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Towards a New Political Order: Re-Establishing the Youth League after the Sino-Japanese War (1946-49)

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Abstract Recent studies on the history of the Communist Youth League in China have complicated the image of a symbiotic relationship with the Communist Party, by shedding light on internal dynamics and rivalries that characterized the 1920s. Yet, the revival of the Youth League following the Sino-Japanese War has been almost completely ignored in the international literature. This essay examines the institutional and organisational development of the Youth League in the late 1940s, focusing on the Party's policy design and decision-making and showing how the process of re-establishing the Youth League as a distinct organization under the firm leadership of the Communist Party dates back to 1946, when the Party started discussing the revival of the organisation and adjusted the system so as to limit its development and accumulation of power, by considering previous mistakes and addressing issues regarding age limits, differentiation of work and leadership.

Keywords New Democratic Youth League. Ren Bishi. Youth organisations. Civil war. Chinese Communist Party. Communist Youth League.

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1 Introduction

With the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the new Communist leadership faced a series of urgent economic, social and political issues. Among them were issues concerning the reconstruction of the political and institutional order based on a model that made the Party, the state and the army pillars of a new system that entrusted the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with a leading role in the functioning of the regime. To attain this objective, 'mass organisations' (*qunzhong zuzhi* 群众组织) were created to function as 'transmission belts' between the CCP and different sectors of society, hold a monopoly on the representation of certain social groups and solicit participation in political life according to the principle of the 'mass line' (*qunzhong luxian* 群众路线) (Barnett 1951; Townsend 1969; see also Audin, Doyon 2019 on more recent developments in the functioning of mass organisations).

Youth thus became a target of specific mass organisations designed to mobilise the new generation in support of CCP objectives and to create loyal citizens dedicated to the 'new China'. The All-China Youth Federation was established as a united front organisation to serve as a national umbrella entity and included, among others, the All-China Students Federation and the Communist Youth League (CYL), which was named the New Democratic Youth League (*Xin minzhuzhuyi qingnian tuan* 新民主主义青年团, NDYL) from 1949 to 1957. The latter also played a key political role in the entire system by running the Young Pioneers, the organisation for children aged 9 to 15. Besides serving as a bridge linking the CCP with the nation's youth, the Youth League also served as a training ground for future CCP members and cadres at all levels of the Party and government apparatus.

Unlike other mass organisations, the CYL had and still has a unique position, being defined as the 'main assistant' (*zhushou* 助手) and 'reserve force' (*houbeijun* 后备军) of the CCP, two functions that were formally recognised in the League's 1953 Statute and later in the CCP's 1956 Constitution approved at the Eighth CCP National Congress (Graziani 2013). Therefore, it has been highly embedded in the political and bureaucratic system as a junior partner of the CCP. Its subordination in the political system and organisational 'juniority' has characterised its life in the following years up to the present day (Tsimonis 2021, on cadres training see Doyon 2023).

However, recent studies on the history of the CYL have begun to complicate the image of a symbiotic relationship with the CCP (Yi 2022; Mulready-Stone 2015; Graziani 2014; see also Stranaham 1998, 43-4). What emerges from scholarship is that, starting with the foundation of the CYL (then named Socialist Youth League) in 1920, there have been times when the League was at odds with its parent organisation, even competing with the CCP and aspiring to transform it-

self into a 'second party'. Rivalry between the Party and the Youth League characterised the revolutionary movement of the 1920s, revealing the complexities involved in importing the Komsomol model from Soviet Russia to China. In 1936, the CYL was disbanded and integrated into the National Salvation Movement, being replaced by anti-Japanese youth national salvation associations, which appealed to a broader group of young people. This decision reflected not only the political climate of the time but also the influence of external factors (i.e. changes in Comintern and Communist Youth International strategies). Furthermore, according to Tsai and Liao (2021, 1-2), "the need to strengthen the Party's leadership to deal with escalating tensions with Japan was used as an excuse to disband CYL". Similarly, Yi (2022, 142) points out that "seeking to end the continuing rivalry, the party used this opportunity to disband the Youth League and fundamentally reorganize its interaction with the young generation". The organisation was only formally re-established after the CCP came to power in 1949.

