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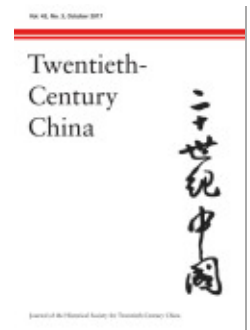
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HEALTHY MINDS, COMPLIANT CITIZENS: THE POLITICS OF “MENTAL HYGIENE” IN REPUBLICAN CHINA, 1928–1937

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In the 1930s, the concept of “mental hygiene” penetrated Chinese intellectual discourse. Concerned with the treatment and prevention of psychological and psychiatric disorders, mental hygienists believed that the mental health of the Chinese population was essential for achieving national strength and political unity. Under the leadership of the Chinese Mental Hygiene Association, psychologists and social scientists pathologized social deviance as a form of mental illness, thereby justifying their intervention into the private lives of the Chinese people. This article will show how the discourse of mental hygiene in early twentieth-century China was utilized to achieve ideological conformity and extend the authoritarian control of the Guomindang. It therefore suggests that mental hygiene must be considered alongside more general discussions of biopolitics and public health in the Republican period.

KEYWORDS: China, Chinese Mental Hygiene Association, Guomindang, mental hygiene, psychology, public health

In 1921, the American neurologist Andrew Woods (1872–1956) gave a lecture at Peking University on “the menace of insanity to popular government.” In the lecture, he urged the Chinese people to seriously consider “what [their] government ought to do about the mental health of its people.” According to Woods, many of China’s political difficulties—warlordism and factionalism among them—could be attributed to the problem of insanity. Insanity, as he understood it, did not refer strictly to “raving maniacs” who required institutionalization. Rather, the category also encompassed those with “dangerously inefficient mental functioning,” including “imbeciles, idiots, or morons,” “epileptics or criminals,” and all sorts of individuals “who are sound but unproductive.” Because these types of people could not “hold their own in the struggle for existence,” they necessarily inhibited the evolutionary progress of the Chinese nation. Woods’ speech, in other words, framed insanity in national terms. Due to the obviously antagonistic relationship between madness and political stability, Woods

advocated for the need to “advance the general level of mental efficiency... among the common people.”¹

Although Woods’ lecture did not make a considerable impact at the time it was given, 10 years later his argument would be taken up in a far more serious fashion. By the 1930s, the issue of “mental hygiene” had thoroughly penetrated Chinese intellectual discourse. A concept that had originated in the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century, mental hygiene was initially concerned with the need to improve treatment and care for the institutionalized insane. By the end of the First World War, however, supporters of mental hygiene had gradually turned their attention to noninstitutional settings as well. Believing that transgressive behaviors signaled the early manifestations of a serious psychiatric condition, mental hygienists increasingly emphasized the need for a prophylactic, rather than simply rehabilitative, solution to the problem of mental illness. They therefore embraced a preemptive approach that included not only the establishment of child guidance clinics and the training of social workers but also the compulsory segregation or sterilization of mentally ill and feeble-minded individuals. In both the United States and Western Europe, mental hygiene came to embody two distinct thrusts: a humanitarian concern over the welfare of the mentally ill and an authoritarian concern over order and social control.²

The dual thrusts of mental hygiene attracted the attention of different segments of the Chinese intelligentsia. While physicians and caregivers were receptive to discourses pertaining to the humane treatment of the insane, psychologists, educators, and other social scientists tended to interpret mental illness as a primarily sociopolitical problem. Just as Andrew Woods had framed insanity as a matter of urgent public interest, the intelligentsia—particularly those with ties to the Nationalist Party (國民黨 Guomindang)—invoked mental hygiene as a synecdoche for broader concerns with national deficiency and national self-strengthening. Convinced that psychiatric and psychological illnesses were contributing to the sluggish advance of Chinese nationhood, they advocated for a more proactive and systematic approach to the eradication of mental illness, feeble-mindedness, and general behavioral deviance than had ever been suggested before.

Previous studies of health and hygiene in Republican China have focused predominantly on the material body and its infirmities.³ Examining the relationship between the healthy body and the strong body politic, historians have shown how government regimes sought to manage, police, and optimize public health in an effort to gain biopolitical control over the Chinese population.⁴ What these studies have not shown, however, is the way in which the intelligentsia and political elite also aspired to discipline and strengthen the *minds* of the Chinese population. Through the apparently “scientific” discourse of mental

1 Andrew Woods, “The Menace of Insanity to Popular Government,” *National Medical Journal of China* 7, no. 1 (March 1921): 201–6.

2 Gerald Grob, *Mental Illness and American Society, 1875–1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 144–78; Theresa Richardson, *The Century of the Child: The Mental Hygiene Movement and Social Policy in the United States and Canada* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 3–4.

3 A notable exception is Wang Wenji, “Yufang, shiying yu gaizao: Minguo shiqi de xinli weisheng” [Prevent, conform, and transform: Republican-era mental hygiene], in Zhu Pingyi, ed., *Jiankang yu shehui* (Taipei: Lianjing, 2013), 237–58.

4 For example, Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and Sean Hsiang-lin Lei, *Neither Donkey Nor Horse: Medicine in the Struggle over China’s Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

hygiene, psychologists and psychiatrists attempted to monitor and control the private thoughts and behaviors of the people—from their emotions and sexual desires to their political and ideological beliefs—in order to correct “abnormal” mindsets and encourage the adoption of sanctioned disciplinary norms. In so doing, they simultaneously helped to bolster the power of the state by pathologizing any activity that strayed from its imagined ideal. Thus, public health in Republican China was not simply a somatic endeavor but also a psychological one: an ongoing effort to correct, discipline, and unify the thoughts of the Chinese people so as to achieve ideological conformity and Nationalist control.

Viewing mental hygiene as a constituent element of sociopolitical discourse not only allows us to rethink our conception of what constitutes public health but also enables us to interrogate the causes and consequences of shifting conceptions of mental illness in China. In the late imperial and early Republican periods, mad individuals were, with some exceptions, narrowly identified as those who exhibited pathological “psycho-behavioral symptoms.”⁵ By the 1930s, proponents of mental hygiene had adopted a much broader view of what constituted poor mental health. Evidence of mental illness, they believed, was exhibited not just by the obviously insane but also by those who flouted systems of authority or exhibited transgressive behaviors. Social deviance was thus reconceptualized as pathological, and psychologists were likewise charged not just with treating the individual but, more importantly, with ensuring social conformity. In this sense, the shifting meanings of mental illness in China were at least partly informed by the same intellectual and political currents that had inspired the Mental Hygiene movement in places like the United States, Canada, and Nazi Germany: the desire to employ positivist methods toward the ends of controlling social phenomena, achieving order and efficiency, and securing future prosperity.⁶

THE ORIGINS OF MENTAL HYGIENE

In the 1930s, Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist Party continued to be plagued by many of the same problems that had haunted the Chinese nation throughout the earlier warlord period (1916–1928). Although Chiang’s extensive military apparatus had nominally unified the country in 1928, the perils of warlordism, communism, and Japanese imperialism continually threatened to tear it apart. Confronted by domestic discontent and foreign invasion, Chiang turned to nationalism as a potential “centripetal force” by which to counter the multiple threats undermining the advance of his regime.⁷ If the Chinese people could only be compelled to sacrifice their individual interests for the grander cause of nationalism, Chiang believed, then the various problems that beleaguered the nation would be no match for the power of a unified Chinese citizenry.

