

Adrian Brona

Jagiellonian University

Selecting cadres: former members of the CCYL in the 19th Central Committee of CPC

Abstract

This chapter examines the role of Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL) as breeding ground for crucial political leaders in China. Author shows the share of former affiliates of Central Committees CCYL in the 19th Central Committee of Communist Party of China (CC CPC) and compares with data from previous CCs. Analysis points out an insignificant correlation between engagement in CCYL and promotion into the CPC structures which shows the importance of the official youth organization of the CPC in the process of selecting the most powerful cadres of the party is overrated.

Keywords: *China, Communist Party of China, Chinese Communist Youth League*

1. Introduction

Since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, two out of six Communist Party of China's (CPC) chairmen/general secretaries were previously the first secretary of Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL). Since 2002, former first secretary of the CCYL was either chairman of People's Republic of China (PRC) or prime minister. It may lead to the conclusion that the CCYL emerged as a powerful institution in post-Mao China. It is often considered as a power base of two factions in the CPC. The first was operating during Hu Yaobang term as chairman (1980–1981) and general secretary (1981–1987) of the CPC. At that time he was promoting many politicians with whom he worked as the first secretary of the CCYL in 1952–1966. The second formed under Hu Jintao, who served as general secretary of the CPC from 2002 to 2012. Hu Jintao, who also was the first

secretary of the CCYL (1984–1985), acted similarly to his predecessor and gave many high positions to his associates. However, unexpectedly swift consolidation of power by Xi Jinping since 2012 have put into question strength of so-called CCYL faction (*tuanpai*).

Within the field of China studies, the CCYL was often reduced to the role of the power base of the *tuanpai*. Although there are a few issues with the factional analysis (Jing 2000, p. 44; Fewsmith 2001, p. 37; Bo 2007, p. 139), it is probably the most appropriate tool to describe and explain processes which occur in party politics in China. However, it is focusing mostly on personal relations between various actors within the CPC. For instance, some scholars define *tuanpai* as politicians, who worked in the CCYL during Hu Jintao years, at least at province level or above and are not related in any way to other factions (Li & White 2003, p. 590). It leaves out an assessment of the CCYL as an organisation which one of the functions is to prepare future leaders of China. The main aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the CCYL as a breeding ground for top Chinese politicians regardless of their factional allegiance. Putting it from the perspective of a career politician in China: is it worth to advance through ranks in the CCYL in order to join the political elite? Throughout this paper, the term “political elite” will refer to members of the CPC Central Committee (CC). This study was divided into two parts. Firstly, it will show the share of former affiliates of Central Committees of the CCYL in the 19th Central Committee of CPC. The sample of former members of the CCYL’s CC was chosen, because of their long-term commitment to the work in the CCYL. The results will show a correlation between long-term engagement in work of the official youth organisation of the CPC and prospects of promotion into the party’s Central Committee. Secondly, the data for the 19th CC of CPC will be compared with similar data from previous Central Committees. The outcome of the comparison will address the question of changing the importance of the CCYL in the process of selecting the party’s most influential cadres. It is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the actual importance of the league within the Chinese political system.

2. Methodology and data

One of the functions of the CCYL is producing successors at all levels of political leadership. In this regard, it is the “reserve army” for the CPC (Li 2006, p. 76; Zeng 2018, p. 183; Wang 2006, p. 104). The CCYL

is a mass organisation, with as many as 90 million members. Numerous Chinese politicians at the beginning of the career signed up to the league. For instance, Xi Jinping became a member of CCYL during cultural revolution (Lam 2015, p. 41). However, he has never played a major role in the organisation. Tracking the career path of every former member of the league is impossible. Different methods have been proposed to reduce the scope of an analysed cohort of the CCYL. For Kou (2014, p. 144), “CCYL affiliate” means civilian cadres who had occupied a CCYL post ranking at the deputy-bureau level or above as their full-time job after 1978 and have advanced to the vice-ministerial rank or higher before retirement, which gave around 300 politicians at the moment of conducting the study. Payette (2016, p. 324), uses the term “*tuanpai*” to refer to those who occupied: league provincial secretary position, a secretary of the CC of CCYL position, first secretary of the Central Secretariat of the CCYL position. These three are respectively prefecture, sub-provincial and provincial-level positions.

