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*The New Life Movement in Jiangxi Province, 1934–1938*¹

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Abstract

This paper discusses the origins and the implementation of the New Life Movement (NLM) in the Jiangxi Province between 1934 and 1938. Based upon primary sources produced during this period, it explores how the Nationalist Party utilised the NLM for the purposes of national reconstruction and social mobilisation. The first section analyses how elements of anti-communism, Christianity and state Confucianism came into play in the NLM; the second section analyses how the Nationalists reinforced the idea of ‘hygienic modernity’ by projecting it into the realms of state building and mass mobilisation; the third section discusses the changes introduced in society by the Nationalists with the creation of semi-governmental organisations; and the fourth section examines the involvement of the NLM with preparation for the war against Japan (1937–1945). The paper argues that the NLM had a lasting impact on Chinese society, and it contributed to shape citizenship and national identity.

Introduction

In 1934, Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Party (*Guomindang*) advocated the tool of mass mobilisation for reviving the Chinese nation. To what extent did this represent a genuine appeal and not a propagandistic artifice? And, furthermore, what role did the New Life Movement (*Xin*

¹ Research for this paper was supported by the Leverhulme Trust Research Leadership Award Scheme which sponsors the China’s War with Japan Programme at Oxford University, the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange Postdoctoral Fellowship held at the Department for East Asian Studies of Venice University and the doctoral grant programme of Cagliari University. I would like to thank Rana Mitter for his insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper and the two anonymous readers for their perceptive remarks. I am also grateful to Ivy Lim, Arianne Gaetano, Chang Li, Wu Hsiao-yun, Tsai Weipin, and Hsu Duen-wei for their help.

shenghuo yundong; hereafter, NLM), a state-sponsored campaign, play in Chinese society? This paper argues that the NLM had a lasting impact on Chinese society, and that it contributed to the shaping of citizenship and national identity. The case of the NLM in the Jiangxi Province demonstrates that state building, mobilisation and preparation for war were taking place in Nationalist China. Although results were limited in comparison with the utopian goals set by the Nationalists, the NLM condensed and epitomised the policies implemented by the Nationalist government, which contemporary scholars on modern China have aptly and accurately re-evaluated.² Archival materials which are now available cannot provide conclusive evidence on the impact of the NLM at grassroots level. However, they are invaluable for tying together the Nationalists, the state-building process, and 1930s' society, on all of which this paper focuses. The paper is divided into four parts: the first part analyses how elements of anti-communism, Christianity and state Confucianism came into play in the NLM; the second part analyses how the Nationalists reinforced the idea of 'hygienic modernity'³ by projecting it on to the realms of state building and mass mobilisation; the third part discusses the changes introduced in society by the Nationalists with the creation of semi-governmental organisations; and the fourth part examines the involvement of the NLM with preparation for war.

The NLM received particular attention in Western scholarship during the 1970s and 1980s as a case of fascistisation of Chinese society and an example of counter-revolution at a time of fierce ideological and military clash between the Nationalists and the Communists.⁴ Most recently new scholarship has provided thematic

² For the re-evaluation of the role of the Nationalist Party in state building, see William C. Kirby (ed.), *Realms of Freedom in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Terry Bodenhorn (ed.), *Defining Modernity: Guomindang Rhetorics of a New China* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002); and Julia C. Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities: State Building in Republican China, 1927–1940* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

³ Ruth Rogaski in her study on treaty port Tianjin has underpinned the relationship between the improvement of health and hygienic conditions and the idea of modernity. She showed that by 1920s and 1930s this idea was pervasive and socially transversal. Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

⁴ Lloyd E. Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Arif Dirlik, 'The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counter-Revolution', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 34, no. 4 (1975), pp. 945–980; Stephen C. Averill, 'The New Life in Action: The Nationalist Government in South Jiangxi, 1934–37', *The China Quarterly*,

studies which offer new insight into the unfolding and responses to the ‘New Life’ proposed by the Nationalists: Carlton Benson has illustrated the failure of the NLM’s anti-consumerism radio messages and how these were manipulated by Shanghai’s merchants; Yen-Hsiao Pei has discussed the role played by the NLM in establishing the archetype of the healthy and modern Chinese woman by focussing on the Shanghai-based magazine *Linglong*; and Jennifer Oldstone-Moore has explored the deeper connection between Confucianism and the ‘New Life’ proposed by the Nationalists by arguing that the NLM was ‘primarily a religious movement in the sense that it attempted to provide a comprehensive system of values and ethics which in part incorporate and systematize modes of behaviour with transformative and ultimately salvific power.’⁵ All these studies indicate that the NLM was a complex and multifaceted campaign whose repercussions are extremely important in understanding Chinese society.

The Ecology of the New Life Movement: Anti-Communism, Christianity, and State Confucianism

The NLM was aimed at the regeneration (*fixing*) of the Chinese people through their acceptance and commitment to a code of behaviour based on the Confucian virtues of ‘*Li*’ (propriety), ‘*Yi*’ (uprightness), ‘*Lian*’ (integrity) and ‘*Chi*’ (shame). These virtues found their practical application in every aspect of people’s daily lives, such as in the choice of food (*shi*), clothing (*yi*), shelter (*zhu*) and action (*xing*). By adherence to these basic codes a society in which people would live in a clean (*qingjie*) and orderly manner (*guiju*) would be created.⁶ Although closely related to the cultivation of individual morality

no. 88 (December 1981), pp. 594–628; William Wei, *Counterrevolution in China: The Nationalists in Jiangxi during the Soviet Period* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1985).

⁵ Carlton Benson, ‘Consumers Are Also Soldiers: Subversive Songs from Nanjing Road during the New Life Movement’, in Sherman Cochran (ed.), *Inventing Nanjing Road: Commercial Culture in Shanghai, 1900–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asian Studies, 1999), pp. 90–132; Yen Hsiao-pen, ‘Body Politics, Modernity and National Salvation: The Modern Girl and the New Life Movement’, *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 29, no. 2 (June 2005), pp. 165–186; Jennifer Oldstone-Moore, *The New Life Movement of Nationalist China: Confucianism, State Authority and Moral Formation* (University of Chicago, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, 2000), p. 4.

⁶ I have adopted Song Meiling’s translation as in the ‘Outline of the New Life Movement’, by General Chiang Kai-shek, in C. W. H. Young (pseudonym of Ch’en

and the improvement of people's living conditions, the movement gradually shifted towards the transformation of the entire society. The concepts of 'militarisation' (*junshihua*), 'improvement of production' (*shengchanhua*) and 'aesthetic uplifting' (*yishuhua*) introduced by 1935, marked the progression towards this broader domain.⁷

The debate on the origins of the NLM remains a fascinating topic. The question of China's moral revival and national self-strengthening is fundamental for understanding modern Chinese history. It permeated the thinking of Kang Youwei (1858–1927); it was hotly debated during the New Culture Movement; and particularly after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September 1931, it became part of the ideological repertoire of both the Nationalists and the Communists, the same as the attainment of 'cleanliness' and 'orderliness'. Reynolds notes that at the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese students who went to Japan to study experienced a deep sense of shame due to their perception of China's weakness and underdevelopment *vis-à-vis* their host country, but '[m]ore dispiriting, perhaps, were everyday rules of Japanese life which, however attractive to some, placed cumbersome demands upon most cultural outsiders.'⁸ In 1905 a list with norms of behaviour was being circulated among the Chinese students in Japan, containing some prescriptions drafted especially for them:

Don't spit just anywhere. Don't urinate just anywhere. Don't overshoot the toilet when urinating or defecating. Don't greet friends noisily on the street, and don't just stand around talking. Don't go around naked. Even in the heat of summer. At exhibitions, don't keep asking the price of things. Don't ask people's age. Don't read over people's shoulders.⁹

The NLM echoed the set of instructions aimed at correcting students' behaviour in Japan with the difference that through the NLM the

Han-ming), *New Life for Kiangsi* (Shanghai: The China Publishing Company, 1935), pp. 175–176.

⁷ Jiang Jieshi: Xinyun zhounian jinian gao quanguo tongbaoshu [Chiang Kai-shek's Announcement to All Compatriots in the First Anniversary of the New Life Movement], 19 February 1935, in *Zhongguo di'er lishi dang'an guan* (ed.), *Zhonghua minguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian* [Collected Documents on China's Republican History, hereafter ZMSDZH], ser. 5, pt 1, Politics (5 vols.), (Nanjing, China: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1994), vol. 5, pp. 774–775.

⁸ Douglas R. Reynolds, *China 1898–1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 62.

⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

Nationalists reinforced the idea of ‘hygienic modernity’ with the results that it rose above the individual and encompassed the nation.

The NLM resonated with the ambience of totalitarian countries such as Italy. For years it has borne the stigma of being a fascist-like movement, and there has been a lively debate on the influence of fascist ideology and practices upon Chiang Kai-shek’s regime among scholars of Republican China. Whereas Lloyd Eastman has described ‘[t]he NLM as one of the means that Chiang Kai-shek and the Blue Shirts would use to implant this spirit – this fascist spirit – among the Chinese people’,¹⁰ Maria Hsia Chang has challenged the fascist nature of the Society for Vigorous Practice¹¹ (*Lixingshe*) – which Eastman identified with the Blue Shirts – and associated its existence and ideology with a programme for ‘the renaissance of China via the economical, political, and social modernization of Chinese society.’¹²

The organisations mentioned by Eastman and Chang, except for the *Lizhishe* (Society to Establish the Will), took shape after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. They were mainly but not exclusively paramilitary, and their idea of moral revival and state building was intertwined with anti-communism, national mobilisation and war preparation. Furthermore, they were all involved in the implementation of the NLM. As we shall see, by 1934 war preparation was well under way, and the NLM was a key tool deployed by the Nationalists to achieve this goal. Starting from 1932 the *Lizhishe* had been active in conducting widespread propaganda work in the war districts (*zhanqu*) of north China (Huabei) and Jiangxi by means of special cars called ‘propaganda film cars’ (*dianying xuanchuan che*) especially equipped for showing slides. The effectiveness of this propaganda work was highly regarded by Huang Renlin, who pointed

¹⁰ Lloyd E. Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 66–67.

¹¹ The Society for Vigorous Practice (*Lixingshe*) was established in 1932 and was dissolved in 1938; the Regeneration Society (*Fuxingshe*) was the lower echelons of the elite group of *Lixingshe* and had more than 100,000 members, whereas the Society to Establish the Will (*Lizhishe*) was established in 1929 and had as its membership pool the alumni association of the Whampoa Military Academy. Xu Youwei and Philip Billingsley, ‘Behind the Scenes of the Xi’an Incident: The Case of the *Lixingshe*’, *The China Quarterly*, no. 154 (June 1998), pp. 284–287, and p. 295 fn 37; Frederic Wakeman, Jr, ‘A Revisionist View of the Nanjing Decade: Confucian Fascism’, *The China Quarterly*, no. 150 (June 1997), pp. 397, 402–403.

