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**A LEAGUE OF PROPAGANDA WITHOUT A PROPAGANDA-LIKE NAME:  
A BASIC-LEVEL STUDY OF THE CYL'S PROPAGANDISTIC ROLE  
TARGETING CHINESE YOUTH IN THE EARLY 1950s***Sanjiao Tang*

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Based on a large number of primary and old sources collected from China's local areas, most of which have never been exposed or researched before, this article conducts a basic-level case study dealing with the role that the Communist Youth League (CYL) played in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s propaganda toward young people in the early 1950s. It revisits the CYL's institutionalized foundation among Chinese youth for promoting the work of propaganda, its unparalleled emphasis on and diversified strategies in propagating the CCP's establishment of a socialist regime, and its methods to maximize the extension of generating influences on the young people and beyond. The aim of the research is to reassess the CYL's indispensable contributions in the early 1950s in keeping young people's thoughts accord with the Party's guidelines, which should not have been ignored by researchers when examining the history of Communist China. In addition, revisiting the CYL's effective role of promoting the CCP's propaganda seven decades ago helps understand the propagandistic strategies that the CCP is using toward today's Chinese youngsters. Despite remaining inactive in youth-targeted work for several decades, since the last few years, the CYL has regained its active role as a major force in propagating the Party's latest guidelines to today's youth in China. Despite the considerable gaps over 70 years, like that between the technologies applied as propaganda tools, the essence of how the CYL contributes crucially to the CCP's propaganda remains still and is further facilitated by the most advanced Internet-based techniques. Therefore, this article provides not only valuable evidence-based references for historical studies on Communist China but also a mirror for a better understanding of China today.

**Keyword:** Communist Youth League; Chinese Communist Party; propaganda; Chinese youth; China

***Introduction***

When re-examining what the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) relies on to establish and maintain its national regime for over 70 years, propaganda "has always been an essential element" [Brady 2016, 3]. It is well-known that there are propaganda departments that systematically keep functioning in the CCP from the central to the basic levels. However, paralleling the top-down departments under the name of propaganda, many more sectors and forces controlled by the CCP also play significant roles in the process, despite the fact that most of them do not have a propaganda-like name, nor do they have any affiliation with either the central or the basic-level department of propaganda. Such a complicated situation prevents many observers from obtaining a more transparent and accurate understanding of how the CCP's propaganda contributes to its over-70-year success as an essential element. During the first half of the 1950s, the initial stage of the CCP's national regime, when there were drastic domestic and international transformations, without the

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contributions from many other organs with semi- or full-propagandistic roles, the CCP's propaganda might never have achieved such a satisfying effect.

Among all the forces involved in the CCP's propaganda, the Chinese Communist Youth League (Zhongguo gongchanzhuyi qingniantuan, Gongqingtuan or CYL for short)<sup>1</sup>, from the beginning of the 1950s, generated active and directive effect in helping achieve the goal of propaganda among China's young people, although it never belonged to the Party's propaganda departments administratively. Based on its institutionalized foundation in Chinese youths, its unparalleled emphasis on propaganda work, its diversified strategies in propagating, and its maximized extension in exerting influences, as this article aims to argue, the CYL from the 1950s became a league of propaganda targeting China's younger generation and beyond. Every branch of the CYL, especially including those basic-level branches in schools, factories, and stores, was expected to work as a branch of the CCP's propaganda. Each member of the CYL, regardless of his or her vocations, was expected to be a volunteered propagandist of the Party.

Admittedly, all the work of the CYL was suspended due to the institutional disorder caused by the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Then, from the 1980s onward, greater expectations had been placed on the CYL by the CCP on cultivating and selecting younger cadres. In addition to the CCP's loosening control of Chinese youngsters' ideological cognition during the era of marketization and globalization, the CYL's propagandistic role had been heavily weakened for several decades. The recent decade, however, as the return of a politicized environment to China, has witnessed a reactivating CYL participating in and leading public discussions among today's youth. While keeping in line with the tone of the Party as closely as 70 years ago, now the CYL's involvement in public opinions is greatly facilitated by the Internet-based technology and the CCP-censored social media, resulting in its regaining of a significant propaganda role targeting Chinese young people<sup>2</sup>. Comparing with the situation seven decades ago, behind the tremendous advancement in technologies, many of the ways that the CYL had tried and tested for reaching the goal of propaganda are still in use.

