iscte

**INSTITUTO
UNIVERSITÁRIO
DE LISBOA**

Veiled Legacies: Secret Societies, Foreign Influences, and the Enduring Tapestry of Chinese Characteristics in Republican-Era China

David Ramalho Alves

Master's in International Studies,

Supervisor:
Professor Cátia Miriam Costa, Researcher,
CEI-Iscte - Centre for International Studies
Iscte - University Institute of Lisbon

June, 2024

Department of History (ESPP)

Veiled Legacies: Secret Societies, Foreign Influences, and the Enduring Tapestry of Chinese Characteristics in Republican-Era China

David Ramalho Alves

Master's in International Studies,

Supervisor:
Professor Cátia Miriam Costa, Researcher,
CEI-Iscte - Centre for International Studies
Iscte - University Institute of Lisbon

June, 2024

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to my advisor, Professor Cátia Miriam Costa. From the very first moment, I have been extremely lucky, not only for the opportunity to learn from her expertise but also for all the opportunities, conversations, and friendship she has granted. Undoubtedly, her work and dedication have been fundamental to this dissertation. For all her commitment to my academic and professional development, I am immensely grateful.

I would also like to thank all my professors and colleagues at Iscte who have shaped my academic journey. Additionally, I extend my gratitude to my friends who stimulated my interest in wanting to learn more. However, it feels only right to make a special mention of António Barrento, who has been, is, and will always be, my biggest reference, a true 圣贤.

To my family, it is difficult to put into words how much I value your support and how special you are to me. It has not always been easy to understand my desire to study these topics, given my academic journey full of twists and turns. Even knowing it would involve sacrifice, you never stopped helping me and always gave me the strength to pursue my goals.

Last but certainly not least, I am forever indebted to Inês for her devoted love, patience, and unwavering belief in me. Her support, understanding, and endless encouragement have been my guiding light, motivating me to be better. I want you to know that I am extremely proud of you, and that your presence in my life is a source of great joy and inspiration. I am incredibly fortunate to have you by my side.

To all those who have had an impact on this journey, whether large or small, 非常感谢.

安玮鸿

Resumo

Na primeira metade do século XX, a China atravessou transformações profundas com o estabelecimento de uma estrutura de poder, identidade e ideologia marcada por influências externas que moldaram a era republicana durante a década de Nanjing (1928-1937). O principal objetivo da pesquisa foi analisar a relação entre o governo nacionalista, as sociedades secretas e as influências externas, bem como as suas manifestações na década de Nanjing.

Este estudo examinou a interação entre o discurso governamental e as representações do poder, ideologias externas e perceções sociais, especialmente no final deste período. Utilizou-se uma metodologia qualitativa baseada na análise de fontes documentais primárias, incluindo discursos do Presidente Chiang Kai-shek (n=49) e imagens de revistas de entretenimento Manhua (n=117), procedendo-se ao tratamento de dados. A codificação e categorização das fontes com recurso ao programa MAXQDA permitiu explorar diferentes dimensões de análise e as suas relações, como: identidade nacional, sistema político, esfera socioeconómica, influências externas, e aspetos culturais e sociais.

Os resultados demonstram que a adaptação seletiva de elementos tradicionais e influências externas conduziram a uma ideia forte de modernidade aplicada ao modelo de governação chinês. Destaca-se a ênfase do presidente na via da militarização e do movimento Nova Vida como tentativas de reforma cultural que promoviam uma modernidade conservadora com "características chinesas". Verificou-se uma interconexão entre governo, influências externas e sociedades secretas, assinalada por representações de corrupção e autoritarismo, destacando-se ainda desigualdades sociais e desconfiança pública que refletiam diferentes tensões e contradições no regime.

Palavras-chave: China Republicana; Governação; Ideologia; Modernização; Nacionalismo.

Abstract

In the first half of the 20th century, China underwent profound transformations with the establishment of a power structure, identity, and ideology marked by external influences that shaped the Republican era during the Nanjing decade (1928-1937). The primary objective of this research was to analyse the relationship between the Nationalist government, secret societies, and external influences, as well as their manifestations during the Nanjing decade.

This study examined the interaction between governmental discourse and representations of power, external ideologies, and social perceptions, especially towards the end of this period. A qualitative methodology was employed, based on the analysis of primary documentary sources, including speeches by President Chiang Kai-shek (n=49) and images from the entertainment magazine *Manhua* (n=117), followed by data processing. Coding and categorisation of the sources using the MAXQDA software allowed for the exploration of different dimensions of analysis and their relationships, such as national identity, political system, socioeconomic sphere, external influences, and cultural and social aspects.

The results demonstrate that the selective adaptation of traditional elements and external influences led to a strong notion of modernity applied to the Chinese governance model. The president's emphasis on militarisation and the New Life Movement stood out as attempts at cultural reform promoting a conservative modernity with "Chinese characteristics." An observed interconnection between the government, external influences, and secret societies was marked by representations of corruption and authoritarianism, highlighting social inequalities and public distrust that reflected various tensions and contradictions within the regime.

Keywords: Republican China; Governance; Ideology; Modernisation; Nationalism.

Glossary of Romanised Terms and Chinese Characters

Cai Yuanpei	蔡元培	Chinese scholar
Chen Duxiu	陈独秀	Chinese revolutionary socialist and scholar
Chen Guofu	陈果夫	Chinese politician (one of the Chen Brothers)
Chen Lifu	陈立夫	Chinese politician (one of the Chen Brothers)
Chiang Kai-shek	蒋介石	also known as 蒋中正, GMD Leader and President
Dai Li	戴笠	Chinese Spymaster
Du Yuesheng	杜月笙	Notorious Shanghai gangster
Feng Yuxiang	冯玉祥	Chinese warlord
Fuxingshe	复兴社	Renaissance Society
Gelaohui	哥老会	Elder Brothers Society
Gongmin	公民	citizen (rights)
Guanzi	管子	also known as 管仲, Chinese Legalist philosopher
Guomin	国民	citizens, nationals
Guomindang [GMD]	国民党	Nationalist Party
H. H. Kung	孔祥熙	Chinese Minister and politician
Han	汉族	largest ethnic group in China
He Zhongshan	何忠山	Chinese military and political figure
Hu Hanmin	胡汉民	Right-wing Nationalist scholar and politician
Hu Shi	胡适	Chinese scholar
Jiangxi	江西	Chinese province
Kang Ze	康泽	Chinese military leader and politician
Liang Qichao	梁启超	Chinese scholar
Lixingshe	力行社	Society for Vigorous Practice
Lizhishe	励志社	Society to Establish the Will
Lu Xun	鲁迅	also known as 周树人, Chinese writer and scholar
Manchukuo	满洲国	Japanese puppet state in Manchuria
Manhua	漫画	caricature, cartoon, manga
Mao Zedong	毛泽东	Chinese Communist politician and military leader
Ming	明代	Ming dynasty
Mukden (incident)	沈阳事变	False flag event in Northern China

Nanjing	南京	Chinese city, former capital
Qing	清代	Qing dynasty
Qingdao	青岛	Chinese city in Shandong Province
Shaanxi	陕西	Chinese province
Shanghai	上海	Major Chinese city
Shanghai Manhua	上海漫画	Shanghai Sketch (magazine)
Shao Yuanchong	邵元冲	Chinese Nationalist politician
Shi Yousan	石友三	Famous Chinese traitor
Shidai Manhua	时代漫画	Modern Sketch (magazine)
Shimin	市民	city resident
Shuge	书格	online repository
Song	宋代	Song dynasty
Soong Meiling	宋美龄	Madame Chiang kai-shek
Sun Yat-sen	孙逸仙	also known as 孙中山, First President of China
T. V. Soong	宋子文	Chinese Minister and politician
Taiping	太平	Great Peace (Heavenly Kingdom Movement)
Taiwan	台湾	Taiwan Island
Teng Jie	滕傑	Chinese military leader and politician
Tianjin	天津	Chinese city in northern China
Tiyu	体育	sports, physical education
Tongmenghui	同盟会	Alliance for Democracy Society
Wang Jingwei	汪精卫	Chinese Nationalist politician
Wuchang	武昌	Chinese city in Hubei, now a province of Wuhan
Wuhan	武汉	Chinese city in Hubei Province
Xian	西安	Chinese city in Shaanxi Province.
Xinhai Geming	辛亥革命	Xinhai revolution
Yan'an	延安	Chinese village
Yuan shikai	袁世凯	Chinese general
Yuan	院	branch of government
Zhang Xueliang	张学良	Chinese warlord
Zhonghua minzu	中华民族	Chinese people

Index

Introduction

The research entitled "Veiled Legacies: Secret Societies, Foreign Influences, and the Enduring Tapestry of Chinese Characteristics in Republican-Era China" emerges from the master's degree program in International Studies at Iscte – University Institute of Lisbon. This study is grounded in analysing the relationship between foreign influence, ideology, modernity and national identity, given the significance of this topic. These are key elements during the period of the Nationalist government in the Chinese Republican Era (1911-1949), particularly in the Nanjing decade (1928-1937). Therefore, the object of study is the Nationalist *Guomindang* Government (GMD) during the Republican era in China, specially directed towards the latter part of the decade between 1934 and 1937.