5 Fabien Simonis, “Mad Acts, Mad Speech, and Mad People in Late Imperial Chinese Law and Medicine” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2010), 35.

6 As Mathew Thomson pointed out, the Mental Hygiene movement unfolded differently in different locations, but its underlying impulse arose from a similar source. Mathew Thomson, “Mental Hygiene as an International Movement,” in Paul Weindling, ed., *International Health Organizations and Movements, 1918–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 283–304.

7 Lloyd Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China Under Nationalist Rule, 1927–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1974), xii.

It was against this backdrop that Chinese intellectuals began to give attention to the problems and possibilities of mental hygiene (心理衛生 *xinli weisheng* or 精神衛生 *jingshen weisheng*). To them, mental hygiene represented a potential solution to the entwined problems of political heterodoxy and national disunity. Although previous generations of leaders had certainly stressed the enforcement of normative behaviors as a means by which to ensure stability and order,⁸ mental hygiene represented an unprecedentedly intrusive and regulatory approach to the longstanding problem of civil disobedience. To those who supported the premises of mental hygiene, deviance was reconceptualized as a psychological malfunction that required professional intervention, rather than an issue of individual moral civility.

By the time the concept of mental hygiene gained traction in China in the mid-1930s, the term—and the international movement it generated—had already been in existence for over two decades. The concept originated in the United States through the work of a mental health advocate named Clifford Beers (1876–1943). In 1900, after experiencing a mental breakdown and attempting suicide, Beers was committed to a sanatorium. There, he suffered regular abuse at the hands of attendants and physicians, many of whom sought to “profit through the misfortunes of others.”⁹ When Beers recovered a few years later, he reached out to the psychiatrist Adolf Meyer (1866–1950) in an attempt to create an organized program for the improvement of mental health care. Together, the two established the National Committee for Mental Hygiene (NCMH) on February 19, 1909.¹⁰

As several scholars have pointed out, the objectives of the NCMH were both poorly defined and constantly shifting.¹¹ At the time the organization was founded, the goal of mental hygiene was straightforward: to eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness and improve treatment and care for the mentally ill. Over the course of the next decade, however, the implications of mental hygiene and the objectives of the NCMH gradually expanded. Due in large part to the discovery of “shell shock” during the First World War, psychiatrists throughout the Western world came to the realization that psychoses and neuroses could develop over time in the minds of otherwise normal and well-functioning individuals—particularly if their environmental conditions were unsound.¹² This realization had a profound impact on the future direction of the international Mental Hygiene movement. If, as the American neuropsychiatrist William White (1870–1937) explained, mentally ill patients simply represented the “end products of many years of bad mental hygiene,” then the goal of mental hygienists was not just to treat these individuals retroactively but also to determine methods by which to “[cut] off the source of mental disease

8 For example, much has been written on female chastity, heterosexuality, and the enforcement of sexual normativity in the late imperial period. See Janet Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

9 Clifford W. Beers, *A Mind That Found Itself* (1908; New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1933), 52.

10 Clifford W. Beers, *The Mental Hygiene Movement: Origin and Growth* (Norwood, MA: Plimpton Press, 1917).

11 Grob, *Mental Illness*, 144; Johannes Pols, “Managing the Mind: The Culture of American Mental Hygiene, 1910–1950” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1997).

12 Martin Stone, “Shellshock and the Psychologists,” in William Bynum, Roy Porter, and Michael Shepherd, eds., *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry*, vol. 2, *Institutions and Society* (London: Routledge, 1985), 242–71.

at its origin.”¹³ From the late 1910s onward, therefore, the focus of mental hygiene shifted to involve prevention as well as care, and a major emphasis was placed on childhood education and the rearing of psychologically healthy youths.¹⁴

As the objectives of mental hygiene expanded, psychologists began to supplement the work already being done by the neuropsychiatric profession. By the 1920s, psychiatrists and psychologists had positioned themselves on opposite, yet complementary, sides of the Mental Hygiene movement. While neuropsychiatry progressively came to be understood as the “negative side of mental hygiene” due to its purely reactive utility, psychologists—alongside educators, sociologists, and lawmakers—attempted to prevent psychiatric symptoms from occurring in the first place.¹⁵ Focusing predominantly on the development of mental hygiene programs in elementary schools, child psychologists aimed to instill in children “habits, ideas, and ideals of order” that would continue to influence their behaviors and mindsets for the rest of their lives.¹⁶

In their frantic search for early indications of mental illness, psychologists became acutely attuned to any type of behavior that could potentially be classified as abnormal. Frankwood Williams (1883–1936), who served as medical director for the NCMH beginning in 1922, pointed out that poor mental health could be evinced not only by the obviously psychotic mental patient but also by more subtle personality types, such as the “domineering, arbitrary father,” the “clinging mother,” and the “overly modest, overly religious, overly kind individual.” The difference between these persons and those with more conspicuous forms of functional psychosis, he argued, was “not so much a matter of kind as of degree.”¹⁷ Being mentally ill, in other words, no longer meant the opposite of being mentally healthy; rather, the two were reconceptualized as mere degrees on a continuum. As “deviant” behavior became conflated with the beginning stages of a more overt pathology, socially questionable traits such as criminality, idling, homosexuality, naughtiness, feeble-mindedness, and “all forms of social maladjustment and even unhappiness” came to be seen as distinct markers of an inchoate mental malfunction, and therefore the potential target of medical intervention.¹⁸

Although the NCMH had originally been established to ensure the welfare of psychiatric patients, over time a more socially oriented strain of thinking began to occupy the attention of its supporters. As mental hygienists increasingly conflated mental illness with social deviance, they began to turn away from a narrow focus on the health of the individual and toward a broader concern with the harm these individuals caused to their social environment. Given the growing fear that mental disorders were incurable, degenerative, and ultimately detrimental to the overall health of the nation and race, certain physicians and lawmakers began to advocate for a more proactive and permanent solution to what

13 William White, “The Origin, Growth, and Significance of the Mental Hygiene Movement,” *Science* 72, no. 1856 (July 25, 1930): 79.

14 Richardson, *Century of the Child*; Kathleen Jones, *Taming the Troublesome Child: American Families, Child Guidance, and the Limits of Psychiatric Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

15 Daniel Wolford La Rue, *Mental Hygiene* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 9–11.

16 Edwin Kirkpatrick, *Mental Hygiene for Effective Living* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934), 326.