¹² Maria Hsia Chang, *The Chinese Blue Shirt Society: Fascism and Developmental Nationalism* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1985), pp. 28–29, 51–57.

out that ‘it had had very good results’ – the positive comment might have also something to do with the fact that Huang’s purpose was to obtain funds from Chiang Kai-shek.¹³ Huang, a long-time friend of Song Meiling and a fervent Christian, was from March 1937 in charge of the NLM; since 1929 he had also been in charge of the *Lizhishe*.¹⁴ Huang does not specify the slides’ content, but Deng Shukun, a member of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in Nanchang, recalls the use of slides for pro-NLM propaganda in Lichuan County and refers to it as ‘political poison’.¹⁵

Anti-Communism

Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) launched the NLM on 19 February 1934 at the military headquarters located in Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi Province. This venue was carefully chosen. Since February 1933, Nanchang had been the headquarters for directing military campaigns against the Communists in Jiangxi and neighbouring provinces (Anhui, Fujian, Hebei, Hubei and Hunan).¹⁶ Apart from being the command post for devising military measures essential to establishing a firm control over the territory regained by the Nationalists, between May 1933 and January 1935, the Nanchang Headquarters was the very place where Chiang Kai-shek’s trusted collaborators were called in to draft policies aimed at the

¹³ Academia Historica (GSG), Taipei, Archives of the Nationalist Government, GSG 508, ‘Huang Renlin cheng dianhua jiaoyu gaikuang... [Huang Renlin Presents a Memorandum on the Status of Audio-Visual Education Programme...]’, 20 January 1942, pp. 1722–1723. For materials kept at GSG I adopt the new collocation introduced after documents have been digitised.

¹⁴ Xiao Jizong (ed.), ‘Xin shenghuo yundong shiliao [Historical Materials on the New Life Movement]’, in *Geming wenxian* (Documents of the Revolution), (Taipei, China: Zhongyang wenwu gongying she, 1975), vol. 68, p. 208; on the link between the *Lizhishe*, the YMCA and the NLM, see James C. Thomson, Jr, *While China Faced West: American Reformers in Nationalist China, 1928–1937*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 154–155.

¹⁵ Cai Zhichuan, ‘Nanchang Zhonghua jidujiao qingnian hui [The Young Men’s Christian Association in Nanchang]’, *Jiangxi wenshi ziliao* (Jiangxi historical materials), no. 26 (1987), pp. 26–27; Deng Shukun, ‘Song Meiling – Jidujiao – Xin shenghuo yundong [Song Meiling, Christian Religion and the New Life Movement]’, *Wenshi ziliao xuan ji* (Selections of Historical Materials), no. 93 (1984), p. 73.

¹⁶ Sun Caixia, *Xin jiu zhengxue xi* (The Old and New ‘Political Studies’ faction), (Beijing: Huaxia wenhua chubans, 1997), p. 209.

reconstruction of the areas previously occupied by the Communists.¹⁷ The NLM was central to the implementation of these policies.

The NLM, together with numerous top-down mobilisations sponsored by the Nationalist Party, came at a crucial time in modern Chinese history. Five military campaigns against the Communists (1930–1934) had proven to the Nationalists that in order to permanently eliminate the system of government organised by the Communists, they needed to take hold of the formal administrative agencies together with the loci of informal power (such as schools and peasants associations). Only by gaining that sort of support could Nationalist-devised policies hope to find a receptive environment and be effectively applied. For the Nationalists, it was not so much a matter of forcefully reinstalling a political power as that of convincing the populace, and above all the local elites, that the Nationalist government was a far better option for those areas that had already experienced Communist administration. In this respect, the need for re-establishing the ties – Prasenjit Duara's 'cultural nexus of power' – with the local elites motivated the construction of new patterns of interactions in society, which, in the Nationalists' intentions, would channel civilian mobilisation.¹⁸

The Guomindang's foremost authorities formed the General Association for the Promotion of the NLM (*Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zonghui*; hereafter General Association). Among them were in particular four men whose political experience contributed to the elaboration and the implementation of the NLM: Yang Yongtai, Xiong Shihui, Yan Baohang and Deng Wenyi. Yang Yongtai (1880–1936), a Guangdong native, had a major part in devising the NLM. He was identified as a member of the Political Study Faction (*Zhengxue xi*) that was influential at the time. Other faction members were Xiong Shihui, Zhang Qun (1889–1990) and Huang Fu (1880–1936), who were all close friends of Chiang Kai-shek. In 1933, Chiang Kai-shek

¹⁷ On the Nanchang Headquarters, see Hans J. van de Ven, 'New States of War: Communist and Nationalist Warfare and State Building 1928–1934', in Hans J. van de Ven (ed.), *Warfare in Chinese History*, (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2000), pp. 350–372. See also Guomindang Historical Commission, Taipei (hereafter DSH), Te 6/14, Guomin zhengfu junshi weiyuanhui weiyuanzhang Nanchang xingying di er ting (ed.), *Guomin zhengfu junshi weiyuanhui weiyuanzhang Nanchang xingying chuli jiaofei shengfen zhengzhi gongzuo baogao* (Report on the Political Work by the Chairman of the Military Affairs Committee of the National Government at Nanchang Headquarters in the Bandit-Suppression Provinces), (Nanchang, November 1934).

¹⁸ Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China 1900–1942* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

called upon Yang in Nanchang and entrusted to him the position of secretary of the Nanchang headquarters. In fact, Yang Yongtai had previously collaborated together with Xiong Shihui between the fourth and the fifth military campaign of 1932–1933 in drafting Chiang Kai-shek's plan to eliminate the Communists in Jiangxi and neighbouring provinces. The plan of 1932 was referred to by the slogan 'three parts military and seven parts politics' (*sanfen junshi, qifen zhengzhi*) to emphasise a commitment to politics rather than military tactics.¹⁹ Accordingly, it introduced a set of administrative measures into these provinces.²⁰ Yang's central involvement in the NLM is exemplified by his drafting of the 'Outline of the New Life Movement' that was presented by Chiang Kai-shek to the public in May 1934, as well as by his active lecturing on the NLM up to his assassination, in obscure circumstances, in Hankou on 25 October 1936.²¹ Xiong Shihui (1893–1974), a Jiangxi native, was nominated the governor of Jiangxi Province in December 1931. He administered the province for over a decade until 1942, and throughout this period he was a leading figure in promoting the NLM. Chiang Kai-shek held Xiong Shihui in high esteem, and after Chiang's son, Jiang Jingguo (1910–1988), returned to China from the Soviet Union, Chiang assigned him to Jiangxi Province (in January 1938), where he worked in the local administration under Xiong Shihui.²²

If Yang Yongtai was one of the brains behind the NLM, Yan Baohang's endowments were his connection with the YMCA and the strong attachment to Zhang Xueliang (1901–2001). As for Deng

¹⁹ Sun Caixia (1997), pp. 209–210. Yang believed in the necessity of changing mindset and erasing bad costumes and endorsed a vision of 'fair and clean officials' who would contribute to China's modernisation and strengthening. Van de Ven (2000), p. 354. On the link between the eradication of corruption among civil servants and the NLM, see Patricia Thornton, *Disciplining the State: Political Corruption, State-Making and Local Resistance in Modern China* (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of California, Berkeley, CA, 1997), pp. 134–135.

²⁰ They were the re-introduction of the *baojia* system and the division of the province into 13 administrative areas, in which commissioners were responsible for co-ordinating the work of the county magistrates and reporting to the provincial level. William Wei (1985), pp. 50–59; see also van de Ven (2000), pp. 350–364.

²¹ Sun Caixia (1997), pp. 218, 238–241. For Yang Yongtai's speeches, see Yang Xuanxi, 'Yang Yongtai xiansheng yanlunji [Collected Speeches by Mr Yang Yongtai]', in Shen Yunlong (ed.), *Jindai Zhongguo shiliao congkan* (Collection of Historical Materials on Modern China), vol. 98, (Taipei, China: Wenhai chubanshe, 1973).

²² Li Songlin, *Zhongguo Guomindang shi da cidian* (Great Dictionary on the History of the Guomindang), (Hefei, Anhui, China: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 1993), pp. 557, 542.

Wenyi (1905–?), he was a Whampoa Military Academy man, and for the movement's first five months, from February to July 1934, presided over the Nanchang Association. A Hunan native, Deng was a well-known figure and was a member of the *Lixingshe*. Until June 1934, he was in charge of the investigation section (*diao cha ke*) at the Nanchang headquarters. According to rumour, he was brusquely dismissed from that position and replaced by Dai Li (1897–1946).²³

The core staff of the Nanchang Association for the NLM was made up of nine persons, mainly important figures within the Jiangxi provincial party section,²⁴ and between the end of February and mid-March, Nanchang citizens participated in the public meetings (*dahui*) organised by the association.²⁵

The NLM associations, whether established at the national level in provinces and cities or at the county level, followed the layout of the General Association as it was set after July 1934. After such regulations were introduced, the county magistrate was made responsible for the association at that level – whereas at the provincial and city levels it was the local highest ranking administrative official. He was also charged with the selection of members from the local government, party, military and education circles, along with the legally recognised social organisations (*shehui gong fatuan*).²⁶ By the end of 1934, local associations had been registered in 49 counties out of 83²⁷; by the end of 1935, they were present in 64 counties, in the two towns of Zhanshu and Hekou and in the special districts of Zhaoqiao and Xishan.²⁸

Other organisations were set up by the notables of Nanchang. For instance, the 'New Life Club' (*Xin shenghuo julebu*) active by the end

²³ By July 1934, Yang Yongtai's position seemed to be further strengthened and Deng Wenyi seemed to be marginalised in the running of the NLM. Rumour had it that Deng was fired from his position within the Nanchang headquarters over the matter of allegedly having filed a misleading report to Chiang Kai-shek – on the issue of a local official (Xu Peigen) who had been involved in accidentally setting fire to and destroying 10 Italian planes at the Nanchang Airport in June 1934 to cover up a case of embezzlement. Sun Caixia (1997), pp. 218–219, 225–226.

²⁴ *Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zonghui* (ed.), *Minguo ershisian nian Xin shenghuo yundong zong baogao* (General Report on the New Life Movement, 1934), (*Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zonghui chubanshu*, 1935), p. 112; hereafter XSYB-1934.

²⁵ XSYB-1934, pp. 112–113.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 140, 143, 144.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Figures gathered from table 4, pp. 43–51.

²⁸ *Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zonghui* (ed.), *Minguo ershisian nian quanguo Xin shenghuo yundong* (The New Life Movement throughout the Country, 1935), (*Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zonghui chubanshu*, 1936), p. 753; hereafter XSYB-1935.

of February, counted Xiong Shihui's nephew, Xiong Bin, among its members.²⁹ During its preparatory meeting the club swiftly decided to turn to the Nanchang headquarters and the provincial government for financial assistance. Its members pledged to oppose bad habits, such as the frequenting of brothels, the use of opium, drinking, and gambling, and to support the use of national products. The club organised evening talks, where officials were invited to discuss topics relevant to the NLM; up to 23 March the New Life Club had invited three guest speakers: Qi Zhenru, head of the Henan Education Office; Ding Zhaowu, member of the Central Committee; and Ma Lingfu, head of the Anhui Civil Administration Office.³⁰

It is difficult to say if and what models the organisers had in mind for promoting such a club, but three sources, i.e. the YMCA, the Communists and the Rotary Club, might have provided inspiration for the organisation and the gap in society that these clubs hoped to fill. The links between the NLM and the YMCA will be discussed in the next section and will show similarities in terms of structure and activities. As for the Communists, their clubs (*julebu*) were already common practice in Jiangxi before 1934 and might have been model source for the Nationalists. These clubs, together with the Lenin's Rooms (*Liening shi*), were used as a network for spreading information to the population and, more specifically, for the purpose of political propaganda. They attempted to raise people's political awareness whilst, at the same time educating them. The Communists maintained that their clubs were present everywhere, including in the rural areas. Amongst their main activities were writing wall-newspapers, the promotion of literacy programmes, and holding evening meetings.³¹ By the same token, the Rotary Club had existed in Shanghai since October 1919 and had been involved throughout the 1920s in charity

²⁹ This club already existed under a different name. 'Jingcheng julebu gaining wei Xin shenghuo julebu [The Earnest Sincerity Club has changed its name to New Life Club]', *Jiangxi Minguo Ribao* (The Jiangxi Republican Daily), hereafter *JMR*, 26 February 1934.