In this sense, to better understand the CCP's propaganda, the CYL's role should not be overlooked. To better understand how the CYL again manages to contribute to the Party's goal of propaganda despite the age of information explosion, it is necessary to revisit what it did as a league of propaganda toward young people in the early 1950s.

Depending on large numbers of primary sources and old publications mainly collected from Chongqing and East Sichuan<sup>3</sup>, this article conducts a regional case study of how the basic-level CYL functioned as a key force of propaganda during the initial stage of the CCP's national regime.

China's nearly three-year-long border closure due to COVID-19 has prevented international researchers from conducting field work and accessing needed materials. As for the sources related to topics deemed sensitive by the CCP regime, including issues of propagandistic affairs, they are difficult to be accessed by overseas scholars even if the border closure is lifted. Under these circumstances, it is valuable to have so many diverse and unexplored primary sources in hand upon which to conduct a pioneering exploration.

### ***Research background***

On the basis of older-generation scholars' relevant results achieved through very limited sources by the 1970s<sup>4</sup>, in recent decades, an increasing number of international researchers exploring China after 1949 have paid attention to the significance of propaganda in the CCP's regime during the Mao era or after that. For example, Juyan Zhang and Glen T. Cameron highlight the structural transformations of the CCP's propaganda from the 1990s [Zhang, Cameron 2004]. David Shambaugh conducts an in-depth study on the institutionalized structure and mechanism of the CCP's propaganda system in

contemporary China [Shambaugh 2007]. Paralleling Shambaugh's exploration, Annie-Marie Brady exposes more detailed information on the CCP's propaganda system's history and developments, with a focus on the Party's departments of propaganda from the central to basic levels [Brady 2016]. In 2021, the publishing of *Redefining Propaganda in Modern China: The Mao Era and Its Legacies* (James Farley, Matthew D. Johnson ed.) provides with numbers of novel and inspiring articles talking about the CCP's propaganda in Mao's China [Farley, Johnson 2021]. In addition to such kinds of historical research, the last few years witnessed many more publications discussing specific issues associated with the recent upgrades of the CCP's propaganda strategies. For example, Sheng Zou concentrates on the developing role of state-run media in the making of soft propaganda in China [Zou 2021].

However, among all the existing scholarship exploring the CCP's propaganda from the Mao era to today's China, the CYL's role receives almost no attention. Apart from the unaffiliated relation with the Party's propaganda system as a significant reason, the CYL's nearly absence from propaganda work during the 1990s and 2000s adds to the possibility of being overlooked by most researchers focusing on the CCP's propaganda.

Not to mention the severe lack of research on the CYL's propagandistic role, the studies concentrating on the CYL are always insufficient. So far, most CYL observers mainly emphasize its role in the CCP's power system, especially at the elite level, such as Jérôme Doyon [Doyon 2020]. Undoubtedly, studying the careers of cadres with CYL-related working experiences can help understand the intergenerational transfer of the CCP's ruling power. However, from almost one decade ago, it seems that CYL cadres comparatively lost their special advantaged status in career promotion.

Even among scholars concerning the recent trends among Chinese youngsters, such as nationalist activism, although some of them, such as Kecheng Fang and Maria Repnikova, and Shan Wei and Juan Chen, pay much attention to the younger group of nationalist activists forming on Chinese social media platforms, known as the Little Pinks (*Xiao fenhong*), few mention the contributions that the CYL's propaganda is making to this trend [Fang, Repnikova 2018; Wei, Juan 2021]. Actually, in today's China, the CYL's official accounts on those social media were never absent on any hot topic related to nationalism. To identify the formation of a younger Chinese nationalist group, a review of the CYL's propaganda, noticing the parallel between its influences in the 1950s and those in China today, will be helpful.

Therefore, this article significantly adds to the gaps in the existing literature on both the CCP's propaganda and the CYL. In addition to helping understand the CYL's propaganda strategies that the CCP relied on for mobilizing Chinese youth during the initial stage of its national regime, the results of this research provide a historical mirror for better comprehending the CYL's current role in many ongoing trends among Chinese young people.