17 Frankwood Williams, *Mental Hygiene* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1929), 15.

18 White, “Mental Hygiene Movement,” 79.

they saw as a national crisis. By the 1930s, the NCMH had acknowledged the need for a eugenic approach to the mentally ill, a decision that was most notoriously supported within German politics but also gained a notable degree of support in the United States. Herbert Hoover, the 31st president of the United States and an enthusiastic supporter of eugenics, held a conference in 1930 at which he advocated for the “selective” sterilization of the mentally unfit. In conjunction with the 1927 *Buck v. Bell* court ruling, which upheld the right to asexualize mentally defective individuals, 30 American states were compelled to pass sterilization laws over the course of the next decade.¹⁹

On the eve of the Second World War, then, mental hygiene encompassed two distinct—yet somehow entirely complementary—views. On the one hand, as Clifford Beers put it, the movement was concerned with the need to foster a “more rational public attitude toward mental illness and the hygiene of mind.” Through educational work and the support of neuropsychiatric research, the NCMH aimed to reclaim the mental patient “from a very long period of neglect and inhumanity.”²⁰ On the other hand, and particularly as the cause of mental hygiene gained increased attention within the public at large, the Mental Hygiene movement simultaneously focused its attention on reducing the threat of mental illness for the benefit of the society, nation, and race. By applying psychological principles toward the goal of forging socially useful and well-adjusted citizens—and by implementing eugenic measures on individuals who could not be redeemed—proponents of mental hygiene insisted that their discipline would ultimately contribute to the creation of a fitter populace.

When Chinese intellectuals first encountered the concept of mental hygiene, it was this latter interpretation that they found most persuasive: namely, the possibility of preemptively eliminating behavioral deviance and creating a healthier and more unified society. This is not to say that all members of the intelligentsia were enthralled by this line of reasoning, of course; psychiatrists and medical psychologists, many of whom were affiliated with Western-run hospitals like the Peking Union Medical College, generally emphasized the therapeutic and educational aspects of mental hygiene.²¹ But those with backgrounds in fields such as education and the social sciences—individuals who had little direct contact with the mentally ill themselves—fixated on the link between mental hygiene and national self-strengthening. Motivated by a belief in the salutary, progressive, and objective nature of these social engineering discourses, such scholars remained confident that they were at the forefront of a thoroughly scientific movement, one that could save the Chinese nation, once and for all, from the many problems that threatened to tear it apart.

19 Ian Dowbiggin, *The Sterilization Movement and Global Fertility in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 26–30.

20 Beers, *Mental Hygiene Movement*, 311–12.

21 For example, Geoffrey Blowers and Shelley Wang Xuelai, “Gone with the West Wind: The Emergence and Disappearance of Psychotherapeutic Culture in China, 1936–68,” in Howard Chiang, ed., *Psychiatry and Chinese History* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 143–60. On neuropsychiatry in Beijing, see Hugh Shapiro, “View from a Chinese Asylum” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1995).

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY IN CHINA

The seeds of mental hygiene first began to enter the Chinese imagination in the 1920s, when intellectuals were increasingly traveling to the United States and Western Europe to pursue advanced degrees in the field of psychology. As the historian Geoffrey Blowers has noted, the earliest Chinese psychologists became interested in the discipline because they believed that a scientific understanding of human psychology could enable them to foster “correct patterns of behavior” and a “healthy mind.”²² More interested in the practical utility of applied psychology than in its philosophical rationale, intellectuals scoured translated texts for clues about how to harmonize the behavior of the individual with the greater good of his society. The influential educator and president of Peking University Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培 1868–1940), for instance, distinctly noted the relationships among experimental psychology, early education, and the ability to govern the psychological growth of children. Hoping to promote the healthy behavioral development of Chinese youths, he established China’s first psychological laboratory in Beijing in 1917 and chaired the psychological research institute at the Guomindang’s Academia Sinica in 1928.²³ Throughout the 1920s, the popularity of the field continued to grow. The first department of psychology was founded in Nanjing in 1920, the Chinese Psychological Society was formally established in 1921, and specialized journals and study groups proliferated in tandem with the return of psychologists from abroad.²⁴

Early Chinese texts on psychology frequently stressed the importance of proper conditioning in childhood as a means of ensuring social conformity. The behavioral psychologist Huang Weirong (黃維榮 dates unknown), for example, argued that three-fourths of all cases of abnormal behavior could be attributed to poor training received in childhood. He therefore suggested that psychologists and educators work together in order to cultivate habits that were “in compliance” with the child’s society.²⁵ Guo Renyuan (郭任遠 1898–1970), also a behavioral psychologist, concurred with this view. Arguing that “early life is like a blank sheet of paper,” Guo insisted that a proper elementary education was necessary in order to create “strong and healthy citizens.”²⁶ And the psychiatrist Gui Zhiliang (桂質良 1900–1956), who received her doctorate from Johns Hopkins in 1929, asserted that psychiatry should be used for preventive, rather than just reactive, purposes. Children who had begun to show signs of behavioral deviance, she proposed, should be brought to a psychiatrist as soon as possible. By advising parents how to “raise the child properly,” psychiatrists could enable children to adapt to their environment and become “useful social elements.”²⁷

22 Geoffrey Blowers, “The Origins of Scientific Psychology in China, 1898–1949,” in Adrian Brock, ed., *Internationalizing the History of Psychology* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 97.

23 Yan Guocai, ed., *Zhongguo xinli xue shi ziliao xuanbian* [Collection of materials on the history of Chinese psychology] (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1990), vol. 4, 15.

24 Louise Higgins and Mo Zheng, “An Introduction to Chinese Psychology: Its Historical Roots Until the Present Day,” *Journal of Psychology* 136, no. 2 (2002): 225–39.

25 Huang Weirong, *Biantai xinli xue ABC* [ABCs of abnormal psychology] (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1929), 103.

26 Guo Renyuan, *Xinli xue ABC* [ABCs of psychology] (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1928), 51.

27 Gui Zhiliang, *Xiandai jingshen bingxue* [Modern psychiatry] (Shanghai: Xinyue shudian, 1932), 11, 81.

Acting in parallel with trends in the United States, Chinese scholars also began to reinterpret nonconformist behaviors as species of mental illness. Sun Xiong (孫雄 1895–1939), a penologist who taught at Fudan University, argued that mental illness did not pertain only to the seriously deranged but also to those with all types of “abnormal mindsets” (反常情態 *fanchang qingtai*); the mentally ill, he continued, thus belonged in the same category as prostitutes, criminals, and suicidal individuals.²⁸ A journalist named Si Yi (思毅 dates unknown), writing on the relationship between mental illness and modern society, associated the disorder with homosexuality, adultery, divorce, and any activity that “jeopardized morals and decency.”²⁹ And, as a result of the slow but steady influx of Freudian thought, a host of sexual behaviors, such as masturbation, licentiousness, and sexual fetishism, also became linked to psychologically abnormal states.³⁰ By categorizing such behaviors as a form of poor mental health, Chinese intellectuals refashioned deviant or unorthodox activities into a legitimate target of psychological intervention.