³⁰ 'Xin shenghuo julebu zuo qing Qi Zhenru jiangyan ti wei "Xin shenghuo wei fuxing minzu zhi jixu" [The New Life Club Yesterday Invited Qi Zhenru to Give a Talk on "The Urgent Need of the New Life for Reviving the Nation"]', *JMR*, 20 March 1934; 'Xin shenghuo julebu dunqing Ma Lingfu jiangyan [The New Life Club Cordially Invited Ma Linfu to Give a Talk]', *JMR*, 23 March 1934.

³¹ *Chifei fandong wenjian huibian* (Collected Reactionary Documents on the Red Bandits), with a preface by Chen Cheng (np, 1935), vol. 5, Politics, pp. 1488–1490; Ellen R. Judd, 'Revolutionary Drama and Song in the Jiangxi Soviet', *Modern China*, vol. 9 (January 1983), pp. 136–138.

work for supporting schools, orphanages and hospitals. Moreover, during the war against Japan the club took a very active role in assisting the refugees who had fled from Nanjing to Shanghai at the end of 1937 by providing funds for emergency hospitals and refugee camps.³² Hence diverse elements, combined together, could have inspired the creation of what I refer to here as a semi-governmental space in society, one that would allow the Guomindang to ‘allocate’ a degree of participation in the political process whilst reinstating the government’s control over it.

Yet ideological boundaries could become blurred in the everyday life of villagers, and regulations could not prevent the movement from taking unpredictable routes. In Yangzhao Village, located in Hukou County, armed bandits kidnapped two children, Zhou Songsheng and Zhou Hesheng, at the local private primary school. Upon leaving, the bandits left a request for a ransom amounting to 2,000 silver dollars. The ransom note was signed by a man called Huang Leshan, who claimed to be the president of the Hukou, Pengze and Duchang Association for the Promotion of the NLM. When some of the bandits were captured in a nearby mountain area at Wutongling (Phoenix tree peak), Liu Yingquan, supposedly the leader, recounted how he and Yin Hengshan had recruited people from an area located on the border between Pengze and Hukou counties. Liu Yingquan also declared that he had been sent by Huang Leshan to organise the New Life Party (*Xin shenghuo dang*) and that he did so in order to make a living. A meeting was held, and Huang Leshan made a public speech arousing the spirit of the listeners by stating:

The weather is dry and there is no food. I have brought you together here, because we have to devise a plan for finding food. First, the grains which have been stored should be divided. Secondly, those who have money should hand it in, so that we can buy grains for all. Third, the Brave and Righteousness Corps for Communist Suppression [*Changong yiyong dui*] should receive meals from the government. Now we have to take arms and overthrow the capitalists, so that nobody will starve to death again[!].³³

³² <http://www.rotaryshanghai.org>. See the section on history: RC Shanghai Historical Narrative and History of the Rotary Club of Shanghai – Part II, Far Eastern Rotary Review, November 1939.

³³ ‘Tongji Hukou xian Wutongling bangfei yudang [Order of Arrest for the Remaining Bandits at Wutongling in Hukou County]’, *Jiangxi sheng zhengfu gongbao* (Jiangxi Provincial Government Gazette), no. 2, (2 October 1934), p. 15.

After this speech, about 16 people from the village decided to follow Huang Leshan, Liu Yingquan and Yin Hengshan. They all went to Yangzhao Village and kidnapped the two children. Liu Yingquan explained that they did so out of desperation, mainly because they had suffered from protracted flooding and famines, which had hit the whole county.³⁴

Needless to say, Huang Leshan, at that time, was not involved in the NLM in any county. However, there are two rather intriguing points here: the NLM seemed to give Huang Leshan some credibility. Also, the public speech he made, barring the reference to the local group for suppressing the Communists, could be labelled as Communist in tone.³⁵ Perhaps Huang Leshan and his affiliates had previously supported the Communists, although there is no reference to Red bandits (*Chifei*) in the text, and then when the wind changed used the New Life Party as a pretext to persuade villagers of their goodwill.³⁶ After all, words and ideas could easily overlap; the lexical contiguity whereby the 'Brave and Righteousness Corps for Communist Suppression' are placed in the same context as the 'capitalists' and the NLM show that in the countryside there was a great deal of confusion about who was doing what.

Christianity

The NLM sought to bring the Christian community in China closer to the Nanjing government. There are no doubts that Chiang Kai-shek had fully assessed Yan Baohang's qualities before asking him to become the secretary of the General Association. The background of Yan Baohang (1895–1968) is revealing. A Liaoning native, since his youth he had been active in the Shenyang YMCA, and later became a teacher in local schools. His teaching methods included the use of songs and drama to explain current affairs and the promotion of physical education. Between 1925 and 1929 he studied at Edinburgh

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

³⁵ According to Stephen Averill, the Brave and Righteousness Corps for Communist Suppression were no other than *baojia* militia units, named this way in the areas of Jiangxi recovered by the Nationalists. Averill (1981), p. 603.

³⁶ Similar occurrences took place in Manchuria after 1931, where some bandit groups used the pretext of resistance against Japan to pursue their own interests. Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance and Collaboration in Modern China*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 192–194.

University. After returning to China, between September 1931 and May 1933, he headed the propaganda section within the Northeast National Salvation Society. The society was established in September 1931 after the Mukden Incident to support the cause of Manchuria's liberation from the Japanese invasion.³⁷ The background provided Yan Baohang with excellent training in terms of organising mass mobilisation movements such as the NLM. Even more important was his link through the YMCA with the Christian community, to which the NLM had appealed since its beginning.³⁸

In autumn 1933 in Nanchang, local missionaries and members of the YMCA³⁹ had been invited to the preliminary meetings with Chiang Kai-shek, Xiong Shihui and Yang Yongtai in preparation of the NLM. On a certain day within that same period, Song Meiling (1898–2003) with the missionary William Johnson had invited to an informal gathering about 30 people, which comprised the leaders of Western and Chinese missionaries and representatives of missionary schools and hospitals. During the tea party Song Meiling explained the NLM and emphasised the similarities between the principles endorsed by the movement and the Christian values and the ways which the Christian community could contribute in spreading the movement in Nanchang: for instance by allowing the students of their schools to give speeches about the NLM at railway and coach stations; by granting permission for carrying propaganda among the patients of missionaries' hospitals; and by allowing members of the Christian community to do proselytising work in the military hospital and the Nanchang model prison, but also among the peasants of the Lichuan rural experimental district through showing them slides that propagandised the NLM.⁴⁰

Yet these were early steps in winning the support of the Christian community and were later substantiated by Chiang Kai-shek's words and acts. In January 1935, following Song Meiling's authorisation, the Associated Press made public 'a confidential statement by Chiang

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 29–31, 132–142.

³⁸ By the term Christian community I intend the National Christian Council of China, the YMCA and the missionaries.

³⁹ The Nanchang YMCA branch first opened in 1918. By 1925 the new building was equipped with a movie theatre, evening school and sports facilities. Cai Zhichuan (1987), pp. 26–27.

⁴⁰ Deng Shukun (1984), pp. 71–73. The author refers here to the Lichuan project which is described later.

Kai-shek to the movement's [NLM's] executive committee' in which he urged to seek collaboration with local missionaries and the YMCA:

The great need of society in China . . . is an integrating force. In England and in America this force is furnished by churches and kindred social organizations, and in Italy and Russia by dominant party. Our own national party has in many places lost public respect and cannot function as the needed force. . . . Officials, teachers, students, military and police should co-operate with the Young Men's Christian Association, for that is the clearing house of service for the churches in our large cities. Where there is no YMCA, a plan of cooperation with the Churches directly should be worked out. . . . Western church leaders in our midst ought also to be utilized. Their attitude toward life is sane and sensible. . . . I am not urging that we become foreignized, that we eat foreign food, wear foreign clothes and live in foreign houses, but rather that we live the rational sane life that the Movement and its principles call for.⁴¹

By 1935 direct action had been taken, unmistakably with Chiang Kai-shek's endorsement, by Yan Baohang to apply pressure to the YMCA and the churches in China. He issued a circular addressed to the YMCA and the churches in which he emphasised the common ethical ground on which, in Yan's opinion, Christianity and the NLM stood, and he also mentioned his YMCA past to convince the YMCA and the Christian community of the goodwill of the NLM. The circular also pointed out that Chiang Kai-shek himself, during a meeting held in November 1934 at the Nanchang headquarters, had recommended that the General Association work together with the YMCA and the churches; it is highly probable that the document quoted in Thomson originated from this same meeting. The practical purpose of Yan's communication was that of forwarding his newly drafted principles for organising the New Life Service Corps (*Xin shenghuo fuwutuan*) within the religious institutions. And as Yan cleverly put it, the reason for this was as follows: '[I]n recent times I have repeatedly received letters from the fellow brothers of the YMCA and Churches everywhere manifesting without exception the desire of being in the service of the New Life Movement'. He was indeed asking for assistance since, as he humbly pointed out, 'I have not been able to achieve much with regard to the New Life Movement'.⁴²

⁴¹ Copy of 'China Mail File No. 146', January 8, 1935, YMCA, WS 27a, China 1935, quoted in Thomson (1969), pp. 164–165.

⁴² 'Hanfa qingnianhui ji gejiaohui shenghuo fuwutuan zuzhi jianze [Letter Transmitting the Principles for the Organisation of the [New] Life Service Corps to the YMCA and Every Church]', 1935, in XSYB-1935, pp. 248–249.

According to the regulations, the New Life Corps would be independently (*dandu*) established organisations, although it was made clear that they were set solely for the purpose of implementing the NLM: YMCA and church members were eligible for memberships of the corps, and the director of the local branch of the YMCA or the local minister were in charge of the organisations. Each *tuan* (corps), made of 5 to 10 members, was to implement the NLM among individuals, households, neighbourhoods, YMCA, and Churches during sermons and public gatherings.⁴³

Despite Yan's effort, the National Christian Council of China (*Zhonghua quanGuo jidujiao xiejin hui*; hereafter NCCC) and the YMCA were divided on the issue of openly sponsoring the movement. Mainly they feared the consequences of siding with the government: the label of the movement being 'fascist' had already been widely circulated.⁴⁴ But although a full and formal collaboration between the NLM and the YMCA was not attained before the war against Japan, the NLM did provoke a range of reactions, including those of the missionaries who at the local level chose to co-operate with the NLM according to their own judgement.⁴⁵ Interestingly, as Thomson has pointed out, in Jiangxi, part of the Christian community was more favourable towards the NLM, primarily because in this area the movement had been linked with practical objectives, such as rural reconstruction. However, the situations differed greatly even within Jiangxi. The Lichuan Project, one of the most famous rural reconstruction projects at the time, is a paramount example of the contradictions and the uneasy relationship between the Christian community and state-endorsed projects. Started in the spring of 1934 and directed by the missionary George Shepherd, who in October 1933 was sent by the NCCC to Nanchang with Zhang Fuliang, the Lichuan Project was directly supported by Chiang Kai-shek and Song Meiling.⁴⁶ The project employed 17 volunteers who had been educated mainly

⁴³ 'Zhonghua jidujiao qingnianhui ji jidujiao ge jiaohui Xin shenghuo fuwutuan zuzhi jianze [Principles for the Organisation of China's YMCA and Every Christian Church's New Life Service Corps]', 1935, *Ibid.*, pp. 263–264.

⁴⁴ 'Fascist Methods of Salvation', *The North China Herald*, 18 April 1934; William Paton, *Christianity in the Eastern Conflicts* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1937), p. 57.