### ***The institutionalized foundation among Chinese youth***

The CYL, dating back to 1922, one year after the foundation of the CCP, has always been regarded as the Party's structured reserve force. As soon as the CCP established its national regime in 1949, the CYL swiftly developed across the country, including from big cities to vast rural areas. Only in Chongqing City and nearby counties, the first half of 1950 witnessed an almost quadruple expansion in the number of CYL members [Qingnian Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 1], although it was just six months the Kuomintang (KMT) regime retreated from Chongqing to Taiwan. As an organization in Leninist-party style, the drastic expansion in personnel produced an urgent need for organizational reinforcement, especially the foundation and operation of League branches (*tuanzhibu*), the basic-level institutionalized CYL organization.

According to the CYL's Constitution published in the beginning of the 1950s, wherever there are five or more CYL members, no matter in schools, factories, bureaus, stores,

streets, or villages, a branch of the League should be built [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 4]. Given that there had been more than 500 thousand CYL members in Chongqing and nearby regions by 1950, evidently over tens of thousands of League branches had begun running there, so as to “lay the CYL’s foundation in the cells of China’s society” [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 4].

Copycatting the Leninist-style organizational structure, in every League branch, at least three members formed a branch committee (*zhibu weiyuan*, *zhiwei* for short) and worked under the leadership of the branch secretary (*zhibu shuji*, *zhishu* for short). Yet, it is inaccurate to believe that the basic-level work of the CYL entirely depended on the branch secretary and committee members. Moreover, each League branch as well had its principle in personnel organization and daily work. Divided as per where the CYL members worked, studied, or lived, five or six of them were typically asked to form a League group, which should have a meeting at least every ten days. Records and reports of the meeting (in written or oral form) were both required by the branch committee. In the meantime, committee members would attend each group’s meetings regularly, inspect and instruct their work and pay close attention to any individual member’s thoughts and expressions [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 40].

Apart from the top-down institutionalization of the CYL’s own organizations, in the cases of schools and factories, which accommodated the majority of young people and where institutional forces already functioned well, the CYL branches tightly cooperated with the associations of students, teachers, and workers. In Chongqing, the school-based CYL branches were strongly encouraged to play a guiding role for the students’ associations, engage in their work, and send prominent CYL members to take the important positions in them [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui xuexiao gongzuobu 1953]. In this sense, in secondary and tertiary schools, the CYL from the early 1950s has gained the leadership role, although at that time, the CYL just absorbed quite a small part of the youth students. Relatively similar trials were practiced in factories. Additionally, concerning the situation that workers had different literacy levels, the CYL provided special training classes to cultivate cadres for the factories. Additionally, special working groups dispatched by the Chongqing City Committee of the CYL arrived to help the factories’ CYL branches promote their work [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1951].

Although there was a minimum age limit for becoming a CYL member (normally 14 years old), it could not keep the CYL’s institutional force from reaching further younger generations. In 1950, in the same decision made by the CCP’s central level that the CYL organizations should be established nationally, the most qualified CYL cadres were sent to lead the work of the Young Pioneers League (YPL, in the early 1950s, titled as Early Youth and Children’s League, *Shaonian ertong tuan*) [Qingniantuan Xinan gongzuo weiyuanhui shaonian ertong gongzuobu 1952, 13]. Such a kind of affiliation between the youth’s and children’s leagues was further clarified according to the institutional divisions of the CYL, in which there was a department in charge of the children’s affairs from the central to the county level [Qingniantuan Xinan gongzuo weiyuanhui shaonian ertong gongzuobu 1952, 19]. While the organizations of the CYL, including those at the primary levels, managed to emulate the style of a Leninist party, it is not strange at all if the YPL’s top-down structure was also Leninist-like institutionalized. Regardless of the much younger age, from small groups of the YPL (formed by every 8 to 15 children) to big groups consisting of hundreds of children, the Leninist institutionalization was promoted nationally [Qingniantuan Xinan gongzuo weiyuanhui shaonian ertong gongzuobu 1952, 47–48].

The institutionalization that was built from the most basic level and involved every individual youth member since the early 1950s had prepared a solid foundation for the CYL to play a significant role in contributing to the CCP’s propaganda targeting youngsters including even small children.

### *Unparalleled emphasis on propaganda work*

While the top-down structure of the CYL seemed to almost duplicate the Party's systems in China, where the departments of propaganda had already been established and institutionalized nationally during the same period, the CYL, from the central to the basic-level League branches, from the early 1950s had had an unparalleled emphasis on the work of propaganda too.