Psychologists and other social scientists justified their intrusion into the personal lives of the Chinese people through appeals to alarming demographic data. They believed that the incidence of mental illness was rapidly increasing and that, unless proactive measures were adopted to halt its spread, the Chinese nation would soon be overrun with mentally defective individuals.³¹ One journalist, citing statistical data from Western psychopathic hospitals, estimated that the entire population of England would be insane within the span of two decades.³² Some went even further to suggest that “everyone in the civilized world” would soon show symptoms of mental pathology if the rate of increase in insanity continued apace.³³ And others believed that China did not even have to wait for the crisis of mental illness to reach its apogee. In 1937, an article in the well-known pictorial *Liangyou* (*The Young Companion Pictorial*) declared that 99% of people already exhibited some form of mental illness. Simply titled, “Are You Crazy?,” the article did little to assuage popular fears of mental degeneration. As the subhead succinctly summarized, “You might think you’re not, but after reading this essay, you’ll think again.”³⁴

Mental illness was seen as not only a demographic problem but also an economic one. The psychologist Wu Nanxuan (吳南軒 1893–1980), who will be discussed in more detail below, pointed out that hundreds of millions of dollars were spent each year on the institutionalization and management of the mentally ill and feeble-minded in the United States and England alone. In China too, the government could expect to spend 20,000

28 Sun Xiong, *Biantai xingwei* [Abnormal behavior] (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1939), 1.

29 Si Yi, “Jingshen bing yu xiandai shehui” [Mental illness and modern society], *Qinghua zhoukan* 43, no. 4 (1935): 6–17.

30 Zhang Kecheng, *Nannü shengzhi qixing shenjing shuairuo de yufang ji zhiliao* [Prevention and treatment of sexual neurasthenia in men and women] (Shanghai: Shenghuo yiyuan, 1934); Zhao Han'en, *Jingshen bingxue* [Psychiatry] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1929), 13.

31 The belief that mental illness was on the rise was a universal phenomenon. See Andrew Scull, *Social Order/Mental Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 310–11.

32 Si, “Jingshen bing,” 6.

33 Sun Xiong, *Biantai xingwei*, 2–3; Liu Xiong, *Nao shenjing bing* [Brain and nervous diseases] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1931), 13, 48.

34 “Ni you shenjing bing ma?” [Are you crazy?], *Liangyou huabao* (*The Young Companion Pictorial*), no. 124 (1937).

to 30,000 yuan on the care of a single individual over the course of his or her lifetime.³⁵ The psychiatric social worker Song Siming (宋思明 dates unknown), though relying on different economic data, came to a similarly damning conclusion. Noting that it cost approximately 150 yuan a month to feed and medicate each mentally ill individual, Song stated that the Chinese government could expect to “waste” at least 150 million yuan on the insane every few weeks.³⁶ If mental illness did not lead to societal collapse on its own, these scholars cautioned, then the problem would easily bankrupt the country long before then.

The combination of the above arguments—that mental illness harmed social order, cost exorbitant sums of money, and was relentlessly increasing—led psychologists, journalists, and other members of the intelligentsia to the conclusion that mental disorders were a matter of national importance. Sun Xiong warned that psychiatric afflictions were a problem that implicated “the entire society and race.”³⁷ Song Siming lamented that mentally ill patients “wasted the country’s money and could not contribute to society.”³⁸ And Wu Nanxuan declared that mental illness and feeble-mindedness were “great racial and social liabilities” that endangered the very future of Chinese civilization.³⁹ Recognizing that mental disorders constituted a social Darwinist threat to the continuation of the Chinese nation, psychologists turned from a strictly descriptive preoccupation with madness to an active engagement with the cause of mental hygiene.

TOWARD A CHINESE MENTAL HYGIENE MOVEMENT

In the spring of 1930, delegates from 53 nations gathered in Washington, DC to attend the First International Congress on Mental Hygiene. Ernst DeVries (1883–1976), professor of neurology at the Peking Union Medical College, helmed the Chinese delegation, which consisted of five individuals.⁴⁰ At the commencement ceremony held on May 5, representatives from each delegation were invited to introduce the current state of mental hygiene in their respective countries. Dr. Wang Zuxiang (王祖祥 dates unknown; known as T. Hsiang Wang), a public health official with the Nationalist government’s Ministry of Health, was chosen to speak on behalf of the Chinese contingent. Wang readily acknowledged that the scope of mental hygiene in China lagged “somewhat behind” that of other nations. Although there existed a few institutions for the reception of the mentally ill, he explained, most patients who were admitted to these facilities were too impaired to be effectively treated. Over the next few years, however, China planned to develop its mental hygiene activities in two ways. First, the Ministry of Health intended to establish examination clinics in

35 Wu Nanxuan, “Shehui kongzhi dineng de zhongyao he fangfa” [Importance and methods of the social control of the feeble-minded], *Guoli zhongyang daxue jiaoyu congkan* 1, no. 1 (1933): 86.

36 Song Siming, *Jingshen bing zhi shehui de yinsu yu fangzhi* [Social causes and prevention of mental illness] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1944), 15.

37 Sun Xiong, *Biantai xingwei*, 1.

38 Song, *Jingshen bing*, 20.

39 Wu, “Shehui kongzhi dineng,” 88. Wu used the English phrase in his text.

40 *Proceedings of the First International Congress on Mental Hygiene* (New York: International Committee for Mental Hygiene, 1932), ix, 23.

all hospitals and health centers for the specific purpose of detecting mental disease at an early stage. Second, the ministry sought to incorporate mental hygiene into school hygiene, with the aim of both preventing mental disorders and “insuring the optimum mental development in growing children.” This brief introduction, optimistic in its tenor, underscored China’s support of, and alignment with, the general principles of the international Mental Hygiene movement.⁴¹

A few years after this conference, a Chinese Mental Hygiene movement indeed began to coalesce. The movement was dominated by psychologists and other social scientists with ties to the central government, who did little to incorporate neuropsychiatrists, public health specialists, or other physicians into its ranks. Leaders of the movement, concerned more about the detrimental impact of mental illness on Chinese society than on the individual, advocated a two-pronged approach to the pursuit of mental hygiene in China: first, the creation of psychologically healthy and politically conformist citizens and, second, the segregation or elimination of defective individuals through eugenics and eugenics. These dual goals, though shared by a number of participants in the movement, were most clearly articulated by two of the main progenitors of Chinese mental hygiene, Zhang Yinian (章頤年 1904–1960) and Wu Nanxuan.

Zhang Yinian, a psychologist who authored the first Chinese-language monograph on mental hygiene in 1936, received his education at New York University and the University of Michigan. While abroad in the United States, Zhang had been deeply influenced by the international Mental Hygiene movement and the work of Clifford Beers; upon returning home in the early 1930s, he deemed himself “the Beers of China” and began to teach college courses on mental hygiene at Shanghai’s Jinan University.⁴² Despite his self-given moniker, however, Zhang’s interpretation of mental hygiene had less to do with patient welfare, per se, than with the prevention of psychological disorders for the general improvement of Chinese society. As he wrote in his monograph, the “worrisome, frightening, and serious problem” of mental illness could easily lead to an increase of criminality, a loss of social order, and economic, moral, and spiritual damage to the Chinese nation as a whole. Yet, he continued, in spite of the devastation that had already been caused by mental illness, the Chinese people remained unconcerned about preventing its advance. Although they had generally accepted the utility of public health for the eradication of communicable diseases, they failed to recognize that the elimination of psychological afflictions was equally pressing. Consequently, Zhang bemoaned, epidemics were decreasing while mental disorders were “growing by the day.”⁴³

For Zhang, the eradication of mental illness and the formation of a psychologically healthy populace were two sides of the same coin. The easiest way to achieve these entwined goals, he believed, was to prevent psychological abnormalities from forming in the first place. As he explained in a series of essays, once individuals had begun to exhibit an “eccentric temperament” or “abnormal emotions,” this was necessarily a sign

41 *Proceedings*, 94–95.

