

Lund University  
Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies  
Masters Programme in Asian Studies  
East and South-East Asian Track  
Spring semester, 2006



THE COMUNIST YOUTH LEAGUE IN THE  
STRUGGLE TO REVOLUTIONIZE CHINESE  
YOUTH (1962-1966)

Author: Sofia Graziani  
Supervisor: Phuong An Nguyen

## **ABSTRACT**

Following Mao Zedong's new political offensive in September 1962, the Communist Youth League (CYL) was called to play a leading role in the struggle to revolutionize Chinese youth. However, as the Cultural Revolution entered its first phase, the CYL turned to be one of the most challenged institutions. Through a rigorous historical research based on archival data mainly kept in Beijing public libraries, this thesis explores the main issues and problems encountered by the CYL in the struggle to revolutionize youth in the period 1962-1966, attempting to evaluate the impact of Mao's renewed emphasis on class struggle on youth work. Precisely, it examines the main developments in the League political education work and the League's membership and recruitment pattern in order to further understand the way in which the CYL responded to Maoist requests and policies, the causes that led to Maoist criticism in 1966, and ultimately the effect on youth behaviour.

## CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	4
INTRODUCTION .....	5
I. Presentation, purpose and research questions.....	5
II. The nature and functions of the CYL.....	7
III. Methodological considerations.....	9
IV. Disposition.....	11
1. THE OFFICIAL PROMINENCE OF POLITICS IN CYL’S WORK .....	12
1.1. The emphasis on class struggle and class education.....	12
1.2. The CYL and the Socialist education movement.....	14
1.3. Main developments in the Movement to study Mao Zedong Works.....	15
1.4. The Lijiazhuang branch and the CYL as a school for the study of Mao Zedong Thought .....	17
1.5. Main problems and the failure of the CYL to respond to Maoist requests.....	18
2. CYL’S RECRUITMENT AND MEMBERSHIP.....	21
2.1. Introduction to CYL’s membership and pattern of recruitment.....	22
2.2. The launching of the membership drive and the issue of cadres rejuvenation.....	24
2.3. Implications of membership expansion: the emphasis on behaviour and its impact on youth...28	
CONCLUSIONS .....	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	36

## FOREWORD

The research presented in this thesis was made possible thanks to many people. I am especially grateful to Professor Yin Hongbiao at Peking University for his advice and support during my fieldwork in Beijing in the summer 2005. Insightful readings and invaluable comments on part of the thesis were offered by Professor Guido Samarani at the University of Venice and by Professor Michael Schoenhals at Lund University to whom goes my deep gratitude. I would also like to thank my supervisor Phuong An Nguyen for her suggestions during the research process, and all the academic staff in the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies at Lund University, particularly Marina Svensson and Flora Sapio who have always encouraged me during my stay in Lund and during my fieldwork in Beijing as well. A special thank goes also to Professor Laura De Giorgi at the University of Venice for her encouragement.

Furthermore, I wish to thank the staff of the Library of the Chinese Youth University for Political Science (Beijing), particularly the associate librarian Zheng Danniang, for allowing me to visit the Library and collect and copy important primary sources. I also would like to acknowledge the research support provided by the Nordic Centre at Fudan University (Shanghai) in September 2005. Finally, I thank the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation (Taiwan) for offering me a travel grant that enables me to work on the material collected at the Sinological Library of the Institute of Chinese Studies at the University of Heidelberg from May 30<sup>th</sup> to June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2005.

It goes without saying, however, that no one but myself should be held responsible for the thesis results and for any mistakes in the pages that follow.

## INTRODUCTION

### I. Presentation, purpose and research questions

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Chinese youth have been at the forefront of political action and have assumed a crucial role in political upheavals, the most prominent example being the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) policy has placed special emphasis on the political education of Chinese youth, not only because of China's demography (which accounted a relatively young population), but also because of the question of succession. Chinese leaders, Mao Zedong in particular, were very sensitive to this issue, especially since the end of the 50s when the fear that China might fall into "revisionism" was becoming a major matter of concern. The emphasis placed on youth's commitment to "revolutionary" behaviour and goals, was therefore aimed at securing the maintenance of the policies for which Chinese communists had struggled. Young generation represented, in the view of Mao, the last hope of preserving the spirit of the revolution.

In the struggle to revolutionize Chinese youth, the Communist Youth League (CYL), the primary CCP's auxiliary youth political organization, was to play a leading role. Since its establishment in 1949, it has assumed an important role in Chinese politics and society, as the channel through which the masses of youth acquired and developed the values of the prevailing political culture. However, during the Cultural Revolution, the CYL became one of the most challenged institutions: its Beijing Municipal Committee was criticized and its Central Committee disbanded in the summer of 1966, leaving the organization more or less dormant for a dozen years. If youth were so important in the strategy of the CCP, why did their leading mass organization become one of the most challenged institutions during the Cultural Revolution?

Few western scholars have attempted to gain a deeper understanding of the Chinese political life by examining the performance of the CYL in the period leading up to the launching of the Cultural Revolution (1963-1966). Paul M. Healy, in his work on the CYL over the period going from 1949 to 1979 -- the only major scholarly work, which has insofar been written on the CYL *per se* -- argues that Mao Zedong attempted to take complete control over the League in those years but his attempts didn't turn to be successful as the developments in the middle of 1966 ultimately revealed.<sup>1</sup> According to Healy, the key problem that prevented the CYL to fully implement Maoist

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul M. Healy, *The Chinese Communist Youth League 1949-1979*, Griffith Asian Papers, no. 4, Nathan, Griffith University, School of Modern Asian Studies, 1982, pp. 68-69. See also Wang Hsueh-wen, "Maoist Rectification of the Young Communist League", *Issues & Studies*, November 1970, p. 31.

policies and to “place politics first” was the occurrence of deliberate obstructions on the part of the Beijing Municipal Committee of the CYL which, in turn, influenced many basic-level organizations in their daily political work.<sup>2</sup> This explanation is in line with what the Chinese press reported in 1966 and, in my view, the study of Paul M. Healy failed to provide a critical historical interpretation of the primary data on which the research is based. Other studies have looked at the weaknesses of the organization in the realm of membership and recruitment as important aspects that revealed a deviation from a pure Maoist line and the League’s apparent alliance with the Liu-Deng faction.<sup>3</sup> Precisely, relaxed admission standards and resistance toward a real rejuvenation of the League leadership at all levels affected its vanguard nature and prevented the kind of “revolutionization” of Chinese youth requested by Mao, leading to Mao’s failure to make the League an instrument of his policy.<sup>4</sup>

Taking the contributions of the above-mentioned scholars as my point of departure, this study wants to be a significant voice in this debate. Accordingly, it explores the Chinese political life in the 1960s by examining the performance and the role assumed by CYL. Precisely, the study addresses the main issues and problems encountered by the CYL in “revolutionizing” Chinese youth in the period going from September 1962 when Mao Zedong inaugurated an extremely politicized period putting again “class struggle” at the forefront, to 1966, when the Cultural Revolution erupted and CYL’s work and activities were suspended. Did the CYL effectively communicate party policies directed towards youth immediately prior to the Cultural Revolution? If not, why? Which were the main difficulties encountered by the CYL in that historical period which may help us understand its suspension in 1966? And finally, how youth’s behaviour and activism have been affected by changing political conditions?

In an effort to answer these central questions, this study focuses on the role assumed by the CYL in the political-ideological campaigns unfolding since 1963 as well as on CYL’s membership and recruitment policies at the national level, which were directly linked to the achievements of revolutionary tasks.

Before moving on to discuss methodological issues, I shall give a brief introduction on the nature and functions performed by the CYL in Chinese politics and society

---

<sup>2</sup> Paul M. Healy, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> See for example James Townsend, *The Revolutionization of Chinese Youth: A Study of Chung-kuo Ch’uing-nien*, China Research Monograph, no. 1, Berkeley, University of California, Center for Chinese Studies, 1967; Victor Funnell, “The Chinese Communist Youth Movement, 1949-1966”, *The China Quarterly*, no. 42, April/June 1970, pp. 105-130.

<sup>4</sup> James Townsend, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

## II. The nature and functions of the CYL

The CYL is the primary youth political organization in China. Originally named Socialist Youth League it held its First National Congress in Guangzhou in 1922 when the birth of a national unified youth organization was proclaimed. Thereafter, the organization changed its name several times: Communist Youth League in 1925, New Democratic Youth League in 1949 and finally, in 1957 Communist Youth League of China. The formal establishment of the New Democratic Youth League in April 1949, when its First National Congress was convened and all past Congresses were recognized as its predecessors, marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of China's Communist Youth Leagues.<sup>5</sup>

As a mass organization, it represents a fundamental component of the organizational network of the PRC and an important part of the Chinese political system. According to the definitions provided by James Townsend in his comprehensive study on political participation in Communist China, the CYL belongs to the category of those mass organizations that have large memberships and that are primarily devoted to the political mobilization of their members and the population at large. By assuming “the greatest responsibility for transmitting official policies to the lowest level and organizing the masses for political activity” this type of mass organizations played a prominent role in the Chinese political system.<sup>6</sup> The CYL shows the following characteristics: firm control and supervision by the CCP, exercised through the placement of party members in leading positions within the League at all levels<sup>7</sup> and through party committee leadership over the League organ at the same level, a characteristic that ensure that the League will follow the party's lead; secondly, it is based on the organizational principle of “democratic centralism” (*minzhu jizhong zhiyuan*)--as it has invariably been proclaimed in its constitution—which means minority submission to majority, and lower levels following the dictates of higher levels (centralism) as well as regular convening of congresses at all levels and free expression of opinion on key policy issues before decisions are reached (democracy). As J. Townsend has observed, similarly to state and party's structure, “centralism” is much more prominent than “democracy” since all major decisions are made at the top and higher levels can reconsider and revoke the decisions of lower levels. As a matter of fact, the centralized leadership of the top organs of the League over the lower levels complements and strengthens the state structure by transmitting central policy down to the basic level; thirdly, a well-developed basic-level organization, characterized by local branches which

---

<sup>5</sup> On the history of the Communist Youth League before its formal establishment in 1949 see Klaus H. Pringsheim, *The China Quarterly*, no. 12, October-December 1962, pp. 75-91.

<sup>6</sup> James R. Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China*, 3rd edition, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969, p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> The national leadership of the CYL for example has always been occupied by high-level party members such as Hu Yaobang who guided the League from 1952 to 1966.

promote political indoctrination and participation, as well as collective action at the grassroots level, and encourage obedience to higher directives among the members; finally the function of the party's "transmission belt" which is of fundamental importance in the Chinese political system. In line with the Leninist tradition, it links the party and the masses and it produces the popular support of party policies that the mass line demands, thus being a vital tool in the transmission of party directives to the masses of youth and more generally in the process of policy implementation.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it is officially defined not only as the party's main "assistant" (*zhushou*) but also as the party's "reserve force" (*houbeijun*), functioning as a training ground for future party members and providing the CCP with a source of potential members. Especially during the Maoist era, it provided important opportunities for upward mobility, thus playing an important role in terms of party membership recruitment and growth.