In Chongqing, for example, according to the city-level CYL's notice, every League branch was required to concentrate on six major tasks as its daily work. Four of them directly contributed to the goal of propaganda, though the propagandistic work was normally conducted in the name of study or education. For example, it should promote political study among the branch members. It should inspect the results of members' daily studies. It should also pay attention to educating the masses [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 26]. As for the other two tasks, which called for actively responding to and carrying out any instruction from the Party, the Government, and the upper-level CYL organizations, in many cases, what the CYL branches needed to promote among young people was propaganda-related too.

To be more specific, what a League branch let its members *study* ranged from ideological content to domestic and international affairs, all of which were highly politicized and closely kept pace with the CCP's newest policies and guidelines. For instance, in March 1952, a volume of reading materials recommended for CYL members in Chongqing focused on eliminating the phenomena of waste and corruption in the Party. It was actually the theme of the Three-anti Campaign (*Sanfan yundong*) that was promoted in China during the same period [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongzuo weiyuanhui 1952]. During the Five-anti Campaign (*Wufan yundong*) targeting private entrepreneurs and merchants, knowing about the evilness of capitalist businesses was the key point in another reading volume compiled and issued by the CYL Committee of Chongqing City [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongzuo weiyuanhui 1952]. In 1953, when the goal of finishing the First Five-year Plan (*Yiwu jihua*) of the national economy in advance attracted the whole country's attention, early next year, CYL members in Chongqing needed to learn the spirit of Wang Chonglun, a model worker who efficiently completed production task [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu 1954]. To transform the whole nation to a socialist regime, while 1954 witnessed the issuance of the General Line of the Transition Period (*Guodu shiqi zongluxian*), to motivate all the CYL members to study the General Line was a core task conducted by all the League branches in Chongqing City [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1954]. During the tide of the Socialist Transformation (*Shehui zhuyi gaizao*) Movement in 1955, when realizing the ideal of communism was deemed possible by the central of the CCP, reading the articles focusing on the education of communism turned out to be one more assignment for Chongqing youngsters in the CYL [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu 1955].

Along with the domestic campaigns that the CYL needed to propagate among youth one after another, China's standpoints and involvement in international tensions took another big part of the CYL-based propaganda. When propagandizing the campaign of opposing waste in 1952, the Chinese army's arduous lives on the battlefield of the Korean War were appreciated as a representative example by Chongqing young people [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongzuo weiyuanhui 1952a, 17–20]<sup>5</sup>. Even when the goal was to help CYL members develop communist morality, they should still keep their hatred toward the U.S. by regularly studying the materials assigned by the CYL. For example, in 1955, although the Korean War had ended and there was no more actual conflict between China and the U.S., a qualified CYL member should not forget that "U.S. invaders were occupying China's Taiwan and the Penghu Islands" [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu 1955, 11]. Besides the propaganda aiming to mobilize nationalism, in the

CYL's political education in secondary schools, internationalism and the alliance of socialist countries were as well in the list of to be propagandized, of which were ideology-oriented [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1954].

To generally and persistently carry out so unparalleled emphasis on propaganda-related work, the regular meetings in each League group, plus the required reports and inspections, surely facilitated the *study* progress and secured the *study* effect. In the meantime, political classes (*zhengzhike*) or League classes (*tuanke*), as required courses not only in schools but in most other places where a League branch existed, added greatly to the results of the propaganda-orientated education. In secondary schools in Chongqing, for instance, political classes were regarded as the focus for the CYL branches to conduct their work [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 17]. Many factory workers might not be literate enough to study by themselves. They were asked to attend the CYL's classes, which contained extra parts for answering workers' questions [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1951].

Yet, if there were just political classes provided, the effects of propaganda could not have been so notable, as confirmed by the CYL Committee of Chongqing City [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1951].

### ***Diversified strategies in propagating***

Noticing the distinctions among different groups of CYL members, such as the gap between those in schools and in factories, the League branches in Chongqing practiced diversified strategies for achieving a satisfying result of propaganda.

Apart from political classes, the CYL in schools endeavored to make full use of media platforms to amplify the effects of propaganda. The media in paper forms were most handy for basic-level branches without sufficient resources. In most cases, the CYL newspapers (*tuobao*) were usually issued on the walls or blackboards of a school or factory. In some extraordinary circumstances, the League branches managed to print it as mimeograph papers and send it to each League group as study materials, which were praised and advocated as model experiments [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 64].