In this study I propose to distinguish between former members of the CCYL, considered without factional affiliation, and *tuanpai*, i.e. members of the Hu Jintao’s faction. Throughout this paper, the term “former members of CCYL” is used to refer to former members of the CCYL’s Central Committee, the elite of the organisation. They constitute the sample in this quantitative study. There are three advantages to this approach. Firstly, it is a broad group, but manageable regarding obtaining data. Secondly, the sample does not indicate any factional alignment. Thirdly, those who obtained a seat in the CCYL’s Central Committee were committed to long-term engagement in the work of the league.

The primary assumption of this study was that people who became members of the CCYL’s Central Committee are well positioned to advance to the same post at the party later in their career. It is based on the fact that the CCYL is a youth organisation of CPC. It has similar Leninist structure, which includes National Congress, Central Committee, the Secretariat and various departments, which are akin to party’s departments. If a young politician is skilful enough to advance to the top of approximately 90-million CCYL, then he or she can achieve similar outcomes in the party. Therefore name lists of CCYL’s Central Committees were compared with a membership of the 19th Central Committee of CPC. In the second part of the analysis, the results of the first stage were compared with similar data from previous CCs of CPC. Data were collected from publicly available name lists of members of committees published on the Internet by either CCYL, CPC or state media (Chinese Communist Youth League n.d.; People’s Daily n.d.).

From 1978 until 2018 nine National Congresses of the CCYL were held. The 10th National Congress was in 1978, the 11th in 1982, the 12th in 1988 and then every five years subsequent ones, up to the 18th National Congress in 2018. Because of the league's characteristic as a youth organisation, it is hard to require members of its CC advance straight to the party's Central Committee. The only member of the CCYL who traditionally is also a member of the CPC's CC is the first secretary. Due to insufficient data regarding the average age of CCYL's CC members, it is difficult to predict how much time will pass between their sitting in CCYL CC and ascension to CPC CC. However, a rough estimate may be concluded based on the average age of members of CCYL secretariat, which is the highest governing body of the CCYL. For most of the CCYL's secretariats, its ranged from 38 years (in 1982) to 40,1 years (1993). The only noticeable exceptions are CCYL's secretaries selected in 2013 and 2018, with an average age of 43,14 years and 46 years respectively. In the party, the average age of the members of core leadership groups (Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee) in 15th–18th CC was above 60 years (Li 2016, p. 96). Based on this data we can conclude that for most of CCYL's CC members it would take up to 20 years to ascend into the CPC's CC, which has a bit lower average age than core leadership groups. Therefore, the study will focus on members of the CCYL's CC selected between 1978 and 2008 who were promoted to CPC's CC between 1997 and 2017. This time frame provides two advantages. Firstly, since all former CCYL's members in the study were at the top positions in the league in post-Mao China, it will provide knowledge about the role of the organisation run by people who do not have a part in conflict with Japan and Civil War (1946–1949). Secondly, comparing the results for five CPC's CC will show the change in the impact of CCYL on elite creation.

From the 10th National Congress of the CCYL held in 1978 to the 16th National Congress in 2008, there were 2057 both full and alternate members of the CCYL's CC. A minority of cadres served in more than one Central Committee. After exclusion of multiple terms assigned to one person, the data was checked for the possibility of more than one person with the same name. The result was 1850 unique members of the CCYL's CC selected between 1978 and 2008. Those names were compared with a membership of 15th–19th CPC's CC. The outcome of every comparison was checked for the possibility of different people in the CPC and the CCYL having the same name. This stage was performed by scrutiny of cadres biographies available on various official websites. If the same name

appeared in both the CCYL's CC and the CPC's CC, then the biography of the CPC's CC member was checked for indication of work in the CCYL's CC. For instance the position of province secretary or in the central organs. Only validated matches were included in the results.