42 Shu Yueyu, “Zhang Yinian: Zhongguo xinli weisheng de kaituo zhe” [Zhang Yinian: progenitor of Chinese mental hygiene], *Ziran bianzheng fa tongxun* [Journal of dialectics of nature], no. 6 (2015): 138–46.

43 Zhang Yinian, *Xinli weisheng gailun* [Introduction to mental hygiene] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1936), 1–11.

that an underlying pathology was afoot; in order to preserve their mental hygiene, then, individuals needed to develop socially “useful” habits and eliminate behaviors that were “in conflict” with their society.⁴⁴ Because the development of healthy and harmful habits generally occurred during childhood, Zhang stressed the need for parents and educators to take a prominent role in fostering psychological health. At home, he suggested, parents should set a good example for their children by exhibiting positive marital relations and offering proper discipline, while at school, educators should focus on cultivating each child’s moral character and instructing him or her in correct social values and norms.⁴⁵ The path to achieving mental hygiene was thus decided during childhood; only when children had fully internalized the need to “adapt to the customs of their society” would they be able to lead “fulfilling and successful lives” while thwarting the omnipresent threat of insanity.⁴⁶

Zhang’s position represented the more optimistic thrust of Chinese mental hygiene. Believing that mental illness could be prevented through proper education and the introduction of healthy social and environmental stimuli, Zhang emphasized the positive role that mental hygiene could play in the development of socially oriented citizens.⁴⁷ On the other side of the spectrum, Zhang’s contemporary Wu Nanxuan was somewhat less hopeful about the prospects of employing only educational means for the eradication of mental defects and illnesses. Like Zhang, Wu was a psychologist who first came into contact with the discourse of mental hygiene while studying abroad in the United States. Upon finishing his doctorate in educational psychology at Berkeley in 1929, Wu returned to China, where he published extensively on the need to implement the principles of mental hygiene domestically. In one of his earliest publications on the subject, Wu lamented that China was the only country that “hadn’t devoted special attention to the problem.” Describing the current status of mental hygiene in China as “shameful” and “pitiful,” he decided to propagandize the content, scope, and necessity of the movement to his fellow citizens.⁴⁸

Wu was particularly fixated on the unique qualities of the German mental hygiene initiative. “There are at least two points that are worthy of our attention,” Wu wrote of the German movement. “Ever since the Socialist Party under the leadership of Hitler has come to power, they have strictly prohibited the procreation of the mentally ill and feeble-minded, either by restricting them from marrying or through sterilization.” As Wu went on to explain, the German approach to mental hygiene focused less on the slow process of improving environmental stimuli than on the relatively quicker process of eliminating mentally defective individuals altogether. If German citizens were unable to prove that they were of sound body and mind, then they would be denied the right to marry—and

44 Zhang Yinian, “Xinli weisheng yu ertong xundao” [Mental hygiene and the guidance of children], in *Xinli weisheng* (Shanghai: Jiaoyu bianyi guan chubanshu, 1935), 16.

45 Zhang Yinian, “Xinli weisheng zai xuexiao ji jiating zhong de yingyong” [Utility of mental hygiene in the school and at home], *Xinli jikan* 2, no. 2 (1937): 1–11.

46 Zhang Yinian, “Xinli weisheng yu ertong xundao,” 25.

47 Other psychologists also shared this position. For example, Xiao Xiaorong, “Xinli weisheng zhi jiben yuanze” [Basic principles of mental hygiene], *Guoli zhongyang daxue jiaoyu congkan* 2, no. 1 (1934): 1–13.

48 Wu Nanxuan, “Guoji xinli weisheng yundong” [International mental hygiene movement], *Guoli zhongyang daxue jiaoyu congkan* 2, no. 1 (1934): 38–39; Wu Nanxuan, “Xinli weisheng yiyi fanwei yu zhongyao xing” [Meaning and importance of mental hygiene], *Guoli zhongyang daxue jiaoyu congkan* 2, no. 1 (1934): 1–11.

consequently, the right to reproduce. In order to further protect the gene pool, Germany had also instituted a sterilization program for mentally unfit individuals. Sterilization (or “asexualization,” as Wu also referred to it) “decisively resolved” the problem of mental illness by eliminating the potential for psychological and degenerative disorders to be passed along to new generations. “The German government’s superior attention to the spirit of mental hygiene,” Wu positively concluded, “shows clearly in its words and in its actions!”⁴⁹

Inspired by the German model, Wu suggested adopting a dual approach to the eradication of mental illness and feeble-mindedness in China: eugenics and eugenics. Claiming that mentally defective individuals were particularly prone to engaging in crime, vagrancy, and licentious behavior (indeed, he cited a claim that 85% to 100% of prostitutes could be classified as feeble-minded), Wu recommended the preemptive extermination of all classes of “morons,” “imbeciles,” “idiots,” “cretins,” and “mongoloids” from the Chinese gene pool. Toward this end, he advocated not only prohibiting the mentally ill and weak-minded from marrying but also sterilizing such individuals, so as to prevent them from procreating—a method, he underscored, that had already proven very successful in California. Wu pointed out that more radical procedures were also available if these measures proved insufficient, though he doubted most Chinese would approve of them: in particular, the possibility of euthanizing mentally unfit individuals with chloroform in order to “painlessly exterminate” them in a cost-efficient manner.⁵⁰

The eugenic program, Wu made clear, was an indispensable method by which to defend against the propagation of mentally ill and feeble-minded individuals. Yet the eugenic solution, as Wu recognized, was only useful insofar as it would prevent *future* cases of mental disorder from occurring. For the mental defectives who already existed, a eugenics program would also be necessary in order to segregate low-functioning or maladjusted individuals from the general population. Introducing a theoretical solution that he referred to as “environmental improvement,” Wu suggested that the Chinese government force mentally defective individuals to register with the state. Once registered, they would be sent to specialized institutions where they would be “socialized” and enjoined to participate in manual labor.⁵¹

Although Zhang Yinian and Wu Nanxuan represented different poles of the Chinese Mental Hygiene movement, they both shared the underlying sentiment that psychological disorders were an acute social, racial, and national liability—and therefore required solutions that would primarily serve the interests of the nation, rather than just the interests of the individual. As Zhang wrote in an addendum to his monograph on mental hygiene, “The people’s hearts and minds are the basis of the nation. If the people’s minds are healthy, then the nation will necessarily be powerful and prosperous; if the people’s minds are degenerate (墮落 *duoluo*), then the nation will necessarily be in decline.”⁵² The purpose of mental hygiene, in other words, had less to do with an individualistic orientation toward patient welfare than with a broader concern for the future of the Chinese nation.

49 Wu, “Guoji xinli weisheng yundong,” 20–21.

50 Wu, “Shehui kongzhi dineng,” 63–97.

51 Wu, “Shehui kongzhi dineng,” 91–93.

52 Zhang Yinian, “Zhongguo xinli weisheng xiehui yuanqi” [Genesis of the Chinese Mental Hygiene Association], in *Xinli weisheng gailun*, 225.