By educating and mobilizing youth in support of party goals and policies and by imbuing its members with communist values, the CYL has assumed a very important role in mass political participation and socialization in Maoist China. In order to cultivate individuals whose political conduct reflect the viewpoints defined by the official ideology and in order to gain the total commitment of the new generation -- born and grown up after the Liberation -- to the new regime and, particularly, to Mao's vision<sup>9</sup>, the Chinese communist leaders have placed a great emphasis on youth's political socialization since their childhood. This process generally aimed at instilling "a sense of belonging to a particular political community and to give the child a positive set of orientations toward the symbols, institutions, and personalities valued by the political system"<sup>10</sup>, in order to prepare them to take over the reins of Party and State leadership.

Official party-sponsored youth organizations such as the CYL, through their political activities, were to play an important role in supervising and creating the political life of the young people and shaping their behaviour. The CYL was, therefore, one of the main agent of political socialization, playing an important role in creating citizens loyal and dedicated to the new China and in nurturing "successors of the revolution".

---

<sup>8</sup> It should be stated here that, within the context of the "mass line" (*qunzhong luxian*), Mao Zedong stressed the two-way function of the "transmission belt" much more than Lenin did. He, thus, placed emphasis on the principle "from the masses, to the masses" as a necessary method of correct leadership, whereas Lenin and Stalin attributed to the masses a much more passive role [Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, New York, Praeger, 1969, p. 70].

<sup>9</sup> Franz Schurmann. *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968, pp. 45-53; Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1985, pp. 11-123.

<sup>10</sup> Charles P. Ridley, Paul H. B. Godwin and Dennis J. Doolin (eds.), *The Making of a Model Citizen in Communist China*, Stanford, The Hoover Institution Press, 1971, p. 184.



### III. Methodological considerations

This thesis is mainly based on qualitative archival research. It explores the subject under investigation by adopting the method of historiography, that is of doing historical research or gathering and analyzing historical evidences. It, thus, relies extensively on primary sources mainly kept in public libraries (archival data) - the most common method among historians – and adopts the method of analysis which draws mainly on what has been referred to as *source criticism* and its criteria for the evaluation and interpretation of data. Accordingly, I have checked and double-checked my sources of information, in order to give a good deal of validity and reliability to my conclusions.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, I attempted, wherever possible, to confirm the validity of one information by reference to other sources, in search for a point of convergence.

The work is firmly based on selective analysis of primary data on the CYL organization during the period investigated. Data have been obtained from a number of sources. First, and most extensively, from official documents of the CYL mainly issued at the central level and gathered in the collection *Tuan de wenjian huibian*. Secondly, from youth mass publications, precisely the national youth magazine *Zhongguo qingnian* and especially the newspaper *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, the only two important central-level publications designed for popular consumption and nationwide distribution. Only on a preliminary basis, use has also been made of written memoirs and recollections of people who witnessed and experienced those historical developments. Since the collection of official documents mentioned above is only available until 1964 (the compilation has been interrupted by the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution), for the years 1965 and 1966 I had to rely mainly on mass publications.

The official documents of the CYL Central Committee (CC) have been chosen because they constitute important sources to look at to investigate CYL's national developments and policies directed towards lower levels and generally towards youth. Data on the smaller units, useful to evaluate the implementation of national directives and policies at the local level, have not been included in the study because of lack of access to these sources in China. Youth mass publications have represented important sources of data as well. As reliable mouthpieces for the official propaganda, their contents follow the current line of a given period and, therefore, provided me with the opportunity to look at the way the government perceives youth issues and to look at policies directed towards youth as well. Both kinds of sources turned to be essential in yielding new facts, connections, or ideas. However, because of their normative function, these sources do not provide

---

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldböck, *Reflexive Methodology. New Vistas for Qualitative Research*, London, Sage Publications, 2000, pp. 69-75.

information from the “bottom”, that is from ordinary people’s perspective. Therefore, recollections and memoirs have been used, wherever possible, to integrate normative sources but only on a preliminary basis and always keeping in mind the particular view or interest they represent.<sup>12</sup> Hence, they have been used only as integrative sources.

Besides primary sources, secondary sources have been also utilised. They include both studies published in China by Chinese scholars and studies conducted by Western scholars. Such works have ensured a good supply of data on many aspects of CYL organization especially on a nationwide scale. Information related to specific geographical areas of China are also provided by some of these sources. However such information is uneven in the quality of coverage for different areas. In general, the data are better and more plentiful on Beijing and Guangzhou on which several studies on youth activism conducted by Western scholars in the 60s and 70s are based. The reliability of secondary data utilised in this study depends to a large extent on the soundness of the methodology of Chinese and Western scholars. Though Chinese sources tend to reconstruct history according to the official interpretation of it, they nonetheless may provide valuable information on facts or events useful during the research process. With regard to Western sources, those studies conducted in the 60s and 70s through the methodology of refugee interviewing and dealing with the political socialization of youth in Guangdong province, especially its capital city, from 1960 to 1966, are focused on a province that has its own peculiarities and for which generalization may be problematic.<sup>13</sup> However, since they address the CYL from the perspective of the students, these works provide us with interesting integrative information on the impact of the league’s shifting recruitment policies on youth activism and competition in the period leading up to the launching of the Cultural Revolution.

The use of all these sources provided the possibility to check the data and the validity of information. Checks have been made, first, by viewing all the results with biases in mind, and, secondly, by consulting more studies on certain aspects to counter-check them with each-other. As inadequacies are particularly likely to occur as far as quantitative data on membership recruitment and pattern are concerned we are consequently restricted in our own dealing with this respect of the subject. It must be made clear that quantitative data included in this thesis have been nonetheless

---

<sup>12</sup> Memoirs published in the West by Chinese citizens emigrated from Mainland China may have been written for a specific purpose, as they address to a specific audience. Moreover it should be remembered here that these sources have to be used scrupulously also because of the fact that memory fails and has undergone a process of reconstruction in the mind of the subjects in a different time-frame.

<sup>13</sup> See Anita Chan, *op. cit.*; Stanley Rosen, *Red Guard Factionalism and the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1982; Jonathan Unger, *Education under Mao: Class and Competition in Canton Schools, 1960-1980*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982. See also Susan Shirk, *Competitive Comrades: Career Incentives and Student Strategies in China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982.

checked and counter-checked wherever possible, and much qualitative information has been analysed.

#### **IV. Disposition**

By large, the thesis is structured in two main parts. By looking at the League involvement in prominent political mass movements unfolding since 1963, especially the Socialist education movement and the Campaign to study Mao Zedong Works, the first section identifies key problems that hindered CYL efficiency and turned to be the sources of its suspension at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. The second part focuses on CYL membership and recruitment policies and identifies the factors that contributed significantly to the CYL's failure of dynamically responding to the changing political conditions and of fully implementing Maoist policies. It also attempts to assess the extent of the impact of class policy and ambiguous official signals on the recruitment process and, ultimately, on youth.

## 1. THE OFFICIAL PROMINENCE OF POLITICS IN CYL'S WORK

During the Cultural Revolution, the CYL turned to be a target of serious attack: in June 1966 the Beijing Municipal Committee of the CYL was “reorganized” and its leading members were criticized for having actively followed the revisionist line of the former CCP Beijing Municipal Committee, headed by Peng Zhen, and for having opposed Mao Zedong Thought in youth work.<sup>14</sup> Paul Healy, in his study of the CYL in the Maoist era, has observed that the ultimate failure of the Maoist faction to control effectively the CYL and the replacement of the CYL by Red Guard organizations in the summer 1966 may be explained by the many problems and obstructions found in the League’s political work in the period leading up to the CR (1963-66). The CYL, in other words, failed to implement the policies of the new Maoist offensive launched at the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eight CCP CC in September 1962 and to “place politics first”.<sup>15</sup> My purpose in this section is to further investigate the CYL work in the realm of political education movements, and to explore the way in which the performance of the League may have deviated on some points from the Maoist line.

### 1.1. The emphasis on class struggle and class education

At the Tenth Plenum of the Eight CCP CC in September 1962, after having partially withdrawn from the political scene for a few years, Mao Zedong tried to regain his dominance within the party, by launching a new political offensive and reassessing the centrality of class struggle in the socialist society. Political retrenchment policies, carried out during the early 60s under the responsibility of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping (moderate reforms such as a partial return to private farming and a relaxation in cultural life), lax discipline among local party leaders, in conjunction with the spectre of “revisionism” encouraged by the developments in the Soviet Union, impelled Mao to warn the Party not to forget class struggle (*qianwang bu yao wangji jieji douzheng*). In his view, under socialism, classes and class struggle necessarily exist and the capitalist class attempts a restoration of its system. Moreover, in the light of what he observed in the Soviet Union, the party, originally pure in revolutionary spirit, was showing signs of being corrupted by its own exercise of power, CCP and government officials were already being seduced by the privileges of power and had lost their revolutionary fervour. In late, 1962 Mao Zedong launched the Socialist education movement

---

<sup>14</sup> “Mao Zedong sixiang yongyuan shi gongqingtuan de zuigao zhishi” (The Thought of Mao Zedong will forever be the highest directive of the CYL), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, June 16, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Paul M. Healy, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

so as to bring about both a radical social transformation through existing Party and state institutions and a purification campaign to advance proletarian ideology and combat bourgeois ideology.

The new campaign, which was launched on a national basis in May 1963, generally, aimed at opposing bureaucratization, reversing socio-economic policies perceived by Mao as “revisionist” and revitalizing a collectivistic spirit within the Party and in society at large. In Mao’s search to “continue the revolution”, youth received special attention, as it was the time for a new generation of Party members to replace the old guard and guarantee a revolutionary future. During the Tenth plenary session of the Eight CCP CC, Mao Zedong said that it was necessary to carry out a profound class education among young people: “we have to educate youth, otherwise our country may go on the wrong side” (*yao hao hao jiaoyu qingnian ren, fouze women de guojia hui zou xiang fanmian*).<sup>16</sup> Since youth had not experienced the Revolution before 1949, they had to temper themselves in the crucible of revolutionary struggle, “taking class struggle as the main subject” (*yi jieji douzheng wei gang*).

The concept of the inevitability of continuous class struggle for many years to come, as it was stressed at the Tenth plenum of Eight CCP CC, was subsequently echoed at the Eight plenum of the Third CYL CC held in Beijing from December 1962 to 11 January 1963. The League plenum considered Mao’s theory on class struggle in the period of “transition to communism” as the League’s “strategic task of a long-range program” (*bainian daji de zhanlue renwu*), which would have strengthened socialist education and the practice of class struggle among youth on a long term basis.<sup>17</sup> The plenum delineated the League’s tasks for the future: to train youth in the revolution of the proletariat and in the discipline through practical struggle; to educate youth to arduous struggle, to dig into practice, to learn from good examples, and to serve the construction of socialism; and finally to let young people support the direction of communism forever and uphold the red banner of Mao Zedong Thought, and to make them the good students and soldiers of Mao Zedong. Class education and class struggle were not restricted to one generation but, rather, to several generations in the future. Only through class education as a fundamental component of communist education, young people would have achieved a correct political orientation, enhanced their class consciousness, supported the revolution and become the successors of the revolutionary cause.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence, from 1963 to the launching of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, political education was increasingly stressed by the CYL and a series of utopian political campaigns such as the “learn from Lei Feng” campaign, the movement to study Mao Zedong Works, the campaign to “learn from

---

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Wang Wei’s speech at the Eight Plenum of the Third CYL CC on December 20, 1962. See *Tuan de wenjian huibian* (Collection of documents of the CYL), 1963, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> “Guanyu gongqingtuan san jie ba zhong quanwei qingkuang de baogao” (Report on the situation of the Eight Plenum of the Third CYL CC), in *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1963, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

the PLA”, the Socialist Education Movement and the subsequent cultivation of “revolutionary successors”, aiming at revolutionizing youth by promoting class education, received constant attention in the Youth League’s publications.