In the first half of the 20th century, China underwent a period of profound transformation, characterised by efforts to modernise and establish a republican structure, while contending with external influences that shaped ideological landscapes and perceptions of national identity (Hsü, 2000; Spence, 2012). During the Republican era, relations between elites belonging to various secret societies and the Nationalist government forged a distinct ideological power structure imbued with "Chinese characteristics," which resonates anew in today's China (Fenby, 2009; Wakeman, 1997). However, the structures and power relations that characterised the period of Nationalist rule did not materialise in isolation; rather, they were intertwined with foreign ideologies (Eastman, 1991; Fairbank & Goldman, 2006). The introduction of various political doctrines, including communism, socialism, liberalism, and nationalism, added layers of complexity to China's already intricate power dynamics (Hsü, 2000). As we witness the rise of China's global influence and its role on the world stage, the need to understand the historical foundations of Chinese power structures becomes ever more pressing (Coble, 2007; Mitter & Moore, 2011). Based on this context, this research aims to show the multifaceted dynamics that defined this era, shedding light on the complex relationships between state power, external ideologies, and the influence of secret societies. The analysis was motivated by the main research question: "What was the relationship between the Nationalist government, secret societies and external influences in the Chinese Republic (1934-1937)?" This initial question, in turn, gave rise to secondary questions, namely: "How did the connection between the government, external ideologies, and secret societies shape the power structure of the time?" and "How was this link perceived by society?". The research presented here was designed to offer perspectives for answering these fundamental questions by examining the aforementioned dimensions of analysis using a theoretical-analytical basis that supported the research design and methodological strategy. By delving into this rich tapestry of history, this study sought to deepen our understanding of this relevant period.

Therefore, the research aim is to analyse the relationship between the Nationalist government, secret societies and external influences, and their manifestations in the last part of the Nanjing decade. To achieve this goal, the following specific research objectives were outlined: i) To identify the various political lines (ideological stances) in President Chiang Kai-shek's rule during the Nanjing decade; ii) To analyse the representation of key government themes during the Nanjing decade, especially in the period 1934 to 1937; iii) To explore the relationship between government discourse, perceptions of Chinese society and the main dimensions among them. These objectives work together as a lens for interpreting the main themes of state ideology and action, secret society activity, identity, and social dynamics in the Nanjing decade.

In order to carry out the proposed study, this research adopted a qualitative methodological strategy that combined the collection of text and image data related to speeches made by President Chiang Kai-shek during the period of the Nationalist government, as well as images from the main social cartoon magazines of the study period. Categorical content analysis was then conducted using the MAXQDA qualitative analysis software to explore the different dynamics and themes involved, given the volume of data obtained. As such, in the first phase of the analysis, speeches made by President Chiang Kai-shek were collected as primary sources in their original format, providing information on the government's ideological position, political directives, and the main themes prevailing during the period. Based on the speeches, a second phase of analysis was conducted involving a study of figures in cartoon magazines that circulated during the Republican era. The data from these magazines were also analysed as primary sources and subjected to categorical analysis based on the code matrix of the speeches. This allowed to combine the president's narrative, but also have access to a reflection of society's perceptions, and representations of the government's policies and ideological constructions. The analysis conducted explored intersections, divergences, and contested narratives, triangulating the results of the data collected in both phases of analysis, providing a nuanced understanding of the relationship between government discourse, society's perceptions, and the main cross-cutting themes of national identity during the period in question. Thus, this research intends to show how significant external influences were adapted by the government, thereby affecting ideology, public discourse, and social dynamics. Identifying these key transversal themes during this period can shed light on the lasting legacies of the Republican era in shaping Chinese society and politics.

The dissertation is organised into five chapters, ending with the conclusion section, which presents avenues for future research. Thus, the structure follows an orientation in line with the research design, beginning with historical contextualisation and literature review, proceeding through the methodological approach and justification, which leads to the empirical part of the research where the results are presented.

The first Chapter provides a historical context from the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, offering background on the Republican era in China to understand the emergence and influence of various actors and ideologies during this period. It is divided into three sections to facilitate the identification of the changing landscape and key moments.

Chapter 2 systematises the analysis of the literature, categorising existing research into relevant themes, such as particular context, political influences, and socio-economic factors. Each section of the chapter presents an overview of prior studies, thus contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the subject period. This chapter starts with the identification of research trends in Republican China, followed by the literature review on leadership and power dynamics. It then focuses on societal transformations and key popular movements, transitioning to major elements such as modernisation, citizenship, and nationalism. The last section explores the ideological shift in the Nanjing decade.

As for the research methodology, Chapter 3 describes the research methodology employed in the study, justifying the chosen methods and the nature of the sources utilised. Here, the object of study, the initial research questions and objectives are explained. After, it elucidates the research rationale and strategy, followed by the data sources and sampling, the data collection and processing techniques, as well as the data analysis techniques and procedures. It finishes by presenting some ethical considerations for this study.

The fourth Chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data, delving into the thematic relationships identified in Chiang Kai-shek's speeches during the Nanjing decade as well as in the images from the *Manhua* entertainment magazines of the same period. To this end, the chapter has two main sections, firstly focusing on the political ideas and narratives articulated in the official speeches and then on the popular visual media of the time. Both sections are divided into sub-sections, to differentiate coding dimensions, matrix and content analysis, and interpretation of the results.

In Chapter 5, the discussion of the results is provided, triangulating the data obtained with their implications to the initial research questions and objectives. This chapter begins with an examination between the government and power structures, particularly concerning the ideological representations of President Chiang Kai-shek during the late Nanjing decade. Additionally, this analysis is complemented by the popular perspectives and social criticism, which lead to a reflection on the interactions between the Nationalist government, secret societies, and external influences.

The last section integrates a final glance at the main results of the research to draw comprehensive conclusions and highlight the broader implications of the study. All the references and annexes mentioned along this dissertation are presented after these chapters.

CHAPTER 1

Historical Context

The Republican era in Chinese history, spanning from the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, represents a significant period characterised by profound transformation and turbulence (Spence, 2012). This era witnessed the end of imperial rule, the emergence of competing political factions, and the rise of nationalist and communist movements that would shape the course of modern China. Led by revolutionary forces, this era marked a turning point, resulting in the abdication of the last Qing emperor, Puyi, and the establishment of the Republic of China helmed by Sun Yat-sen, who embarked on a mission of modernisation for the country (Fenby, 2009; Spence, 2012).

The revolutionary vision for a progressive country was swiftly overshadowed by internal power struggles, instability, and fragmentation, as the absence of a strong central government and the prevalence of regional conflicts plunged the nation into political turmoil, social unrest, and administrative disarray (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Tanner, 2010). After military unification efforts, the Nationalist Party (Guomindang, GMD) emerged as dominant force and centralised state power, being able to institute a series of reforms aimed at modernising the nation's political, economic, and social structures, fostering industrial growth, and bolstering education and infrastructure.

Concurrently, the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) posed a significant challenge to the GMD's authority. Despite ideological differences and continuous conflict, the two parties forged a fragile alliance in key moments, namely, against the Japanese aggression during the Second Sino-Japanese War in the late 1930s. This conflict, ignited by Japan's invasion in 1937, inflicted widespread devastation and casualties until Japan's defeat in 1945 (Mitter, 2013; Spence, 2012). However, the end of World War II only escalated tensions between the GMD and the CCP, culminating in a devastating civil war and the subsequent retreat of the Nationalist forces to Taiwan. This partition created a complex geopolitical landscape, with the United States recognising the Republic of China as the legitimate government of China, while other nations (e.g., Soviet Union, India, United Kingdom) extended recognition to the People´s Republic of China. Consequently, an extended period of political and military standoff ensued, marked by mutual accusations of rightful legitimacy.

Since the study of Chinese history during this period can be incredibly dense and multifaceted, the Republican era has been divided into three distinct sections in order to provide a systematic overview. Each section is characterised by significant events that shaped the course of modern China. These periods include the early years marked by the establishment of the Republic of China, the tumultuous Nanjing Decade and finally, the period of wartime resistance against Japanese invasion and the

devastating civil war. By studying these important events, we gain a better grasp of the changes and challenges in this significant period of Chinese history.

1.1 The Early Years: From Revolution to Unification

The imperial Qing Dynasty, established in 1644, experienced a complex journey of ascent and decline, with periods of remarkable prosperity and escalating issues that led to its eventual downfall. In the 19th century, notably during the mid-to-late 1800s, the Qing government grappled with a series of challenges that undermined the authority of the state institutions, which showcased a blend of internal and external pressures, including corruption, inefficiency, stagnation, and social unrest. Combined with the confrontational stance by aggressive Western powers, these pressures culminated in events like the Opium Wars, which allowed these actors to expand their influence through unequal treaties, economic exploitation, and military incursions (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Hsü, 2000; Spence, 2012; Tanner, 2010; Wood, 2020). Additionally, state initiatives such as the Self-Strengthening Movement failed to adequately address modernisation needs, widespread poverty and famine, highlighting an inability and growing weakness to effectively manage the country (Fenby, 2009; Spence, 2012).