Although the two were necessarily related—indeed, Zhang consistently underscored the tautological relationship between mental health and social conformity—psychologists like Zhang and Wu nevertheless devoted little ink to exploring the more patient-centered aspects of mental therapeutics.⁵³

Regardless of how Zhang and Wu approached the task of psychological improvement, their divergent points of view were easily reconciled by their shared goal of achieving social stability and national self-strengthening through the promotion of mental hygiene. Throughout the second half of the 1930s, Zhang and Wu collaborated on a variety of projects in order to propagandize the basic values of their cause. Both gave lectures and taught college courses on the subject, both contributed essays to an edited volume on mental hygiene in 1935, and both spearheaded the creation of the Chinese Mental Hygiene Association (中國心理衛生協會 *Zhongguo xinli weisheng xiehui*), which was founded at National Central University in Nanjing in the spring of 1936.⁵⁴ At the time of its first meeting, the association boasted a membership of 231 professionals, including psychologists, lawmakers, educators, and social workers. Under the leadership of Wu Nanxuan, who was elected secretary-general, representatives of the association gave public lectures and radio broadcasts in major cities like Beiping, Nanjing, and Tianjin, published a quarterly periodical called *Mental Hygiene* (*Xinli weisheng*), and developed extensive plans for future work. Hoping to collaborate with government organs like the Ministry of Health, the association proposed to survey conditions at psychopathic hospitals, establish specialized classes for feeble-minded students, and develop an exam that would determine one's level of mental wellness. Through these various responsibilities, the association ultimately aspired to “promote the mental health of the Chinese people, as well as prevent mental defects and illnesses.”⁵⁵

The Chinese Mental Hygiene Association purposely modeled its activities on the example that had been set by similar organizations in the United States and Europe. In particular, it aimed to incorporate government personnel into the cause of mental hygiene as a means of more effectively propagandizing its mission. In the United States, Herbert Hoover had given symbolic credence to mental hygiene by serving as honorary president of the International Congress on Mental Hygiene in 1930; following his example, the Chinese Mental Hygiene Association also attempted to find ways by which to integrate its activities into the scope of national politics. Just prior to the onset of the Second World War, the association had begun reaching out to government agencies at both the local and national level in order to raise financial and logistical support for their cause. Although the effort was cut short by war, members of the association never gave up the hope that mental

53 Of the 11 guiding principles of the Chinese Mental Hygiene Association, only number eight mentions improvement in care given to the individual patient. The other principles stress the “public utility” (*gonggong shiye*) of mental hygiene research and education.

54 “Jiaoyu wenhua xiaoxi: Zhongguo xinli weisheng xiehui chengli” [News on education and culture: establishment of the Chinese Mental Hygiene Association], *Jiao yu xue* 1, no. 12 (1936): 286. A Shanghai-based Mental Hygiene Association was also created in 1938, but under separate leadership.

55 Zhang Yinian, “Zhongguo xinli weisheng xiehui yuanqi”; “Zhongguo xinli weisheng xiehui jianzhang” [General regulations of the Chinese Mental Hygiene Association], in Zhang Yinian, *Xinli weisheng gailun*, 225–29.

hygiene would one day become a matter of national politics and therefore a “household name” (家喻戶曉 *jiayu huxiao*).⁵⁶

PSYCHOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION

Although the Nationalist Party did not take up the cause of mental hygiene officially prior to the outbreak of war in 1937, the central government still promoted the underlying thrust of the movement: namely, that psychologically healthy citizens formed the basis of a strong and developed nation. Indeed, for the Guomindang, the field of psychology was intriguing not for its therapeutic possibilities alone but also, and more importantly, for its potential sociopolitical applications. As Yung-chen Chiang has noted, the 1930s was a period in which the social sciences dominated intellectual discourse, particularly insofar as these empirical fields could be used to “control the social, political, and economic forces at work.”⁵⁷ Under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, the Nationalists attempted to harness the utilitarianism of the social sciences—including psychology—toward the end of achieving political conformity and social control.

Chinese leaders had become closely attuned to the relationship between psychological rejuvenation and national self-strengthening from as early as 1918, when the revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen proclaimed that the “psychological reconstruction” (心理建設 *xinli jianshe*) of the Chinese people was a prerequisite to achieving political, economic, and social revolution. As Sun had argued, “The affairs of the nation are a manifestation of the collective mentality [人群心理 *renqun xinli*]... The power of the mind is immense.” In a way that anticipated Zhang Yinian’s comments on the relationship between a healthy mind and a healthy nation, Sun also recognized that the people’s minds needed to be rectified in order for the state to realize its modernizing agenda.⁵⁸ The Nationalist Party under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek internalized and extended this basic supposition. When Chiang ascended to the position of national leader in 1928, he promised to follow in Sun Yat-sen’s footsteps by prioritizing the “psychological reconstruction” of the Chinese people. Psychological reconstruction, he recognized, was the “most important factor” in the regeneration of the nation, “without which other kinds of reconstruction [were] of little value.”⁵⁹ Chiang’s right-hand man, Chen Lifu (陳立夫 1900–2001), echoed this point. “From this point forward,” he wrote in 1930, “psychological reconstruction will be fundamentally attached to government reconstruction as its main program... A revolutionary mentality [革命心理 *geming xinli*] must conform to the needs of a revolutionary

56 “Zhongguo xinli weisheng xiehui gongzuo baogao” [Work report for the Chinese Mental Hygiene Association], *Jianguo jiaoyu*, no. 1 (1938): 41.

57 Yung-chen Chiang, *Social Engineering and the Social Sciences in China, 1919–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

58 Sun Zhongshan [Sun Yat-sen], *Xinli jianshe* [Psychological reconstruction] (1925; Chongqing: Hangkong weiyuan hui, 1940), 2.

59 H. H. Chang, *Chiang Kai-shek: Asia’s Man of Destiny* (New York: Doran, 1944), 189–90. See also Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-shek], “Guomin xinli de jianshe” [Psychological reconstruction of the people], in Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Jiang Zongtong dui guofu sixiang shijian duxing yu ronghui guantong* [President Chiang’s conscientious implementation and comprehensive mastery of Sun Yat-sen thought] (Taipei: Zhonghua minguo gejie jinian guofu bainian danchen choubei weiyuan hui, 1965), 660–62.

government.”⁶⁰ For the Guomintang, then, the mentality of the people and the objective of national progress were inextricably linked; by harnessing the power of the mind and directing it toward a national cause, Chiang and his men hoped to garner absolute loyalty to the Nationalist regime.

One of the primary means by which the central government lent its support to the cause of psychological reconstruction was by appointing advocates of mental hygiene to positions of administrative authority in nationalized universities. According to Wen-hsin Yeh, the university system became an important nexus of academic and political power under Guomintang rule. In major cities like Beijing, Nanjing, and Guangzhou, college campuses were “given a Party superstructure, put under the command of a new leadership, and propelled in the direction prescribed by the Guomintang,” thereby enabling the party to gain immediate influence over the future of higher education.⁶¹ Proponents of mental hygiene figured prominently among the party’s early administrative appointments to these academic institutions. Wu Nanxuan was assigned to a variety of positions in the Guomintang party headquarters before taking up a professorship at the Guomintang-controlled National Central University in Nanjing; in 1931 he was appointed chancellor of the newly nationalized Qinghua University in Beijing; and in 1940 he was promoted to the government’s Ministry of Control, an agency responsible for monitoring and auditing other governmental units. The psychologists Xiao Xiaorong (蕭孝嶸 1897–1963) and Ai Wei (艾偉 1890–1955), leading committee members of the Chinese Mental Hygiene Association, were both appointed to National Central University as the chairs of the psychology and education departments, respectively. And Guo Renyuan, a radical behavioral psychologist trained at the University of California, Berkeley, was appointed chancellor of the Guomintang-controlled Zhejiang University in 1933 before being engaged as director of the Guomintang’s Institute for Physiology and Psychology in 1940.