## 1.2. The CYL and the Socialist education movement

In order to help young people receive a revolutionary education, the CYL had to organize them during political campaigns and lead them in the class struggle. Through the participation in the Socialist education movement, youth received a profound class education. As reported by the committee of the Guangxi autonomous region in a document endorsed by the CYL CC in May 1963, the methods generally used to educate those young people sent, for example, to the people’s communes to enforce the Socialist education movement were: listen to the complaints of the peasants through the establishment of mass meetings by League branches, check commune’s accounts, make comparisons with the old society, learn through examples, set up an advanced model for emulation and propagandise it, and revive the educational system consisting in League classes aimed at strengthening the knowledge of the League constitution and its glorious history.<sup>19</sup> In particular, in unfolding the Socialist education movement the league organization was required to make extensive use of the “four histories” (*si shi*) considered as a fundamental part of class education among youth. The “four histories”, which was made a compulsory political subject for youth, referred to the histories of villages, people’s communes, factories and families (*cun shi, gongshe shi, guang shi, jia shi*) and was aimed at carrying forward the work of educating youth in the history of class struggle by relying on the working class and the poor and lower-middle peasants, and the work of keeping the “family records” (*jiapu*) of the proletariat going generation after generation.<sup>20</sup> As a former participant sent to a State Cotton Factory to write a history of the factory recalls, “writing a history about capitalist excesses and proletarian sufferings was expected to give us a deeper understanding of the class struggle”<sup>21</sup>. Investigation on the “family history” was an important part of the education movement. A report of Chengyang League committee (Shaanxi province) on organizing students for investigation of “family records”, endorsed by the CYL CC in June 1963, provides information on how “family records” investigation was generally carried on in the no. 1 middle school. According to this report, due to the lack of knowledge and experience about class and class struggle among some students, the school party branch with the support of the League Committee decided to carry out the “family records” investigation movement among

---

<sup>19</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1963, pp. 87-95 (especially pp. 90-94).

<sup>20</sup> See for example, *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1963, p. 185-186.

<sup>21</sup> Feng Jicai, *Ten Years of Madness: Oral Histories of China’s Cultural Revolution*, San Francisco, China Books & Periodicals, 1996, p. 103.

students from poor and lower-middle peasants family background. In particular, this investigation started with a meeting for students and teachers during which the secretary of the school party branch presented a report indicating the main significance and the methods of the investigation movement. A discussion organized by the League committee followed. Afterwards, the students interviewed their fathers and collected data. After investigation the group came back to the school, wrote an investigation report while studying the main works of Mao Zedong, so as to look at the sufferings of their own family in the light of the class struggle and to use the class standpoint of Marxism-Leninism to analyse family records. The League committee also organized the students to pay a visit to exhibitions on the comparison between the old and the new society, and to the museum of the houses of poor peasants and landlord holdings. After the visit, the League committee gathered the students for discussion. Furthermore, the League committee supported the school in organizing exhibitions of the family records investigations, which presented tables of statistics of the data collected on the family records and further underlined the comparison between the old and the new society. Through this investigation movement, youth were supposed to further understand the history of exploitation of the working people in the old society, to recognize the sweetness of the present days and to raise their class consciousness.<sup>22</sup> As the report of the Heilongjiang League committee on the socialist education movement in the *sifang* production brigade of the *sifang* people's commune in the Zhaodong county showed, besides students from poor and lower middle peasants family, the League also strengthened the education of the children of landlord and rich peasants through the movement of "family records" in order to encourage them to take a firm stand on the part of the proletariat exploited in the old society and "to draw a clear line of demarcation from their family" (*he jiating huaqing jiexian*).<sup>23</sup>

### 1.3. Main developments in the Movement to study Mao Zedong Works

Launched as a mass movement in the summer 1958 when the CYL CC passed the "Resolution about organizing youth in the study of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Works" (*guanyu zuzhi guangda qingnian xuexi makesi lienin zhuyi, xuexi mao zedong zhuzuo de jueyi*), the movement to study Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Works actually came into prominence since 1963.<sup>24</sup> The movement was strengthened not only by the 1963 publication of the *Diary of Lei Feng* and by the Lei Feng emulation campaign<sup>25</sup>, but also by the heavy involvement of the People's Liberation Army

---

<sup>22</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1963, pp. 101-102.

<sup>23</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1963, pp. 103-113 (in particular p. 109).

<sup>24</sup> Zheng Guang, *Zhongguo qingnian yundong liushinian (1919-1979)* (The Chinese youth movement in 60 years), Beijing, Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1990, pp. 510-511.

<sup>25</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1963, p. 194; pp. 151-154 and p. 137. After his premature death, the soldier Lei Feng was soon held up by the CYL CC as the model every CYL branches had to study and, soon after, extolled by Maoists as the

(PLA) -- politicised by Lin Piao as a force totally committed to the support of Mao Zedong -- in the Maoist propaganda campaign. Lin Piao's efforts to carry out the deification of the words and deeds of Mao had a great impact on the development of the study movement. As Mao's personality cult and dogmatism were taken to an extreme, the movement to study the works of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Works turned into the movement to study Mao's works and his quotations, becoming more and more narrowed.<sup>26</sup>

As a response to this development, in May 1964 the CYL CC endorsed the report of the propaganda department of the Shaanxi Provincial Committee of the CYL entitled "Some questions that deserve attention in the current organization of youth in the study of Mao Zedong Works" (*dangqian zuzhi qingnian xuexi mao zhuxi zhuzuo zhong ji ge zhide zhuyi de wenti*) noting, among other things, the emergence of simplification (*jiandanhua*), formalism (*xingshi zhuyi*) and coercion in the League daily work.<sup>27</sup> In the official comment of the document, the CYL CC indicated that the mobilization of young people to study Mao's works represented a basic and long-term task of ideological edification to be carried out depending on youth's free will, supporting their requests and taking care of their enthusiasm. The CYL CC also stated that coercion were not adequate and called the organization to keep a clear head in organizing young people. Moreover, it requested a complete arrangement of youth's work including political theory and technical and cultural studies.<sup>28</sup>

In August 1965, the Secretariat of the PCC CC listened to a work report by the Secretariat of the CYL CC, and political leaders, such as Deng Xiaoping and Peng Zhen, exposed several important opinions concerning the development of the movement to study Mao's works. In particular, they reassessed the importance of organizing young people in the study movement according to the principle of one's free will, preventing compulsion and societal coercion. Moreover, they suggested that the content of the study had to be broadened so as to combine fields of knowledge such as natural sciences with political theories and the works of Mao Zedong.<sup>29</sup> These instructions which were transmitted to the League organization, by suggesting that political activities should not be so demanding so as to interfere with study time, rest periods, technical

---

embodiment of the loyalty of the ordinary Chinese. What the short life of Lei Feng left to the people was not only the exemplary achievements but also, and most importantly, his precious spirit which among other things, included a deep sense of love for the party and socialism and a complete faith and devotion toward Mao's Thought [Liu Jucai (ed.), *Zhongguo xue lei feng huodong 30 nian jianshi* (30 years of the history of the Lei Feng study movement in China), Beijing, Hongqi chubanshe, 1991, pp. 14-15]. The Lei Feng emulation campaign, essential to the study, application and propagation of the Thought of Mao Zedong, influenced the development of the Movement to study Mao's Works.

<sup>26</sup> Zheng Guang, *op. cit.*, pp. 517-518.

<sup>27</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, pp. 188-192.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. «Dangdai Zhongguo» congshu bianji weiyuanhui (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo de qingnian he gongqingtuan* (Youth and the Communist Youth League in contemporary China), vol. 1, Beijing, Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1998, pp. 69-70; Zheng Guang, *op. cit.*, pp. 518-519.



learning and so on, came as a response to the unfolding of the personality cult produced by Lin Piao and thus may be interpreted as a slight deviation from the Maoist line at that time. Indeed, in June 1966 a *Zhongguo qingnian bao*'s article blamed the League, in particular its Beijing Committee, for having used the words "simplification" to criticize the development of the political movement, and accused the organization for having pursued a revisionist line.<sup>30</sup>

#### **1.4. The Lijiazhuang branch and the CYL as a school for the study of Mao Zedong Thought**

By stipulating that the League's basic task was "to educate the young people in Marxism-Leninism and the thought of Mao", and, thus, "to put ideological work in the first place and persist in the line of upholding proletarian ideology and eliminating bourgeois ideology", the new CYL constitution passed at the Ninth Congress of the CYL in June 1964 reflected the official prominence of politics at that time. This aspect was also reflected in the approval of the decision to make the "study of the Thought of Mao Zedong an essential part in "revolutionizing youth".<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, as insightful readings of the newspaper *Zhongguo qingnian bao* and the magazine *Zhongguo qingnian* have revealed, by mid-1965 the CYL was no longer described as a "school for the study of communism" but rather as a "school for the study of Mao Zedong Thought"<sup>32</sup>.

In order to turn the League into a school for the study of Mao's Thought, in August 1965 the CYL CC decided to popularize the experience of the Lijiazhuang League branch (Shangdong province).<sup>33</sup> The subsequent on-the-spot meeting convened by the CYL CC in December 1965 was aimed at summing up and exchanging the experience of Lijiazhuang in organizing young people to study Mao's Works and was taken as an opportunity to emphasize that in organizing and leading the mass movement particular attention was to be paid on the principles of proceeding from practice as well as on the mass line based on one's own initiative. Since 1963, the Lijiazhuang League branch had organized young people to study Mao's works, to serve the people and to love fervently the community, obtaining positive results in terms of youth's activism and consciousness. This branch was held up as a model for other League branches in creatively "learning and applying Mao Zedong Thought" (*huoxue huoyong mao zedong sixiang*), as it placed the study of Mao's work above all

---

<sup>30</sup> Dong Fangtao, "Gongqingtuan shi huoxue huoyong Mao Zedong sixiang de xuexiao" (the CYL is the school of learning and applying Mao Zedong Thought), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, June 23, 1966.

<sup>31</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, Vol. 1, pp. 5-8.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, the editorial "Wei ba mei ge tuan zhibu bancheng xuexi Mao Zedong sixiang de xuexiao er nuli" (Turning every League branch into a school for the study of Mao Zedong Thought), *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 11, June 2, 1965, pp. 4-5.