Mimeograph techniques alone had not yet satisfied the appetite of many basic-level CYL branches. They intended to apply more advanced media technologies, such as radio broadcasting, in servicing their propaganda work. The rapid development of broadcasting backed by the CCP was available in offering timely help<sup>6</sup>. In Chongqing, the CYL branch in Southwest China Technical College of Industry actively mobilized students to listen to radio programs, especially youth programs [Xinan renmin guangbo diantai 1951, Vol. 1, No. 9–10, 15]. Besides this college, by June 1951, 16 more secondary and tertiary schools in Chongqing had built a stable cooperative relationship with radio stations in the same city [Xinan renmin guangbo diantai 1951, Vol. 1, No. 4–5, 29]. For all the students in these schools, no matter belonging to the CYL or not, listening to the radio, which had been politicized as a tool of propaganda too, became one more way of taking political classes on the campus.

As for youth workers in factories, who had confronted the toughness of making a living, purely political education without any material incentive might not work so well. To help solve many practical issues in workers' daily lives, like dining and housing, was recommended as another important task of the League branch in factories [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 52]. Apart from playing the role of a troubleshooter for workers' welfare, night schools were provided by some factories' League branches, also receiving the gratitude from workers, both junior and senior ones [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 52]. Such a relationship based on gratefulness and trust indirectly but effectively paved the way for CYL branches' work on propaganda.

In addition to the different strategies applied in schools and factories, the most commonly used and most generally welcomed method of promoting propaganda, no matter where a League branch ran its work, was to be an organizer of recreational activities. It seemed that these activities, such as enjoying or participating in stage performances and watching movies, had nothing to do with propaganda. Yet, in the meantime of having the after-work or after-study relaxation facilitated by the CYL, people had already been educated by the propaganda in soft forms. During the Spring Festival of 1951, only in one district of Chongqing City, over 170 works of culture and arts were created by secondary-school students, all of whom were motivated by the CYL's theme of supporting the army and taking care of soldiers' families. Also, in Chongqing, the Month of Sino-Soviet Friendship (*Zhongsu youhaoyue*) in 1951 was filled with CYL-sponsored activities like learning Russian songs and dances, plus holding informal discussions after watching movies or reading literature works from Soviet Union [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1953]. During the tide of reading Soviet novels encouraged by the CYL branches, over tens of thousands of Chongqing students had read those most famous stories, such as *How the Steel Was Tempered* [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1953].

In contrast to these activities closely associated with the CCP's political trends, activities without apparent relation to politics, such as hosting programs of entertainment like a carnival, were seriously criticized, although they once enjoyed some basic-level League branches' sponsorship [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 66].

As instructed by the CYL Committee of Chongqing City, "when conducting (recreational) activities, the CYL organizations at different levels should still put the leadership of thoughts (*sixiang lingdao*) in the first place" [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1953]. Even though admitting that recreational activities are of indispensable significance to young people, first of all, "organizing such activities is one of the important ways of political and thought education" [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1953]. Those experiences of singing, dancing, and movie screening, pleasantly shared among youth peers, could likely speed and smoothen thought education and make groups of youngsters willingly follow the CCP's latest dynamic of propaganda.

### *Maximized extension in exerting influences*

Based on the institutionalized foundation, orientated by the unparalleled emphasis on propaganda, and facilitated by the diversified strategies in propagating, it seemed that the basic-level CYL branches had almost become branches of the CCP's propaganda. Yet the only concern was if the human resource was adequate for conducting all the propagandistic tasks and realizing the goal of propaganda as expected.

In principle, among all the committee members of a League branch, just one of them was responsible for propaganda issues, known as the propaganda member of the committee (*xuanchuan weiyuan*), according to the organizational regulation of a CYL's basic branch. However, based on the sources exposing the daily work of each CYL member at the basic level, like those in schools, factories, and stores, it is safe to argue that, in addition to the propaganda member of the committee, all the other members of a basic-level League branch were expected to be active propagandists of the CCP too, although no salaries would be paid for their contributions. Through mobilizing every CYL member to devote to the propagandistic tasks, it was possible to maximize the influences of the CCP's propaganda in the younger generation and beyond.

As set by the central level of the CYL, the goal was to attract 95 percent of China's younger generation at that time, the majority of whom had not joined the CYL yet [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 10]. In practice, all CYL members were required to be sincere friends of youngsters outside the League, closely caring the status of their politics-related thoughts [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1951].