Why did the nascent regime appoint psychologists and mental hygienists to key positions in university administration? The decision had less to do with a dispassionate interest in psychological philosophy than with a belief that psychology could serve as a tool of “partification” (黨化 *danghua*)—that is, the indoctrination of university students with Guomintang ideology.⁶² Under the leadership of psychologists like Wu Nanxuan and Guo Renyuan, nationalized universities attempted to regulate the behavior, thoughts, and ideals of the student body by “militarizing, disciplining, and collectivizing” them.⁶³ At Zhejiang University, Guo implemented a number of reforms that eliminated harmful ideological stimuli and introduced sanctioned habits of body and mind. He enforced daily military training, eliminated leftist political propaganda, dismissed professors who held incorrect political views, and expelled students for such transgressions as missing class,

60 Chen Lifu, “Xinli jianshe yu jinhou zhi zhengzhi jianshe” [Psychological reconstruction and the future reconstruction of government], *Ziqiu*, no. 19 (1930): 35–36.

61 Yeh Wen-Hsin, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1990), 169.

62 Zhang Shoutao, “Minguo zhongyang daxue danghua jiaoyu yanjiu” [Research into the partification of education at National Central University during the Republican period], *Dang’an yu jianshe*, no. 3 (2015): 56–58; Yeh, *Alienated Academy*, 167–82.

63 *Guoli Zhejiang daxue yaolan* [Guidebook to Zhejiang University] (Hangzhou: 1935), 6.

cheating on exams, or dressing improperly.⁶⁴ Wu aimed to do the same during his short tenure at Qinghua. Upon being appointed chancellor, Wu stated that he would “scrupulously follow the will of chairman Chiang” in order to “rectify academic discipline” and enforce “political stability at Qinghua.”⁶⁵ Both Guo and Wu, in other words, sought to strengthen, reform, and unify the behaviors and mindsets of their students through the adoption of strict codes of conduct. Guo referred to this process as “human engineering” (人類工程學 *renlei gongcheng xue*).⁶⁶

Psychologists like Guo and Wu were not the only ones to deploy the rhetoric and principles of psychological thought for political ends. Following Sun Yat-sen’s early emphasis on the importance of psychological reconstruction, military and political leaders also invoked the psychological deficiencies of the Chinese people as a way to explain the political backwardness of the Chinese nation. In 1933, for instance, Li Yuan (李園 b. 1903), an early graduate of Chiang Kai-shek’s Whampoa Military Academy and a general in the Nationalist army, published a monograph that discussed the adverse relationship between abnormal psychology and Chinese nation building. The monograph, titled *Abnormal Psychology and the Reformation of China* (變態心理與改造中國 *Biantai xinli yu gaizao Zhongguo*), illustrated how the behaviors and mindsets of the Chinese people were directly correlated to the stability of the Chinese nation. According to Li, China’s “current condition”—which he described as “having fallen deeply into darkness”—was the product of “the abnormal psychology of its people.”⁶⁷ Only when the people “corrected their minds” would the nation be able to realize the “glorious revolution” it had set out to achieve under the leadership of the Guomindang.⁶⁸

Li isolated communism, factionalism, and warlordism as some of the many psychologically abnormal attitudes that had stifled the success of the Nationalist revolution. Despite the fact that Li had never received any formal institutional training in the principles of Western psychology, he explained his particular opposition to communism not on theoretical or political grounds but rather on psychological ones. Believing that a communist revolution was premature and did not “fit with the times,” Li argued that anyone who supported communism was necessarily displaying the psychological pathologies of “escapism” (遁避 *dunbi*) and “divergence” (背馳 *beichi*). In other words, Li interpreted communist belief as a type of psychological affliction, much as mental hygienists had linked social nonconformity to mental illness. “The minds of the Chinese people are not correct, and their thoughts surpass the times,” he concluded. In order to save the nation from extinction, it was therefore imperative to correct the psychological shortcomings of the Chinese citizenry and compel them to align their thoughts with the demands and conditions of the contemporary political environment.⁶⁹

64 *Guoli Zhejiang daxue bugao* [Zhejiang University bulletin], no. 37 (June 29, 1934): 1953–54; “Qu Guo xuanyan” [Expel Guo manifesto], *Guoli Zhejiang daxue xiaokan* 24, no. 203 (December 23, 1935). I expand on this argument in Emily Baum, “Controlling Minds: Guo Renyuan, Behavioral Psychology, and Fascism in Republican China,” *Chinese Historical Review* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 141–59.

65 An Kun, *Wei lishi* [Microhistory] (Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 2012), 144.

66 Guo Renyuan, *Xingwei zhuyi xinli xue jiangyi* [Teaching materials on behavioral psychology] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1928).

67 Li Yuan, *Biantai xinli yu gaizao Zhongguo* [Abnormal psychology and the reformation of China] (Shanghai: Xinheng shuju, 1932), 3.

68 Li, *Biantai xinli*, 31.

69 Li, *Biantai xinli*, 49–57.

Perhaps the most obvious incarnation of political psychology during this period, however, came in the form of the New Life movement. A national campaign that aimed to instill values of hygiene, discipline, military courage, and unity of purpose, the New Life movement was Chiang Kai-shek's crowning effort to induce the Chinese public to refashion their minds and behaviors so as to better align themselves with the revolutionary imperatives of the modern nation. Couching his rationale for the movement in the language of Confucian ethics, Chiang underscored that "rectifying the mind" and "cultivating the self" were prerequisites to "ordering the state."⁷⁰ This belief, though ostensibly inspired by traditional Chinese philosophy, was undoubtedly also influenced by Chiang's support of "psychological reconstruction." Indeed, as Chiang asserted at the inauguration of the campaign, "The general psychology of our people today can be described as spiritless." Officials were dishonest, the masses were undisciplined and unhygienic, and adults were corrupt while youths were degraded. It was no wonder, then, that China continued to suffer disorder from within and invasion from without.⁷¹ The only way to solve these problems, Chiang continued, was to completely eradicate old ways of thinking. "Revolution," he claimed, "meant changing everyday patterns of behavior" as well as "habits of thought."⁷²

Although Chiang claimed to derive inspiration for the New Life movement from Confucian tradition, the campaign was, in many ways, a thoroughly modern response to problems of a contemporary nature.⁷³ Indeed, as a number of observers remarked, the New Life movement displayed obvious parallels to the Mental Hygiene movement. The neurologist Wei Yulin (魏毓麟 1899–1968), who was employed at a psychopathic hospital in Beijing, published an article in 1936 in which he highlighted the similarities between the two campaigns. Both movements, he noted, aspired to reform the "insidious and degenerate minds" of the Chinese people by encouraging ideals of "honesty, sincerity, and simplicity."⁷⁴ The psychiatrist Richard Lyman (1891–1959), who worked at the Peking Union Medical College, made a similar observation. Writing in early 1935, he remarked that the Guomindang's efforts to sponsor mental hygiene had thus far been limited to the "more general influence [of] the New Life Movement," though he remained confident that the regime would extend its support for mental hygiene in the near future.⁷⁵

Lyman's prediction was not far off. After the Nationalist capital moved to Chongqing in 1938, the central government became more directly involved in the work of mental hygiene. In 1942, the Guomindang established its first mental hygiene work unit (心理衛生室 *xinli weisheng shi*), which consisted of an outpatient clinic and a mental hygiene consultation center. The unit was placed under the leadership of Ding Zan (丁瓚 1910–1968; known as Ting Tsan), a psychologist and founding member of the Chinese

70 Pichon P. Y. Loh, "The Ideological Persuasion of Chiang Kai-shek," *Modern Asian Studies* 4, no. 3 (1970): 212–13. This formulation comes from the Confucian text *Daxue* (Great learning).