3. Former CCYL's CC members in 19th CC of CPC

The 19th Central Committee of Communist Party of China was elected in 2017. It consists of 204 full members and 172 alternate members. It is the first CPC's CC, which representatives were chosen during the Xi Jinping's term as general secretary of CPC. Due to the centralisation of power during his rule (Lampton 2015, p. 775; Wang & Zeng 2016, p. 470; Lee 2017, p. 326), we can safely assume he had a dominant influence on the composition of the committee.

There are 27 former members of the CCYL's CC in the 19th CC of CPC. Among them, 19 are full members, and eight serve as alternate members. It is 9.3% and 4.7% of both groups respectively. Figure 1. Presents the data.

Figure 1. Former members of CCYL CC in 19th CPC CC



Source: own study.

The full members of 19th CC of CPC with the experience in CCYL CC are: Bayanqolu, Bagatur, Ji Bingxuan, Liu Qibao, Sun Jinlong, Li Keqiang, Shen Yueyue, Song Xiuyan, Zhang Jun, Zhang Qingli, Lu Hao, Chen Xi, Zhou Qiang, Hu Chunhua, Losang Gyaltsen, Li Zhanshu,

Huang Shuxian, Han Changfu and Lou Yangsheng. The alternate members are Li Qun, Duan Chunhua, He Junke, Gao Guangbin, Zhao Yide, Ge Huijun, Ulan (Wulan) and Pan Yue.

There are three issues, which are worth noting. Firstly, only a small percentage of the 19th CC of CPC served on the CCYL's CC. The overwhelming majority were advancing their career through other means than the league. It may be astounding, especially when we consider the size of the CCYL, its similarity to the CPC and a notion of "reserve army." This data indicates the limited role of CCYL in elite creation in China.

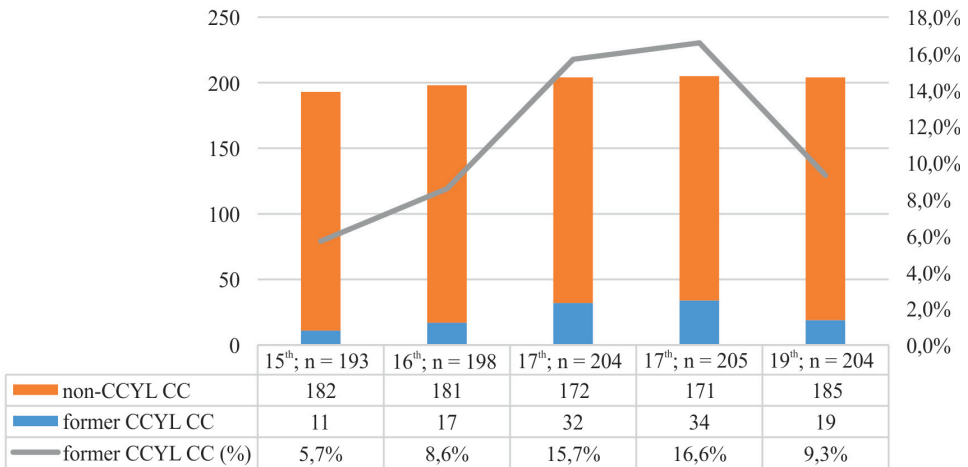
Secondly, among those who have gained experience in the CCYL's CC, five was the first secretary: Li Keqiang (1993–1998), Zhou Qiang (1998–2006), Hu Chunhua (2006–2008), Lu Hao (2008–2013) and He Junke (since 2017). The only first secretary since 1993 who is not currently in CPC's Central Committee is Qin Yizhi (2013–2017). In 2017 he was transferred from the league to position of deputy director of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ). It was a ministerial-level institution. However, traditionally former first secretaries were given governorship over province as a first post-league office. Additionally, in 2018 AQSIQ was merged with two other agencies into the State Administration for Market Regulation, which further diminished Qin status. Apart from former first secretaries, among those 27 cadres, other four was working in the CCYL's Central Secretariat, which is a highly exclusive group of 6–8 members. They are Bayanqolu, Ji Bingxuan, Liu Qibao and Sun Jinlong. Liu Qibao got into the secretariat at the same time as Li Keqiang, while the rest served when the later was the first secretary. Only 2/3 of the 27 was regular members of the CCYL's CC. It implies that only the top few members of the league have guaranteed promotion into CPC CC.