These tensions gave rise to civil rebellions[1], as well as nationalist and revolutionary movements, coupled with the aspirations of intellectuals and reformers for a more equitable and modern society, further destabilising the imperial system (Hsü, 2000; Spence, 2012). Fuelled by dissatisfaction with Qing rule, widespread corruption, and foreign influence, the revolution was sparked by a military uprising in Wuchang on October 10, 1911. According to Spence (2012) this moment, also known as the 1911 Revolution or Xinhai Revolution, was a pivotal event in Chinese history that led to the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China. It quickly spread across the country, with various revolutionary groups and secret societies, such as the *Tongmenhui* and *Gelaohui*, uniting to form an anti-Qing alliance.

On February 12, 1912, Sun Yat-sen, a key figure in the revolution, became the provisional president of the Republic of China, marking the end of over two millennia of imperial rule in China and the beginning of a new era of republicanism (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Fenby, 2009). Sun Yat-sen advocated for progressive ideas that aimed to transform China into a modern, democratic nation. His Three Principles of the People—nationalism, democracy, and people´s livelihood—served as the ideological foundation for the new government (Botjer, 1979). Consequently, there were three main "*yuan*" branches of government, a provisional constitution and the implementation of autonomous institutions, such as the Supreme Court and the General Academy. During the Nationalist government,

---

[1] Such as the Taiping Rebellion, a large-scale civil war in 19th-century China, and the Boxer Rebellion, an anti-foreign and anti-Christian uprising in early 20th-century China, both significantly impacting China's history and society.

this structure was adjusted to five branches, with the addition of a Control and Examination Yuan, to manage auditory processes and the latter to manage administration (Myers, 2000; Wilbur, 1984). The Executive Yuan was responsible for implementing government policies and approved by the National Assembly (Spence, 2012). The Legislative Yuan was the branch of government tasked with enacting laws, being consisted of members elected by the people, as well as representatives from various political parties and interest groups whilst the Judicial Yuan was responsible for interpreting and applying laws (Myers, 2000).

Botjer (1979) and Spence (2012) state that through a modern democratic structure in which the people had the power to govern themselves and participate in decision-making processes, Sun sought to unite the Chinese people under a nationalist banner, thus emphasising the need to rid China of foreign influence and achieve self-determination. Additionally, Sun stressed the importance of improving the livelihoods of the Chinese people through economic and social reforms, aiming to address poverty and inequality. Nonetheless, to be able to achieve these ideals it would be necessary to implement a transitional period in which an autocratic government could provide the necessary foundational basis for democracy (Myers, 2000; Wilbur, 1984). As such, and to avoid another civil conflict in a still very much divided China, Sun Yat-Sen abdicated in favour of General Yuan Shikai. Yuan was a prominent military and political figure in early 20th-century China, who rose to power during the turbulent period following the fall of the Qing Dynasty. Initially a supporter of the Qing government, he played an important role in negotiating the abdication of the last Qing emperor in 1912 and due to his control over the Northern imperial armies, was subsequently appointed as president of the Republic of China (Fenby, 2009; Young, 1983).

However, Yuan Shikai's ambitions for centralised power and authoritarian tendencies led to a series of political manoeuvrings, including the dissolution of the National Assembly and the attempted establishment of a new imperial dynasty under his rule (Hsü, 2000; Spence, 2012). Despite briefly holding the presidency and declaring himself emperor, Yuan faced widespread opposition and internal strife, ultimately leading to his resignation in 1916 and the fragmentation of central authority in China (Young, 1983).

Therefore, the various foreign intellectual influences which had permeated Chinese society prior and during the revolution gained further traction. Western ideologies such as socialism, nationalism, and liberalism started to shape the political, cultural, and economic landscape, particularly among intellectuals and reformers seeking ways to strengthen China's political system (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Spence, 2012). This ideological openness culminated in the New Culture Movement, which emerged in the early 20th century as a central cultural and intellectual movement that sought to challenge traditional Chinese values and promote modernity, democracy, and science (Hsü, 2000; Wood, 2020).

Led by progressive intellectuals such as Chen Duxiu, Liang Qichao, Cai Yuanpei, amongst others, the movement called for a radical transformation of Chinese society, advocating for the abandonment of Confucian orthodoxy and the embrace of Western ideas and institutions (Spence, 2012). Central to the New Culture Movement was the promotion of vernacular language, as defended by Lu Xun and Hu Shi, the empowerment of women, and the rejection of feudalism and superstition. As posited by Fairbank and Goldman (2006), through literature, journalism, and educational reform, the movement aimed to awaken the Chinese people to the need for social and political change, establishing the foundation for the overarching political narratives that would influence the trajectory of Republican China.

In May 4, 1919, a significant socio-political and cultural movement emerged in response to the perceived betrayal of Chinese interests at the Paris Peace Conference following World War I. Sparked by the news of the provisions defined in the Treaty of Versailles, which ceded German territories in China to Japan rather than returning them to Chinese sovereignty, a student protest in Beijing intensified into a nationwide public outrage against the government's failure to resist foreign encroachments and secure territorial sovereignty (Fenby, 2009, Hsü, 2000).

Characterised by fervent nationalism and calls for national renewal, the May Fourth Movement served as a catalyst for further reform, fuelling demands for social justice, national sovereignty, and cultural revitalisation (Botjer, 1979; Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Furth, 1983). It also fostered closer ties between leftist intellectuals and progressive activists, laying the groundwork for future cooperation between the Nationalist Party (Guomindang, GMD), which underwent significant reorganisation and restructuring into a more centralised structure in 1919, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) which was founded in 1921 (Ch'en, 1983; Spence, 2012). The convergence of ideologies ultimately led to the formation of the First United Front, which aimed to unify disparate revolutionary forces against warlordism. Formed in January 1923, it was a crucial alliance between the GMD and CCP in response to the chaotic political situation and regional fragmentation. Spearheaded by Sun Yat-sen and aided by Soviet advisors, the alliance aimed to unite all segments of Chinese society under the banner of nationalism and anti-imperialism (Spence, 2012; Tanner, 2010).

Even with ideological distinctions, the GMD and CCP cooperated in military campaigns against warlord factions and foreign powers, with the CCP providing support through its grassroots organisation (Fenby, 2009). The First United Front provided the foundational base for the Northern Expedition, a military campaign aimed at reunifying China under GMD control and modernising the nation. Under this alliance, the Northern Expedition was formally launched on July 9, 1926, and though the alliance was eventually strained by internal power struggles and ideological conflicts, it represented a significant moment of cooperation between the GMD and CCP in pursuit of national unity and reconstruction (Botjer, 1979; Fairbank & Goldman, 2006).

1.2 From Breaking Point to Relative Stability: The tumultuous Nanjing Decade

As the Republican government, bolstered by the assistance of the CCP, endeavoured to consolidate China's territory in the face of opposition from regional warlords, the nation continued to embrace Western technologies and industries, implementing novel approaches to production and transportation (Fenby, 2009: Spence, 2012). These initiatives played a significant role in fostering China's industrialisation and urbanisation processes, particularly within foreign concessions where Western powers exerted considerable influence (Hsü, 2000; Spence, 2012).

During the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China era, foreign concessions in China emerged as territories governed and controlled by foreign powers within Chinese territory. Primarily situated in major coastal cities such as Shanghai, Tianjin, and Qingdao, these concessions granted extraterritorial rights to foreign powers, enabling them to establish distinct legal, administrative, and commercial systems. Functioning as quasi-autonomous enclaves, where foreign residents enjoyed privileges and immunities not afforded to Chinese citizens, these territories played significant roles in China's modern history, acting as hubs for international trade, commerce, and cultural interchange, exposing Chinese society to Western customs, languages, and lifestyles (Fenby, 2009; Spence, 2012).

While these diverse foreign influences contributed to China's modernisation and global connectivity, they also epitomised the unequal treaties and foreign intrusions that fuelled anti-imperialist sentiment and nationalist movements within China, thus igniting contentious debates on national identity, cultural authenticity, and the perceived erosion of Chinese sovereignty (Mitter, 2008). The May Thirtieth Movement, 1925, exemplifies said context, when widespread protests, strikes, and boycotts across urban China were sparked by the killing of unarmed protesters by British police in Shanghai (Tanner, 2010), or by other brutal events such as the 1927 massacre in Shanghai, which marked a tragic turning point in the relationship between GMD and the CCP during the Northern Expedition (Botjer, 1979; Spence, 2012).

The Shanghai Massacre of 1927 was an example of a violent ideological conflict initiated by Chiang Kai-shek, the then military leader of the GMD. The massacre targeted suspected communists and leftists within the ranks of the GMD's army and led to the betrayal and subsequent purge of communist elements from the alliance (Tsui, 2018; Wilbur, 1984). This event was conducted with direct support of the Green Gang, a powerful secret society based in Shanghai that emerged in the late Qing Dynasty and exerted significant influence in the city throughout the Republican era. Initially formed as an aid organisation for Chinese immigrants, the Green Gang evolved into a criminal syndicate involved in various illicit activities, including opium smuggling, gambling, extortion, and prostitution. Led by notorious figures such as Du Yuesheng, this organisation maintained close ties with political elites, foreign powers, and rival gangs, wielding considerable power and influence in Shanghai's underworld

and beyond (Martin, 1996; Spence, 2012; Tsui, 2018).