This essay examines the institutional and organisational developments regarding the CYL in the period between the end of the Sino-Japanese War and the establishment of the PRC, and explores the ways in which the CCP directed and subordinated youth organisations by moving from mass organizations with broad anti-Japanese appeal to increased party discipline. The essay shows that the process of re-establishing the CYL as a distinct organisation under the firm leadership of the CCP dates back to the year 1946, when the first debates about the revival of the organisation emerged and the CCP intentionally acted to limit the development and accumulation of power of the Youth League due to prior conflicts between the two organisations, addressing issues regarding age limit, differentiation of work and leadership.

Compared with the rich literature on the CCP history, there have been few studies on the CYL. Recently published works have examined the politics and internal complexities of the CYL in the 1920s and early 1930s; however, the revival of the Youth League following the Sino-Japanese War has so far been almost completely ignored in the international literature, if we exclude the work by Pringsheim (1962). This chapter builds on and further develops recent studies conducted on CCP-CYL relations in the pre-1949 period, focussing on the Party's Youth League policy design and decision-making at the leadership level (rather than on operations on the ground) from 1946 to 1949, drawing on a variety of available Chinese sources, including histories of the youth movement, CCP documents and the memories of former cadres, such as those of He Qijun, who was a member of the CCP Central Youth Work Committee at the time.

2 The Early Efforts Towards Establishing the New Democratic Youth League

The First National Congress of the NDYL was held in April 1949 and saw the participation of 364 delegates representing 190,000 members. Ren Bishi's report to the First National Congress (presented as Honorary President of the league) focussed on the following issues: 1) the need for political leadership of the CCP; 2) the need to unite and educate the new generations, including the children of intellectuals and other strata of the petty bourgeoisie showing progress in political awareness; and 3) the importance of working with students, as future experts for the economic construction of the country (*Zhongyang tuanxiao qingniantuan gongzuo jiaoyanshi* 1979, 111-20). The name chosen fully reflected the orientation of the CCP for what was foreshadowed to be an upcoming transitional phase characterised by an alliance of all revolutionary classes. The name was changed to CYL in 1957 at the Third National Congress, reflecting the new political orientations of the Communist leadership and, above all, Mao Zedong. In the early phase of the PRC, the political and organisational features of the Youth League were defined by an organisational structure mirroring that of the CCP, to which it was subordinate, based on the Soviet model of the Komsomol, whose Central School in Moscow was a destination for many young Chinese cadres at the time (*Gongqingtuan zhongyang qingyunshi gongzuo zhidao weiyuanhui et al.* 2003).

Yet, the First National Congress of the New Democratic Youth League came at the end of a process that began in the mid-1940s, following the failure of the negotiations between the Guomindang (GMD) and the CCP after the end of World War II. As stated above, the history of the CYL has its roots in the early years of Communist politics and the Chinese revolution, but the organisation was in fact reformed in 1936, when the new strategy of a "united front against fascism", as formulated by the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in August 1935 and received by the Communist Youth International the following month, combined with the popular and student response to Japanese aggression in China (December 1935), causing the CCP to change its youth policy (Samarani 2003; Solieri 2003; Graziani 2014; Yin 1992). The Party decided to replace the CYL with broader anti-Japanese youth national salvation associations, open to all patriotic young people regardless of their ideological-political affiliation. Meanwhile, the National Liberation Vanguard (*Minzu Jiefang Xianfengdui* 民族解放先锋队) was officially established by students in Beijing and was soon turned by the CCP North China Bureau into a united front patriotic youth mass organisation (Li 2012, 145). In October 1937, a document issued by the CCP North China Bureau called for widening this organisation, soliciting youth par-

