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***Rejuvenating Communism:
 Youth Organizations and
 Elite Renewal in Post-Mao
 China.***

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In the landscape of China's mass organisations, the Communist Youth League (CYL, *Zhongguo gongchan zhuyi qingnian tuan* 中國共產主義青年團) deserves special attention. Conceived as a means of connecting the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to young people aged 14-28 (14-25 before 1982) and involving them in organised political activity, the CYL has traditionally provided the institutional basis for the political socialisation and mobilisation of young people in support of CCP policies, monopolising what the Party calls "youth work" (*qingnian gongzuo* 青年工作). Over the years, it has maintained a special relationship with the CCP, serving not only as its "assistant" (*zhushou* 助手) in mobilising and controlling youth, but also as a "reserve force" (*houbeijun* 後備軍), especially since the early 1980s.

While no specific studies on this organisation were produced for many years – until the early 2000s, Healy's 1982 book was the only major Western monograph on the subject – recent research has begun to reassess its history and investigate its multifaceted role in contemporary China, with particular attention to the Party-League-youth evolving relationship and its social mandate (Graziani 2013; Tsai and Liao 2021; Tsimonis 2021). The rise of Hu Jintao and what has been seen as the league faction (*tuanpai* 團) in the early 2000s gave new impetus to the study of the CYL as a channel for political recruitment and elite promotion (Doyon 2020). This also allowed for a reevaluation of the CYL as a "reserve force," giving rise to the view of the organisation as a CCP cohesive faction, initially developed under Hu Yaobang in the 1980s (Li 2005; Kou 2014).

Rejuvenating Communism: Youth Organizations and Elite Renewal in Post-Mao China is a significant contribution to the field, offering the first book-length analysis of youth organisations as pathways for political mobility in post-Mao China. Based on extensive fieldwork during the late Hu and early Xi Jinping eras, the book examines the role of youth organisations in the political selection of cadres, focusing on their early career development. By looking at young cadres' experiences from below, Doyon highlights

their agency in becoming part of the Party/state's elite and emphasises the relational aspect of this process. As such, the book aims to unravel the hows and whys of young cadres' commitment to a political career in the changing social landscape of post-Mao China, through an empirically grounded and theoretically informed analysis that starts from the university setting where dedication to a political career begins.

The research allows Doyon to develop what he calls "undogmatic commitment," where political dedication derives not just from pure ideological factors or mere material gains, but from a complex cultivation process that involves a behavioural transformation on the side of the cadres and a progressive attachment to the social role they aspire to. At the same time, the book shows how officials are, since an early stage, embedded into the Party-state hierarchies, accumulating multiple personal ties that facilitate their integration into multifaceted and nonexclusive networks that reinforce uniformity and commitment to the regime. This leads Doyon to introduce the concept of "diffuse allegiance" to the Party-state, challenging the view of the CYL as the foundation of one of the CCP's factions. By tracing cadres' individual experiences, personal ties, and networks, the book also challenges the idea of meritocracy in political professionalisation and career advancement.

The structure follows the trajectory of young cadres, starting with their formative experiences as student cadres until they gradually rise in the hierarchy. Following the introduction, Chapter Two delves into the experience of college students, focusing on their becoming student cadres in the context of the evolving student management system and the specific policies aimed at making a political career attractive after 1989. Chapter Three investigates the process of becoming a student leader on campus, looking at how student cadres undergo subjective transformations in behaviour and self-perception. This shapes their social circles and image, estranging them from the broader student body, while feeding their dedication to the role they aspire to. Chapter Four takes the case of elite universities (Peking University and Tsinghua University) to explore specific dynamics that foster the development of personal connections and the creation of "embryonic political networks" that remain important for future political trajectories.

Chapters Five and Six continue by tracking cadres who transition from student roles to becoming CYL officials, quickly rising in the student management hierarchy and eventually moving to higher political positions beyond campus. The importance of these positions is highlighted as a fast track to Party-state leadership positions, especially in the context of broader changes in the recruitment and promotion of the cadre corps implemented since the early 1980s. In Chapter Six, Doyon also discusses CYL officials' own experiences within a youth organisation that is heavily dependent on the Party and underfunded, compared to other mass organisations. He interestingly shows how these CYL weaknesses can make it an ideal training ground for young officials, placing them in situations where they must do their best to innovate and implement projects, while pleasing their superiors – a key aspect of promotion within the CYL in the absence of objective evaluation criteria. Meanwhile, they learn to behave like future leaders, performing their role in ways that signal their status. Yet, such "codified performance," made up of references to political

symbols that reinforces officials' status and sense of belonging, does not prevent the articulation of different policy preferences and viewpoints within the CYL. Doyon further notes that this balance between codified performance and the various interpretations of it, between cohesion and pluralism, remains fragile and is actually threatened by the Xi Jinping administration's push for activism and ideological conformity. This point, which could have been articulated further, is extremely relevant, as it contributes to challenging the idea of the CYL as a cohesive group in terms of policy preferences. This leads us to Chapter Seven, where Doyon shows how officials accumulate multidimensional personal ties, expanding their networks as they shift from one position to another, and are eventually integrated into a complex, diversified, multilayered network that facilitates elite cohesion and commitment to the Party-state as a whole, rather than a faction, strongly limiting the emergence of clearly delineated groups. While adding to the understanding of elite overall cohesion, the chapter also addresses its fragility as changes to political selection policies under Xi have weakened the CYL's role as a reserve force.

Drawing from an impressive range of contemporary sources (including interviews, participant observations, and CCP and CYL documents), this book recentres the agency of Chinese youth in the political cultivation-commitment process and makes a key contribution to understanding the CYL's role in political recruitment, while increasing our knowledge of the sources of Party-state elite cohesion and resilience. It should also be praised for including a gender dimension, providing interesting insights into how cadre-cultivation processes contribute to gender imbalance, and adding new evidence of women's political marginalisation in contemporary China. Although the author could have further contextualised the pluralism within the CYL ranks in terms of viewpoints and policy preferences, connecting it to the diversity of views at the top of the CCP, this is a path-breaking book that will remain a key point of reference for many years to come, informing debates on youth, elite politics, and authoritarianism in China and beyond.

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