⁴⁵ The Xi'an Incident in December 1936 would contribute to a change of attitude of the Christian community towards Chiang Kai-shek. Also by May 1937 'four of the movement's top executives were former YMCA secretaries'. Thomson (1969), pp. 190–191.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 85–86, 173, 174; Young (1935), pp. 76, 87.

in Christian universities and technical schools, both in China and abroad, and sponsored mass education, hygiene, rural co-operatives and agricultural improvements.⁴⁷ By mid-1935, however, the project had already come under the scrutiny of the NCCC for the alleged lack of Christian inspiration, even though it was directed by a missionary. To the NCCC the main fear was that government would gain control over the Church.⁴⁸

Fear heightened by the end of 1935 when Chiang Kai-shek asked Shepherd to become a 'director' of the NLM.⁴⁹ In March 1936, Shepherd moved to Nanjing to take up the role of executive adviser for the NLM and kept this title until early 1939.⁵⁰ The political implications of gaining the Christian community's support on the NLM for Chiang Kai-shek's regime are clear. However, it was an offer difficult to refuse for the other side too because, after all, Chiang had power over the future development of the Christian community's activities. But leaving aside the issue of realpolitik, the extent to which the Christian community, which dealt with work at the grassroots level, was fascinated by Chiang Kai-shek and Song Meiling is interesting. There was a genuine belief that the NLM and their advocates were very respectable, and this impression was by no means limited to Jiangxi. In her letter, Mrs Nora Young has described vividly the excitement caused by the Chiang couple's visit to the English Baptist Mission in Xi'an:

Then our next piece of news is about the visit to Shensi of General & Madame Chiang Kai shek, which was a great thrill for everybody, especially us missionaries, for they were most anxious to co-operate with us. We were all invited to a meeting with them & they were most gracious & kind. They told us about the New Life Movement which they are inaugurating, & which is to inculcate the principles of right conduce, righteousness, integrity & a sense of shame at wrongdoing. The General said that without Christianity it was impossible to carry out these principles & asked for our co-operation. Owing

⁴⁷ Young (1935), pp. 55–56.

⁴⁸ Thomson (1969), pp. 111, 119–120.

⁴⁹ At the end of 1935 the General Association moved to Nanjing and during the war against Japan followed the central government's retreat: from Nanjing to Hankou in late 1937 and to Chongqing in 1938. It moved back to Nanjing in 1945. The movement continued as long as the Guomindang stayed in power. Xiao Jizong (1975), pp. 198–207.

⁵⁰ On Shepherd's involvement in the NLM in mid-1930s, see Thomson (1969); *Ibid.*, pp. 175–184, 194–195; on his experience on rural reconstruction in Jiangxi, see George W. Shepherd, 'Reconstruction in Kiangsi', *International Review of Missions*, vol. 26, no.102 (April 1937), pp. 167–176.

to a slight acquaintance with the Governor's wife I was invited by her to a select little supper party to meet Madame Chiang. It was a very interesting occasion, the other guests were wives of prominent local officials; (we were eight in number, & were entertained with most delicious Chinese Food.) But most interesting of all was the guest of honour. Madame Chiang is one of the most beautiful women, fascinating, vivacious, young & intensely energetic & patriotic. She speaks most excellent English – or American rather – & is most cultured & accomplished. Before the evening was over she had us all pledged to form a committee to run an opium refuge for women, for which she promised funds. It is an excellent idea & should give an opportunity for a very real piece of service. It has been decided to have the refuge in connection with our B.M.S. Hospital, & our Dr. Elizabeth Clow is the doctor in charge. It all makes more work for her, & she is already far too busy as it is, but it was an opportunity very difficult to refuse. The refuge was opened last week, & the Governor's wife, Mrs. Shao, is taking a very real interest in it. She is in charge of the administration & it will be good for her to have this piece of public work to do, [sic]⁵¹

Beyond the excitement for the event, visits like this one could and would result in the creation of links within the local community, which were indispensable for starting projects such as the opium refuge for women. This example shows the versatility of the NLM which could operate at different levels simultaneously. The experiences of George Shepherd and Nora Young draw attention to how the 'common ethical ground' worked at the practical level and the extent to which the NLM was a superb opportunity for widening the influence and the effectiveness of missionary work through large and small projects.

State Confucianism

Anti-communism played a major role in shaping the NLM. Communism had stirred the peasantry and delegitimised the role of the local elites, and when it came to recover the areas which had been under Communist control, Confucian ethos provided the ideological and practical framework for 'rectifying' social relationship

⁵¹ Baptist Missionary Archives at Regent's Park College, Oxford, Box CH/46, Miscellaneous Correspondence, Folder: China Miscellaneous 1925–1946, Letter from Nora Young to the British Missionary Society, London, dated 11 December 1934. Grateful appreciation is expressed to Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) World Mission of Didcot, United Kingdom, for permission to consult and select my own quotations from their archive material which is housed in the Angus Library at Regent's Park College, Oxford, United Kingdom.

in local society and with the central government.⁵² Education was utilised by the Nationalists for preventing the spread of Communist ideas and re-educating the population, particularly in Jiangxi, where the Communists had used the network of local schools for igniting political activism and to embark on recruitment.⁵³ However, it would be reductive to explain the Nationalist government's emphasis on education and literacy campaigns uniquely as a reaction to Communist activities. Schooling, and in general the providing of education, was part of the overall state-building effort of the Nationalists. Between 1932 and 1937 the Nationalist government's stress on education, especially at rural levels via the Sun Yat-sen People's Schools (*Zhongshan minzhong xuexiao*; hereafter People's Schools) and the schools at the *bao*-level (*Baoli xiaoxue*), was significant. The latter existed already as local schools, but they were re-organised under a new legislative framework.⁵⁴ Between 1933 and 1936, state funding to education and culture increased steadily and only began to decline in 1937. The funds nearly doubled between the years 1933 and 1934, increasing from 23.29 million yuan to 45.79 million yuan. Successive years saw continued growth, 49.13 million yuan in 1935 and 55.40 million yuan in 1936, whilst funding fell to 48.15 million yuan in 1937.⁵⁵ A source compiled at the provincial level indicates that in Jiangxi by 1934 the output for primary education had increased and amounted to 2.64 million yuan.⁵⁶ Data for provincial expenses gathered at the national level show that between 1933 and 1934, total expenditures for education in Jiangxi dropped from 2.12 million to 2.00 million yuan.⁵⁷ Even if we acknowledge the downward trend,

⁵² On the changes in society introduced by the Communists, see He Youliang, *Zhongguo suwei'ai quyu shehui biandong shi* (History of the Social Changes in the Chinese Soviet Areas), (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo shuju, 1996).

⁵³ On this aspect, see Stephen C. Averill, *Revolution in the Highlands: China's Jinggangshan Base Area* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 109–123.

⁵⁴ Wei (1985), pp. 137–138.

⁵⁵ 'Minguo yuan nian zhi ershiliu nian jiaoyu wenhua jingfei yilanbiao' (Comprehensive Tables on the Expenses for Education and Culture from 1912 to 1937), 1937, in ZMSDZH, ser. 5, pt 1, Education (2 vols.), vol. 1, p. 118.

⁵⁶ Jiangxi elementary schools in 1934 enrolled 390,750 students in 8,699 schools and 16,867 teachers. 'Ershisan niandu Jiangxi sheng ge xianshi chudeng jiaoyu gaikuang tongji [Statistics on the General Conditions of Primary Education in Each County and City in Jiangxi Province for 1934], *Jiangxi jiaoyu* (Education in Jiangxi), no. 19 (May 1936), p. 47.

⁵⁷ 'Minguo shijiu jian zhi ershisan nian ge shengshi jiaoyu jingfei gaikuang [Survey on the Funds for Education from 1930 to 1934 in Each Province and City]', May 1935, in ZMSDZH, ser. 5, pt 1, Education (2 vols.), vol. 1, p. 113.

we can safely assume that the reduction in educational funding at the national level did not lead to a decrease for primary schools at the local level in Jiangxi. The local schools were also subsidised by the local elites, whose contribution was not included in the figures published by the provincial and the central government.

Education was linked to the NLM, not only because the movement's main objective was to educate the Chinese people but also because its principles were incorporated into the standard curricula at the local level. The People's Schools and the schools at the *bao*-level both aimed at teaching young people as well as adults. The former accepted children aged 10–16 and adults aged 16–50. Naturally, children were taught reading and writing and arithmetic, but teachers were also asked to promote local agriculture, co-operatives and the NLM – mainly by teaching the principles of 'cleanliness' and 'orderliness' to improve hygienic conditions. In addition, the curricula included lessons about the Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People, Communist atrocities (*chifei zui'e*),⁵⁸ traditional morals (*guyou daode*) and citizenship (*gongmin shenghuo*), as well as physical education (*tiyu*) and self-defence (*ziwei*) classes. Adults were more or less taught the same subjects. However, lessons on proper morals were adjusted to suit adult learners. In such lessons the virtues of propriety, rectitude, uprightness, integrity and sense of shame were emphasised in combination with the teaching of filial piety (*zhongxiao*) and benevolence (*ren'ai*). This filial respect was further extended to the concept of sacrificing oneself for the sake of the nation. Clearly, these lessons aimed at constructing a harmonious relationship between the good citizen, one who would follow proper morals, and the nation, which required what we may term as 'filial loyalty'.⁵⁹ In 1934, in 47

⁵⁸ The following is an example of how the textbooks adopted in the People's School described communism and its atrocities:

The worst of all evils is Communism, which has no heart and no liver and no conscience,
Communists kill and burn and make everyone unhappy,
The Communists and bandits are brutal,
The Communists and bandits are cruel,
They recognize neither father nor mother,
And they sell their native land.

Quoted in English translation with the Chinese text in Young (1935), pp. 52–53.

⁵⁹ 'Jiangxi sheng shofuqu Zhongshan minzhong xuexiao shishi banfa [Methods for the Implementation of Sun Yat-sen People's Schools in the Recovered Areas of Jiangxi Province]', in 'Jiaoting chengni guanyu banli tezhong jiaoyu ge shixiang banfa guicheng deng jianling zhunbei an [The Provincial Education Office Submits Various Regulations, Methods and Other Orders Concerning the Undertaking of

counties and 5 special districts, there were 1,168 People's Schools with 56,500 students enrolled and 2,025 teachers, with a total cost of 65,022 yuan.⁶⁰ As Averill has pointed out, the People's schools 'were the direct and explicit Nationalist government counterparts of the Lenin Elementary Schools which the CCP had established previously in the Soviet areas'; and more to the point, many of the Communists' schools were taken over and renamed by the Nationalist government so that they became Sun Yat-sen's Schools.⁶¹

The curricula adopted by the *bao*-level schools were very similar to those of the People's School. The aim of the schools was to eradicate illiteracy among children and adults in rural areas, and attendance was compulsory. They accepted children who had not been exposed to any previous education and were aged between 6 and 15 for a maximum of four years of instruction. Adults between the ages of 15 and 45, who had dropped out, were taught at night and were expected to obtain a diploma after six months.⁶² The main difference between the People's School and the *bao*-level schools lay in the source of financial support. In addition to receiving provincial contributions the People's Schools received specially allocated funding from the Military Affairs Council and the Boxer Indemnity Fund. As the *bao*-level schools' mission was to educate at the local level, they received sponsorship by the local elites and the local government, as well as from the provincial government. In 1935 the number of *bao*-level schools jumped from 5,000 to 14,448, so that 54.3% of *bao* had their own school. This growth continued steadily in 1936 and 1937, with 17,374 and 17,938 schools, respectively. Among the reasons for such an astonishing increase was the conversion of existing schools into *bao* schools.⁶³ Interestingly, the data furnished by the Jiangxi provincial government showed that there was a commitment to the *bao* schools even during the difficult period of the war against Japan, long after the

Special Education to Keep as a Record]', *Jiangxi sheng zhengfu gongbao*, no. 89 (20 June 1934), pp. 41–44. On civic education and party doctrine, see Robert Culp, 'Setting the Sheet of Loose Sand: Conceptions of Society and Citizenship in Nanjing Decade Party Doctrine and Civics Textbooks', in Bodenhorn (2000), pp. 45–90.