Alternative secret societies, such as the Red Spears and the White Lotus Society, existed in other regions of China and operated under different banners, sharing common characteristics of peasant or popular base, clandestine operations, and militia-like involvement in violent activities (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Hsü, 2000; Keay, 2009). It is important to notice that while fundamental in this Shanghai operation, these secret societies have played complex roles in Chinese society, serving as social networks for marginalised groups and sources of instability, highlighting the intricacies of power dynamics and social order in early 20th-century China (Chesneaux, 1973; Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Spence, 2012).

After the incident, conservative factions within the GMD continued a comprehensive purge of communists across all territories under their jurisdiction, resulting in violent suppression known as the White Terror. This purge precipitated a division within the GMD between left-wing and right-wing factions, with Chiang Kai-shek emerging as the leader of the centre-right faction headquartered in Nanjing, in opposition to the original left-wing KMT government, led by Wang Jingwei in Wuhan (Eastman, 1974; Hsü, 2000; Wilbur, 1984).

Eastman (1991) explains that following this violent rupture and the successful completion of the Northern Expedition, Chiang Kai-shek established his dominance within the GMD and initiated the Nanjing decade, a tumultuous period of GMD rule characterised by centralisation of power, suppression of opposition, and attempts at modernisation. Concurrently, the CCP, retreated to the Jiangxi province and established the Jiangxi Soviet, an autonomous region governed by communist principles and where the leader Mao Zedong gained notoriety, marking the beginning of the CCP's rural-based revolutionary strategy (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Fenby, 2009).

From this period, the Nanjing decade, also known as the Golden Decade, stands out for its relative stability and governmental ambition in comparison to the preceding Warlord era. Spanning from 1928 to 1937, it represents a central period characterised by significant political, social, and economic transformations in China under the leadership of the GMD and the General Chiang Kai-shek. Throughout this era, the GMD government endeavoured to modernise the newly unified nation and consolidate its authority, with Nanjing emerging as the capital of political activity (Botjer, 1979; Fairbank & Goldman, 2006). Against the backdrop of efforts towards national unification and political centralisation, China remained a nation marked by divisions, where unity was pursued through forceful integration. This resulted in a more apparent unity than real consolidation, being often overshadowed by individualistic interests over collective objectives.

Although President and Generalissimo from 1928, internal divisions within the GMD posed challenges to Chiang Kai-shek. The dominant pro-Chiang groups included the influential Whampoa

Clique, the CC Clique and the Political Study Clique[2] (Eastman, 1974), as opposition to Chiang emanated from both leftist and rightist factions, led by figures like Wang Jingwei and Hu Hanmin, respectively (Eastman, 1984a; Tien, 2019). Despite factional strife, Chiang maintained control through adept manipulation, strategic alliances and leveraging the National Revolutionary Army, with strong military wins solidifying authority and power base (Worthing, 2018), effectively relegating the GMD to a mere instrument of propaganda.

In this context, Shanghai, as China's foremost metropolis and a vibrant cosmopolitan centre, embodied a complex tapestry of contradictions reflective of the dilemmas faced by the Nanjing government (Mitter, 2008). While its status as an international port city fostered a diverse milieu of cultures, ideologies, and economic pursuits, as well as a dynamic social landscape, Shanghai also served as a hotbed for political intrigue, social inequality, corruption, and labour unrest (Tanner, 2010; Tsui, 2018; Wood, 2020). Despite several constraints, the GMD undertook a series of progressive reforms aimed at modernising the country on various fronts. These reforms encompassed political, economic, and social spheres, with efforts to centralise administration, stimulate economic growth through industrialisation and infrastructure development, and implement social welfare programs to improve living standards. Additionally, there was a concerted push for a cultural renaissance to revive traditional Chinese arts while embracing modern innovations (Botjer, 1979; Tsui, 2018).

To counteract the perceived moral decline and social upheaval brought about by years of war and political instability, Chiang Kai-shek initiated in 1934, the New Life Movement (Mitter, 2008). This socio-cultural campaign focused on the promotion of traditional Confucian values and morality in Republican China. It sought to emphasise principles such as carefulness, integrity, and social order, thus encouraging individuals to cultivate virtuous behaviours and contribute to the collective welfare of society. The New Life Movement encompassed various aspects of daily life, including education, hygiene, and social etiquette, promoting a disciplined and harmonious way of living (Botjer, 1979; Hsü, 2000; Spence, 2012). While initially bearing some progressive merit, the movement faced criticism for its authoritarian undertones, ideological regression, and perceived lack of tangible results in addressing the deeper socio-economic issues facing Chinese society (Fenby, 2009; Tanner, 2010).

During the Nanjing decade and particularly under Chiang Kai-shek's leadership, there was a discernible tendency towards authoritarianism. Chiang's regime emphasised centralised control and the suppression of political dissent, often resorting to tactics of censorship, surveillance, and political purges to maintain power. The GMD sought to mobilise mass support through propaganda campaigns and the promotion of nationalism, while also cultivating a cult of personality around Chiang himself (Eastman, 1974, 1991). Additionally, the New Life Movement, aimed to instil discipline and conformity,

---

[2] Factions or groups within the GMD with specific leaders, interests, and power bases, often aligning or competing with each other.

resulted in a militarisation process of youth and society, thus echoing aspects of European progressive fascist ideology (Tsui, 2018; Spence, 2012).

Furthermore, the GMD's militarisation and reliance on secret paramilitary organizations like the Blue Shirts and the *Lixingshe*, also mirrored characteristics of fascist regimes. The Blue Shirts were a prominent ultranationalist group in Republican China that played a sizeable role in shaping political dynamics and social order, tasked with the mission of maintaining public order and combating a sense of moral decay that weakened the nation (Botjer, 1979; Taylor, 2009). The Blue Shirts organisation had close ties with the *Lixingshe*, another secret society known for its involvement and collusion with political elites. Both organisations were characterised by their hierarchical structures, strict codes of conduct, and close ties to the GMD government, exemplifying the complex interplay between politics, nationalism, and power in Republican China, reflecting the era's tumultuous social and political landscape (Eastman, 1974; Wakeman, 2003). In addition, these organisations influenced the broader socio-political objectives of the Nationalist government, being crucial in the ongoing campaign to eliminate the Communist Party.

In September 1933 and after several failed military attacks against the communist forces, with the strategic and tactical counsel of his German adviser Hans von Seeckt, Chiang Kai-shek's National Revolutionary Army was able to establish a fortified perimeter around the communist Red Army in Jiangxi province (Hsü, 2000; Spence, 2012). To evade encirclement by the Nationalist forces, the CCP undertook a strategic retreat known as the Long March, a pivotal event in Chinese history which took place between October 16, 1934, and October 20, 1935. Faced with defeat and internal divisions, the CCP embarked on a gruelling journey covering over 6,000 miles, traversing treacherous terrain and enduring harsh conditions (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Spence, 2012). Along the way, they faced numerous battles and hardships, with thousands perishing due to hunger, exhaustion, and enemy attacks. Even with substantial losses, the Long March allowed the CCP to regroup and reorganise its forces, ultimately leading to the establishment of the Yan'an Soviet in Shaanxi province, a stronghold for communist activities and ideological development (Fenby, 2009; Spence, 2012). According to many (e.g., Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Mitter, 2008; Tanner, 2010) the Long March solidified Mao Zedong's leadership within the CCP and laid the foundation for the party's eventual triumph in the Chinese Civil War.

1.3 From Wartime Resistance to Civil Conflict

In northeastern China, the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo had been created by the Empire of Japan, further complicating the political landscape in China. Established in 1932, Manchukuo served as a crucial component of Japanese imperial expansionism during the interwar period. Created in the

wake of the Mukden Incident on September 18, 1931, this staged false flag event provided Japan with a pretext to occupy Manchuria (Botjer, 1979; Spence, 2012). Japan's effortfully portrayed Manchukuo as an independent and sovereign state governed by the last Qing emperor Puyi, while it remained under de facto Japanese control, serving as a staging ground for military aggression against China and a source of valuable resources for the Japanese war effort (Fenby, 2009; Spence, 2012). Manchukuo's existence was widely condemned by the international community as a violation of China's territorial integrity and sovereignty, leading to Japan abandonment from the League of Nations, thus highlighting the complex geopolitical dynamics of the era that led to the Second Sino-Japanese War (Botjer, 1979; Eastman, 1974; Fenby, 2009).

Amidst the conflict, the Xian Incident on December 12, 1936, stands out, where Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Nationalist government and National Revolutionary Army, was kidnapped by his own subordinates which demanded a cessation of hostilities with the CCP to form a united front against the Japanese invaders (Hsü, 2000; Spence, 2012). Chinese public opinion had vehemently criticised the Nationalist government for its passive stance and strategy of non-confrontation towards the Japanese occupying forces, preferring to prioritise efforts on combating the Communist Party instead of resistance against the Japanese (Taylor, 2009). As such, the Xian incident and the increased tangible threat posed by the Empire of Japan´s armies, led to the Second United Front between the Nationalists and Communists during the summer of 1937, who temporarily put aside their differences to resist the Japanese aggression during the Second Sino-Japanese War (Ch'en, 1991; Fairbank & Goldman, 2006).