In addition to CYL members in schools who were anticipated to exert propaganda influences among groups of classmates, usually through a form of friend-like impact, various specific methods of maximizing the influences were provided for other CYL members with vocations other than a student. Younger teachers who were members of the CYL were asked to unite all the other teachers in studying the Party's latest instructions [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1954]. In factories, all CYL members were motivated to participate in the tasks of propaganda both on and off work, becoming helpful assistants of the Party on production lines [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi weiyuanhui 1953]. In stores, apart from promoting propaganda within their personnel, the salesmen and saleswomen were encouraged to propagate the CCP's policies to customers and even residents nearby, as one of the major plans for the stores' daily work [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 19]. Children in the YPL were included in the mobilization for propaganda as well. For example, besides playing the role of small propagandists in primary schools, similar to their secondary-school and tertiary-school brothers and sisters, YPL members were expected to devote themselves to serving the society through which helped the Party's propaganda reach to people outside schools, like those who dropped out of schools. YPL children in the countryside were not overlooked in contributing to the propaganda work either. They assisted rural cadres in propaganda tasks like (CCP-censored) news reporting [Qingniantuan Xinan gongzuo weiyuanhui shaonian ertong gongzuobu 1952, 16].

Regardless of the distinct personal backgrounds of each CYL member, once joining the CYL, the most common identity that was shared by all of them was propagandists of the Party. It was an almost same story for each child to join the YPL. Through each of the members' significant contributions, in only a few years after the CCP initiated its national regime, comprehensive influences of its propaganda were efficiently maximized and successfully extended to every corner of the country.

### **Conclusion**

In terms of all the revealed information on basic-level CYL branches' work in the early 1950s, it was no wonder that the League satisfyingly finished one of the primary tasks assigned by the CCP, to conduct the Party's propaganda and keep Chinese youth's thoughts in line with the Party [Qingniantuan Chongqingshi gongwei xuanchuanbu 1950, 1]. The CYL's role in achieving the CCP's goal of propaganda toward youngsters could not be replaced by any other propagandistic force under China's party-state system, including the propaganda departments of the Party itself.

During the decades around the 2000s, the CYL hardly maintained its role as a propaganda force with its members as propagandists. However, the most recent-decade trends happening in the CCP's propaganda and thought work toward the younger generation remind observers of the return of the CYL's propagandistic contributions. Admittedly, the Internet-based technologies have made the CCP's propaganda quite different from that in the 1950s; it is also the general application of the Internet techniques that dramatically reinforces the CYL's function of propaganda. Beneath the application of technologies, however, the essence of how the CYL contributes crucially to the CCP's propaganda remains still.

Here is one of the latest and most perfect instances demonstrating the CYL's reviving and ongoing role as a significant force for today's propaganda. In April 2022, the Central Committee of the CYL issued the Synopsis of Strengthening and Improving the League's Guidance for Thoughts and Politics Work in the New Era (2022). Under such a lengthy title, the importance of the CYL-based propaganda targeting youngsters is fully illustrated. Moreover, the necessary methods recently instructed for the League to promote propagandistic tasks surprisingly echo what the CYL branches based its propaganda role on during the early 1950s. In the first place, it again emphasizes the unparalleled significance



of the CYL's work on propaganda, which is to "educate younger generations, as the major responsibility and task". To be specific, among all the ten work plans of education that the CYL will carry out for China's young people this year, eight of them directly help propagate the legitimacy of the CCP's regime. For promoting these plans in practice, basic-level League branches are still deemed as the elementary unit providing platforms for guiding youths' thoughts. As for the Internet and all the other new media technologies, they are expected to take the main part in the diversified strategies servicing in the new era. At the end of this newest synopsis, cooperation throughout the whole League (*quantuan xietong*) is included in the crucial mechanism for reaching the proposed goals, again requiring all CYL members to devote to this propaganda-focused work and to play the role of volunteer propagandists.

Through a basic-level reexamination of the CYL's contributions to the CCP's propaganda during the early 1950s, this article not just exposes the CYL's essential significance to the CCP's newly established regime but also provides a mirror of today's China, where the CYL is regaining its influential force in the CCP's youth-targeted propaganda.

