmospheric and oceanic sciences, mathematical sciences, chemistry,

archeology, and the School of Computer Science, which said goodbye to Professor Lv Jinyu at the young age of 45.

While many of the dead were CCP members, some were members of minor political parties such as the China Democratic League, the China Association for Promoting Democracy, or the JiuSan Society. Although they were not CCP cadres, nonetheless the deaths of these politically active faculty members are a loss to the Party. In China, even minor political parties are essentially part of the CCP's united front, following Party policy decisions and serving the regime, while lending a veneer of pluralism to the autocratic regime. Notable among these was the death of professor Zhao Huacheng, a leading scholar in the study of archaeology in the Qin and Han Dynasties, and a member of the JiuSan Society.

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