<sup>33</sup> "Gongqingtuan zhongyang guanyu tuiguang Lijiazhuang tuan zhibu zuzhi qingnian xuexi Mao zhuxi zhuzuo jingyan de tongzhi" (CYL CC's notification to popularize the experience of Lijiazhuang League branch in organizing youth to study Chairman Mao's works), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, August 29, 1965, p. 1.

other League works, arming youth with Mao's Thought and consequently turning them into revolutionaries.<sup>34</sup>

In April 1966, the task of "placing politics first" (*tuchu zhengzhi*) was given priority. The Third Plenum of the Ninth CYL CC approved the "Resolution concerning a further and better development of the movement to study Mao's works among the youth of all the country" (*guanyu zai quanguo qingnian zhong geng hao de kaizhan xuexi mao zhuxi zhuzuo yundong de jueyi*) indicating that the most important task was to make the League the school for learning and applying with full vigour the Thought of Mao Zedong, thus, leading youth to study Mao's works, to listen to his words and to walk alongside the CCP. In other words, the League had to show an absolute faith and worship in Mao's Thought and make it the only instrument of its work.<sup>35</sup> During the same month, the task of "putting politics first" received a constant attention in the national newspapers: a *Zhongguo qingnian bao* editorial stated, for instance, that only through putting Mao's Thought in command, the League may be said to adopt and support the correct political orientation.<sup>36</sup> As stated by a *Renmin ribao* editorial appeared in April 22, 1966, putting politics first meant putting Mao Zedong's thinking first with the purpose of promoting the revolutionization of the ideology.<sup>37</sup> The experience of Lijiazhuang in creatively studying and applying Mao Zedong's works was again pushed forward at that time. As a result, during the same month the CYL CC held in Beijing "the exposition of Lijiazhuang League branch in organizing youth to study Mao's works" which exhibited for 40 days, further popularizing and promoting this branch's experience.<sup>38</sup>

### **1.5. Main problems and the failure of the CYL to respond to Maoist requests.**

The fact that in April 1966 the emulation of Lijiazhuang was further pushed forward and resulted in the exposition mentioned above, may suggest that the movement to study Mao's works was yet to be efficiently carried out. Indeed, besides the successes achieved -- first and foremost in Lijiazhuang, Shandong province, but also in other league branches such as the Pujiang electric meter factory in Shanghai<sup>39</sup> -- problems were hampering the development of the League's political work. The weaknesses were to be made explicit during the Third plenary session of the Ninth CYL CC held in April 1966. Although the plenary session affirmed the achievements of the League in

---

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> See Zheng Guang, *op. cit.*, p. 520-521 and *Peking Review*, vol. 9, no. 21, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> "Quan tuan dou yao renzhen xuexi Lijiazhuang tuan zhibu" (The League has to study conscientiously the Lijiazhuang League branch), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, April 23, 1966, p. 1

<sup>37</sup> "In Putting Politics First, One Must Constantly Put Mao Tse-tung's Thinking in Command", translated and published in *Peking Review*, vol. 9, no. 20 (May 13, 1966), pp. 43-45.

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. "Quan tuan dou yao renzhen xuexi Lijiazhuang tuan zhibu", *cit.*; "Xiang Lijiazhuang tuan zhibu xue shenme?" (What is the content of the study of Lijiazhuang branch?), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, April 28, 1966, p. 1. See also Zheng Guang, *op. cit.*, p. 516.

<sup>39</sup> On the experience of this factory's League branch see the editorial "Yong Mao Zedong sixiang fadong qingnian" (Using Mao Zedong Thought to mobilize youth), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, March 30, 1965, p. 1.

giving prominence to politics, however, it also noted a big gap as compared with the work of the PLA. According to a *Zhongguo qingnian bao* article, one of the main causes for this weakness was League cadres' lack of a deep understanding and knowledge of the class struggle and the struggle between two lines in the period of socialism.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, cadres' lack of proper activism had constituted a major problem often reported in the official documents since 1963. In 1964, for example, it was reported that some cadres were so busy that could hardly find time to study and apply Mao's works and thinking, failing to recognize the significance of such study.<sup>41</sup> The cadres' lack of proper understanding had been officially reported also with regard to the Lei Feng emulation campaign.<sup>42</sup> For instance, a *Zhongguo qingnian bao*'s article published in June 15, 1963 reported the case of some basic-level cadres working in the Heilongjiang province who showed a scarce understanding of the movement's content and aim, lagging behind the masses and negatively influencing youth activism.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, the Beijing Municipal Committee of the CYL was blamed for having shown an attitude of obstruction toward higher directives.<sup>44</sup> Two points were mentioned by the official reports at that time: first, the Municipal Committee of the CYL had not enforced the CYL CC's request to organize an exhibition on the deeds of Lei Feng; second, it avoided to popularize the experience of the Lijiazhuang branch as requested by the CYL CC. While in August 1965 the CYL CC decided to propagate the experience of the Lijiazhuang League branch, the Beijing Municipal Committee of the CYL was indeed propagating its own model, the League branch of the Nanzhai production brigade.<sup>45</sup> In October 4, 1965 the editorial "Learn from Nanzhai and create four good", which was published in the local newspaper *Beijing ribao*, propagated the Nanzhai League branch instead of the Lijiazhuang failing to mention the important task of putting the study of Mao Zedong Thought first. This editorial's content was later interpreted as an attempt to deviate from the decision of the CYL CC with regard to popularize the experience of the Lijiazhuang League branch whose core was about placing the study of Mao's works above all other league activities.<sup>46</sup> Both cases were explicitly mentioned during the first enlarged session of the new Beijing Municipal Committee of the CYL held in July 1966. They constituted major evidences of the revisionist line

---

<sup>40</sup> "Yiding yao ba gongqingtuan bancheng huoxue huoyong Mao Zedong sixiang de xuexiao" (The League has to be transformed into a school to study and apply Mao's Thought), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, April 4, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, p. 190.

<sup>42</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1963, pp. 139-143 (especially p. 141-142) and p. 195.

<sup>43</sup> "Tuan zhibu ganbu daitou xuexi" (Basic-level branches' cadres take the initiative in the study), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, June 15, 1963, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Dong Fangtao, *cit.*

<sup>45</sup> Gongqingtuan Beijing shi weiyuanhui (ed.), *Beijing qingnian yundong jishi 1919-2004* (Documentation on Beijing youth movement, 1919-2004), Beijing, Renmin chubanshe, 2004, pp. 69-70.

<sup>46</sup> Paul M. Healy, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

pursued by the former committee which suppressed the movement to study Mao's works, thus, failing to appreciate the task of "putting politics first".<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> "Gongqingtuan yongjiu de toudeng renwu" (The major task of the league forever), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, July 26, 1966, p. 1.

## 2. CYL'S RECRUITMENT AND MEMBERSHIP

Western scholars have observed that the downfall of the CYL in 1966 and the attack from Mao and his supporters were partly rooted in the League's recruitment pattern.<sup>48</sup> Precisely, James Townsend has argued that, even though the massive recruitment effort carried out in 1965 was an attempt to respond to Maoist requests for revolutionizing Chinese youth by reversing a trend that was leading to the League inefficiency and bureaucratisation, relaxed admission standards and resistance toward a real rejuvenation of the League leadership at all levels predicted the failure for any attempt to change radically the character of the League as the instrument of Maoist policy. The substance of criticism lodged by Maoist against the CYL's top leaders during the Cultural Revolution was the League identification with the prevailing policy of the Liu-Deng leadership group through the dominance of Hu Yaobang who was accused to have undermined the class nature of the League and stressed organization at the expenses of class analysis and ideology.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, James Townsend has also suggested that the fact that in August 1966 the CYL was rapidly replaced as an organizational weapon by Red Guard organizations and that Mao was reluctant to attack publicly the CYL as a whole in that period may indicate that the recruitment drive in 1965 accomplished something for it did provide a large numbers of youth the chance to participate to organized political activities and it did show the long-standing conflicts between senior and junior levels within the organization. According to this interpretation, some of the newly admitted youth, in that year, may have constituted a readily available core for the creation of Red Guard units.<sup>50</sup>

Proceeding from this perspective, my purpose here is to investigate the League recruitment pattern in the years immediately prior the Cultural Revolution in order to further understand problems and patterns of resistance encountered by the organization in that particular period. Particularly, I will focus on the recruitment process and the characteristics of members, two starting point in looking for signs of weakness in a mass organization such as the CYL, attempting a preliminary evaluation of the impact of class policy and of ambiguous official signals on the recruitment process and ultimately on youth.

---

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, James Townsend, *The Revolutionization of Chinese Youth*, *op. cit.*, p. 66 and Victor Funnell, *cit.*, pp. 105-130.

<sup>49</sup> Shelah Gilbert Leader, "The Communist Youth League and the Cultural Revolution", *Asian Survey*, XIV, no. 8, August 1974, pp. 702-704.

<sup>50</sup> James Townsend, *The Revolutionization of Chinese Youth*, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

## 2.1. Introduction to CYL's membership and pattern of recruitment

The quality and distribution of League membership has always been a matter of concern for the political leadership since the early 50s. During the decade following the founding of the PRC, the CYL experienced a rapid membership expansion, from 3 millions in 1950 to 25 millions members in 1959, with a major recruitment effort during the co-operative movement in 1955 and 1956 when the league came to represent 17 per cent of all country's youth.<sup>51</sup> Constant expansion was determinant to fulfil its role of party's assistant by mobilizing the masses in all the political and economic campaigns and to carry out the task specified by the party.

However, the pattern of recruitment was never satisfactory not only because of bureaucratic tendencies and occasional lowering of qualifications for league members, but also because of an uneven distribution of the membership, which was relatively weak in rural areas. The membership had always been remarkably high in urban areas within those institutions mainly composed of young people under the age of 25, notably schools (high schools and universities), factories and the armed forces. Thus, for instance, in 1956, 57.3 per cent of China's university students were League members<sup>52</sup>; in 1953, the percentage of league members at Beijing University was 42 per cent and became 78 per cent in 1957.<sup>53</sup> In Beijing Xicheng district of the 3005 new members recruited in 1962, 2761 were students.<sup>54</sup> Such a high percentage of members among students may be explained not only through the concentration of young people in schools but also through the fact that students were among those captive groups particularly exposed to various forms of organizational pressure to join the League especially in high schools where league membership was given, in certain periods, special weight when it came to admission at a higher level of the educational ladder.<sup>55</sup> Upward educational mobility generally depended on three criteria along which students developed personal mobility strategy: "class origin" (*jieji chushen*), "political behaviour" (*zhengzhi biaoqian*) and academic achievement. Recruitment into the CYL actually signified nothing but moral achievement and would have allowed individuals to accumulate a "good political record", important for future advancement especially with the change in political atmosphere after 1963.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, it is important to mention here that, besides the influence it has in terms of educational promotion, the biggest attraction for youths was that admission into the CYL would have allowed individuals to

---

<sup>51</sup> See Victor Funnell, *cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>52</sup> «Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian» bianji bu (ed.), *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian, 1949-1981* (Yearbook of China's Education, 1949-1981), Beijing, Zhongguo dabaiké quanshu chubanshe, 1984, p. 427.