Spanning from 1937 to 1945, the Second Sino-Japanese War, also known as the War of Resistance, was a brutal conflict between China and Japan that resulted in immense devastation and loss of life (Keay, 2009; Mitter, 2013; Tanner, 2010). It began with the Marco Polo Bridge Incident on July 7, 1937, and quickly escalated into a full-scale invasion by Japanese forces, who occupied large swathes of Chinese territory. Although some fierce battles had occurred between the defending armies, the Japanese army swiftly advanced through China and was able to seize Shanghai in November 1937, reaching the outskirts of Nanjing by early December of the same year (Botjer, 1979; Fenby, 2009; Mitter, 2013). Recognising the city's lack of defensibility, the Chinese army largely withdrew its forces as the Japanese approached and following the fall of the city to the invading forces, the city witnessed widespread acts of violence, including mass killings, rape, and looting perpetrated against Chinese civilians and prisoners of war (Keay, 2009; Spence, 2012). These events, known as the Nanjing Massacre or Rape of Nanjing, stands as one of the most horrific atrocities committed during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Afterwards, a collaborationist government under Wang Jingwei was established in Nanjing in 1940, seeking to legitimise Japanese rule in China (Brook, 2019; Spence, 2012). However, it faced opposition from both the Chinese Nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek and Communist forces led by Mao Zedong (Mitter, 2013).

During the closing stages of the Second World War, the United States extended significant support to the Nationalist government in China. Recognising the GMD as a key ally in the fight against Japanese aggression, the U.S. provided military aid, equipment, and financial assistance to bolster Chiang Kai-shek's forces, but the partnership was troubled and exacerbated internal divisions in the GMD, coupled with mounting challenges within China such as corruption, inflation, and social unrest (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Spence, 2012).

Following Japan's surrender in World War II, the conflict between China and Japan came to an end, bringing some relief to a war-weary Chinese population and heralded a hopeful period of reconstruction and reconciliation in China. But as the nation sought to rebuild and heal from the devastation wrought by years of conflict and occupation, tensions between the two parties always persisted and the civil war reignited once the imminent defeat of the Japanese became evident (Keay, 2009; Spence, 2012). Although there had been a brief period of cooperation against Japanese aggression and mediation attempts by the United States, the situation quickly led to a resurgence of hostilities (Botjer, 1979; Fairbank & Goldman, 2006; Pepper, 1984). During the second phase of the civil conflict, spanning from 1946 to 1949, the communists gained dominance as the CCP's guerilla warfare tactics and support among the rural peasantry enabled them to gradually gain the upper hand over the better-equipped GMD forces. In 1949, the CCP emerged victorious, establishing the People's Republic of China, while the GMD retreated to Taiwan, where it continued to govern as the Republic of China (Botjer, 1979; Fenby, 2009; Hsü, 2000; Pepper, 1984; Spence, 2012; Tanner, 2010).

Therefore, the Chinese Civil War was a protracted conflict fought between the GMD, led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the CCP, led by Mao Zedong, lasting from 1927 to 1949, with the roots of the conflict being traced back to the aftermath of the Xinhai Revolution and the subsequent power struggles between the GMD and CCP. It was characterised by shifting alliances, ferocious campaigns, and widespread human suffering, fundamentally reshaping the political landscape of China and had profound implications for regional and global geopolitics. The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 marked the end of the Republican period and the beginning of Communist rule under the CCP. Although the Republican era's progressive efforts were often hampered by internal divisions, external threats, and the persistence of traditional power structures, its legacy, characterised by aspirations for modernisation, nationalism, and social reform, continues to shape China's trajectory in the modern world.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Throughout the Nanjing decade (1928-1937), the Nationalist government (Guomindang [GMD]) forged a one-party state guided by Sun Yat-sen's 'Three Stages of Revolution' doctrine (W. Liu, 2013; Tien, 1972), in which governance focused on 'political tutelage' to educate citizens on political and civil liberties (Taylor, 2014; Wilbur, 1984).

Amidst this intricate political landscape, the Nationalist government sought to bolster a nation-building project against the many existing challenges, including the Guomindang - Chinese Communist Party (CCP) conflict, foreign influence, and economic instability. This endeavour involved a nuanced interplay among Chiang Kai-shek, the GMD, affiliated intellectuals, secret societies, and others, aiming to instil unity and discipline in society through a blend of Western ideologies and traditional values (Wakeman, 1997; Xu, 2019). This modernisation project produced diverse outcomes, transforming societal dynamics and prompting reactions to an increasingly authoritarian regime. Given the complexity of the subject, the literature reviewed delineated key themes such as Chiang Kai-shek's legacy, external influences, the role of secret societies, and moments of societal transformation. Additionally, it explores the evolution and contradictions of concepts like modernisation, citizenship, and nationalism during the Nanjing decade. In order to present some of the main references framing the object of study, a systematic overview of works and studies on research trends in Republican China was carried out, followed by an exploration of the theme's main aspects in existing research.

2.1 Tracing Research Trends on Republican China

Research on Republican China has evolved over time, reflecting changing academic interests and historiographical approaches. Initially, during the mid-twentieth century, scholars focused on political narratives, revolutionary impacts, and prominent figures like Chiang Kai-shek, Sun Yat-sen, and other elites. This era witnessed numerous studies analysing the rise and fall of the Nationalist government, its interactions with Communist forces, and external powers (e.g., Botjer, 1979; Chang, 1979; Eastman, 1972, 1974, 1979, 1984a; Gregor & Chang, 1979; Tien, 1972; Wilbur, 1984, Yeh, 1989).

In the early twenty-first century, China's rapid economic and social changes sparked a renewed interest in its republican history, known as the Republican fever (Zhang & Weatherley, 2013, 2017). This resurgence led to research exploring themes such as modernisation (Bian, 2010; He, 2014; Strauss, 1997), identity (Leibold, 2006; Mitter, 2002; Wakeman, 1997), economics (Kong & Ploeckl, 2022; Remick, 2003), urbanisation (Cody, 1996), gender (Culp, 2012; Edwards, 2000; Stevens, 2003; Tran, 2008) and social dynamics (Barrento, 2019; W. Liu, 2013; Martin, 1995; Morris, 1997; Ownby, 2001).

Furthermore, the CCP's strategic use of historical narratives in foreign policy and domestic consolidation has stimulated research on Republican China (Coble, 2007; Mitter & Moore, 2011). By shaping public memory and fostering nationalist sentiment, the CCP constructed an image of victimhood (Z. Wang, 2008), prompting scholars to critically assess official historiography and explore alternative perspectives and marginalised voices in Republican China's history (Coble, 2007, 2023; Esherick, 2010; Mitter & Moore, 2011; Reilly, 2011; Taylor, 2014; Wakeman, 2003).

Much contemporary research has centred on the GMD's role in the war of resistance and its interplay with the CCP's nationalist narrative, focusing on history, identity, and constructed nationalism (Gries, 2005; Lin, 2023; Lyu & Zhou, 2023; Woods & Dickson, 2017; Zhao, 2013). However, Stroup (2022) notes that many studies on Chinese nationalism are insularly focused and lack interdisciplinary approaches, limiting their suitability for comparative analysis. These, in turn, have originated research on specific themes, such as Chiang´s wartime speeches (Lams & Lu, 2018), corruption (C. Wang, 2017), and Nationalist demise (Coble, 2023), which, while insightful, often rely excessively on historical narrative frameworks and top-down approach, offering a particular view of the period. An exception is Clinton's (2017) "Revolutionary Nativism," which while exploring how Confucian-fascist groups emerged within GMD's China, utilises the interdisciplinary study of modernist aesthetics and nativist discourse to analyse nationalist rhetoric.

2.2 Revisiting Chiang Kai-shek's Legacy: Leadership Dynamics, Trusted Allies and Political Connections

Chiang Kai-shek's legacy holds immense significance in Chinese history, prompting an examination not only of his leadership but also of his chosen alliances and political connections. His intellectual development, influenced by a wide range of readings spanning Chinese classics, Western literature, and Marxist theory, diverged from the democratic and scientific focus of the New Culture Movement towards a preference for philosophers from the Song and Ming dynasties (Lua & Lina, 2008). Chiang's commitment to personal development within the framework of neo-Confucianism often remained overshadowed by his focus on the CCP, yet his extensive writings on traditional values reflected their importance, even amid wartime exigencies (Lai, 2023). Moreover, his growing adherence to Christianity left a lasting imprint on initiatives such as the New Life Movement and significantly influenced his regime (Esherick, 2010).

Lua and Lina (2008) argue that Chiang Kai-shek's depiction evokes divergent opinions regarding his leadership style. While criticisms point to tendencies of micromanagement and a perceived lack of magnanimity, some acknowledge the obstacles he faced in establishing a modern state. Chiang's emphasis on military discipline, evident in his telegrams addressing soldiers' misconduct, illustrates a

focus on superficial facets of discipline and his detachment from deeper societal issues (Huang, 2011). Esherick (2010) notes the absence of political violence in Chiang's personal diary, raising questions about its reliability as a historical source and prompting reflection on his association with less commendable aspects of his regime.