<sup>1</sup> Between 1949 and 1957, the CYL was renamed as *Zhongguo xinminzhuzhuyi qingniantuan* 中国新民主主义青年团 (Chinese New Democratic Youth League). In documents and internal materials issued during this period, it was sometimes called *Qingniantuan* for short. From 1957 onward, the name of the Chinese Communist Youth League has been reused.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the official account of the Central Committee of the CYL on Weibo, one of the most popular social media in China, has more than 17.5 million followers. This number does not include the CYL organizations at different levels and various units throughout China's party-state system, most of which have also opened accounts on social media.

<sup>3</sup> All the primary sources and old publications used in this article are from the author's private collections. Bought from either old-book markets or recycling stations in Chongqing and East Sichuan areas, those waste papers provide a valuable channel for researchers, especially international ones, to access parts of the overlooked or hidden history in Mao's China.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding international scholars' representative research results related to the CCP's propaganda by the 1970s, see: Franklin Houn, *To Change a Nation: Propaganda and Indoctrination in Communist China* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1961); Robert J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China* (New York: Norton, 1961); Frederick Yu, *Mass Persuasion in Communist China* (New York: Praeger, 1964); Chalmers Johnson (ed.), *Ideology and Politics in Contemporary China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> In October 1950, the CCP sent Chinese army to participate in the Korean War. Communist China involvement and fighting with the UN army significantly shaped the development and the result of the war. It also deeply molded the tightened international environment that China faced until Mao's death.

<sup>6</sup> Upon taking over China Mainland by the end of 1949, radio broadcasting was regarded as "one of the most effective tools for massive propaganda and education" [Renmin ribao, June 6, 1950]. The early 1950s witnessed the mushrooming of radio stations in urban China and the expansion of the broadcasting network, both of which were promoted and controlled by the CCP. In Chongqing City alone, only by 1951 three radio stations were newly established and began broadcasting. As the most effective propaganda tool, young people were always included in the main groups of targeted audiences.

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**СОЮЗ ПРОПАГАНДИ, У НАЗВІ ЯКОГО НІЧОГО НЕ СКАЗАНО  
ПРО ПРОПАГАНДУ: БАЗОВЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ПРОПАГАНДИСТСЬКОЇ РОЛІ  
НА ПОЧАТКУ 1950-х рр. КОМУНІСТИЧНОГО СОЮЗУ МОЛОДІ КИТАЮ,  
ОРІЄНТОВАНОГО НА МОЛОДИХ КИТАЙЦІВ**

У статті на основі великої кількості даних (більшість із яких ніколи раніше не оприлюднювалися і не досліджувалися), отриманих безпосередньо з джерел у різних районах Китаю, проведено базове тематичне дослідження, присвячене ролі, яку відігравав Комуністичний союз молоді Китаю (КСМК) у пропаганді Комуністичної партії Китаю (КПК) серед молоді на початку 1950-х рр. Розглянуто історію інституціоналізованого заснування КСМК для сприяння пропагандистській роботі серед китайської молоді, його безпрецедентну увагу до пропаганди встановленого Компартією соціалістичного режиму, різноманітні стратегії, а також методи максимізації розширення впливу на молодь і поза межами організації.

Мета дослідження полягає в переоцінці надзвичайно великого впливу КСМК на початку 1950-х рр. на схвалення і підтримку молоддю настанов партії. Досліджуючи історію комуністичного Китаю, не можна ігнорувати цей вплив. Крім того, перегляд через 70 років

ефективної ролі КСМК у просуванні пропаганди КПК допомагає зрозуміти пропагандистські стратегії, які КПК застосовує до сучасної китайської молоді. Попри те що КСМК протягом кількох десятиліть не вів активної роботи серед молоді, за останні декілька років Союз активізувався і відновив свою роль провідної сили в поширенні серед сучасної молоді Китаю останніх директив партії.

Хоча за 70 років відбулися значні зміни в, наприклад, технологіях, що використовуються як знаряддя пропаганди, суть того, як КСМК робить вирішальний внесок у пропаганду КПК, залишається незмінною. Найпередовіші технології Інтернету лише полегшують роботу КСМК. Отже, ця стаття не лише містить інформацію, що ґрунтується на прямих свідченнях і важлива для історичних досліджень комуністичного Китаю, а й може бути дзеркалом, що сприяє кращому розумінню Китаю сьогодні.

**Ключові слова:** Китай; Комуністична партія Китаю; Комуністичний союз молоді Китаю; китайська молодь; пропаганда

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