<sup>53</sup> Gongqingtuan Beijing daxue weiyuanhui (ed.), *Gongqingtuan zai Beida* (The CYL at Beijing University), Beijing, Renmin chubanshe, 2004, pp. 363-364.

<sup>54</sup> Beijing shi Xicheng quzhi (ed.), *Beijing shi Xicheng quzhi* (Beijing Xicheng district gazetteer), Beijing, Beijing chubanshe, 2001, p. 235.

<sup>55</sup> See for example Anita Chan, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>56</sup> See Susan Shirk, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-83; middle school life in the period 1960-1980 is described by Jonathan Unger, *op. cit.*

cultivate the necessary qualities to deserve party membership. Therefore, many youths eagerly went after admission into the CYL in order to prepare themselves to become political activists and enjoy political rewards. A former CYL member and Red Guard leader with these words recalled his experience:

We League members were the most active students who played a leading role in all activities. Everyone expected us to set an example in department, study and political activism; all of us were proud of our membership. We had hopes of entering the Party as soon as possible and knew that this would depend upon the record we made while in the Young Communist League. [...]<sup>57</sup>

Besides the deficiency in terms of distribution of the membership, in an organization dedicated to youth the question of age and the excessive number of over-age members, including many cadres, has been a major problem for the CYL since the mid-50s.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, a unique feature of the Youth League was the temporary nature of its membership which, at least theoretically, produced a constant turnover of members: 15 and 25 years were the lower and upper age limits within which a person was eligible for admission, with the age of 28 being the acceptable extension limit for those appointed to leading position (League cadres).<sup>59</sup> However, in practice, the CYL was stuffed with several overage members. For instance, in 1957, out of a total membership of 23 million, 2.8 million were over the upper age limit of 25, of whom one million, mostly cadres, were over 28.<sup>60</sup> In 1962, of all the League cadres in Beijing municipality, 33.7 per cent were over 25 and 6.2 percent were over 28 years.<sup>61</sup>

This phenomenon was partly due to the decisive influence of the CCP leadership on the CYL which was exercised through the placement of party members in leading organs and specialized posts at all levels, regardless of age, but also to the dual membership (League and Party) of many young cadres which enhanced their standing in the League, allowing them to retain their position long after their League membership had expired. Moreover, in an organization with a shifting membership, over-age cadres were partly retained in order to prevent the disruptive effects of the turnover of the membership on the organization and ensure a politically stable and experienced leadership.

The problems faced by the League in terms of recruitment pattern were becoming urgent as the total League membership began to stagnate since the end of the 1950s. Despite the lack of

---

<sup>57</sup> Gordon A. Bennett and Ronald N. Montaperto, *Red Guard: The political biography of Dai Hsiao-ai*, New York, Doubleday Company, 1971, p. 18.

<sup>58</sup> Victor Funnell, *cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>59</sup> See Art. 1, 1957 and 1964 League Constitution in *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1957, pp. 59-60 and 1964, vol. 1, p. 63.

<sup>60</sup> James Townsend, *The Revolutionization of Chinese Youth*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>61</sup> Gongqingtuan Beijing shi weiyuanhui (ed.), *Beijing qingnian yundong jishi 1919-2004*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

reliable and exact figures in terms of total membership for the year 1964, a report of a CYL Central Committee' work meeting held at the beginning of 1964 reported a national membership of only 22 millions, including 7 millions of overage members.<sup>62</sup> The organization was clearly confronting with the risk of becoming less representative of the segment of the population it was supposed to organize and lead; the membership crisis was therefore to undermine its function as a "linking bridge" between the party and the broad masses of youth.

## **2.2. The launching of the membership drive and the issue of cadres rejuvenation**

The various problems and the crisis faced by the CYL in terms of recruitment pattern became urgent as the party's "cultivation of revolutionary successors" (*peiyang geming jiebanren*) campaign called for the revolutionization of Chinese youth. The task of "cultivating successors" was to be carried out by bringing in enthusiastic new blood into the League particularly in rural areas, getting close to the masses and overcoming the problem of over-age members by recruiting especially youth under 20 years, as stressed by an important editorial published in *Zhongguo qingnian bao* on April 2, 1964 which laid out the CYL's task and hinted at its crisis.<sup>63</sup>

The question of League membership and recruitment was at the top of the agenda in 1964. The importance of actively carrying out the recruitment of new young members was stated in a report of League CC work meeting held in Beijing in March 1964. The report recognized the importance of rejuvenating the local leadership according to the policy of "making a bold selection, integrating the new with the old cadres, and retaining the mainstay of the cadres for the sake of training the new ones" (*dadan xuanfan, xinlao jiehe, baoliu gudan, yizi shushou*). Far from suggesting a replacement of all the older cadres, this policy was rather directed at training and selecting young cadres while at the same time retaining the backbone cadres, as a response to Mao's call to bring up successors to the revolution without undermining the organizational cohesion in a shifting membership.<sup>64</sup> As stated in the summary report of the work meeting presented by Hu Keshi, the need for expansion of League membership, particularly urgent in the countryside, responded not only to organizational requirement but also to political and ideological demands. The work of training "revolutionary successors" clearly demanded a great accent on youth and required the promotion of a high political and class consciousness.<sup>65</sup>

The emphasis and urgency in membership expansion were also reflected in the revised League's Constitution adopted in 1964 that paved the way for a major recruitment effort by

---

<sup>62</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, p. 90.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in James Townsend, *The Revolutionization of Chinese Youth*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>64</sup> See in *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, pp. 128-131 (especially p. 131). See also the summing report by Hu Keshi in *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, pp. 123-126 (especially p. 125).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.



stipulating, for example, that an applicant needed a recommendation from only one League member instead of two as indicated in the previous one.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, in his well-known report to the Ninth National Congress of the CYL, entitled “For the Revolutionization of Our Youth” (*wei wo guo qingnian geminghua er douzheng*), Hu Yaobang indicated that in order to revolutionize Chinese youth, to inject new blood into the league and to strengthen its fighting power, a major recruitment effort was to be carried on in the coming 2/3 years. The report went on by explicitly mentioning that the number of the league members below the age of 20 at that moment was too small.<sup>67</sup> The emphasis on recruitment and expansion, especially in the countryside, was to be carried out in relation not only to the start of the Third Five Year Plan in 1966 but also to the implementation of the policy’s guidelines of class struggle, production struggle and scientific experiments, the so-called “three great revolutionary movements” (*san da geming yundong*) advanced by Mao in 1963, necessary in order to prevent bureaucratism and revisionism.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, in 1965 the CYL launched a membership drive which resulted in a massive inflow of new members: the total membership of the CYL prior to the Cultural Revolution has been reported to be about 40 million<sup>69</sup>, of whom 8.5 million had been recruited during 1965, setting a record number of new recruits in only one year.<sup>70</sup> Efforts to overcome the problems related to the distribution of membership led to an increase of the national rural average from 13 per cent in 1964 to 25 per cent in 1966.<sup>71</sup> In response to some League cadres’ suggestions on the priority of membership consolidation rather than expansion in strengthening the organization and its work efficiency, a *Zhongguo qingnian bao* editorial argued that expansion and consolidation had to go hand in hand. The issue was related to the relationship between the advanced character and the mass character of the League and the editorial made it clear that they were manifested not only in the quality but also in the quantity of members, thus being compatible with one another. It, thus, responded to those cadres who over-emphasized the advanced character of the League and neglected its mass character by stating that

---

<sup>66</sup> Art. 4, 1964 and 1957 League Constitution in *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1957, p. 61 and 1964, vol. 1, p. 64. See also Gongqingtuan zhongyang xuanzhuabu (ed.), *Zhongguo gongchanzhuyi qingniantuan tuanzhang jianghua* (An introduction to the Constitution of the CYL), Beijing, Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1965, pp. 47-51

<sup>67</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, p. 34.

<sup>68</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, pp. 24-31; See also the editorial “Jiaoyu qingnian yi dai youyuan dang gemingpai” (To teach a generation of youth to be revolutionary forever), *Renmin ribao*, July, 8 1964, reproduced in *Zhongguo gongchanzhuyi qingniantuan di jiu ci quanguo daibiaodahui wenxian* (Documents of the Ninth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Youth League), Beijing, Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1964, pp. 109-113; “Ba fazhan gongzuo fang zai dangqian tuan de zuzhi jianshi de di yi wei” (Place membership expansion in the first position in current CYL organizational construction), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, October 9, 1965, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Victor Funnell, *cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>70</sup> Han Xinfu and Ceng Jingzhong (eds.), *20 shiji Zhongguo dashidian 1901–2000* (Encyclopedia of China’s major events in the Twentieth Century, 1901-2000), Chengdu, Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2002, p. 687.

<sup>71</sup> Paul M. Healy, *op. cit.*, p. 66; Victor Funnell, *cit.*, p. 128.

[...] only when there is a certain number of Leaguers to represent an appropriate proportion of Leaguers of the right League-age among youth, will it be possible for the CYL organizations to establish ties with the masses in general and to work on youths effectively. If there are few Leaguers, then even if they are very fine in quality, they can hardly become staunch hardcores for rallying youths, and the CYL organizations cannot have a mass character or genuine advanced character. [...]<sup>72</sup>

With regard to the issue of cadres' rejuvenation, in August 1965, the PCC CC Secretariat requested the CYL to further carry out a real rejuvenation of the League cadres.<sup>73</sup> By the end of 1965, many over-age cadres were criticized and removed and inexperienced young people were promoted into basic-level cadre positions. For example, by October 1965, 53 per cent of the total number of League full time cadres in Beijing were rectified, causing a decline of the average age from 29.3 to 26.3.<sup>74</sup>

However, evidences show that the rate of leadership rejuvenation process in the two years following the Ninth Congress of the CYL has been quite slow, especially the leadership rectification above the county level. By the end of 1965, for instance, among 24 provinces and municipalities, rectified secretaries of League provincial and municipal committees occupied a percentage of 28,9 per cent, with a declining average age of only 1.3 compared to the period preceding the Ninth Congress. Precisely, by the end of 1965, the national average age of secretaries of committees at provincial and municipal level was still 39 years, at the city level was 34.3 years, at the county level 33 years and at the commune level was 29 years.<sup>75</sup> Official response to this phenomenon came from the League through an editorial published in *Zhongguo qingnian bao* on December 11, 1965. The editorial made it clear that, since the young cadres, now in their 20s, had been nurtured in the Thought of Mao Zedong since their childhood, having acquired considerable experience and a high political and ideological consciousness, their promotions were essential for the "revolutionary cause". However, by indicating the example of the League Committee of Dongcheng district in Beijing municipality in which 15 new young cadres were supervised and trained by 3 "veteran backbone cadres", the editorial went on, stating that in order to become

---

<sup>72</sup> "Ba fazhan gongzuo fang zai dangqian tuan de zuzhi jianshi de di yi wei" *cit.* Quoted also in Paul M. Healy, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>73</sup> «Dangdai Zhongguo» congshu bianji weiyuanhui (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo de qingnian he gongqingtuan*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 37-38.

<sup>74</sup> Gongqingtuan Beijing shi weiyuanhui (ed.), *Qingchun de zuji — Beijing qingnian yundong dashiji 1919-2002* (The path of youth: a record of major events in the Beijing youth movement, 1919-2002), Beijing, Renmin chubanshe, 2002, p. 127.