ticipation in resistance efforts (Gongqingtuan zhongyang qingyun-shi gongzuo zhidao weiyuanhui et al. 1995, 588). Its membership had grown rapidly since its establishment and by the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, units had emerged in many cities across China as well as abroad. In autumn 1938, the National Liberation Vanguard merged with national salvation youth associations in areas under Communist control, while it was disbanded in GMD-controlled areas (Zhang et al. 1989, 82-3). At that point, the Central Office of the CYL had already been abolished and the CCP youth policy fell under the responsibility of the Central Youth Work Committee (Zhonggong zhongyang qingnian gongzuo weiyuanhui 中共中央青年工作委员会, also known as *zhongyang qingwei* 中央青委), which had been initially denominated Department for Youth (*Qingnian bu* 青年部) and headed by Feng Wenbin from 1936 until 1938 (Zhang 2003, 106).¹ Feng had distinguished himself in Communist youth work since the Jiangxi period and would later serve as the secretary of the NDYL from 1949 to 1952 (Klein, Clark 1971, 282-5).

Despite unsuccessful attempts at reviving the CYL carried out around 1940 especially by Li Chang, a young activist who had joined the CYL in the mid-1930s and had become a member of the *zhongyang qingwei* 中央青委 in May 1938 (Feng 2010, 26-9), it was only after World War II, when the national salvation organisations had exhausted their purpose and the CCP-GMD negotiations had failed, that the question of rethinking the youth strategy of the CCP arose.

From August-September 1946, the Central Secretariat of the CCP convened two meetings in Yan'an to discuss the question of re-establishing the CYL. Two meetings were held, one on 26 August and the other on 13 September, with the former seeing the participation of Zhu De, Ren Bishi, Kang Sheng and Hu Qiaomu, among the others. Greater participation seemed to have been guaranteed at the second meeting, which was also attended by Liu Dingyi, Chen Boda, Xi Zhongxun and Liu Ningyi (Zheng 1993, 130, 133; see also Li 2009, 183; He et al. 1987, 121, 145). Both meetings were chaired by Ren Bishi, who had played a leading role in the Communist youth movement since the second half of the 1920s and who in 1946 was a member of the CCP Central Secretariat in charge of youth affairs (together with Feng Wenbin).²

¹ The Department of Youth, set up in 1936, continued until 1938, when the Central Youth Work Committee was formally established by the CCP Central Committee to strengthen its guidance over youth work. Since 1938 (until 1941), the CCP Central Youth Work Committee included Chen Yun, Feng Wenbin, Li Chang, Hu Qiaomu, Song Yiping and Liu Guang, with Chen Yun as secretary and Feng Wenbin as vice-secretary. In September 1941, the CCP centre decided on the following composition: Kai Feng, Feng Wenbin, Song Yiping, Jiang Nanxiang and Gao Langshan (Zhang et al. 1989, 88; Feng 2010, 26).

² Trained in the Soviet Union, Ren Bishi had become one of the most important leaders of the Youth League in the second half of the 1920s (being its secretary from 1927

These two meetings were in fact preceded by a proposal submitted on 25 June by the Central Youth Work Committee to the CCP Secretariat on reviving the CYL. This document was the result of a discussion that had developed among the cadres involved in the regional youth work committees under the direction of Ren Bishi (Zheng 1993, 129; Guo 1992, 142). Entitled “Proposal Regarding the Establishment of the New Democratic Youth League (Draft)” (*Guanyu chengli xin minzhuzhuyi qingnian tuan jianyi - cao'an* 关于成立新民主主义青年团建议 - 草案), it reported on the youth work situation in areas under Communist control and invited the leadership of the CCP to reflect on the reconstruction of the Youth League. In many of these areas, very few cadres were involved in youth work (none in some areas) and the national salvation associations, where still present (for instance, in the Shandong area), had exhausted their mission. The document reported on a situation of neglect and a lack of support and direction in youth work, which had spread since 1942. Even when praising the work of the youth salvation organisations in mobilising young people in areas such as Shandong, the document highlighted the fact that these organisations were not strong enough as they were too ‘ordinary’ (*yiban* 一般) and ‘broad’ (*guangfan* 广泛), emphasising the need to create an organised nucleus of ‘young activists’ (*qingnian jijifenzi* 青年积极分子) in line with the changing needs of the Party and historical conditions. Therefore, it called for the establishment of a youth organisation firmly under the leadership of the Party, one designed to train a “reserve force” for the Party, “assist” the Party and promote the youth ‘vanguard role’ (*xianfeng zuoyong* 先锋作用). It then criticised the incorrect standpoint of letting youth work being the responsibility of the Party, administrative structures or other mass organisations, as well as the past situation in which the CYL was in competition with the Party (*xianfeng zhuyi* 先锋主义, ‘vanguardism’; He et al. 1987, 104-18, in particular 114).