The examination of Chiang Kai-shek's leadership styles and impact across different contexts, including the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, and Western scholarship, has been a focal point of ongoing scholarly discussion (e.g., Chor, 2002; Esherick, 2010; X. Liu, 2010; Lua & Lina, 2008). Existing biographical portrayals are deemed inadequate in fully capturing Chiang's political trajectory and the complex history of twentieth-century China. This gap underscores the persistent challenge in defining China's relations with neighbouring nations and emphasises the necessity for a more comprehensive portrayal of Chiang Kai-shek's life and era in historical literature.

2.2.1 Relationships of alliance and power

The dynamics of power and political alliances surrounding Chiang Kai-shek were notably characterised by the influence of familial and personal ties. Chiang Kai-shek's marriage to Soong Meiling[3], provided him with both stability and a notable political ally due to her significant family connections and wealth (Esherick, 2010). Although Chiang emphasised the recognition and utilisation of talented subordinates, he encountered challenges in recruiting competent colleagues, with competitive tensions often leading to ruptures (Lua & Lina, 2008). To exemplify, Coble (2023) references the bitter rivalry between the Finance Ministers T. V. Soong[4] and H. H. Kung[5], both wielding considerable influence in shaping financial policies in China from 1928 until the collapse of the Nationalist regime. Their influential positions were bolstered by personal ties to Chiang Kai-shek through his wife. Additionally, their American education was also something highly valued by Chiang, highlighting the significance of ties with the United States (Kuo, 2009). This favoured treatment was notably evident in the corruption scandal surrounding the American Dollar Bond issue, which ultimately led to H. H. Kung's resignation (Coble, 2023).

For Chiang, loyalty held significant importance, particularly to his ideologies. This was manifest in his efforts to train loyal officers and his decision to execute a coup and purge the Chinese Communist Party in 1927, driven by suspicions of Soviet interference and ideological objections to communism (Esherick, 2010). As such, his inner circle consisted of influential figures alongside trusted allies like

---

[3] Also known as Madame Chiang Kai-shek, she was a prominent political figure who played a crucial role in rallying support for China during World War II and advocating for Chinese interests internationally.

[4] Chinese politician and financier born into the influential Soong family. Serving in key government positions, including Minister of Finance and Premier of the Executive Yuan, he played an important role in China's economy and foreign diplomacy.

[5] Brother-in-law of Sun Yat-sen and of Chiang Kai-shek, through his marriage to one of the Soong sisters. As an important politician, Kung held various government positions, including Minister of Industry, Premier of the Executive Yuan and Minister of Finance after T. V. Soong.

Shao Yuanchong[6] and the Chen brothers[7] (Lua & Lina, 2008), which showcased a leadership tendency to make judgments based on initial impressions, leading to occasional erroneous appointments[8].

Similarly, the alliance between Chiang Kai-shek and the Green Gang in Shanghai during the Nanjing decade underscored the importance of loyalty and collaboration. The Green Gang, a criminal and violent organization, exerted influence on various entities, shaping Shanghai's political landscape. Factors such as evolving party dynamics within the GMD, relationships with the French Concession authorities, and economic interests influenced the Green Gang's ties with the Nanjing regime (Martin, 1995, 1996; Marshall, 1976). T. V. Soong partnered with the pro-Chiang Green Gang to pressure Shanghai banks into investing in national securities (Martin, 1996; Taylor, 2014). The collaboration between the Green Gang and politicians, notably Chiang Kai-shek, resulted in the suppression of leftist movements and labour unions in Shanghai. The Gang's modern nature, originating from Qing-era mutual-aid associations, enabled its adaptation to the changing environment of Shanghai (Stapleton, 1996).

The pivotal year of 1932 marked significant political reorganisation and an accord with the Shanghai bourgeoisie, with Du Yuesheng[9] emerging as a central figure in consolidating power within the Green Gang and mediating relations between factions (Martin, 1995, 1996). Du's involvement in the opium trade further solidified his influence, generating revenue for Chiang Kai-shek's anti-Communist campaigns (Marshall, 1976). His alliances with individuals of high social status (e.g., Minister of Finance, Mayor of Shanghai), facilitated by exclusive club memberships like the Endurance Club, allowed him to maintain neutrality and/or leverage amidst different factions (Martin, 1995). Subsequently, the control over labour unions and leadership of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce underscored the institutionalisation of gang structures into official administration. This 'criminal corporativism' was amplified by Chiang's compliance and influenced both local and national politics (Martin, 1995, 1996; Clinton, 2017).

2.2.2 Organisational networks and political strategies

The interplay of personal affiliations and alliances in Chiang Kai-shek's sphere of influence shaped the organisational networks and political strategies. While Chiang Kai-shek relied on subordinates like T. V.

---

[6] GMD politician and founding member of the Nationalist Revolution

[7] The Chen brothers, Chen Guofu and Chen Lifu, were influential figures in Republican China, known for their significant roles in the GMD, shaping party organisation and policies through their close alliance with Chiang Kai-shek and their strong anti-communist stance. Both played crucial roles in the Chinese Civil War.

[8] Evidenced by the case of Shi Yousan, Chinese general who later betrayed the central government in Nanjing and then defected.

[9] Also known as Big-eared Du, a prominent ruthless Chinese gangster and leader of the Shanghai Green Gang. Please refer to Chapter 1. Deeply involved in illicit enterprises such as gambling, prostitution, drug trafficking, and extortion. Politically connected, was occasionally utilised by the government for strategic purposes.

Soong, and H. H. Kung throughout the Anti-Japanese War, he expressed dissatisfaction with their financial contributions and China's talent pool, though acknowledging their importance. Chiang's negotiation strategies often combined peaceful negotiations with military force[10] (Lua & Lina, 2008). In response to escalating tensions between China and Japan in Shanghai in 1932, Chiang Kai-shek adopted a strategy of tepid resistance and negotiation, with the support of Wang Jingwei, advocating for "first internal pacification, then external resistance" (Chor, 2002). Esherick (2010) argues that Chiang's adoption of a policy of appeasement towards Japanese aggression was crucial to prepare the military-industrial establishment. Establishing the National Defence Planning Commission prioritised the development of a robust ordnance industry and defence-oriented heavy industries, emphasising his central role in these efforts (Bian, 2010). Despite the communist threat, Chiang expressed reluctance to engage in a full-scale war with Japan due to China's perceived vulnerabilities (Chor, 2002). During this period, an extensive secret service apparatus operated through personalised, informal, and clandestine organisations directly answering to Chiang (Esherick, 2010). Lieutenant General Dai Li, a prominent Chinese spymaster, played a pivotal role in the intelligence operations of Republican China. Despite early hardships, he eventually found himself in Shanghai's underworld and gained entry into military intelligence through connections with Du Yuesheng and Chiang Kai-shek (Wakeman, 2003; Ye, 1989).

Dai Li's influence grew with the establishment of China's first modern intelligence organisation, the Clandestine Investigation Section, aimed at providing crucial military and political intelligence during the Northern Expeditionary Army. He later led the Investigation and Statistics Bureau[11], which expanded into a powerful secret police force. Despite its harmless designation, the bureau functioned as a covert surveillance and enforcement apparatus, elevating Dai to a position of considerable influence within Republican China's political landscape (Wakeman, 2003).

Concurrently, Dai assumed leadership of the Blue Shirts Society, dedicated to providing security and intelligence services to Chiang Kai-shek (Eastman, 1972; Kuzuoglu, 2018; Wakeman, 2003). This characterisation of the organisation's activities aligns with criticisms by political dissidents, who denounced its role as a covert "secret police" entity. These operations encompassed surveillance, abduction, terrorism, censorship, targeted killings, and house arrest, leading to comparisons with Heinrich Himmler of the Nazi Schutzstaffel (SS) by the Western press (Ye, 1989). Espionage networks focused on CCP activities, Japanese intentions, military activities, economic interests, and reporting on the GMD Administration, directly influenced national strategic decisions, recruitment, and procedures

---

[10] Evidenced in instances such as the Xuzhou meeting with Feng Yuxiang and negotiations with Zhang Xueliang over Nanjing's control of Manchuria.

[11] Military agency, dedicated to intelligence gathering and covert spying operations for national security and defence. Its direct connection to Chiang Kai-shek granted it great influence amongst the GMD's administration, institutions and personnel, as well as diplomatic missions and offices abroad during the Nanjing Decade.

(Chambers, 2015; Wakeman, 2003; Kuzuoglu, 2018). Chiang Kai-shek's reliance on trusted advisors and his use of indirect but substantive influence through close relationships highlight his endeavours to centralise power and state institutions within his vision of a unified China (Bian, 2010).

2.2.3 The interplay of Fascist movements and foreign influences in Nationalist China

The emergence of progressive and fascist movements within the GMD regime, marked a significant wave of external influence and ideology, being exemplified by the creation of the Blue Shirts Society. Established in early 1932, its main goal was to preserve and strengthen the nation by providing a leadership "stimulant for a declining, stagnant society" (Eastman, 1972, p.4). Therefore, they adopted fascism as a political ideology (as seen in Mussolini's Italy, Hitler's National Socialist Germany and Hirohito´s Imperial Japan) since it provided a proven method of submitting the individual towards a "heavenly principle" to serve and sacrifice. Its anti-communist, nationalist, and authoritarian ideologies led to the glorification of violence, the cult of personality around the leader and the use of propaganda and paramilitary organisations to maintain power, thus reflecting a larger trend within China during the period (Eastman, 1972; Clinton, 2017).