Thirdly, while the CCYL is mostly believed to be a powerhouse of the league faction (*tuanpai*), among that politicians, we can see people affiliated with different groups within CPC. Most notably Li Zhanshu, who is the right-hand man of Xi Jinping. His other confidant among former CCYL's CC members is Chen Xi, who became in 2017 director of CPC's Organization Department. It may lead to the conclusion that long-term engagement in the work of CCYL does not automatically result in affiliation with *tuanpai*.

4. Former CCYL's CC members in other CPC's CC

Surprisingly small percentage of former CCYL CC members in 19th CC of CPC encourage to compare this results with a similar study of previous CPC CCs. As noted above, the data from 15th to 18th CC of CPC were collected. The 15th CC of CPC was chosen in 1997, eight years after Jiang Zemin became general secretary. Election of the 16th CC of CPC marked the end of his tenure. The 17th and 18th CC of CPC was under the considerable influence of Hu Jintao. Figure 2. shows an overview of a share of former CCYL's CC members among full members of 15th–19th CC of CPC. From the chart, it can be seen that by far the highest share of former CCYL's CC members was in the 17th and the 18th CC of CPC. Although there was a growing representation of former members of the CCYL between the 15th and the 16th Central Committee, a real breakthrough came five years later, when their share almost doubled. Interestingly, the 9.3% result of the 19th CC of CPC is worse than the 17th and the 18th CC of CPC, but it is still better in comparison with Jiang Zemin's time.

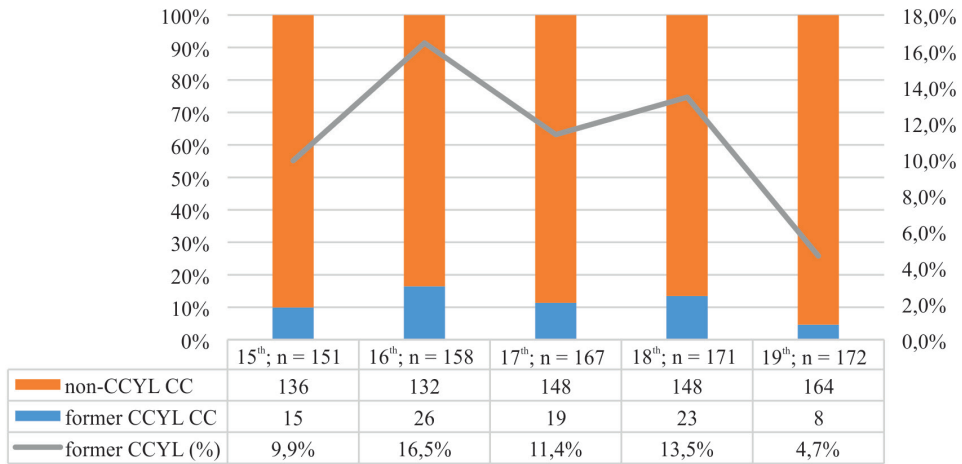
Figure 2. Former CCYL CC members in 15th–19th CC of CPC (full members)



Source: own study.