The document made clear that the re-established Youth League should be an organisation with a political and educational nature and broader membership requirements than the CCP and former CYL, but with ‘stricter’ (*yan jiezhi*) requirements than current ordinary mass organisations, advancing the idea that the membership should ideally consist of 25-30% of all young people and, in terms of social composition, have young workers and peasants as its core force.

When it came to the organisational structure, the document delineated the basic elements that would come to characterise the CYL after 1949: the principle of democratic centralism and an organisa-

to 1928). A member of the Central Committee of the CCP (1927) and of his Political Bureau (1931), from 1933 to 1938 he was one of the most important political leaders of the Red Army and in the 1940s worked closely with Mao Zedong (Klein, Clark 1971, 411-16).

tional structure composed of branches and committees at every administrative level, specifying that the organisation would provide leadership for youth and children work. Regarding CYL-CCP relations, the document stated that “both at the level of policy and tasks, it is under the leadership of the Party, but in daily work, it has its own independence, the Party should not intervene”. In addition, the document clarified that Youth League cadres would be appointed with the approval of the CCP from the central to the lower levels, and all league decisions were to be approved by the Party committee at the same level (He et al. 1987, 117-18). Therefore, this document provided the first organisational outline of the CYL structure, which envisaged a parallel hierarchy with the CYL dependent at all levels on the CCP.

The document formed a basis for further discussion of youth issues at the time. The two meetings convened by the Central Secretariat of the CCP between August and September of that year saw the cadres in charge of youth work in the various regions under Communist control report on the situation at the local level. The discussion focussed on the question of whether and how the CYL should be re-established, and touched upon leadership issues, the possible denomination, tasks and nature of the organisation (the minutes, albeit incomplete, are available in Gongqingtuan zhongyang qingyunshi gongzuo zhidao weiyuanhui et al. 2002, 564-88).

At both meetings Ren Bishi stressed that 400 young activists (*qingnian jiji fenzi* 青年积极分子) had emerged in the course of the struggle against Japan, representing 20% of the youth population in the “liberated areas” across the country, among whom a small number had joined the CCP (Gongqingtuan zhongyang qingyunshi gongzuo zhidao weiyuanhui et al. 2002, 576; He et al. 1987, 135, 146). They needed to be organised to play a role in guiding the broad masses of youth towards the tasks set by the Party. The ideological and political education of future generations was an issue that could not be ignored when considering a possible Communist takeover, and young people had specific interests, problems and characteristics that required a targeted organisational effort. According to Zhu De, the education and training of new generations had to be at the centre of the daily work of the reconstituted CYL; young people would receive an education in the “new democracy” through practice and concrete action, that is, by taking part in production work, agrarian reform, and support of the army (He et al. 1987, 124-6; Zheng 1993, 130).

The talk delivered by Ren Bishi on 26 August touched upon five main issues: leadership and work methods, tasks and denomination, nature of the proposed organisation, relations with other mass youth organisations and finally, organisation-building. Regarding the first point, he urged the cadres to beware of mistakes made in the past when performing youth work, explicitly referring to the tendency of the previous CYL to act as a second party (*di er dang xianxiang* 第二党现象).