⁶⁰ 'Ershisan niandu Jiangxi sheng minzhong xuexiao gaikuang tongji [Statistics the General Condition of the People's Schools in Jiangxi Province for 1934]', *Jiangxi jiaoyu*, no. 20 (June 1936), p. 91.

⁶¹ Averill (1981), p. 604, p. 604, fn 23.

⁶² 'Jiangxi sheng baoli xiaoxue zanxing banfa [Provisional Methods for the Elementary Schools Established at the *Bao* Level in Jiangxi Province]', September 1935, in ZMSDZH, ser. 5, pt 1, Education (2 vols.), vol. 1, p. 575.

⁶³ Wei (1985), pp. 138–139 and table A-7 on p. 167.

Communists had left the province, and with the exception of 1938, the funding grew steadily between 1934 and 1940.⁶⁴ More research is needed on the issue of education during the wartime period, but the centrality of schools in community and political life made these institutions a focal point for gathering intelligence and promoting the war effort in both the free and the enemy-occupied areas.

State Building and ‘Hygienic Modernity’

Public sanitation and hygiene went hand-in-hand with the notion of improving individuals’ health, and the latter was used to define, shape and ultimately underpin the idea modern citizenship.

The city of Nanchang was the centre of activity of the NLM.⁶⁵ The city launched campaigns focusing on hygiene and public health, cultural and ideological training and administrative tasks. The principles of ‘cleanliness’ (*qingjie*) and ‘orderliness’ (*guiju*) were applied everywhere. The sphere of intervention was wide and therefore spectacularly ambitious. The NLM was launched within administrative organs, public places, shops, public toilets, factories, guild halls and labour unions and promoted the improvement of the city appearance (city building façades as well as dikes were to be cleaned up and advertisement displays were tightly regulated) and changes in etiquette and customs (for wedding, funerals and the like). The Public Security Bureau (*Gong’an ju*) was called, together with representatives of each line of business/category, to overview the implementation.⁶⁶ In addition, in Nanchang at least 30 policemen went through a special training and were assigned to the work with the staff of the NLM’s association on checking taverns, teahouses, inns, barbers and bathhouses and issued praise or sanctions according to their compliance with the NLM’s principles. The check-ups were conducted between April and May 1935. The general report lists in great detail the name of the business activity and the reward or the

⁶⁴ Chen Heqin, ‘Jiangxi baoxue de huigu ji zhanwang [Review and Prospects of the Bao Schools in Jiangxi]’, in *Ganzheng shi nian* (Ten Years of Jiangxi’s Administration), December 1941, ch. 33, p. 2.

⁶⁵ In 1924, Nanchang population was of 350,000 units; in 1933 it had dropped to 274, 203. Jiangxi sheng zhengfu jingji weiyuanhui (ed.), *Jiangxi jingji wenti* (Jiangxi Economic Issues), (Nanchang: Jiangxi sheng zhengfu jingji weiyuanhui chuban, 1934), pp. 40–42.

⁶⁶ XSYB-1934, pp. 178–184.

fine they were each given, and in several cases the owners were sent to jail for less than five days.⁶⁷

All these issues and the actual implementation of the movement were discussed through a series of weekly meetings held by the Nanchang All Organs' Joint Conference for the NLM's Implementation (*Nanchang shi ge jiguan tuixing Xin shenghuo yundong lianxi huiyi*).⁶⁸ Some of the proposals would never be carried out, but their actual discussion is useful to understand what was thought to be relevant at the time. Several meetings, for instance, concerned the issue of rooting out parasites such as the houseflies (*cangying*), through which serious epidemic diseases were being spread at the time. The plan was to involve the households of Nanchang in the extermination of the flies and for the *baojia* heads to perform the two-fold task of propagandising the campaign and collecting the dead flies from house to house. Flies were perceived as a great danger to public health, particularly in the case of butchers, bean curd shops and cold-food stalls, which were all exposing food which could be contaminated by the flies with the result that diseases would spread. The Public Health Office (*Weisheng chu*) proposed, as a method to prevent diseases spread by flies, to send personnel to disinfect public toilets and rubbish dumps. It was then decided that Nanchang would hold a week-long campaign to exterminate the flies, and later on the Public Security Bureau informed the city authorities that it had controlled groceries, bakeries, stalls and peddlers selling cold food. Other proposals were made to launch campaigns for the extermination of rats in the city.⁶⁹ In May 1935, a summer campaign was launched to neutralise trachoma. The Public Health Office, on 15 May, organised a public meeting in the local stadium. Besides the *baojia* heads who were involved in virtually all the campaigns, the Schools Hygiene Teams (*Xuexiao weisheng dui*) were also mobilised. A large-scale hygiene check-up event and thorough city clean-up were held as part of the same campaign. Moreover, on the 16th the Public Security Bureau and the Public Health Office sent personnel from house to house to verify the hygienic conditions. The organisations in charge of the NLM's implementation joined hands with the Public Health Office

⁶⁷ At the same time the policemen underwent training courses for understanding the meaning of the NLM. XSYB-1935, pp. 421-422. The results of the inspections are listed in *Ibid.*, pp. 518-535.

⁶⁸ The minutes for the meetings covering the period July-December 1935 are in *Ibid.*, pp. 178-215.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 179, 184-185, 187, 190, 191, 194.

for the summer campaign.⁷⁰ In general, with the NLM the cleaning of the streets of the Nanchang City increased, which resulted in the improvements of hygienic conditions.⁷¹ The city of Nanchang was not alone in its campaigns to improve health; in 1936, the Jiangxi provincial government declared that each of its counties had established a health clinic.⁷²

The concern for public health was connected to the eradication of bad habits and the promotion of public morality. This is evident in the action taken against prostitution, over the concern of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Starting in November 1934 the Public Health Office ordered the county governments and public security offices at local levels to register prostitutes and carry out monthly health check-ups for them.⁷³ Linked to the issue of public morality was the proposal of the General Association to change the contents of ‘Western lens’ (*xiyang jing*) slide shows.⁷⁴ Although the association did not specify if the slides were of a sexual nature, their description that the slides were ‘too evil to endure’ and that they ‘offended public decency the most’ seems to confirm this. The solution, which was approved during one of the weekly meetings, was to collect materials on the NLM and show that instead, and the name of the Western lens was later changed to ‘amusing lens’ (*haha jing*).⁷⁵

In addition to sanitation campaigns, at least 20 more campaigns were launched to deal with various educational, economic and administrative tasks. Some examples include the campaigns to promote literacy and work-study programs,⁷⁶ the formation of co-operatives

⁷⁰ GSG, Archives of President Chiang Kai-shek, 08A-02060, ‘Quanguo xialing weisheng yundong gaikuang baogao [Report on the General Situation of the Summer Hygiene Campaign Nationwide]’, 1935, p. 9.

⁷¹ Nanchang shi difang zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), *Nanchang shi zhi* (*Nanchang City Gazetteer*), (Nanchang: Fangzhi chubanshe, 1997), vol. 4, p. 401.

⁷² Yip, Ka-che, *Health and National Reconstruction in Nationalist China: The Development of Modern Health Services, 1928–1937* (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 1995), p. 90. The ‘Report of Director-General of National Health Administration’ for 1943 confirms that by then every county had established its health centres. Quoted in Sze Szeming, *China’s Health Problems* (Washington, DC: China Medical Association, 3rd ed., 1944), Table I, p. 17.

⁷³ ‘Jiangxi quan sheng weishengchu jinü jianyan guize’ (Regulations of the Health Department of Jiangxi Province for [conducting] Health Checks on Prostitutes), *Jiangxi sheng zhengfu gongbao*, no. 46 (24 November 1934), pp. 5–7.

⁷⁴ The Western Lens was the equivalent of the Magic Lantern in the West.

⁷⁵ XSYB-1935, pp. 198–207.

⁷⁶ It entailed the selling of newspapers and books and the writing of letters on someone’s behalf.

and the purchase of national goods, campaigns to further implement the *baojia* system and undertake population registration, as well as to construct and maintain roads and bridges, and campaigns for air-defence, among many others.⁷⁷

The NLM also hit the county level. Information about the work done in the counties is fragmentary, and reports of assessments of the NLM are limited in numbers. By the end of 1934, only 25 out of 49 counties sent back their reports to the General Association and had been monitored⁷⁸; the following year 27 counties were included in the inspection reports of which 21 were new, added to the counties monitored the previous year. Among these, 4 counties were praised for their excellent work; 9 were regarded as satisfactory; and the remaining 13 were deemed inadequate. Ningdu County represented a category of its own. Here the movement was clearly initiated and managed by the Nationalist army which was still stationed there and dealt with the cleaning of city streets and the burial of corpses.⁷⁹ One of the most common ways to attain 'cleanliness' was to implement one-week clean-ups, such as those in Hukou County.⁸⁰ In other places, such as Yifeng County, morning wake-up calls for residents were instituted, and twice-a-week physical education drills for shop apprentices were organised.⁸¹

The main problem in some counties, such as Guangfeng, was that they were still busy trying to normalise the situation after the Communists had left. In other places, such as Wanzai, the cadres involved in the promotion of the movement had simply done a very bad job, and in one case, such as in Yushan County, the promotion work was described as 'confused' to the point that it reached a total halt. In Gao'an the population had very strong feelings against the NLM, particularly prevalent among those who owned businesses such as hotels, whereas in Yiyang, the population which was composed mainly of refugees was willing to accept the movement.⁸² The inspectors

⁷⁷ The campaigns are listed in 'Xin shenghuo yundong laodong fuwutuan zuzhi dagang [Outline for the Organisation of the New Life Movement Labour Service Corps]' 1935, in XSYB-1935, pp. 260–263.

⁷⁸ XSYB-1934, p. 430.

⁷⁹ XSYB-1935, pp. 428–464. Ningdu had been a Communist stronghold, and the presence of unburied corpses indicates that the area was not fully pacified. *Ibid.*, p. 433.

⁸⁰ XSYB-1934, p. 452.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 470–472.

⁸² XSYB-1935, pp. 435, 437, 441, 451, 456.

sent to evaluate the progress of the NLM in rural areas became a tool for verifying local administrative, economic and social conditions. They assessed the following areas: village tidiness; road, dike and dam maintenance; reforestation; fish culture; military training of conscripts; *baojia* heads' participation in promoting the NLM; inclusion of NLM rules in *baojia* covenant; registration of women with bound feet; and listing of the major natural calamities that had occurred in the area.⁸³

The NLM Inspection Corps (*Xinyun shicha tuan*) were set up only on 1 March 1936, and 142 inspectors were sent off in 2 provinces, 3 cities and 78 counties.⁸⁴ In June 1936 they reported back to the General Association, and it is very likely that Yan Baohang saw the report before drafting his own report and suggesting changes in the areas of personnel, expenses and working matters. Yan was concerned about the overlapping of duties and tiers which prevent individuals from assuming responsibility at different levels, about the compatibility of a system that greatly relied on a voluntary organisation but still required a rational management and about the poor quality of personnel performance and lifestyle. To him the main difficulties lay in managing a structure which was in fact a hybrid of voluntary and mandatory participation. Although the NLM associations were granted a degree of independence in choosing objectives that were linked to local urgent needs, they were tied to the main objectives for 1936, which were organisation and training people (*xunlian zuzhi minzhong*), promotion of national economy (*cujin guomin jingji jianshe*) and spread of social education (*puji shehui jiaoyu*).⁸⁵

In their report the inspectors described the NLM as a 'movement for life revolution' (*shenghuo geming yundong*) and explained that it would need time to deliver visible changes. Everyone in China, from the capital city down to the tiniest village they had visited, was aware of the movement, and it had deeply influenced the community. As for the lack of results, the inspectors pointed their fingers at civil servants.