71 Jiang Jieshi, "Xin shenghuo yundong gangyao" [Essentials of the New Life movement].

72 Jiang, "Guomin xinli de jianshe."

73 Arif Dirlik, "The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement," *Journal of Asian Studies* 34, no. 4 (August 1975): 945–80.

74 Wei Yulin, "Cong yanjiu jingshen bing tandao jingshen weisheng" [Speaking of mental hygiene from the perspective of psychiatric research], *Weisheng yuekan* 2, no. 7-8 (1936): 28–31.

75 Richard Lyman to Dai Bingham, 15 January 1935, folder 697, box 97, record group IV2B9, "CMB [China Medical Board], Inc.," Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Richard Lyman, "Psychiatry in China," *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry* 37, no. 4 (April 1937): 765–71.

Mental Hygiene Association. At the clinic, Ding focused the brunt of his attention on “problem children” (問題兒童 *wenti ertong*). Believing that most cases of mental illness arose when individuals were unable or unwilling to adapt to their environment, Ding stressed the need for children and youths to “strengthen their social adaptability.” He therefore implemented mental health examinations and conducted individual consultations that would enable him to identify and correct the deviant behaviors of his patients. In the span of a few years, the mental hygiene work unit tested the mental health of 4,189 individuals and provided counseling services on 120 separate cases.⁷⁶

Although the Chinese Mental Hygiene movement did not gain further momentum due to the conditions of wartime, the underlying imperatives of the movement—including the creation of useful, conformist, and psychologically “healthy” individuals—had incontrovertibly infiltrated the gestalt of contemporary Chinese politics. Many intellectuals affiliated with the Nationalist Party therefore viewed abnormal psychology primarily as a transgression against social norms rather than as a problem of individual health. Psychology, likewise, came to be seen not just as a therapeutic tool but also as a coercive one.

CONCLUSION

In 1935, the Beiping Ministry of Health began the task of integrating mental hygiene into its educational outreach program. The subject was featured in its monthly periodical, which saw a circulation of close to 60,000 copies over the course of the year, and received attention on the Beiping radio network, where it was featured as part of the ministry’s weekly broadcasts.⁷⁷ In one broadcast talk, a social worker named Wang Ziming (王子明 dates unknown) spoke on the topic of “mental illness and society.” The main problem with mental illness, he began, is that it harms social order, jeopardizes societal tranquility, and compromises the race (種族 *zhongzu*); indeed, this was the reason that all the great nations of Europe and the United States had passed legislation preventing the mentally ill from marrying. Yet the disorder, as Wang went on to explain, was not entirely hopeless. Just like physical ailments, mental illness was both preventable and sometimes even curable, as long as the problem was brought to the attention of a psychological or psychiatric specialist. By treating mental symptoms in their early stages, doctors and social workers could stop the disorder from advancing into a far more serious infirmity. Scientific knowledge about mental illness was therefore necessary for two reasons: to correct previous misinformation about the condition itself and to ensure the strength and prosperity of Chinese society in the future.⁷⁸

Wang’s radio lecture succinctly captured the essence of mental hygiene discourse in 1930s China. Drawing an explicit parallel between mental illness and societal decay, advocates of mental hygiene emphasized the detrimental effects that psychologically un-

76 Wang Wenji, “Yufang,” 246–47; Fan Tingwei and Huang Jian, “Ding Zan yu xinli fenxi de yingyong” [Ding Zan and the practice of psychoanalysis], *Zhonghua yishi zazhi* 40, no. 5 (2010): 306–10.

77 “Shehui weisheng jiaoyu: shiji gongzuo” [Social hygiene education: practical work], *Beiping shi weisheng ju di'er weisheng qu shiwu suo nianbao*, no. 2 (1935): 115–18.

78 Wang Ziming, “Guangbo jiangyan: jingshen bing yu shehui” [Broadcast speech: mental illness and society], *Weisheng yuekan* 1, no. 8-9 (1935): 71–74.

stable individuals could pose to their social environment. Consequently, while psychiatrists continued to be seen as the proper guardians of the mentally ill within the scope of the hospital, various specialists—from psychologists and educators to penologists and social workers—were incorporated into the project of preventing or mitigating the effects of the disorder within the society at large. Emphasizing the utility of proper education, as well as the necessity of eliminating or isolating defective individuals, psychologists definitively linked the existence of mentally ill people to the instability of public order, the weakening of the economy, the contamination of the race, and the perpetuation of national ignominy.

What Wang's speech did not convey, however, was the extent to which the pursuit of mental hygiene had enabled an alliance to form between psychology and national politics. Throughout the 1930s, the expanding scope of mental pathology had allowed the Guomindang to co-opt psychological vocabularies and concepts for explicitly political ends. By appointing supporters of mental hygiene to prominent administrative positions in universities and government bureaus, the Guomindang strove to partify education by reinforcing sanctioned behaviors and eliminating heterodox ones. Through a stress on "psychological reconstruction," moreover, Chiang Kai-shek sought to reinforce a nationalist ethos that condemned liberalist individualism and privileged conformity and self-sacrifice. And after the establishment of the Chinese Mental Hygiene Association, leaders of the movement received institutional support from the Nationalist government in Chongqing. Although the exigencies of wartime prematurely stifled the momentum of the Mental Hygiene movement, it is probable that the cause would have garnered more direct government backing had history unfolded differently.

In short, mental hygiene in China operated in tandem with more general biopolitical initiatives to enforce public health and achieve national self-strengthening. In seeking to reduce the prevalence of mental illness, the intelligentsia was simultaneously attempting to eliminate social deviance and render individuals more responsive to sanctioned ideological norms. In the process, they imbued mental illness with new meanings. By the 1930s, the disorder no longer referred strictly to the obviously insane. Following the advent of the Mental Hygiene movement, those who displayed transgressive behaviors or ideological nonconformity were also potentially classified as mentally ill—and consequently became the targets of professional intervention as well. Thus, despite the fact that China's preliminary exploration of mental hygiene was short-lived, its early manifestations were sufficient to signal that the right-wing intelligentsia and the Guomindang both recognized the practical utility of scientific psychology—not simply as a curative mechanism but more importantly as a technology of power.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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