Nonetheless, there is academic debate on whether the Blue Shirts, and by implication, Chiang Kai-shek, were truly fascist and if that description is correct (Eastman, 1979; Chang, 1979; Gregor & Chang, 1979). Whilst Eastman (1979) argues that the methods and ideas expressed by the Blue Shirts align with those of fascist movements emanating from Europe, Chang (1979) states that ideas coined as fascist, such as emphasis on nationalist sentiment, collective identity, and national re-education, were already rooted in Sun Yat-sen's thought. Eastman (1979) defends that fascism emerged from Italy as a progressive political ideology, characterised by authoritarianism, nationalism, and totalitarianism, implying a dictatorial government led by a single leader or party, typically with strong control over the economy, society, and individual freedoms. As such, the GMD sought inspiration from Italy and Germany to instrumentalise some of these aspects, including militarism and authoritarian governance (Eastman, 1972, 1979; Hong, 1999; Wakeman, 1997).

According to Kogan (1969) and Paxton (1998), defining fascism in contemporary forms is complex due to its adaptability across societies and stages of emergence, consolidation, and exercise of power, advocating for a dynamic approach considering historical context and ideological evolution. Within these criteria, GMD intellectuals advocating one-party rule and authoritarian principles viewed it as a modern nativist form of political management, aligned with the evidence of the time (Chang, 1979). Sun Yat-sen's recommendations in adopting modern Western political and governmental forms, including democracy, to strengthen China by applying a revolutionary authoritarianism and nationalism shared similarities with mass-mobilising, developmental, and one-party systems present in Chinese Communism, Italian Fascism, Imperial Japan, and Maoism (Chang, 1979; Gregor & Chang, 1979).

20

Recognising these attributes, actions, and alliances is crucial in delineating this period, transcending Eurocentric labels.

The undeniable influence of Italian fascism during the period between 1927 and 1936 transformed China's Nationalist government, notably seen in the establishment of the Blue Shirts Society, mirroring similar organisations in Italy and Germany (Coco, 2020; Eastman, 1972; Clinton, 2017). Economic and industrial cooperation between China and Italy, along with the expansion of the Catholic Church in China supported by Mussolini's government, fostered a closer relationship between the two countries during this period (Coco, 2020). Similarly, German influence is evident in the presence of Max Bauer, a German military expert who served as Chiang Kai-shek's military and economic adviser in China from 1927 to 1929. Bauer's expertise and political connections made him an attractive choice for Chiang Kai-shek, particularly after the expulsion of Russian advisers in 1927 (Fox, 1970). With the rise of the Nazi Party in 1933, increased cooperation with the Nationalists aimed to access Chinese raw materials, driven by Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, which emphasised China's need for military and industrial modernisation and desire for German investment (Kirby, 1984; Mitter, 2013). As a result, joint industrial projects were established with Hapro[12] serving as the umbrella organisation for German industrial interests in China from 1934 (Kirby, 1984). Military collaboration intensified, with figures like Hans von Seeckt (arrived May 1933) overseeing German economic and military involvement, and later Alexander von Falkenhausen (arrived 1934) directly assisting the GMD in reforming and training its armed forces (Mitter, 2013). Despite the rupture in political relations during World War II, clandestine diplomatic channels persisted between Chiang Kai-shek and Nazi Germany from mid-1940 to 1943, aligning with his pragmatic foreign policy (Iechika, 2013) and including proposals for Sino-German collaboration and mediation between China and Japan (Glang, 2015).

2.2.4. Foreign diplomatic relations: the impact of trade and economics

Chinese foreign diplomatic relations were profoundly influenced by trade and economic factors, shaping the contours of international cooperation and geopolitical dynamics. During this period, external influences extended beyond Germany and Italy, as Sun Yat-sen's shift towards Soviet Russia for support and the Guomindang's anti-imperialist policy led to significant influence from the British Foreign Office and the United States. The relationship with the United Kingdom was particularly difficult due to the contentious issue of the occupied territories in Hong Kong, which strained diplomatic engagements and hindered the establishment of an equal and cooperative bilateral relationship (Fung, 1983; Murdock, 2009). Similarly, the presence of Western military and police forces in these territories, such as in the Shanghai International Settlement, underscored the one-sided semi-colonial dynamics

---

[12] Handelsgesellschaft für industrielle Produkte

at play and the lengths to which these powers would go to secure the US's and British economic and strategic interests in China (Murdock, 2009). This friction was further complicated by shifting international alignments, driven by the immediate strategic needs and long-term aspirations of the Chinese leadership. Their new, more conciliatory policy towards the Chinese Nationalist movement, aimed to counter Bolshevism and encourage the success of moderate elements, resulted in an increased inflow of goods and ideas (Fung, 1983). Chiang Kai-shek leveraged these events, seeking to cultivate friendships with influential nations, renegotiate trade deals, and on abolishing unequal treaties. As such, the GMD was able to establish tariff autonomy with the United States, emphasising national reconstruction and friendly relations with foreign powers (Fung, 1983).

Cody (1996) explores how these exchanges directly shaped Chinese urban planning, as many Chinese cities underwent physical transformations reflecting the importation of American urban standards and ideas of progress. With American planners introducing innovations like road-widening and municipal zoning in cities such as Nanjing and Shanghai, a more westernised lifestyle was fostered, that impacted social dynamics. Additionally, Chiang Kai-shek's state-building efforts, exemplified by the three-in-one administrative system[13] drew inspiration from American public administration theories to address bureaucratic inefficiencies (Bian, 2010).

2.3 Secret Societies and Societal Transformation in Republican China

Several key intellectuals[14] were significant in introducing a Western ideological influence and by utilising their links to the Whampoa Military academy and/or close ties to Chiang Kai-shek, created secret societies and organisations which became interwoven with the GMD governmental regime (Wakeman, 1997). The *Lixingshe* society (The Society for Vigorous Practice), an important political formation constituted by a military freemasonry membership that admired fascism and pledged itself to Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles and its supreme leader Chiang Kai-shek, the *Fuxingshe* (The Renaissance Society) and the *Lizhishe* (Society to Establish the Will), all aimed to find organisational solutions to national issues, vaguely merging Western and Japanese ultra-nationalist ideology with traditional imperial "scholar-gentry" concepts (Wakeman, 1997, p.403). Ownby (2001) mentions the necessity to differentiate these secret societies from others, as the categorisation originates from the 18th century to any social organization formed outside or against the ruling administrative structure. Therefore, the word "secret" does not imply hidden or unknown, and blurs the difference between brotherhoods, criminal and religious movements, with a misleading negative connotation (Ownby, 2001).

---

[13] American system emphasising planning, execution, and assessment.
[14] e.g., Teng Jie, He Zhongshan, Kang Ze, among others

2.3.1 Key societies: ideological and cultural patterns

Secret societies in China can be categorised into diverse main themes regarding their objectives, such as revolutionary or political societies, criminal organizations, and religious or popular movements. Revolutionary societies (e.g., *Tongmenhui*, *Lixingshe*, Blue Shirts) focused on political activities, organising uprisings, fostering nationalist sentiments, advocating for political change, and exerting progressive ideological influence (Hsü, 2000; Spence, 2012). Criminal organizations (e.g., the Green Gang) primarily engaged in activities like smuggling, gambling, prostitution and drug trafficking, wielding significant influence in local economies and politics, often colluding with government officials or acting as de facto authorities in certain regions (Marshall, 1976; Martin, 1996; Stapleton, 1996). Religious societies originated from popular or social movements (e.g., Red Spears, White Lotus), representing marginalised groups such as peasants or adherents of specific belief systems, offering support and community amidst social and economic upheavals (Bianco, 1972; Ownby, 1996; Tai, 1985). While these categories are not rigid, with some societies transitioning from predatory to protective community-based associations (e.g., *Gelaohui*) in response to exploitative groups (Shaoqing, 1984), they illustrate the symbiotic relationship between banditry, local communities, foreign ideology, and governing authorities during Republican China (Billingsley, 1981). Factors like nationalism, endorsement by militarists and government figures, and the rise of print capitalism influenced the emergence of redemptive societies as organised salvationist moral groups, particularly in urban areas (Ownby, 2019). These societies aimed to uphold traditional values, often blending Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist themes, and occasionally incorporating external Christian and Islamic elements (Ownby, 2019).

The key political societies during the Nanjing decade often had hybrid organisational structures that incorporated elements of both military, such as centralised command and hierarchy, and fraternal or brotherhood organisations, which fostered a sense of union and solidarity among members. Although influenced by fascist ideologies, Wakeman (1997, p.424) argues that only some elements were seen as useful by these societies (e.g., modernisation, national self-confidence, authoritarian, state planned economy), since its members were more engaged with the traditional Confucian principles of "Filial piety", similar to their military values and principles.

Physical prowess became increasingly important, leading to a shift from traditional Chinese martial arts to Western-style team sports and athletic competitions, symbolising national strength and progress. The adoption of Westernised athletics in China and the transition to a more inclusive and community-oriented approach created the concept of *tiyu* (physical culture), blending traditional, Western, and nationalist ideologies, emphasising education and universities (Morris, 1997). The emergence of "body engineering" alongside the "New Woman" movement stressed physical fitness and hygiene as vital for national rejuvenation (Zhang, 2018). This emphasis on a healthy body aligned

with goals of national strength and military readiness without detracting from previously defended education and social reform, present in the New Culture and New Woman ideals (Edwards, 2000; Zhang, 2018).