⁸³ Facsimile of the form for inspection in rural areas in *Ibid.*, pp. 427–428.

⁸⁴ Interestingly, the NLM Inspection Corps served as a pool for recruiting 'reliable' personnel (whose moral integrity was proven) and could in fact open the path to permanent jobs within the administrative system. Second Historical Archives, Nanjing, Archive 28–1550, *A Brief Historical Sketch of the New Life Movement* (Xin shenghuo yundong jianshigao), (ser. II, May 1937, Revised June 1938, The New Life Movement Headquarters, Hankow), p. 9.

⁸⁵ GSG, President Chiang Kai-shek's Archives, 08A-02071, Yan Baohang, 'Xin shenghuo gajin yijian [Suggestions for Improving the New Life Movement]', 1936.

Even the NLM had not been able to change the corrupt and evil chronic habits of ordinary civil servants, so much were they rooted. These people's behaviour had nullified everybody else's because 'the doings of superiors are imitated by inferiors' (*shang xing xia xiao*). In order to change individual behaviour, the inspectors concluded, it was first necessary to change the civil servants' behaviour.⁸⁶ This conclusion was very much in tune with Yang Yongtai's beliefs.

Mass Mobilisation: The Development of Semi-Governmental Organisations

The Jiangxi Youth Vacation Service Corps (*Jiangxi qingnian jiaqi fuwutuan*), the Women's Civil Servants Service Corps (*Funü gongwuyuan fuwutuan*) and the Labour Service Corps (*Laodong fuwutuan*) were the main mass organisations being set up for implementing the NLM in Jiangxi Province. They were rather similar in their scopes of activities, but different social groups participated in them. One core question is whether these organisations were in fact closer to military rather than civilian organisations and if their scope was to achieve a militarised control over society. The practical tasks that the corps performed highlighted their civilian character, and the role of the *state* was to organise its citizens through a constant mobilisation for the improvement of the community in which they lived. The impression is that the 'system' was intended to be a gigantic civil urban-rural conscription, and this is further confirmed by the age range of those involved and the corps's stratification. Indeed, the tight society organisation and segmentation seemed to derive from the need for 'patrolling' the territory in almost a military guise. Likewise, the tension between the territory's administration and the military control over it stemmed from the necessity of preparing civilians to the war against Japan rather than being an aimless restoration of order.⁸⁷ The system served the purposes of keeping an eye on the implementation of policies at the lowest administrative levels and as a pool to provide manpower for the civil service; i.e. members of the Labour Service Corps would check and emulate each other's behaviour, and the heads

⁸⁶ GSG, President Chiang Kai-shek's Archives, 08A-02069, 'Xinyun shicha tuan san yue gongzuo baogao [Report on Three Months' Work of the New Life Movement Inspection Corps]', 1 June 1936.

⁸⁷ I would like to thank Hans van de Ven for helping me formulate this point.

of each group had the power to inspect their group members' houses, as they were held responsible for ensuring the cleaning standards at their administrative level.⁸⁸ Since the corps and these activities were linked to the administrative division and required the collaboration of the whole neighbourhood, it bears a resemblance with a system of mutual responsibility and presents analogies with its urban counterparts in early Communist China.

Youths

The Jiangxi Youth Vacation Service Corps was the first one to be organised in June 1934, and the students' corps were joined also by the school staff and teachers; their service was divided in three terms of two months each. It is difficult to track the numbers and changes which took place between July and December 1934. We know that initially both elementary and high schools were organised into groups; for instance as soon as the NLM was launched, one of the elementary school in Nanchang named Shengjinda (Roped Gold Pagoda) had organised its own pupils in the NLM Corps (*Xin shenghuo tuan*) with a membership of 329 students.⁸⁹ In the months following the launch, it was decided to organise the corps only among pupils starting from junior high school. The city was divided into 10 district corps, 3 directly subordinate divisions whose membership was generally counted in Nanchang's membership, and 12 subordinate districts corps outside Nanchang.⁹⁰ By the end of 1934 there were 118 corps in the city, and membership had increased by 1,805 to 6,916; outside Nanchang there were 43 corps and more than 5,000 members by November 1934. Initially, the youth corps provided their service for the NLM's implementation on a daily basis between seven and nine in

⁸⁸ 'Nanchang shimin Xin shenghuo yundong fuwutuan gongzuo jihua [Work Plan for the Nanchang Citizens' New Life Movement Labour Service Corps]', in XSYB-1935, p. 281.

⁸⁹ 'Shenghui Shengjinta xiaoxue zu ertong Xin shenghuo tuan [Jiangxi Province's Shengjinta Elementary School Organises the Children's New Life Movement Corps]', *JMR*, 12 April 1934.

⁹⁰ The schools involved in the corps's scheme were 59, and we also have names and addresses of the youths who were involved. Jiangxi Provincial Archives (JPA), Nanchang, 43-12-0224-D41, *Xin shenghuo yundong cujin hui Jiangxi qingnian jiaqi fuwutuan tuanwu gaikuang* (An Overview of the Activities of the Jiangxi Youth Vacation Service Corps under the Association for the Promotion of the New Life Movement), 24 July 1934, pp. 4–8, 46–59.

the morning and five and seven in the afternoon during the students' holidays. Later on, voluntary service was arranged in schools when the students were freed from classes and moreover were outside the school on Sunday afternoons and during holidays.⁹¹ The proceedings for the meetings of the students, even for really small groups (e.g. five to ten), were tightly regulated. The students had to stand up and sing the party's anthem and then read Sun Yat-sen's will. Afterwards they had to discuss and criticise their work of the past week and plan activities for the following week. They adjourned the meeting by singing the corps' anthem. If the meeting involved the whole student body, the corps would both sing the party anthem and bow⁹² (*jugong*) three times in the direction of the party and national flag and Sun Yat-sen's portrait. Rewards such as exemption from school fees were given to the students who participated very actively in the activities of the corps,⁹³ whilst the General Association organised ceremonies for commending the best students.⁹⁴

Groups of students were dispatched to give public speeches in the main streets and help the police in fining passers-by for being untidy, smoking whilst walking, and walking on the right-hand side of the street.⁹⁵ In Nanchang they were involved in informing the population about epidemic diseases and how to prevent them. Also, on Sundays they were dispatched in the main streets of Nanchang to direct traffic and to verify if street peddlers, shops and households were keeping good manners and respecting hygienic standards. Spatially and hierarchically the students' service was joined to public security and the *baojia*'s structures at the district city levels.⁹⁶

⁹¹ 'Jiangxi qingnian jiaqi fuwutuan [The Jiangxi Youth Vacation Service Corps]', 1934, in XSYB-1934, pp. 242–248.

⁹² On different ways of taking bows and their meaning, see Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911–1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 52 (figure 5), 62 (figures a, b), 63, 77. A similar routine was adopted in public ceremonies such as those to honour Confucius. 'Guomindang zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui zhuanqing guomin zhengfu ming ling gongbu siKong banfa han [The Guomindang Executive Committee Asks the National Government to Order the Promulgation of the Methods for Confucius's Ceremony]', June 1934, in ZMSDZH, ser. 5, pt 1, Culture (2 vols.), vol. 2, pp. 530–531.

⁹³ XSYB-1934, pp. 260, 263–265.

⁹⁴ 'Zhi Nanchang shi ge xuexiao jihe qingnian jiaqi fuwutuan nuli tuanyuan lai hui lingjiang han [Letter Asking the Nanchang City Schools to Assemble Commendable Members of the Jiangxi Youth Vacation Service Corps to Attend an Awarding Ceremony]' 1935, in XSYB-1935, p. 247.

⁹⁵ XSYB-1934, pp. 431, 437–438.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 247–251, 266.

The activities at the county level, such as in Boyang County, involved organising students to issue fines to people who walked on the wrong side of the streets or whose clothes were untidy. Students' propaganda teams were also dispatched into rural areas, where they introduced the NLM principles to the population through performances (*huazhuang*) which were attended by at least 7,000 people.⁹⁷ In Jiujiang County, 25 male-student propaganda teams were sent to public streets and places, whilst 20 female-student teams paid visits to private houses.⁹⁸ In Yifeng County, 387 primary school children received training on simple practical work in the fields, on labour education and on respectful behaviour.⁹⁹

Women

Women were an important part of the NLM and, within the logic of the nation's regeneration, could not possibly be left out: if good manners and hygiene were not first and foremost applied at the household level, how could the whole society and nation change? Women were 'natural' role models by acting in the family as mothers, educators and guardians of family welfare, and the first group of women to be formally established in October 1934 was the Nanchang Women's Civil Servants Service Corps (*Nanchang shi nü gongwuyuan fuwutuan*). By the end of 1934 there were 347 members organised in 37 corps.¹⁰⁰ Membership came largely from the education circles: the majority of the 255 women who had joined the corps by April 1934 taught in elementary schools or worked for government administrative organs.¹⁰¹

Later on in 1935 this and other corps were re-organised around the concepts of 'labour service' (*laodong fuwu*), and their names and organisations changed accordingly. By the end of 1935 the New

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 431. On the students' propaganda teams travelling from Nanchang to the neighbouring villages, see 'Xin shenghuo xiangcun buxing xuanchuan dui ding san shi ri chufa xuanchuan' (The New Life Walking in the Villages' Propaganda Teams Set [the Date of] the 30th to Set Off to Spread Propaganda), *JMR*, 28 March 1934.

⁹⁸ XSYB-1934, pp. 437–438.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 470–472.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 268–269.

¹⁰¹ JPA 43-12-0220, 'Nanchang shi funü fuwuyuan tuan jinxing gaikuang [A Work-in-Progress Survey of the Nanchang Women's Civil Servants Service Corps]', *Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zonghui huikan* (The Journal of the General Association for the Promotion of the New Life Movement), no. 4 (20 September 1934), p. 26.

Life Women's Labour Corps (*Funü Xin shenghuo laodong fuwutuan*) had registered 737 members with the General Association.¹⁰² Predictably, family and society were the realms of women's voluntary service. Whereas family service was connected to the various aspects of improving the household welfare, and hence the members addressed problems concerning the daily management of the household (clothing, diet, hygiene, child-rearing and so on), society service was aimed at mobilising women on emergency tasks, such as relief campaigns or more long-term projects as in the case of women's civics training class. In the first instance, the corps provided the relief committee with 300 winter garments for the disaster victims in the areas previously occupied by the Communists. As for the civics classes, the courses were specifically tailored for women's needs, namely by taking into account their lack of free time in comparison with men. The first term's classes were taught throughout a period of six weeks, every Sunday afternoon from two to four for a set number of 150 women between the ages of 10 and 50. The corps members were responsible for teaching on a rota basis, and the teaching matters concerned the New Life, individual and public hygiene, social etiquette, the modern family, child rearing, childbirth hygiene, party songs and literacy teaching. Interestingly, the corps were not responsible for the recruitment of prospective students, but the Public Security Bureau ordered the *baojia* heads to do it. The first group of 'women citizens' (*nü gongmin*) graduated at the end of December 1934. One of the main problems was that nine out of ten of these women were in fact illiterate, and teaching consisted of the basic methods of lecturing and singing.¹⁰³

The New Life Women's Labour Corps, as they were then called from around April 1935, widened their recruitment pool to include

¹⁰² XSYB-1935, pp. 766–767.