There was a different situation regarding alternate members. This data is present on figure 3. What is interesting about the numbers in this chart is that share of former CCYL's CC members in the 17th CC of CPC decreased in comparison to the 16th CC of CPC. Furthermore, even though the number has risen in the 18th CC of CPC, their share was still below the level of the 16th CC of CPC. What also stands out in the chart is a significant drop in the 19th CC of CPC. In comparison with the previous CC, the share of former CCYL's cadres as alternate members was far smaller.

Figure 3. Former CCYL's CC members in 15th–19th CPC'S CC (alternate members)



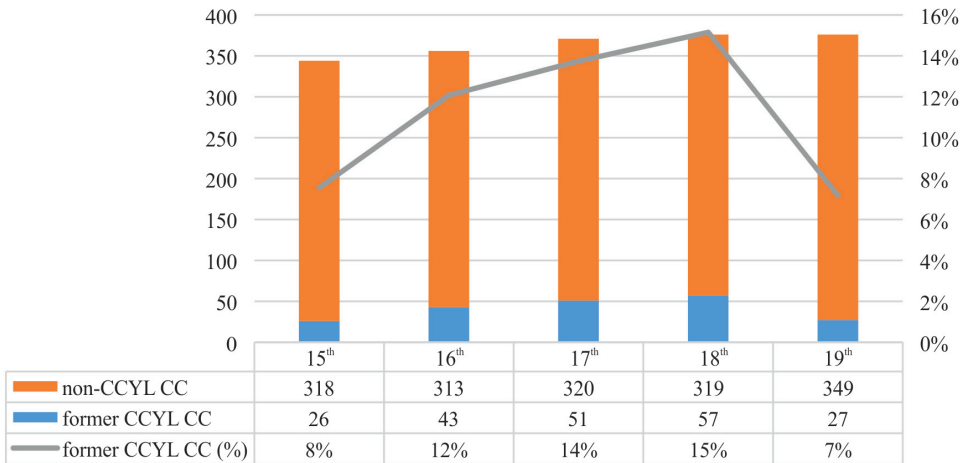
Source: own study.

Figure 4. combines date from two previous charts. It clearly shows steady grow in quantity of former CCYL's CC members in CPC's CC from 15th to 18th CC. Nonetheless, during Xi Jinping's tenure as a general secretary, there was a sharp decline, which brought the percentage of former CCYL's cadres below the level of 15th CC of CPC.

There are two striking observations emerging from the data comparison. Firstly, an increasing proportion of former CCYL's members during Hu Jintao's time as general secretary. It may be somewhat counterintuitive, but it is not indicating that the league role in fostering future top cadres became more prominent comparing with the era of Jiang Zemin. It is merely the result of its former first secretary promoting those whom he knows and trust. This process started even before Hu became general secretary of the party. The CCYL was the most important source of his

support, along with graduates from Qinghua University and trainees from Central Party School (Zheng 2002, p. 77). He was active in supporting his former colleagues from the CCYL into secondary or subordinate offices in provinces and the government (Wang 2006, p. 106; Lam 2006, p. 19; Zheng 2010, p. 93). Later they were promoted into a leadership position, which has led to CPC's CC. The rise of *tuanpai* is especially evident regarding alternate members – their percentage during Hu's time dropped in comparison with the 16th CC of CPC because former CCYL's affiliates were becoming full members instantly, without tenure as alternate members. That is the reason why there were more former CCYL's cadres among full members than alternate members of CPC's CC in Hu's era.

Figure 4. Former CCYL's CC members in 15th–19th CPC's CC (full + alternate members)



Source: own study.

Secondly, a sudden drop in 19th CPC's CC may indicate a further decrease in the role of the CCYL in the future. It is also more evident from the data for alternate members. While during Jiang's tenure there were almost twice as much former CCYL's affiliates among alternate members than full members, in the Xi's era the proportion swung around. There are only several cadres who can obtain promotion from alternate to full member. It is also hard to imagine that Xi Jinping all of a sudden will change his management of human resources within the party.

