

Document 9.2: Excerpts from “The Guidelines of New Life Movement”, by Chiang Kai-shek, *Central Daily News*, May 15, 1934

Chiang Kai-shek, with the significant involvement of his wife, launched the New Life Movement in 1934. The goal was to improve citizens' behavior and morals and to minimize the appeal of Communist ideology by promoting the Guomindang's own social-welfare program. The movement was spread by Guomindang organizations throughout China by, among other means, lectures, pamphlets, and plays. Women, in particular, were the targets of zealous enforcers of “correct” behavior and dress.

I. The Main Principles of the New Life Movement

The New Life Movement aims to revolutionize the lives of our citizens. Through the simplest and yet the most effective methods, it will rid our citizens of customs that are not suitable for this age and environment and move them toward lives that are suitable for this age and environment. In other words, it is to ground our citizens' lives with basic Chinese morals: *li, yi, lian, chi* as the foundations.

We Chinese originally were a nation that valued *li* (propriety) and *yi* (righteousness), and understood *lian* (modesty) and *chi* (a sense of shame). *Li, yi, lian, chi* are especially important and urgent for the purpose of establishing and building our country today.

Our nation has a 5,000-year-old civilization with refined practices of *shi, yi, zhu, xing* (dining, attire, dwelling, and conduct)... Our nation has 400 million people with deep-rooted *shi, yi, zhu, xing* traditions. The reason that the current conditions of these traditions have become chaotic, confused, even inhuman is because the influence of *li, yi, lian, chi* has diminished.

Today, the New Life Movement will replace these barbaric and vulgar customs with elegant and beautiful culture and will replace fighting, stealing, and begging behavior with long-held morals. We certainly need to wait for *li, yi, lian, chi* to reestablish itself; however, under such chaotic and confused conditions, the social order is disturbed, evil ideologies pervade the society, and the common people are at a loss, not knowing whom to follow. To improve the situation through politics and education has been as ineffective as trying to wrestle with sand or capture wind. “To correct one's garment, you should start with his collar.” To improve our lives today, we must start

with this chaos and confusion. This is why the New Life Movement is the only way to build our country and educate our citizens....

IV. The Content of the New Life Movement

1. The Theory of the New Life Movement

The New Life Movement promotes life based on *li, yi, lian, chi*. [People should] practice *li, yi, lian, chi* in their daily lives and accomplish their goals and ambitions through moral behavior. *Li, yi, lian, chi* should be the central principles to which people refer when they interact with others, when they do business, and when they cultivate themselves. Whoever fails to follow these principles will suffer defeat on individual, national, and ethical levels.

There are two kinds of people who are skeptical of the New Life Movement. One considers *li, yi, lian, chi* no more than a set of polished behaviors. They argue that if our knowledge and technology are below other nations, no matter how beautiful and benevolent our behavior may be, our country still will not be saved. This kind of argument is a result of reversing the importance of moral conduct with that of knowledge and technology, because knowledge and technology are by-products of the pursuit of perfect moral conduct. Otherwise, knowledge and technology will be used for ill purposes, harming others and not necessarily benefiting oneself. Therefore, *li, yi, lian, chi* will not only save the country, but will also strengthen our country.

The second group of skeptics argue that *li, yi, lian, chi* are just virtues that are useless when one is hungry and cold. This argument is a result of misunderstanding Guanzi's saying, "First have adequate clothing and food, and then know the difference between honor and shame; first fill your barn with grain, and then learn etiquette and manners." What is not understood is that *li, yi, lian, chi* are the foundation of being human—for why does one need clothing and food if one is not human? Therefore, a society based on *li, yi, lian, chi* makes up for the lack of clothing and food with hard work, while a society without *li, yi, lian, chi* makes up the deficiency by stealing, cheating, robbing, and begging, yet still fails. In such a society, even if people have enough clothing and food and their grain storage is full, one cannot enjoy the prosperity because it is achieved through stealing, cheating, robbing, and begging. An obvious proof of this is that the most affluent cities in the world are often infested with thieves and robbers. In our country, traitors, foreigners' running dogs, communist bandits, and corrupt officials all do their evil deeds

out of hunger, cold, and a failure to live by *li, yi, lian, chi*. In conclusion, we must live our lives according to the principles of *li, yi, lian, chi*.