These mistakes included not only the adoption of a style (vanguardism) borrowed from the Party - a tendency that in the period of the national revolution (up to 1927) was due to the fact that the Youth League had been created before the party and its building had preceded that of the CCP in places where the Party had not yet been built -, but also the tendency towards 'youthism' (*qingnianzhuyi* 青年主义) and 'independence' (*dulixing* 独立性) that occurred during the war of resistance against Japan. At that time, many youth organisations in Communist-held areas had developed into virtually autonomous groups. As Ren Bishi stated:

today the CCP leadership is stronger, it is not easy for the Youth League to make the mistake of adopting a second party style, but if we do not guard against it, discord with the Party may occur. (Ren 1987, 404)

As such, the CYL, if re-established, would need to pay attention to the characteristics of young people and their suitable working methods simply because young people were the target of the Youth League's work. Therefore, education would represent a key concern in youth work as the educational training of new generation was considered extremely important. Ren Bishi finally referred to the experience of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in leading the Komsomol as worth studying by Chinese cadres. Regarding the second issue pertaining to basic CYL tasks and denomination, he stated that "the basic tasks of the Party are the basic tasks of the Youth League", and since at present this task is "struggling for the new democracy" (*wei xin minzhuyi er fendou* 为新民主主义而奋斗), a denomination such as the "New Democratic Youth League" or "Democratic Youth League" would be appropriate for providing a broader definition more open to different social groups and preventing the organisation from becoming too narrow. Moreover, he highlighted the political nature of the organisation and its role as an assistant to the CCP. If, on one hand, the new organisation needed to be much larger than the prior CYL, on the other it was necessary to create an advanced nucleus. Therefore, Ren Bishi affirmed that other mass youth organisations had to be developed, simultaneously with the revived Youth League being the pivot. Finally, he addressed the issue of how to proceed with organisation-building in areas under Communist control, stating that there was a need to start at a local level, with the local CCP branches having a leading role in setting up the corresponding Youth League branches (Ren 1987, 404-5).

The second meeting, held in September, came after Mao Zedong had approved the idea of reviving the youth organisation and was aimed at further soliciting opinions and addressing the last doubts that some cadres still had on the issue. Xu Teli, then member of the

CCP Central Committee and Vice-Director of the Propaganda Department, addressed the issue of the CCP and adult leadership and stated that adults should lead the youth since adults were able to address their specific requests, provide them an education and lead them into society and the CCP (He et al. 1987, 158). This raised the importance of providing new blood for the Party, but also conveyed the idea of the youth as junior and subject to CCP and adult authority, which was in line with a major shift in the conception of youth that had also emerged from Mao Zedong's 1939 talk "The Orientation of the Youth Movement", where he had praised the young people's vanguard role, while emphasizing the integration of students with the rural masses and the cultivation of the youth rather than their emancipation (Graziani 2019). During this second meeting, the question of youth work in areas still under GMD control was also raised, with Ren Bishi (Ren 1987, 406) stating that key importance was to be given to winning over the youth in competition with the Three People's Principles Youth Corps (*Sanminzhuyi Qingnian tuan* 三民主义青年团),³ a youth organisation that the GMD had launched in 1938, amid the Sino-Japanese War, as an instrument to strengthen the Party while disciplining students and tackling their political activism (Huang 1993; Eastman 1984, 89-107). In general, in his talks during these central meetings, Ren Bishi emphasised the need to prevent the league from arguing for "independence" and ensured that its responsibilities were confined mainly to educating young people and organising them to participate in production and construction.

Following these meetings, the Central Youth Work Committee began building the organisation in Yan'an, where the first branches were created in factories, schools and the countryside. At the same time, on 5 November, the Central Committee of the CCP issued a proposal on building the Democratic Youth League (*Zhongyang guanyu jianli minzhu qingnian tuan de tiyi* 中央关于建立民主青年团的提议; Zheng 1993, 136-7), which read:

The Central Committee believes that today a new organisation of young activists should be built; this organisation should be larger [*qunzhonghua* 群众化] and more rejuvenated [*qingnianhua* 青年化] than the past Communist Youth League and should be under the leadership of the CCP. Its name will be the Democratic Youth League or the New Democratic Youth League.