<sup>75</sup> «Dangdai Zhongguo» congshu bianji weiyuanhui (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo de qingnian he gongqingtuan*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 39.

suitable leaders, young cadres would still have to accept guidance and training from older cadres.<sup>76</sup> The content of the editorial shows that in deciding the League priorities as between organizational cohesion and revolutionary élan, the general idea was that acquisition of practical experience under close supervision would have strengthened the organization and the revolutionary cause simultaneously, thus satisfying the demands about the cultivation of revolutionary successors and avoiding the risk of giving organizational responsibility to untried personnel. James Townsend has indeed observed that most of those who were promoted to positions of responsibility were already serving as cadres, thus not being truly inexperienced.

In his early comprehensive study of the process and issues confronting Chinese youth prior to 1966 based upon the youth publication *Zhongguo qingnian*, Townsend discussed the dualism inherent to the idea of cultivating revolutionary successors, pointing to two different interpretations of this slogan. According to his observation, one interpretation emphasized the word “revolutionary” referring to the recruitment of cadres who possessed Maoist attributes, while the other, by emphasizing the word “cultivation”, may have referred to the need of providing training and supervision in the development of leadership material. With regard to the case of the CYL recruitment campaign, he concluded that the action of senior cadres appeared to be guided by the second interpretation, which may have in fact justified the routinization of bureaucratic training and promotion.<sup>77</sup>

However, it was at the central level that a major leadership change took place at the CYL’ Ninth Congress in June 1964. In this occasion, 178 members and 74 alternate members were elected to the league CC<sup>78</sup>; among the 178 members, 142 were newly elected. At the First Plenum of the Ninth CYL CC held in July 1964, of the 29 members of the Standing Committee elected in 1957, only nine were re-elected and among the members of the Secretariat, 6 were newly admitted.<sup>79</sup> The fact that the new members were mostly basic League cadres and, comparatively, young and “progressive” coming from the ranks of the PLA has been interpreted not only as a response to the concern Mao Zedong had always showed regarding the age of cadres in the League CC, but also as

---

<sup>76</sup> “Jianjue de fangshou de tiba xinsheng liliang” (Resolutely and freely promote new blood), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, December 11, 1965, p. 1. The case of the League committee of Dongcheng district in Beijing municipality is also mentioned in Victor Funnell, *cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>77</sup> James Townsend, *The Revolutionization of Chinese Youth*, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>78</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, pp. 73-76.

<sup>79</sup> «Dangdai Zhongguo» congshu bianji weiyuanhui (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo de qingnian he gongqingtuan*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 38; Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu et al. (eds.), *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao (1921-1997)* (Materials on the organizational history of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1997), Beijing, Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2000, attached vol. 4, p. 23.

the evidence that this major personnel change aimed at cultivating successors and, mostly important, at consolidating the power-base of the Maoist faction within the League.<sup>80</sup>

However, notwithstanding this major leadership change at the national level, age difference between cadres at the higher levels and cadres at the lower levels persisted, with the central organs still dominated by middle-aged party members. Hu Yaobang, a middle-age man whose dominance of the League in the years 1952-66 was most probably derived non only from his high position within the party – he was elected to Party CC in 1956 – but also from his association with Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi who wished to give influential position of power to their supporters, is just a case in point in this respect.<sup>81</sup>

### **2.3. Implications of membership expansions: the emphasis on behaviour and its impact on youth.**

If, on the one hand, the recruitment campaign launched in 1965 mobilized large numbers of youth who had been previously kept out of organized political activities, on the other hand, the massive influx of new members relaxed admission standards, eventually altering the “advanced” nature of the League and the purity of its ranks. While in the period 1963-1964 effort to tighten up on political credentials of its members led to give priority to individuals’ “class origin” in League recruitment, in 1965, as recruitment intensified, children of “bad” family origin (youths from landlord, rich peasant and capitalist background) were allowed and even encouraged to join the League. Since the early 1965, a new national youth policy announced by key party leaders officially recognized the importance of “political behaviour” rather than of “class origin”. In the speech delivered by Peng Zhen (member of the CCP Politburo and Major of Beijing) to the Second Session of the Fourth Congress of the All-China Federation of Youth and to the Congress of All-China Students held in Beijing in January, the need to give priority to the behavioural criterion in the political evaluation of youth was emphasized.<sup>82</sup> In Shanghai, the complaints of many young people of bourgeois class background that in 1965 were allowed to criticize the League as having “a glass door, through which they can see but cannot pass” brought an official response in the spring of that

---

<sup>80</sup> Wang Hsueh-wen, *cit.*, p. 30. Paul M. Healy, *op. cit.*, p. 71; see also Mao Zedong’s speech delivered when he received the Presidium of the Second National Congress of the NDYL in 1953, “Gongqingtuan de gongzuo yao zhaogu qingnian de tedian” (The work of the CYL has to take care of the characteristics of youth) in Gongqingtuan zhongyang and zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.), *Mao Zedong Deng Xiaoping Jiang Zemin lun qingshaonian he qingshaonian gongzuo* (Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin’s talks on youth and youth work), Beijing, Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2003, pp. 96-102.

<sup>81</sup> For a record of the relationship between Hu Yaobang and Deng Xiaoping see Yang Zhongmei, *Hu Yaobang: A Chinese Biography*, Armonk, New York, M. E. Scarpe, 1988, pp. 113-115.

<sup>82</sup> See for example, Gongqingtuan Beijing shi weiyuanhui (ed.), *Beijing qingnian yundong jishi 1919-2004*, *op.cit.*, p. 228 and Zheng Guang, *op. cit.*, p. 537.

year.<sup>83</sup> As a consequence, the Second plenum of the Ninth Communist Youth League CC (March 29-April 19, 1965) relaxed the criterion of “class origin” in League recruitment and placed the priority on the role of the League in “uniting with and organizing the overwhelming majority of youth” (*ba jue da duoshu qingnian tuanjie he zuzhi qilai*), including those whose origins were not good.<sup>84</sup> In an article published in *Zhongguo qingnian* in May 1965 the meaning of the task “uniting with and organizing the overwhelming majority of youth”, quantified as over 95 per cent of youth, was further explained in terms of social composition of the League: a part from workers, poor and lower-middle peasants, and revolutionary young intellectuals, other classes, including the great majority of sons and daughters of the old exploiting classes who were demanding advance and had an active revolutionary spirit, were to be organized.<sup>85</sup> More importance was given to political performance, ideological stand and moral integrity of the applicant, with particular attention to individual willingness in rebelling against his/her class origin. Several editorials, articles and letters to the editors related to this issue were published during 1965 in youth journals and newspapers paying attention on the official party’s policy of “emphasis on behaviour” (*zhongzai biao xian*) as a major criterion for League admissions.<sup>86</sup> In line with Peng Zhen’s speech, in the same year statements of other party leaders indicated this change. In July 5, 1965, during an inspection visit in the army production corps (*shengchan jianshi bingtuan*) in the reclamation area of Shihezi in Xinjiang, Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi paid a visit to the educated youth (*zhishiqingnian* or *zhiqing*) who had been sent there to support the construction of the border areas. In that occasion Zhou Enlai, in line with the tolerant spirit of Peng Zhen’s speech, stated that children coming from exploiting classes or with problematic social relations had to be evaluated by considering their current performance and position since “one cannot choose one’s family, but one can choose one’s road” (*yi ge ren de chushen bu neng xuanze, dan qianxu shi keyi xuanze de*).<sup>87</sup> Moreover, in order to encourage individuals coming from a non-red class background, at the end of 1965, the PLA provided a new hero for emulation, Wang Jie, who, unlike Lei Feng came from a middle-class

---

<sup>83</sup> Lynn T. Whyte III, *Policies of Chaos: The Organizational Causes of Violence in China’s Cultural Revolution*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 198.

<sup>84</sup> See the text of the CYL Ninth CC Second Plenum’s Communiqué in *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 10, 1965, pp. 2-3 (especially p. 3) and Hu Keshi, “Gongqingtuan jiu jie er zhong quanhui de zongjie” (Summary of the second plenum of the 9th Congress of the CYL), in *Zhongguo qingnian yundong lishi wenjian xuanbian* (Collection of historical documents on China’s youth movement), neibu teaching materials, Zhongyang tuanxiao qingniantuan gongzuo jiaoyanshi, 1979, pp. 434-449.

<sup>85</sup> Gao Zehong, “Ba jue da duoshu qingnian tuanjie qilai” (Organize the overwhelming majority of youth), *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 10, 1965, pp. 4-5.

<sup>86</sup> See for example, *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, November 3, 1965, p. 3 and the editorial “Zhongzai biao xian shi dang de jieji zhengce” (Giving importance to the performance is the party’s class policy), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, September 9, 1965, p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> Liu Xiaomeng et al. (eds.), *Zhongguo zhiqing shidian* (Encyclopedia of China’s educated youth), Chengdu, Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1995, pp. 488-489. See also the editorial, “Chushen bu youyi, daolu ke xuanzi” (One cannot choose one’s family, but one can choose one’s road), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, July 27, 1965, p. 1.

family.<sup>88</sup> In Maoist China, “political behaviour” and “class origin” were two important criteria to evaluate the degree of a young person’s political record and activism, with the first reflecting the priority placed on attitudinal transformation and indoctrination of the proletarian values, and the second reflecting the socio-economically rooted “class line” (*jieji luxian*) which actually meant the possession of a “revolutionary” nature by virtue of one’s father “class status” (*jieji chengfen*). On these political criteria depended in the early and mid-60s the future prospects of urban Chinese youth, in terms of social and political upward mobility.

In the 60s, the Party leaders attempted to combine in practice the ideological definition of “class” as a question of behaviour, with the selective, ascriptive criterion of “class origin” by relating the two political criteria through the so-called “class policy” (*jieji zhengce*). Party’s class policy rested on the unclear instructions “pay attention to the origin, but don’t pay exclusive attention to origin; put the major stress on political behaviour” (*you chengfen lun, bu wei chengfen lun, zhongzai zhengzhi biaoqian*). But, since it was implicitly assumed that family origins exerted an important influence over political behaviour — an assumption that was made explicit by the campaign to “cultivate revolutionary successors” in 1964<sup>89</sup> — youth of good origins were supposed to have a political advantage over youth of worse origins, even though behaviour was equal.<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, after the Tenth Plenum of the Eight CCP CC class labelling became an increasingly important element in everybody’s life<sup>91</sup>: “class origin” came to play a major role in the social and political promotion and, in everyday practice, the instruction “pay attention to the origin” often became “pay exclusive attention to origin” which discriminated youth from non-red class origin.<sup>92</sup>

During 1963-65, the official “class line” rhetoric strengthened in line with Mao’s slogan “never forget class struggle” and his fear of “revisionism” and the potential degeneration of the young generation. Although the collectivisation of agriculture, the nationalization of industry and the limitation of the role of private property during the socialist transformation in the mid-50s made the pre-Liberation labels fall into disuse, Mao’s reassertion of the centrality of class struggle revived

---

<sup>88</sup> See “Emulate Wang Chieh, Great Revolutionary Fighter”, *Peking Review*, vol. VIII, no. 46, November 12, 1965, pp. 3-4. On the emulation of heroes, including Wang Jie, see Mary Sheridan, “The Emulation of Heroes”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 33, January-March 1968, pp. 47-72.

