

MOBILIZING YOUTH, MOLDING MINDS

RAISING YOUTH IN THE CHINESE POLITICAL SYSTEM

For Chinese children, the experience of grade school is inseparable from the Young Pioneers—founded by the Communist Party—which claims 130 million members (ages 7–14), making it the largest children’s organization in global history.

Nearly every student is initiated in second grade and thereafter participates, both during and outside of school hours, in activities designed to inculcate patriotism and loyalty to the Communist Party and its leaders. In addition to attending daily flag-raising ceremonies and learning tales of hardship endured by young martyrs of the past, students act as hall monitors or serve on safety patrols to foster a sense of personal duty to the Party.¹

At age 14, youngsters become eligible to join the 75 million-strong Communist Youth League (CYL), and the most promising students are strongly encouraged by teachers and school officials to do so. Workers and rural youths may also form CYL clubs, and these account for nearly half of the total membership.²

The League delivers political education through lectures, meetings, discussion groups, film screenings, and so forth. It also arranges social activities to build *esprit de corps*. Members are required to submit periodic reports on their ideological development.

The League is in turn a major training and recruiting ground for full Communist Party membership (which is by invitation only). It is also an important arena for acquiring political experience and a power base; Hu Jintao is among the current, senior Party leaders who formerly held high office in the League.

Based on the Leninist, Soviet model to deliver the Party “line” to young people, these “mass organizations” seem rather anachronistic in today’s fast-changing society. Many members take the ideological instruction with a large measure of salt, but still see

membership as a sign of social status and a means of personal advancement—especially since Jiang Zemin’s “Three

Represents” theory urged the Party to embrace technical and business elites. Nevertheless, as one former Pioneer told *The New York Times*, “Little kids don’t really understand the talk about ‘loving the Party,’ and later you may think some of the Young Pioneer stuff was funny... But that kind of talk gets into your blood.”³

Over the last two decades, the Youth League has moved some way toward embracing a social welfare, as opposed to exclusively political, role. In 1989, the League established a Youth Development Foundation whose flagship Project Hope has been China’s most successful state-sponsored philanthropic institution, raising more than \$200 million to support education projects, most famously, scholarships to return drop-outs to school. In addition, the League oversees several Youth Cadre Training Colleges that once offered only political programs but that are now also training youth and community development workers for placement with urban district governments. This evolving social role has been encouraged through exchange and partnership programs with dozens of youth organizations from Hong Kong and overseas.

Still, the League’s formal apparatus continues to provide a comprehensive—indeed, quasi-military—command structure for mobilizing loyal youth in political campaigns, and a channel for disseminating new orthodoxies. There is clear potential for them to adopt a more “Confucian identity” in the future; indeed, doing so may make them more credible to youngsters puzzled by the convoluted turns of a latter-day Communist ideology.

What happens, meanwhile, to the tens of thousands of young Chinese who now study abroad (and many of whom are Youth League members)? Are they off the ideological leash?

Every Chinese embassy around the world includes at least one official from the Department of Overseas Chinese Affairs (*qiaoban* 侨办), whose job it is to liaise with local diaspora communities and muster among them support for Beijing's position on major issues (e.g., Taiwan, Falun Gong, Tibet). To pursue these ends, the government of China provides generous funding for local diaspora Chinese associations and media. As China rises economically, these efforts appear to be bearing fruit, especially among Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, where ever more business and community leaders are enthusiastically embracing Beijing.⁴

Relatively unresearched, however, is the question of what, if any, links the *qiaoban* has with overseas student communities, and what, if any, measures the government of China takes to maintain the students' political allegiance during this period of international exposure. The numerous, campus-level Chinese Students Associations are, at least formally independent.