3 The issue of the competition with the GMD Youth Corps had been raised a few years before by Li Chang, when he proposed the re-establishment of the CYL considering the difficulties that broad and loose youth national salvation corps encountered in winning over youth. Later, during the Yan'an rectification campaign, he was criticised for adopting a "second party style" and for "vanguardism" in youth work (Feng 2010, 27-9).

The target of the revived organisation would be young people between the ages of 15 and 23, and the organisation would be based on the principle of democratic centralism and provide education on the thought of Mao Zedong, which had just been elevated to an official doctrine at the Seventh CCP National Congress. The document also made clear that while “the CCP and the government would not directly command the Youth League”, the league would “observe government decisions”, implement government directives and submit itself to the CCP leadership and never develop in opposition to the Party and government. Moreover, it stated that in ‘liberated’ areas it would be built by the youth federation cadres, while the question of whether it was needed in GMD-controlled areas was left open for further discussion (*Tuan zhongyang qingyunshi yanjiushi et al. 1988, 633-5*).

3 The Experimental Set Up of New Youth Organisations in Communist-Controlled Areas

Based on these decisions, starting in the autumn of 1946, the regional offices of the CCP began the work of building the Democratic Youth League on an experimental basis. This process would continue up to September 1947, when the Youth League construction in Communist-controlled areas accelerated parallel to the development of the agrarian reform (Zheng 1993, 138-9; Li 2009, 197-200). In this regard, important meetings were held: a meeting on the land issue convened by the CCP Central Committee and a meeting on youth work in Communist-controlled areas convened by the Central Youth Work Committee, which discussed the question of Youth League-building and decided to expand and accelerate the process of setting up the league while carrying out the land reform. Liu Shaoqi gave instructions regarding the work of reviving the Youth League, underlining five key issues: 1) education and study as the most important tasks of the League; 2) the importance of ideological construction; 3) using caution when building the organisation by focussing on the quality of youth rather than the quantity; 4) adopting a correct work style, which meant having an honest, progressive and revolutionary style and serving the people and their interests; and 5) paying attention to the training of cadres (Zheng 2004, 131-2).

Local sections also arose in urban areas. Activities among young people became particularly important to the CCP in the struggle for the ‘liberation’ of cities. For example, in Beijing, where the urban proletariat was very limited, winning over students and intellectuals became an imperative for Chinese Communists (Yick 1995, 80-136). On the other hand, as it has been shown, the ultimate success of the CCP was due to both issues of strategy and the loss of consensus and credibility that the GMD was facing. Attempts to tame

and suppress the student protest movement that had arisen over the resumption of the civil war and foreign domination in China caused the GMD government to progressively alienate students and intellectuals (Pepper 1986).

In addition to the sections of the Democratic Youth League, other youth organisations also emerged in Communist-controlled cities, including the Youth Federation of Liberated Areas, the Chinese chapter of the Soviet-sponsored World Federation of Democratic Youth, that would be renamed the 'All-China Youth Federation' following a CCP politburo meeting at Xibaipo in September 1948, and turned into an umbrella organisation for all youth groups within which the Youth League would have a guiding role (Zheng 1993, 140-1). In Harbin, the Federation, established as early as August 1946, led 1400 students in land reform work in suburban areas between 1946 and 1948 and 5000 students in propaganda and service to soldiers (Pringsheim 1962, 86-8). By 1948, as the Youth League organisations were formally built in Harbin and other cities of the Northeast region, more than 80% of the Federation's members had become league members (Li 2009, 194, 198-9).