<sup>89</sup> *Renmin Ribao* editorial, August 3, 1964. Cited in Susan Shirk, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>90</sup> Zhai Zhenhua, *Red flower of China: An Autobiography*, New York, Soho Press, 1992, p. 47.

<sup>91</sup> Those individuals with good-class origins who, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution came to be classified among the “five red types” (*hong wu lei*; that is, workers, poor and lower-middle peasants, revolutionary cadres, revolutionary soldiers, and revolutionary martyrs) could hope for upward mobility, while those with middle-class origins (families which before 1949 belonged to the intelligentsia middle-class, non-intelligentsia middle class and former middle peasants) or worse, that is bad-class origins (such as families of former capitalists and rightists, pre-Liberation rich peasant families, pre-Liberation landlord families, families of counter-revolutionaries) had less or no chances [Jonathan Unger, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14]. According to the policy of labelling, everyone belonged to some group and had a classification, which reflected moral goodness and badness. As Lynn White has observed, this policy became one of the causes of deep frustration among individuals contributing to the violence of the Cultural Revolution [Lynn T. White III, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-15].

<sup>92</sup> Zheng Guang, *op. cit.*, p. 538-541.

the pre-Liberation class structure with the good class youth becoming beneficiaries of class favouritism in admission to vanguard organization and in educational selection. The political environment became increasingly imbued with “old” class themes. For instance, “class education” about the sufferings of the poor in the pre-Liberation era was added to the syllabus of extracurricular activities; young people, who had not personally experienced exploitation before 1949, were required to attend “recall bitterness and contemplate sweetness meetings” (*yiku sitian hui*) in order to instill “class feelings” and “class hatred” in young people through the horrors of the previous lives and to raise their class consciousness.<sup>93</sup> The Socialist education movement which first started in the countryside and later was introduced to urban areas, placed a great emphasis on class struggle and class education, favouring those people with proletarian labels and delegitimizing job positions, education or promotion for people who had other labels under the assumption that threat from the old class enemies such as landlords and capitalists rested in the habits and values of the pre-socialist era.<sup>94</sup> As the socialist education movement was going on and the class line policy was strengthening, the tendency to view political performance in terms of one’s family origin made it difficult for youth of other class origin to gain admission to the CYL. In 1964, it was officially reported that a great number of young people from different class backgrounds who were demanding advance and had a revolutionary spirit were eligible to be admitted to the League if they took a firm stand on the side of the proletariat.<sup>95</sup> But, the focus was on family origin as indicated by a *Renmin ribao* editorial of August 1964,

The focus of selecting and training the successors should be on advanced cadres of worker, poor peasant and lower-middle peasant origin. With their history of severe exploitation and oppression these people from the proletariat and semi-proletariat have the most revolutionary political attitude and thus most readily accept Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong’s thinking.<sup>96</sup>

Family origin as a necessary prerequisite for membership in the CYL and general leadership recruitment was strengthened until 1965 when, as shown above, a reorientation of the “class policy” for recruitment to the Youth League took place and new members were admitted in that year regardless of their class background. The shift from class origin to individual political performance in CYL recruitment was in line with the fact that Mao started to place attention to the new

---

<sup>93</sup> See for example Anita Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>94</sup> Richard C. Kraus, “Class Conflict and the Vocabulary of Social Analysis in China”, *The China Quarterly*, no. 69, 1977, p. 62.

<sup>95</sup> *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, pp. 32 and 34. See also Hu Keshi report on the revision of the League Constitution in *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, p. 49.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Stanley Rosen, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

privileged class composed by party and government cadres whose children benefited from class-line policies based on pre-liberation class categories. The “old” class themes were retained but were now directed toward the new class enemy who had emerged under socialism and the priority now was to be given to one’s own political beliefs and action, not class label of one’s own father. This new official interpretation of “class policy” was rooted in the idea that one’s class stand could always be changed through ideological remoulding or ideological degeneration. Individual behaviour was now defined as an important criterion of determining “bad elements” or new bourgeois elements defined by their support for policies that lead to capitalist restoration and new revolutionaries defined by their behaviour in seeking to build socialism.<sup>97</sup>

However, it is important to observe that the new definition of “class”, resting on political behaviour, was to coexist with the socio-economically rooted “class” definition. This phenomenon complicated the process of class definition in everyday political practice and hindered campaigns intended to apply the principle stressing deeds or manifestations (*biaoxian*) rather than family background. Most importantly, Mao Zedong, whose thought at that time was the main source of ideological guidance, was ambiguous on the relationship between class as an objective and a subjective phenomenon. He placed importance on “redness” as the criteria for individual mobility, with the word “redness” indicating both the possession of “revolutionary nature” by virtue of one’s father’s class status and one’s own demonstration of “revolutionary” behaviour. Due to the use of old ascriptive definition of class, alongside the new behavioural definition, he never resolved the ambiguity inherent in the selection criteria and the different interpretations caused an increasingly intense conflict.<sup>98</sup>

The confused regime’s class policy over the 60s, particularly evident in the contradiction emerged between the importance attached to “political behaviour” and the retention of “old” class themes, was to have a great impact and influence on the daily life of millions of young people. The policy of “emphasis on behaviour” encouraged those young people of non-proletarian class background previously been kept out from organizational activities and gave them the chance to participate in the revolution. In March 12, 1965, the journal *Beijing tuan de qingkuang* made known the opinions of the students of some universities concerning the new youth policy proclaimed by Peng Zhen: if, on the one hand, the reaction of those with a “bad” class background was one happiness since they

---

<sup>97</sup> Richard C. Kraus, *cit.*, p. 67. See also Susan Shirk, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>98</sup> Gordon White, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin: The Case of the Cultural Revolution*, Contemporary China Papers, Australian National University, Contemporary China Centre, 1976, pp. 1-18; Anita Chan, “Images of China’s Social Structure: The Changing Perspectives of Canton Students”, *World Politics*, vol. 34, no. 3, April 1982, pp. 309-310.



had their hopes raised, on the other hand, those born from workers and peasants class background were supposed to make strict demands on oneself, making a personal effort.<sup>99</sup>

This policy came nonetheless in 1965 while the Socialist education movement was still going on which actually meant to favoured groups that their virtue came by ascription, not achievement. Official signals to people were extremely confused and ambiguous at this time, thus, being very much the cause of tensions and hostility among youth from different class backgrounds. Shift in policy orientation, ultimately rooted in policy disputes and discordance within the top leadership CCP, naturally generated conflicts between different social groups, strengthening the feeling of satisfaction of some, but, at the same time, bolstering the dissatisfaction of others.<sup>100</sup> In a society characterized by conflicting social groups with different interests, the new national League policy encountered resistance among cadres and red-origin youth, especially the children of revolutionary cadres who, feeling legitimised by the simultaneous strengthening of the “class line”, tended to defend the status quo. Given the centrality accorded to the struggle between two lines (capitalist and socialist) in youth’s work, promoting proletarian ideology and eliminating bourgeois ideology, and the task of “taking the class struggle as a key link” (*yi jieji douzheng wei gang*), underlined at the Ninth Congress of the CYL in 1964<sup>101</sup>, as well as the strengthening of class education, many CYL cadres hesitated in the implementation of the more tolerant policy “emphasis on behaviour” causing feelings of frustration among those individuals with non-red class origin.<sup>102</sup> In the implementation of “class policy” the problem perceived was one between a “right” deviation, manifested in neglecting “class origin” in favour of behaviour, and a “left” deviation, manifested in overemphasising “class origin” when it came to judge political virtue. The latter implied less serious political risk than the former which, in that particular political environment, could have implied for a cadre the risk of being criticized for “lacking a firm class stand”.<sup>103</sup> Western studies, mostly based on interview data related to the area of Guangzhou, have shown that policy fluctuations and variations in “class policy” implementation during the 60s led to a wide range of discontents and to deep frustration among urban Chinese students from different class background. Consequently, these youth came to express themselves during the Cultural Revolution fuelling the fights between rival Red Guard factions and contributing significantly to the violence of the

---

<sup>99</sup> Gongqingtuan Beijing shi weiyuanhui (ed.), *Beijing qingnian yundong jishi 1919-2004, op.cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>100</sup> Wang Shaoguang, “The Structural Sources of the Cultural Revolution”, in Kam-ye Law (ed.), *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Reconsidered: Beyond Purge and Holocaust*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, particularly pp. 58-62.

<sup>101</sup> «Dangdai Zhongguo» congshu bianji weiyuanhui (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo de qingnian he gongqingtuan, op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 130; *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, pp. 5-40 (in particular pp. 17-24); See also in the CYL Constitution, *Tuan de wenjian huibian*, 1964, vol. 1, p. 61.

<sup>102</sup> Zheng Guang, *op. cit.*, p. 545; Xu Youyu, *Moran huishou* (Unexpected recollections), Zhengzhou, Henan renmin chubanshe, 1999, p. 35; «Dangdai Zhongguo» congshu bianji weiyuanhui (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo de qingnian he gongqingtuan, op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 76.

<sup>103</sup> Gordon White, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

Cultural Revolution.<sup>104</sup> As shown by Jonathan Unger, within schools where competition over claims to status, power and scarce resources among different social groups was especially intense, the resistance toward the policy of “emphasis on behaviour” was particularly strong. In classrooms, for instance, red-class origins League members often continued to stress “class origin” in selecting new members and, in doing so, in some cases, they also have the tacit support of school officials and teachers coming from the same class categories.<sup>105</sup>

As the Cultural Revolution entered its first stage, the more tolerant attitude toward the judgement of political virtue enshrined in the policy of “emphasis on behaviour” was criticized, in the campaign against Peng Zhen in mid-66, as a “rightist” deviation of the official “class policy” and then denounced by youths from red-class backgrounds classified among the “five red types” (*hong wu lei*) as part of a larger programme of capitalist restoration.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Gordon White, *op. cit.*; Lynn T. White III, *op. cit.*, chapter one; Jonathan Unger, *op. cit.*, chapter 5; Susan Shirk, *op. cit.*, chapter 3; Anita Chan, “Images of China’s Social Structure: The Changing Perspectives of Canton Students”, *cit.*; Stanley Rosen, *op. cit.*, chapter 2.

<sup>105</sup> Jonathan Unger, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>106</sup> Xu Youyu, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35. Gordon White, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the highly propagandistic struggle to revolutionize Chinese youth, the CYL was called to play a prominent role not only through the active involvement in utopian political campaigns but also through membership expansion and leadership rejuvenation, with the latter being instrumental to the achievement of Maoist revolutionary goals. In examining the development of the League political work and recruitment policies, this study, first of all, reveals the existence of various shortcomings that prevented the organization to respond efficiently to Maoist policies and requests after September 1962.