¹⁰³ XSYB-1934, pp. 269–271. Yen Hsiao-pen has analysed the Nationalists' attempt at nationalising the body, particularly the female body. According to Yen, the idea of modernity proposed by the NLM with its insistence on family and home cares and health was perceived by young urban women as traditionalist. Thus they reacted to it by navigating rather selectively the wave of regulations for disciplining the female body and used them, instead, to free their body. As Yen's analysis shows there were contradictions and limits in the Nationalist idea on the 'modern' female body. It is important to note, however, that whereas the pages of *Linglong* gave voice to urbanised women whose role and body consciousness was indeed high, we know little of the impact of the NLM on less-aware women. It is possible, in fact, that as there were different levels of consciousness and awakening in 1930s' Chinese society, the activities described above did raise women's body consciousness and emancipated them. Yen, Hsiao-pen (June 2005), pp. 165–186.

not only civil servants but also housewives and students whose schools became the *danwei* for their organisation. The Nanchang Association for the Improvement of Women's Living Conditions (*Nanchang funü shenghuo gaijin hui*), which belonged to the General Association and was directed by Xiong Shihui's wife, was also active in organising events which complemented both the NLM and the women's voluntary work. For instance, from May 1935 it hosted weekly lectures (*jiangxi hui*) at the Provincial Education Office. They discussed family-oriented topics such as children's education, domestic economy, hygiene and women's self-cultivation, and around 500–600 civil servants attended the lectures. In addition, this association organised women in co-operatives to produce handicrafts. The creation of the co-operatives aimed at providing women with professional training on sewing, embroidering and weaving; the products were sold and the profits divided among the co-operative members. This association was also active in relief work. In one instance, it participated in a three-day non-stop fund-raising charity event organised for flood victims by all women organisations in Nanchang, which raised more than 3,000 yuan. Moreover, it promoted its own Infant Welfare Commission (*Fuying weiyuanhui*) that together with the Nanchang Charitable Association (*Nanchang cishan hui*) would take care of the much-needed infant asylums. The first step of the Infant Welfare Commission was that of providing basic training for wet nurses, but it also requested the more affluent households to donate cotton and fabric for replacing worn-out swaddling clothes. It furthermore organised classes for training military nurses, which were attended by over 500 female civil servants.¹⁰⁴ In February 1936 the Women Directing Committee (*Funü zhidao weiyuanhui*) was set up formally under Song Meiling's direction¹⁰⁵; this organisation operated within the structure of the General Association and, as the wartime period shows, capitalised on Jiangxi's experience with regard to women mobilisation.

Able-Bodied Men

The Labour Service Corps (*Laodong fuwutuan*) took their members from the military, party, public administration and education circles. Their organisation/structure followed either the city administrative

¹⁰⁴ XSYB-1935, pp. 765–770.

¹⁰⁵ Xiao Jizong (1975), pp. 201, 208.

divisions or the work units wherein the corps were set up.¹⁰⁶ In the case of Nanchang citizens the Labour Service Corps, co-ordinated jointly by the heads of Public Security Bureau and the *baojia*, was set up in every district. Each household in the district was expected to provide one member to the local corps, where the male's age ranged between 16 and 50.¹⁰⁷ The term *fuwu* embodies the idea of service spirit which is at the heart of all the organisations which emerged with the NLM. This was particularly true for the Labour Corps. Their constitution was based on the principle that the corps members would be willing to sacrifice themselves in order to support their country and that they would face the difficulties with bravery. This spirit was promoted in society in order to shape a strong community-based service that could be utilised, for instance, for organising the population, spreading general education, giving support to the jobless and increasing the economic production. Some of the campaigns within the NLM's mobilisation were seasonal, so that in spring, trees would be planted; in summer, sanitary campaigns would be promoted; in autumn, at harvest time, the co-operatives would be supported; and in winter, dam and dykes would be built. The service was voluntary in the sense that members of the corps provided the service for at least one hour during their free time under the direction of the local NLM association.¹⁰⁸

The Labour Service Corps were considered an essential structure for the NLM's implementation, and its members were projected as models for the entire population.¹⁰⁹ The data on membership of this organisation in Jiangxi are difficult to assess.¹¹⁰ The following, however, is a practical example of the work conducted by a group of civil servants at the Water Control Bureau (*Shuiliju*). At that point the civil servants in Nanchang were specifically mobilised to implement a

¹⁰⁶ 'Outline for the organisation. . .', in XSYB-1935, pp. 260–263.

¹⁰⁷ In the case of Nanchang citizens the corps's organisation was organised by replicating the city districts and the distribution of the Public Security Office. 'Nanchang shimin Xin shenghuo laodong fuwutuan zuzhi jianze [Principles for the Organisation of the New Life Labour Service Corps among Nanchang citizens]', in XSYB-1935, p. 269.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 260–263.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 754–755, 761.

¹¹⁰ The General Association lamented the lack of data from the local level for compiling statistics on the Corps. By the end of 1935 there were in 11 provinces 295 Corps and 69,018 members. Jiangxi was not included among them, but the Labour Service Corps set-up at county levels which depended by the local county associations were 42 for a total membership of 5,645. *Ibid.*, pp. 238, 547–548, 754.

literacy campaign,¹¹¹ and the Water Control Bureau reported back to the Jiangxi provincial government's Committee for Spreading Easy-Learning Education (*Jiangxi shenghui puji jianyi jiaoyu wei-yuanhui*) on the progress made by the New Life Labour Service Corps (*Xin shenghuo ladong fuwutuan*) within the bureau. This group was led by the official in charge of the office, Yan Fangtian, and had 24 members (23 men and 1 woman). The corps had delivered basic teaching on reading skills to 16 men aged between 20 and 48 years. The training began in July 1935, and the report was compiled at the beginning of October 1935. The aim of the programme was for these mature students to become literate, and they were tested by means of individual exams. According to the report sent by Yan Fangtian to the committee it had been difficult to teach effectively because the students' age was uneven. In his view, the programme was a very good initiative, but it would have been more successful if the students had also been taught to write.¹¹²

The mobilisation went beyond the realm of administrative institutions; in August 1934 the shop assistants (*Shangdian fuwuyuan*) were mobilised in Nanchang. By September there were more than 2,000 of them accountable for the implementation of the NLM. The shop assistants, who perhaps also included shop owners, were asked to admonish passers-by outside the shops' entrance and to implement public hygiene and order in the streets and alleys, as well as to check on neighbouring shops.¹¹³ According to the numbers gathered in the city of Nanchang, by 14 September there were 32 businesses registered with the General Association, with a total of 879 shop assistants, of which 633 had received and wore an armband (*beizhang*). The association had arranged three training sessions for the month of September, and those provided with armbands underwent the first session of training.¹¹⁴

As Zhang Fangling has pointed out, Nanchang merchants were asked to participate in the NLM, and each trade association in

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 761.

¹¹² JPA 23-1-707, 'Zhunhan tianju gongwuyuan laodong fuwutuan tuixing jianyi jiaoyu diaocha biao yi fen qing cha zhao you' (Receive and Examine the Filled-Out Form of the Civil Servants of the Labour Service Corps for Carrying Out [the] Easy-Learning Education [Campaign]), 5 October 1935.

¹¹³ XSYB-1934, pp. 267–268.

¹¹⁴ JPA 43-12-0220, 'Jiaodao shangdian fuwuyuan gongzuo gaishu [An Overview of the Teaching for Shops Assistants]', *Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zonghui huikan*, no. 4 (20 September 1934), p. 24.

Nanchang was required to establish study groups (*jiangxi fenhui*), which were reviewed by representatives sent by the General Association. Acquiring prestige might have been among the reasons behind merchants' involvement in the NLM, but the business circles had their own economic agenda to pursue. The merchants tried to play the system to their own advantage by, for example, naming their business after the NLM and gaining free publicity. Part of them, Zhang says, blamed the sharp decline in the commercial sector to the Communists, as their presence in the countryside had caused the peasants' purchasing power to decline sharply. They felt that it was the government's duty to stabilise society so that people's purchasing power would start to rise again. Moreover, they hoped that the NLM would contribute to eliminate smuggling and support the purchase of national products, which would benefit both their business and the local government because smuggled goods eluded taxation. The attempt to win the merchants' support culminated with the Jiangxi NLM Association setting a special festivity called the Merchants' Festival (*Shangren jie*) on 12 September 1935. On the provincial government's part, the NLM was a chance to gain the support of the business community and tighten control over the chambers of commerce which in 1937 were, eventually, re-organised by Xiong Shihui.¹¹⁵

Preparation for War

The development of semi-governmental organisations helps us to understand the channels through which the NLM, policies and propaganda were implemented and enables us to register the immediate readjustments in society when the war against Japan started.

Chiang Kai-shek started war preparations as early as November 1932 by setting up the National Defence Planning Council, and German advisors were brought in for assisting in the crucial task of military preparation of the Nationalist army. By the first half of 1935 the teams within the council had conducted several investigations

¹¹⁵ Zhang Fangling, '20shiji 30niandai de Nanchang shangren yu xinshenghuo yundong – yi Nanchang "shangrenjie" wei zhongxin [The Businessmen of Nanchang in the 1930s and the New Life Movement: the Case of the Merchants' Festivals]', *Lishi dang'an* (Historical Archives), no. 2 (2005), pp. 102–106.

in order to assess China's capacity in the strategic fields of military, finance, mining, industrial and agricultural output, transportation and the like,¹¹⁶ but culture and education were also included in the general investigation:

The Culture Team investigated education, as well as the Hitler Jugend, the organisation and activities of the Russian Youth Vanguards, and the British Child Protection agencies. It also busied itself with the drawing up of plans for promoting sports, youth training, and the compilation of text books in standard Chinese on Chinese history, geography, and citizenship. There were also plans in physical examination of students, investigation of teaching methods, military training for the local population, and the compilation of songs to promote nationalism.¹¹⁷

The inevitability of war and the preparation for it was discussed by civil servants in their public speeches. In March 1934 at the New Life Club in Nanchang the head of the Henan Education Office emphasised the need for a national self-strengthening movement such as the NLM, and with remarkable logic he depicted the international scenario that would come and China's role in it:

[F]rom various facts we can suppose that the Second World War [*di'er ci shijie dazhan*] will erupt within 1936, because of Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations. . . , [and] Soviet Russia's second Five Years' Plan ought to be completed within two to three years. England, Germany, and Italy are all expanding [their] naval, air, and land armies, and by 1936/1937 [this] will be completed [H]ence if we count the time, we only have from two to three years to work energetically towards self-strengthening [in order] to save the nation from extinction The New Life Movement namely wants people to take responsibility step by step from the small things up to saving the nation from extinction and reviving the nation.¹¹⁸

Topics such as air defence were discussed during the weekly meetings held by the Nanchang All Organs' Joint Conference for the NLM's implementation. In December 1935 the Aviation Commission (*Hangkong weiyuanhui*) proposed the adoption of a textbook on air defence to the local Bureau of Education (*Jiaoyu ju*), and permission was granted. The textbook was very simple and easy to memorise and aimed at teaching citizens and children how to react in the event of an air raid, involving possible chemical bombing.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the

¹¹⁶ Hans J. van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China, 1925–1945* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 151–155.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 154–155.

¹¹⁸ 'The New Life Club yesterday invited Qi Zhenru. . .', *JMR*, 20 March 1934.