Further steps towards the revival of the CYL were taken on the eve of the Communist victory in the civil war, when the experimental process of building the league had already been extended to Communist-controlled areas in the regions of Dongbei, Xibei, Huabei and Huadong, despite being organisations with different names, such as the Mao Zedong Youth League, Democratic Youth League and New Democratic Youth League (Zheng 2004, 132). In September 1948, the newly founded Central School (*Zhongyang Tuanxiao* 中央团校) began its first term in Hebei (Pingshan County) as the main centre for the education and training of youth cadres, and in December the journal *Zhongguo qingnian* 中国青年 (Chinese Youth), originally founded in 1923 as an organ of the Socialist Youth League, resumed publication under the direction of the CCP's Central Youth Work Committee and featured an article by Zhu De entitled "The Present Tasks of Chinese Youth" (*Zhongguo qingnian dangqian de renwu* 中国青年当前的任务; Zheng 2004, 133; Li 2012, 188-9, 196-7; Townsend 1967, 15). Besides reproducing documents on the youth movement, presenting and commenting on "role models" and promoting discussion on certain centrally promoted policies, the journal had to present and explain the CCP line in such a way as to obtain the full support of young people. As such, this journal would soon become a key tool for the political socialisation of the youth in the PRC, becoming an official publication of the NDYL Central Committee along with the newspaper *Zhongguo qingnian bao* 中国青年报 (published since 1951; Townsend 1967, 24-6).

Following the experimental operation of the Democratic Youth League in Communist-held areas, on 10 October 1948 the CCP Cen-

tral Committee announced in a “Circular on the September (Politburo) Meeting” that the “New Democratic Youth League” would be launched in the first half of the following year (Saich 1996, 1322). As a result, on 1 January 1949, the Central Committee approved the “Resolution on the Establishment of the New Democratic Youth League”, summing up the historical experience of youth work and praising the work and positive contributions offered by the various local sections that had been experimentally established between 1946 and 1948 in enrolling young people in the army, guiding them in the development of production and enabling them to take part in agrarian reform and cultural activities. The resolution also formally established the nature and functions of the new organisation in view of the convening of the First National Congress:

The New Democratic Youth League is a mass organisation of advanced young people who are resolutely fighting for the new democracy under the political leadership of the CCP; it is the core through which the CCP unites and guides the vast masses of young people; it is the school through which the CCP educates young people in Marxism-Leninism. (Tuan zhongyang qingyunshi yanjiushi et al. 1988, 708)

The resolution defined the age limits for joining the organisation (15-25 years) and established that the league had the task of uniting and educating the masses of youth as well as organising them in the struggle for the liberation of China and for advancing the cause of the “new democracy”. Accordingly, it was stipulated that the organisation had to be broader than the past CYL so as to attract youth activists from all “democratic classes”. While expanding its mass base, it was nevertheless to remain an organisation of advanced activists, thus being different from ordinary youth groups: “Only by organising activists among Chinese youth, we can provide the vast masses of youth with a strong nucleus” (Tuan zhongyang qingyunshi yanjiushi et al. 1988, 708). It was further explained that membership in the league was to be voluntary and indications were also given on how to proceed with the organisational construction in cities, factories, the army, schools and elsewhere. After the resolution was approved, a committee headed by Ren Bishi was formed to perform the preparatory work for the convening of the National Congress that would formally inaugurate the new organisation a few months later (Li 2009, 200-2).

4 Conclusions

Since 1949, the league has played a crucial role in the political mobilisation and socialisation of young people, becoming a key group in the landscape of official PRC youth associations. Its functions, role and structure have very much resembled the Komsomol model, with the CCP maintaining a strong influence on youth policy decisions and cadre development. This essay has shown that, while CYL antecedents dated back to the early 1920s, it was only after the Sino-Japanese War, in the context of the CCP-GMD struggle for control of China, that the question of establishing the Youth League as a distinct but politically subordinated organisation arose, and the major features of its organisation and design emerged. Realising the importance of strengthening its leadership over youth work and disciplining young people, the CCP decided to experimentally set up new organisations in ways that would also limit the league's development and accumulation of power vis-à-vis the party. This process was started at a time when the national salvation youth organisations created in the mid and late 1930s had outlived their usefulness and was driven by an awareness that the progressive youth that had emerged in the course of fighting against Japan needed to be organised and disciplined in view of the Communist seizure of power. The idea of a highly hierarchical and centralised organisation subordinated to the CCP also grew out of discussions focussed on the need to prevent those erroneous tendencies that had in fact characterised the early organisational experience of the CYL.

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