2. The Elaboration of *li, yi, lian, chi*

The interpretations of *li, yi, lian, chi* change from time to time. We should interpret them as follows: *li*, [propriety], the intention to do things the right way; *yi* [righteousness], upright and proper behavior; *lian* [modesty], to be innocent and guilt free; *chi* [sense of shame], to realize one's wrong doings.

Li [propriety] applied in the natural world is principle; applied in the social world, it is order; applied in a country, it is rule and discipline. To do things according to *li* is to do things right.

Yi [righteousness] is being appropriate or having appropriate behavior. It cannot be considered *yi* if one behaves inappropriately, or knows what is appropriate but fails to do it.

Lian [modesty] is being able to distinguish right from wrong. Following natural and social rules is being right; straying from natural and social rules is being wrong.

Chi [sense of shame] is to know when one's behavior is wrong or inappropriate, and feel shame about it....

Attachment: What One Must Know in Order to Live a New Life

6. Food in New Life

While it is basic human instinct to eat and drink in order to sustain life, it is important to eat meals at set times as opposed to eating to satisfy one's taste buds and eating whenever one feels like it. Eating utensils should be clean and food should be washed. One should eat local produce and keep the profit within one's community. One should not abuse alcohol and eat moderate amounts. Keep quiet when drinking and chewing, and sit straight and properly. When there are bones in your food, try not to make a mess. When dining with a group, be careful not to spread germs by using chopsticks correctly. One should eat raw and cold food as little as possible, and

abstain from opium and cigarettes. Make one's own living, and see eating off of others as shameful.

7. Clothing in New Life

While it is basic etiquette to wear clothes, one should not chase after the latest fashions or treat plain clothing as shameful. Choose simple styles, and use domestically produced fabric. Women in the household should make clothing for the family. Wash them frequently and mend when needed. One should wear clothing properly, and not reveal too much skin. Keep hats off when indoors. Air quilts and sheets in the sun often, and pack lightly when traveling. Give clothes to the poor when you no longer need them.

8. The Home in New Life

The home is where one establishes one's family and career. When gathering for family time, maintain harmony and keep voices down. Get up early and wash and sweep daily. Use domestically produced materials to build your home. Keep walls clean and furniture simple. Open windows and shades often to vent and light the rooms. Cherish family time and work hard. Watch out for fire and guard your doors. Remove trash instantly and keep the home dust-free. The kitchen and bathroom should be kept especially clean. Trap rats and kill flies. Keep pipes and passages unclogged. Maintain harmony with neighbors and keep the public interest in mind. Help each other out during hard times. Take vaccinations to prevent diseases. Observe the flag ceremony and be respectful during national holidays.

9. Conduct in New Life

Behave in proper and mature ways. Do not rush and push when getting on and off buses or boats. Give seats to the elderly and women and help people who are weak or sick. Walk away from traffic and hold your posture straight. Keep your eyes sharp and ears alert. Return found items to the original owners and greet others when you meet them. Show sorrow at funerals and do not gloat at others' misfortunes. Avoid people when you sneeze and aim at the ground when you spit. Make public urination a taboo and always follow the rules in public. Enter and exit smoothly and quietly. Do not interrupt conversations. Rise for the national anthem. Be honest and keep your appointments. Live a simple social life and abstain from gambling and prostitution.

10. The Implementation of New Life

Transforming one's life involves freeing oneself of vulgar customs and practices. Start with simple rules and progress to more complicated ones, from easy steps to difficult ones. Serve the public first, then yourself. Start with yourself and then require the same of others. Start in your immediate vicinity and then go beyond. Start with small affairs and then move on to big issues. Establish habits gradually and carry them out with persistence. Civil servants and school students should lead and set the example. Support each other, and then support family and community. Fathers discipline sons, while older brothers guide younger brothers. Husbands and wives support each other and so do friends. No money or time is wasted, yet when the Movement accomplishes its goals, old customs will have changed. We encourage our citizens to launch this effort all together.

Source: Chiang Kai-shek, "The Guidelines of New Life Movement." *Central Daily News*, May 15, 1934. Trans. Nan Ye.