On the basis of the evidences provided above, I suggest that, rather than opposing Mao Zedong policy and being clearly associated with the Liu-Deng leadership group, the CYL have slightly deviated from a pure Maoist line. CYL's political work and recruitment pattern in particular, simply reflected policy inconsistencies and disputes within the Chinese political leadership at that time. Ambiguous official signals had a great impact on policy implementation especially in the case of "class policy", hindering a correct implementation of the policy of "emphasis on behaviour" and contributing to young people resentment and conflicts. At the same time, the CYL was victim of the contradiction inherent to its nature and of its own bureaucratic tendencies. With regard to the first point, during the massive recruitment campaign in 1965, the organization was confronted with the problem of how to expand membership and implement the "revolutionary successors" programme, while yet maintaining its ideological integrity. The problem was rooted in its own nature, notably in the relationship between the advanced character and the mass character, which actually could hardly be effectively compatible with one another. With regard to the second point, resistance toward cadres' rejuvenation process was rooted not only in the CCP's organizational involvement and control, and in the organizational need for continuity of leadership in a mass organization characterized by a shifting membership, but also, and most probably, in the age composition of its leadership whose members tended to obstruct the mobility of youth within the League by virtue of age and experience. These factors contributed significantly to the CYL's failure of dynamically responding to changing political conditions.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### English language sources:

- Alvesson, Mats and Kaj Sköldberg, *Reflexive Methodology. New Vistas for Qualitative Research*, London, Sage Publications, 2000.
- Bennett, Gordon A. and Ronald N. Montaperto, *Red Guard: The political biography of Dai Hsiao-ai*, New York, Doubleday Company, 1971.
- Chan, Anita, "Images of China's Social Structure: The Changing Perspectives of Canton Students", *World Politics*, vol. 34, no. 3, April 1982, pp. 295-323.
- Chan, Anita, *Children of Mao. Personality Development and political Activism in the Red Guard generation*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1985.
- "Emulate Wang Chieh, Great Revolutionary Fighter", *Peking Review*, vol. VIII, no. 46, November 12, 1965, pp. 3-4.
- Feng Jicai, *Ten Years of Madness: Oral Histories of China's Cultural Revolution*, San Francisco, China Books & Periodicals, 1996.
- Funnell, Victor, "The Chinese Communist Youth Movement, 1949-1966", *The China Quarterly*, no. 42, April/June 1970, pp. 105-130.
- "In Putting Politics First, One Must Constantly Put Mao Tse-tung's Thinking in Command", translated and published in *Peking Review*, vol. 9, no. 20 (May 13, 1966), pp. 43-45.
- Healy, Paul M., *The Chinese Communist Youth League 1949-1979*, Griffith Asian Papers, no. 4, Nathan, Griffith University, School of Modern Asian Studies, 1982.
- Kraus, Richard C., "Class Conflict and the Vocabulary of Social Analysis in China", *The China Quarterly*, no. 69, 1977, pp. 54-74.
- Leader, Shelah Gilbert, "The Communist Youth League and the Cultural Revolution", *Asian Survey*, XIV, 8, August 1974, pp. 700-715.
- Pringsheim, Klaus H., "The Functions of the Chinese Communist Youth League (1920-1949)", *The China Quarterly*, no. 12, October-December 1962, pp. 75-91.
- Ridley, Charles P., Godwin, Paul H. B. and Dennis J. Doolin (eds.), *The Making of a Model Citizen in Communist China*, Stanford, The Hoover Institution Press, 1971
- Rosen, Stanley, *Red Guard Factionalism and the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1982.
- Samarani, Guido, *La Cina del Novecento: dalla fine dell'Impero a oggi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2004.
- Schram, Stuart R., *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, New York, Praeger, 1969.

- Schurmann, Franz, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968.
- Sheridan, Mary, “The Emulation of Heroes”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 33, January-March 1968, pp. 47-72.
- Shirk, Susan, *Competitive Comrades: Career Incentives and Student Strategies in China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982.
- Townsend, James R., *The Revolutionization of Chinese Youth: A Study of Chung-kuo Ch'ing-nien*, China Research Monograph, no. 1, Berkeley, University of California, Center for Chinese Studies, 1967.
- Townsend, James R., *Political Participation in Communist China*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1969.
- Unger, Jonathan, *Education under Mao. Class and Competition in Canton Schools, 1960-1980*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Wang Hsueh-wen, “Maoist Rectification of the Young Communist League”, *Issues & Studies*, November 1970, pp. 29-38.
- Wang Shaoguang, “The Structural Sources of the Cultural Revolution”, in Kam-ye Law (ed.), *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Reconsidered: Beyond Purge and Holocaust*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 58-91.
- White, Gordon, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin: The Case of the Cultural Revolution*, Contemporary China Papers, Australian National University, Contemporary China Centre, 1976.
- Whyte III, Lynn T., *Policies of Chaos: The Organizational Causes of Violence in China's Cultural Revolution*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Yang Zhongmei, *Hu Yaobang: A Chinese Biography*, Armonk, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 1988.

### **Chinese language sources:**

- “Ba fazhan gongzuo fang zai dangqian tuan de zuzhi jianshi de di yi wei” (Place membership expansion in the first position in current CYL organizational construction), *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, October 9, 1965, p. 1.
- Beijing shi Xicheng quzhi (ed.), *Beijing shi Xicheng quzhi* (Beijing Xicheng district gazetteer), Beijing, Beijing chubanshe, 2001.
- “Chushen bu youyi, daolu ke xuanzi” (One cannot choose one's family, but one can choose one's road), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, July 27, 1965, p. 1.

- «Dangdai Zhongguo» congshu bianji weiyuanhui (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo de qingnian he gongqingtuan* (Youth and the Communist Youth League in contemporary China), vols. 2, Beijing, Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1998.
- Dong Fangtao, “Gongqingtuan shi huoxue huoyong Mao Zedong sixiang de xuexiao” (The CYL is the school of learning and applying Mao Zedong Thought), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, June 23, 1966.
- Gao Zehong, “Ba jueđa duoshu qingnian tuanjie qilai” (Organize the overwhelming majority of youth), *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 10, 1965, pp. 4-5.
- Gongqingtuan Beijing daxue weiyuanhui (ed.), *Gongqingtuan zai Beida* (The CYL at Beijing University), Beijing, Renmin chubanshe, 2004.
- Gongqingtuan Beijing shi weiyuanhui (ed.), *Qingchun de zuji---Beijing qingnian yundong dashiji, 1919-2002* (The path of youth: a record of major events in the Beijing youth movement, 1919-2002), Beijing, Renmin chubanshe, 2002.
- Gongqingtuan Beijing shi weiyuanhui (ed.), *Beijing qingnian yundong jishi 1919-2004* (Documentation on Beijing youth movement, 1919-2004), Beijing, Renmin chubanshe, 2004.
- “Gongqingtuan yongjiu de toudeng renwu” (The major task of the league forever), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, July 26, 1966, p. 1.
- Gongqingtuan zhongyang and zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (eds.), *Mao Zedong Deng Xiaoping Jiang Zemin lun qingshaonian he qingshaonian gongzuo* (Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin’s talks on youth and youth work), Beijing, Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2003.
- “Gongqingtuan zhongyang guanyu tuiguang Lijiazhuang tuan zhibu zuzhi qingnian xuexi Mao zhuxi zhuzuo jingyan de tongzhi” (CYL CC’s notification to popularize the experience of Lijiazhuang League branch in organizing youth to study Chairman Mao’s works), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, August 29, 1965, p. 1.
- Gongqingtuan zhongyang xuanzhuabu (ed.), *Zhongguo gongchanzhuyi qingniantuan tuanzhang jianghua* (An introduction to the Constitution of the CYL), Beijing, Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1965.
- Han Xinfu and Ceng Jingzhong (eds.), *20 shiji Zhongguo dashidian, 1901-2000* (Encyclopedia of China’s major events in the Twentieth Century, 1901-2000), Chengdu, Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2002.
- “Jianjue de fangshou de tiba xinsheng liliang” (Resolutely and freely promote new blood), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, December 11, 1965, p. 1.

- Liu Jucai (ed.), *Zhongguo xue lei feng huodong 30 nian jianshi* (30 years of the history of the Lei Feng study movement in China), Beijing, Hongqi chubanshe, 1991.
- Liu Xiaomeng, Ding Yizhuang, Shi Weimin e He Lan (eds.), *Zhongguo zhiqing shidian* (Encyclopedia of China's educated youth), Chengdu, Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1995.
- “Mao Zedong sixiang yongyuan shi gongqingtuan de zuigao zhishi” (The Thought of Mao Zedong will forever be the highest directive of the CYL), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, June 16, 1966, p. 1.
- “Quan tuan dou yao renzhen xuexi Lijiazhuang tuan zhibu” (The League has to study conscientiously the Lijiazhuang League branch), *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, April 23, 1966, p. 1.
- Tuan de wenjian huibian* (Collection of documents of the CYL), Gongqingtuan zhongyang bangongting.
- “Tuan zhibu ganbu daitou xuexi” (Basic-level branches' cadres take the initiative in the study), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, June 15, 1963, p. 2.
- “Wei ba mei ge tuan zhibu bancheng xuexi Mao Zedong sixiang de xuexiao er nuli” (Turning every League branch into a school for the study of Mao Zedong Thought), *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 11, June 2, 1965, pp. 4-5.
- “Xiang Lijiazhuang tuan zhibu xue shenme?” (What is the content of the study of Lijiazhuang branch?), *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, April 28, 1966, p. 1.
- Xu Youyu, *Moran huishou* (Unexpected recollections), Zhengzhou, Henan renmin chubanshe, 1999.
- “Yiding yao ba gongqingtuan bancheng huoxue huoyong Mao Zedong sixiang de xuexiao” (The League has to be transformed into a school to study and apply Mao's Thought), *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, April 4, 1966, p. 1.
- “Yong Mao Zedong sixiang fadong qingnian” (Using Mao Zedong Thought to mobilize youth), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, March 30, 1965, p. 1.
- Zhai Zhenhua, *Red flower of China: An Autobiography*, New York, Soho Press, 1992.
- Zheng Guang, *Zhongguo qingnian yundong liushinian (1919-1979)* (The Chinese youth movement in 60 years), Beijing, Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1990.
- Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu, zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi, zhongyang dang'an guan (eds.), *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao (1921-1997)* (Materials on the organizational history of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1997), Beijing, Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2000.

*Zhongguo gongchanzhuyi qingniantuan di jiu ci quanguo daibiaodahui wenxian* (Documents of the Ninth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Youth League), Beijing, Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1964.

«Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian» bianjibu (ed.), *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian, 1949-1981* (Yearbook of China's Education, 1949-1981), Beijing, Zhongguo dabaike quanshu chubanshe, 1984.

*Zhongguo qingnian yundong lishi wenjian xuanbian* (Collection of historical documents on China's youth movement), neibu teaching materials, zhongyang tuanxiao qingniantuan gongzuo jiaoyanshi, 1979.

“Zhongzai biao xian shi dang de jieji zhengce” (Giving importance to the performance is the party's class policy), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, September 9, 1965, p. 1.

**Chinese newspapers and magazines consulted:**

*Zhongguo qingnian bao* (Chinese)

*Zhongguo qingnian* (Chinese)

*Peking review* (English)