¹¹⁹ XSYB-1935, pp. 212–213.

NLM's propaganda work style and techniques affected air-defence mobilisation: students teams were organised for making public speeches. In September 1935, the Nanchang Bureau of Preparation for Air-Defence Drills (*Nanchang fangkong yanxi choubei chu*) sent to the Jiangxi Provincial Industrial College (*Jiangxi shengli gongye zhuanke xuexiao*) the regulations for making speeches in public on the topic of air defence. Each team would consist of four members and one head-team, and all the city schools starting from junior high (*zhongdeng*) would send students to deliver speeches from 9 to 12 in the morning and from 2 to 5 in the afternoon every day from 1 to 18 October. Each morning one team member would collect the propaganda material from the Bureau of Preparation, whereas the team head was responsible for the daily collection of 1 yuan for tea allowance. The Provincial Education Office (*Jiaoyu ting*) would daily dispatch personnel to supervise the students' propaganda work. The Bureau of Preparation also sent the school a list of air-defence propaganda slogans and requested the school organisations to choose one slogan, copy it on to cloth banners and hang it near the front gate. The slogans concerned the importance of air defence and utilised a repertoire similar to the NLM by emphasising the link between self-defence, nation strengthening and national revival.¹²⁰ At the same time, senior high school (*gaozhong*) students were routinely involved in military drills (*junxun xuesheng huicao*) which were arranged by the Jiangxi National Military Training Committee (*Jiangxi guomin junshi xunlian weiyuanhui*) in Nanchang and Jiujiang once every last week of the month.¹²¹ There was in fact widespread concern over the preparation of the population for war by governmental institutions, and although not every mobilisation was masterminded by the NLM associations, their techniques and the issues addressed were similar.

In July 1937, immediately after the Marco Polo Bridge incident, organisations such as the Labour Service Working Groups (*Laodong fuwu gongzuotuan*) established in 1936 within Guomindang were reoriented towards supporting the war effort. They were promptly

¹²⁰ 'Air-defence is self-defence;' 'The purpose of air-defence is to strive for the nation's existence;' 'The purpose of air-defence drills is to fulfil our wartime preparation;' 'The people must help the government in building air-defence;' 'In order to revive the Chinese nation [we] must promote national air-defence.' JPA 37-3-21, 'Hanfu shijie jiangyan shishi banfa... [Letter with Attached the Methods for Carrying Out Speeches in City Streets...]', 28 September 1935.

¹²¹ JPA 37-3-21, 'Wei...ben niandu di yi ci xiaozhang huiyi...you [On... This Year's First Meeting of the Headmasters' Council...]', 28 September 1935.

re-organised into the Wartime Service Brigade (*Zhanshi fuwutuan dadui*), made up of 40 men and 20 women. Brigade members of both sexes received general military training, which consisted of lectures about politics, air national defence, resistance to the enemy, propaganda techniques and guerrilla warfare methods. Moreover, every day the brigade members underwent hour-long military drills. They were also in charge of organising and training the population in their areas by presenting public lectures and song and theatre performances. Besides preparing themselves for fighting the enemy, they saw to the reception of wounded soldiers arriving from the frontline and the collection of goods for military needs.¹²² As for war propaganda elsewhere, during the war against Japan four propaganda film cars were sent to the war districts with the purpose of showing propaganda slides that would encourage and comfort the population. The cars gradually became damaged, and since in wartime spare parts were difficult to get hold of, the General Association decided to use mini-projectors. For this purpose it produced 40 sets of slides about the NLM and the war against Japan, which were widely projected.¹²³

By late 1938 Nanchang was under heavy Japanese air bombing, and half of the population had left the city.¹²⁴ The northern counties of Jiangxi were at the centre of the battles against the Japanese, and the Jiangxi NLM Association was relocated.¹²⁵ This association did not abandon the goal of implementing the principles of ‘cleanliness’ and ‘orderliness’ as well as the three transformations of society (militarisation, improvement of production, and aesthetic uplifting), but in practice its work dealt with supporting the war effort. It carried out propaganda by hanging posters throughout the city and encouraging local theatres and cinemas to display signs that instructed

¹²² DSH Te 6/20.2, *Zhongguo Guomindang Jiangxi sheng dangbu gongzuo gaishu* (Overview of the Work of Guomindang’s Jiangxi Provincial Party Committee), (Nanchang, 1938), pp. 17–20. Ten years after its foundation the Labour Service Corps’ structure was still in place and drew together nationally 494,763 members. There were 383,370 members at provincial level (*sheng tuan*), 81,272 at city and county levels (*shixian tuan*) and 30,121 at railway level (*lu tuan*). Xiao Jizong (1975), p. 237.

¹²³ GSG 508, 20 January 1942, pp. 1722–1723.

¹²⁴ Freda Utley, *China at War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), p. 93.

¹²⁵ The city of Nanchang was officially evacuated at the end of March 1939 to Taihe in the central-southern part of the province. The report on the 1938’s activities of the Jiangxi NLM Association refers exclusively to the work carried out in Ji’an. Very likely the association first moved to Ji’an, where in 1938 the YMCA and the main press agencies were also evacuated, and later reached Taihe. *Nanchang shi zhi* (1997), vol. 1, p. 50; Cheng Qiheng ‘Jiangxi xinwen shiye jianshi [Concise History of Journalism in Jiangxi]’, *Jiangxi wenxian* (Documents on Jiangxi), no. 92 (April 1978), p. 23.

people how to react in case of an air raid. It led a collection of money and goods to send over to the frontline. In total, over 10,000 pairs of shoes and over 8,000 pairs of knitted cotton socks were sent to the Jiangxi provincial association for supporting the resistance effort (*Jiangxi sheng kangdi houyuan hui*) and to the Service Corps of the Military Commission in the combat areas (*Junweihui zhandi fuwutuan*). The association also served as a link for the organisation of free medical check-ups for refugees escaping from the war zone. At least in Ji'an, this service was successful in creating a network of doctors.¹²⁶ Assistance to refugees was not unique to Jiangxi. According to Freda Utey, in 1938, the refugee camps in Wuhan, which sheltered 50,000 refugees, were managed jointly by the local NLM Association. Funding for refugee camps scattered throughout China came from the Chinese government, the International Red Cross and donations from abroad.¹²⁷

With men called up to serve in the army, the contribution of women was crucial. Song Meiling, whilst praising the work carried out by the women involved in the NLM between the years 1938 and 1941, compared the effort of Chinese women with the mobilisation and responsibilities shouldered by American, English and French women during World War I, i.e. providing support to soldiers and participating in agricultural work and transportation.¹²⁸ During the wartime period the Women Directing Committee (*Funü zhidao weiyuanhui*) was enlarged and re-organised, and the Women Working Committee for the NLM (*Xinyun funü gongzuo weiyuanhui*) and the NLM's Women Working Teams (*Xin shenghuo funü gongzuo dui*) were added to it. The former was present at the provincial and city levels, and among the overseas Chinese (there were 10 such commissions

¹²⁶ DSH 483/24, Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zonghui (ed.), 'Ge sheng shi Xinyun hui daibiao dahui jilu minguo ershiqi niandu gedi xinyun hui gongzuo baogao [Minutes of the Delegates' Assembly of the Associations for the New Life Movement in Every City and Province, and Report on the Associations' Activities for 1938]', in *Xinyun congshu* (Collectanea on the New Life Movement), (ser. 21, 1939), pp. 42–43.

¹²⁷ Utey (1939), p. 49.

¹²⁸ DSH 483/31, Song Meiling, 'Zhongguo funü Kangzhan de shiming [The Chinese Women's Mission in the War of Resistance]', pp. 1–6, in Fuzhihui wenhua shiye zu (ed.), *Xinyun funü zhidao weiyuan hui san zhounian jinian tekan* (Special Issue on the Third Anniversary of the New Life Movement's Women Directing Committee), (Chongqing, China, July 1941), pp. 1–3. On the commemoration of Song Meiling after her death as 'Mother of the Nation', see Jeremy E. Taylor, 'Recycling Personality Cults: Observations of the Reactions to Madame Chiang Kai-shek's Death in Taiwan', *Totalitarian Movement and Political Religions*, vol. 7, no. 3, (September 2006), pp. 352–354.

in the United States); and the latter were organised within the administrative organs, in the five *Yuan*, in the Central Guomindang Committee, ministries and the like. The NLM Women Working Teams' involvement in the war effort was pursued through the organisation of training classes – special courses were established to train them as nurses and tailors, just to name two professions necessary to the resistance and relief efforts, and to increase their participation in wartime production by way of women's factories and co-operatives. Their training and involvement in wartime production were intended to enable women to respond to the needs of the war, but the latter was aimed also at making women financially independent. Furthermore, women were mobilised for spreading propaganda, promoting literacy campaigns, assisting wounded soldiers and orphans, supporting family dependents of military personnel and providing service in the combat areas. For instance, teams active in the NLM in Guangdong participated in the evacuation of the civil population, road destruction and reconstruction, watching duties and ammunition transportation.¹²⁹ In Jiangxi the NLM Association sent women to visit families, house-by-house, along with the *baojia* heads. The main purpose of these visits was to convince women to encourage the men in their households to join the army and to buy government bonds to support the war effort. The presence of the *baojia* heads led to the impression that besides the propaganda effort, the top agenda was the household registration for conscription and the uncovering of collaborators (*hanjian*).¹³⁰

The war patently gave 'new life' to the NLM, and in the novel scenario the network of local associations and its human resources would in fact make a difference in shaping local mobilisation and support for the war effort.

Conclusion

The national regeneration of China which the Nationalist government advocated through the NLM was closely intertwined with its state-building efforts. The NLM's promotion of health and hygiene, rural

¹²⁹ DSH 483/31, 'Xinyun funü gongzuo weiyuanhui ji Xin shenghuo funü gongzuo dui de jieshao [An Introduction to the New Life Movement's Women's Work Committees and New Life Women's Work Teams]', in *Xinyun funü zhidao weiyuan hui san zhounian jinian tekan*, pp. 65–68.

¹³⁰ DSH 483/24, p. 44.

education and citizenship was intended to aid the government in regaining control over the local administration in Jiangxi. More generally, the NLM's associations along with its mass organisations became a tool for voicing official policies and allowed the Nationalists' idea of modernity and citizenship to circulate in an unprecedented way. As a mass movement dedicated to the goals of reconstructing and reforming society, the NLM was hindered by the unsettled environment within which it had to operate, but above all it was hindered by its contradictory message. Whereas civilian mobilisation was encouraged, it was nonetheless carefully controlled, and the government's transformation of the individual and the society was detached from political transformation and participation.

The NLM, however, raises a fundamental issue in Chinese society, which would be the primacy of the state in social mobilisation. Some of the examples provided in this paper, such as the Labour Service Corps's inspections, the wake-up calls and rural education, bear a striking resemblance with Communist China. In the case of the NLM, state intervention was exemplified by a code of behaviour, which directly affected the individual's relationship with the state. The school curricula introduced in rural areas, the students' meetings for the implementation of the NLM and the activities of groups linked to the NLM all aimed at providing models for citizenship and, ultimately, at shaping national identity. These groups, with all their limitations, show that the Nationalist government was attempting to re-map the communal space by carving a space for semi-governmental organisations. To a great extent this was linked to the desire to re-connect the government with the local levels, but with the war against Japan looming, these organisations were central to war preparation and the war effort. Although this general mobilisation followed a strictly top-down approach, and participation in most cases was inspired by bureaucratic zeal rather than by genuine enthusiasm, it is evident that the NLM was at the heart of negotiating patterns of relationships in 1930s' society.