Nonetheless, the tenure of former CCYL's CC member, Chen Xi, as a head of CPC's Organization Department will be an exciting time

to observe if he will alter the trend. After all, many of the promotion of former CCYL's CC members into the CPC's CC happened when Li Yuanchao, other former CCYL's CC affiliate, held the same office. Nevertheless, even if the proportion of former CCYL's CC members will increase in the 20th CC of CPC, a lot of that promotion may happen because of close relations with Chen Xi. Therefore, it might not be an indication of the stronger role of the CCYL in training of future leaders of China.

5. The limited role of CCYL in elite creation

Above results show the percentage of former CCYL's CC members within the CPC's CC. One person can serve a few terms, so it does not provide information regarding the quantity of them.

In the period between 1997 and 2017 former members of 10th to 16th CC of the CCYL were elected 204 times into CPC's CC. However, closer scrutiny of data shows that the majority of them were chosen for more than one term. Three politicians served in all five analysed CPC CC. They are Song Xiuyan, Li Keqiang and Shen Yueyue. On the other extreme, just under a third (31 people) served just one term. Figure 5. provides the summary statistics for a number of people with multiple terms.

Figure 5. Members of 10th–16th CCYL's CC in 15th–19th CPC's CC by a number of terms

	One term	Two terms	Three terms	Four terms	Five terms
Number of people	31	32	18	10	3

Source: own study.

Careful inspection of the table shows that only 94 people elected into the CCYL's CC between 1978 and 2008 were promoted into the CPC's CC between 1997 and 2017. As stated before, there were 2057 members of the CCYL's CC during the analysed period, out of whom 1850 were unique members, who served one or more tenures in the committee. What is striking about those figures is that only 5% members of 10th–16th CC of the CCYL eventually got into the CPC's CC. Overall, these results indicate the limited role of the CCYL as a breeding ground of Chinese political elites.

6. Conclusions

We can draw three conclusions based on the results of the study. Firstly, contrary to the expectations, this study did not find a significant correlation between long-term engagement in the work of the Central Committee of the CCYL and promotion into CPC's CC. Only 5% of the people who spend enough time in the CCYL to become elite of this organisation later achieved the same status in the party. Though, around 1/3 of them served three or more terms in CPC's CC. It is quite unusual due to the high turnover rate in this body – more than 60% in 15th–18th CPC's CC (Li 2016, p. 79).

Secondly, the rise of prominence of former CCYL's members during the tenure of Hu Jintao was probably not based on the stronger role of the league in elite training since 1978. Factional politics can explain it. The ascent to power of *tuanpai* depended on two factors: former first secretary of the CCYL being in a position to determine promotion into important offices and substantial aspect of personal relations in Chinese politics. To the lesser extent, it was also an effect of Li Yuanchao, a former member of the CCYL Central Secretariat, being director of party's Organization Department between 2007 and 2012. The data from 19th CPC's CC suggest it was a temporary situation. The role of the CCYL decreased, even though Li Keqiang, another former first secretary of the league, is prime minister of State Council and hold a second-rank spot in the Standing Committee. He does not have such an influence over the advancement of senior cadres.

Nevertheless, some researchers argue that besides personal connections, also the age of former CCYL cadres is a factor in their promotion (Kou & Tsai 2014, p.162). They advance their career quicker in the beginning, which gives them more time to seek a promotion at the higher echelons of the power. It can also explain to some extent why so many former CCYL's cadres served multiple terms in CPC's CC – they obtained a seat in a relatively young age, which is giving an opportunity to serve for a longer time.

Thirdly, institutionally, CCYL is not a “breeding ground” for Chinese political elites. The organisation's influence in that matter is minimal. Its role depends on attitude of CPC's general secretary toward the organization, which is an institutional weakness. This conclusion may be contrary to some popular beliefs. Nonetheless, it does not mean CCYL

is not important. Its role is merely not tied exclusively to elite creation. Further research should be undertaken to investigate the role of the league in preparing cadres of lower rank, especially in the provinces.

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