Historically, however, the hearts and minds of Chinese overseas students have not been unswervingly set on

the motherland, for China continues to suffer a brain drain from students who decide to settle overseas. According to a 2007 study by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, of 1.06 million people who had left China since 1978 for overseas study, only 275,500 had so far returned.⁵

Notes

1. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D03E2D7133FF935A1575AC0A96F958260>.
2. "Chinese Communist Youth League Members Reach 75.439 Million" [中国共青团团员人数已达到7543.9万人]. China News website [中国新闻网] May 4, 2008. <http://www.china-news.com.cn/gn/news/2008/05-04/1238619.shtml>.
3. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D03E2D7133FF935A1575AC0A96F958260>.
4. June Shih and Nick Young "Philanthropic Links Between the Chinese Diaspora and the People's Republic of China" in "Diaspora Philanthropy and Equitable Development in China and India" 2004, Harvard University Global Equity Initiative.
5. Jonathan Watts "China fears brain drain as its overseas students stay put" *The Guardian*, June 2, 2007.

The Young Pioneers (少先队)



(Excerpted and translated by HRIC from the organization's official website, <http://cyc6.cycnet.com:8090/ccylmis/cypo/jczs.jsp>)

Members: Anyone between the ages of 7 and 14 who is willing to join, willing to respect organizational rules, and has applied to and been accepted by the group committee can become a group member. Currently, there are 130 million members of the Young Pioneers.

Flag: Red flag with a five-pointed star and a torch.

Emblem: A red ribbon inscribed with “Young Pioneers,” along with the five-pointed star and torch.

Uniform: Red Scarf

Salute: The right hand should be raised high above the head with all five fingers together. This is to signify that the people's interest supersedes all.

Slogan: “Be prepared to struggle for the cause of Communism!” [Response:] “Be prepared at all times!”

Song: “We are the Successors of Communism”

Pledge: “I am resolute in following the instructions of the Communist Party of China: study hard, work hard, labor hard, and be prepared to devote all my strength to the Communist cause!”

Work Conduct: Honesty, courage, vivacity, and unity.

Founders and Leaders: The Young Pioneers was founded by the CPC. The Communist Youth League, commissioned by the CPC, has direct leadership over the Young Pioneers.

Mission: To unite for the purpose of educating young children, to obey the Party, to love our country, love the people, love work, love science, and take care of public property; to diligently study, exercise, and develop skills; to resolutely contribute to the establishment of a modern socialist country with Chinese characteristics; to work hard to become the talented people needed to establish socialist modernization; and to serve as the successors to the cause of communism.

Organization: Schools (or villages) organize large or medium detachments, which are then composed of smaller divisions.

Advisers: The Communist Youth League selects a few outstanding members, invites teachers who have displayed ideological progress, moral integrity, abundant knowledge, and a love for children; or leading individuals from various fields to serve as advisers or instructors to the Young Pioneers. They are close friends and mentors for Young Pioneers members. They help the medium or large group committee members with their work and organize activities. Currently, there are 4 million school advisers, as well as 800,000 outside advisers.

The Communist Youth League (共青团)



(Excerpted and translated by HRIC from the organization's official website, www.gqt.org.cn)

Members: Chinese young adults between the ages of 14 and 28 who have acknowledged the rules and regulations of the group and are willing to participate in a division of the group, invest energy into their work, execute the group's decisions, and pay their membership dues in a timely manner can apply to join the Communist Youth League.

Members who have joined the CPC can still retain their membership in the Communist Youth League. If they are 28 years old and do not hold a post in the League, however, they may not retain their membership.

Flag: The flag of the CYL is red, to signify the success of the revolution. In the upper left-hand corner is a yellow five-pointed star surrounded by a yellow circle, which signifies the generation of Chinese young adults closely united around the CPC. The flag can be used at any of the group's important meetings or on days set aside for CYL activities.

Song: "How Glorious, the Communist Youth League"

Mission: The Communist Youth League firmly endorses the guiding principles of the CPC. Guided by Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist thought, as well as the theories of Deng Xiaoping and the "Three Represents," they thoroughly implement the concept of scientific development, emancipate the mind, pursue the truth, keep up with the times, and unite young adults from every ethnic background across China in order to establish a stronger democratic, civil, harmonious, socialist, and modernized country, and to struggle for the eventual realization of Communism.

Emblem/Badge: The CYL emblem includes the group flag, a wheel, a sheaf of wheat, a rising sun and its rays, and a ribbon inscribed with "Communist Youth League." It signifies that young people from all different ethnic groups are united under the glory and brilliance of Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist thought, and are forging valiantly ahead in the direction to which the Party points them. The group's divisions and members should use the emblem according to regulations.