Social Darwinism gained prominence, framing racial conflict in terms of survival of the fittest, and by the 1930s, a collective racial strength narrative emerged, with the burden of progress placed on the Han ethnicity, influencing subsequent policies (Foreman, 2022). Thus, the members of the secret nationalist societies were turned into main strategists for a Nationalist military and civil training system, with the purpose of training patriotic officers and instructors, hence developing the concept of "Fascinization" as a new form of political thought (Wakeman, 1997, p.419).

2.3.2 The New Life movement

In the intricate landscape of the Nanjing decade, amidst waves of political and social change, various societies and movements emerged with the ambitious goal of reshaping the nation's cultural fabric. These societies theorised government-driven civic initiatives aimed at fostering cultural reform and promoting Neo-Confucian social values, such as the New Life Movement in 1934 (Eastman, 1972; Wakeman, 1997). Its overarching goal was to unify China under a centralised ideology (Dirlik, 1975), by emphasising traditional morality and disciplined behaviour (W. Liu, 2013; Xu, 2019). While the GMD integrated the movement into government routine and used government agents, especially policemen, to implement it, there are differing interpretations of its significance and success (Dirlik, 1975; Mitter, 2002; W. Liu, 2013).

As Liu (2013) contends, earlier scholarship views the movement as strengthening Chiang's dictatorship and tightening state control, akin to fascist ideology, while recent scholarship sees it as necessary reform for state-building, centralising state power, and shaping new citizens. Unlike infrastructure-focused reforms, this campaign prioritised hygiene, raising awareness among city residents and linking personal behaviour to broader concepts of civility, modernity, and nation-building (Nakajima, 2008). By utilising mass media and borrowed publicity strategies, these campaigns became increasingly politicised and ritualised, involving top-down mobilisations to establish Nationalist government control over previously Communist-held areas (Ferlanti, 2010; Nakajima, 2008). Concurrently, advancements in transportation and communication allowed for new leisure and travel habits, framing travel tourism as progress and hygiene-related, intertwining individual experiences with the nation's modern identity (Barrento, 2019).

The New Life Movement represented a new political ideology, blending Confucianism and Legalism, arising more from negotiation and implementation than intentional design. It established a new realm of state power between morality and law, distinct from Western disciplinary projects, redefining the state's moral and legal role to build a strong nation-state as part of China's modernisation process

(Dirlik, 1975; W. Liu, 2013; Ferlanti, 2010). Under this movement and new educational programs, aimed at reviving Confucian morality and incorporating martial discipline, children underwent military indoctrination to create student-soldiers. By combining the Three People's Principles with "resolute, sacrificing, iron-and-blood spirit of fascism", the state-led societal formatting involved economic reforms, youth militarisation, purges of rivals (e.g., terrorist operations by Dai Li against civilians), and justified violence to combat national weakness (Eastman, 1972, p.10).

The Nationalists' New Life movement showcased partial successes in propagating transformative ideologies (Mitter, 2002), as the co-opted psychological concepts for political ends reinforced nationalist ideals (Baum, 2015, 2017). While viewed as interference with individual freedom by some or as a necessary aspect of modernisation by others, it marked a significant transition moment, reshaping the moral and legal boundaries of state power in daily life (W. Liu, 2013). The Chinese scouting program, influenced by the British Boy Scout program, served as a key avenue for youth military education, emphasising a comprehensive educational approach that blended military drills with character building, skills training, and civic voluntarism, reflecting the GMD's vision of a modern citizenship dedicated to serve the nation (Fong, 2022; Leibold, 2006; Wu, 2022). However, internal disputes, reliance on police power, and failure to institutionalise a systematic disciplinary mechanism underscored the movement's developmental shortcomings (Dirlik, 1975; W. Liu, 2013), albeit improvements in health conditions (Ferlanti, 2010; Nakajima, 2008).

Chiang Kai-shek had a dual strategy to promoting the New Life Movement. Publicly, he projected optimism, promoting *Guanzi*'s virtues[15] and using foreign behaviour as a standard for emulation, emphasising shame for improper conduct and attire. Privately, he grappled with the movement's superficiality, inherent contradictions and its reinforcement of societal divisions (Huang, 2011). Clinton (2019) underscores how the movement placed the burden of self-sacrifice on the disadvantaged, whilst equating Nationalist Party leadership with the nation's future, thereby exacerbating existing inequality.

2.4 Modernisation, Citizenship, and Nationalism in shaping the Nanjing Decade

During the Nanjing decade, the coming together of modernisation endeavours, shifting notions of citizenship, and fervent nationalism played instrumental roles in shaping the era. The Nationalist government invested significantly in road construction during this period, primarily to enhance military capabilities. Industrial machinery imports were directed towards vital sectors like textiles, food production, cement, and chemicals, crucial for nurturing a burgeoning industrial base. Equally,

---

[15] foundational Chinese philosophical and political treatise from the Spring and Autumn period (770-481 BCE), covering self-cultivation through practice, principles of governance, state management and leadership

telegraph system recovery played a pivotal role in facilitating modern communication networks, marking a notable infrastructure development stride (Hsü, 2000). Strauss (1997, p.344) notes how the GMD used various strategies to achieve modern institutional breakthroughs, such as the "Weberian technocratic bureaucracy" and the "Soviet-inspired Whampoa legacy of "controlled mobilization" via revolutionary indoctrination". New administration structures and legislation, rooted in Sun Yat-sen's principles, underscored societal obligations preceding rights, reflecting a shift from lineage-based to nation-based values (He, 2014).

Various political ideologies including modernity, anarchism, liberalism, and socialism began to shape perspectives on societal interests, politics, and social change (Dirlik & Krebs, 1981). Reformist intellectuals and revolutionary leaders aimed to expand public service responsibility to all members of society, emphasising popular sovereignty and political rights. They introduced terms to signify citizenship, such as *guomin*, *gongmin*, and *shimin*, each with distinct connotations to national membership, participation in public life, and urban community membership, respectively (Culp, 2012). The Japanese invasion of China intensified the nation-building project, leading to the conceptualisation of the *Zhonghua minzu*, symbolising a unified national community (Leibold, 2006). Through media and education, reformist elites sought to shape the people into new citizens with rights, navigating between individual and collective identities amidst emerging modern concepts like democracy, socialism, Social Darwinism, race, and class (Mitter, 2002).

2.4.1 The female figure and modernity

The emergence of the "New Woman" and the "Modern Girl" in early 20th-century China exemplifies new waves of thought and a shift in the nation's social and cultural landscape (Zhang, 2018). These figures embodied the tensions of China´s modernisation, challenging traditional Confucian ideals and advocating for greater female agency (Edwards, 2000). The urban landscape, particularly Shanghai, became a crucible for these transformations as it was fuelled by international trade and goods, a burgeoning intellectual scene and a Westernised cosmopolitan lifestyle. Here, the "Modern Girl" thrived, depicted in literature and media as a symbol of both danger and pleasure, emblematic of modernity and often associated with a growing vibrant consumer culture (Stevens, 2003; Zhou, 2019). While the "New Woman" championed for legal reforms and female empowerment, the "Modern Girl" represented a multifaceted figure, embodying both glamour and societal anxieties about sexuality and decadence (Stevens, 2003; Zhou, 2019). The *cheongsam*[16] encapsulated this complexity by blending Western aesthetics with changing beauty ideals (Zhou, 2019).

Despite their symbolic association with modernity, "Modern Girls" often faced limitations. Their

---

[16] Traditional female garment

portrayals in media were carefully crafted, often objectifying them for the male gaze and depicting them as sexualised femme-fatales (Stevens, 2003). Additionally, their agency and subjectivity were often contested, with anxieties about cultural loss and the erosion of traditional values shaping their representation (Sang, 2015; Stevens, 2003). Thus, the evolving portrayals of the "New Woman" and the "Modern Girl" reveal the complex interplay between Western influences, local politics, and the struggle for female subjectivity in a modernising China (Edwards, 2000; Sang, 2015; Stevens, 2003; Zhou, 2019).

2.4.2 Militarisation as citizenship education

In the latter period of the Nanjing decade, fostering 'citizenship' became a priority in education, leading to the militarisation of school life (Wu, 2022). The GMD government integrated modern fascist ideology into its political system while upholding Confucianism as the "highest culture of our people," promoting a novel concept of "Confucian Citizenship" (Wakeman, 1997, p.424). According to Eastman (1972), the Nationalist revolution values were failing, and cultural renewal was seen as a prerequisite for military or political revitalisation, thus explaining the totalitarian aspirations of societies like the Blue Shirts. This involved the use of propaganda, authoritarian methods, and the cult of personality around Chiang Kai-shek, aiming to replace "the decadent, individualistic culture with a new "nation-first-ism culture, that is positive, progressive, and brave" (Eastman, 1972, p.8). Despite the apparent stability of the Nanjing decade, it reveals the challenges of authoritarianism and political turbulence in China, marked by an amalgamation of modernisation efforts, cultural shifts, and intellectual influence. This era fostered a distinctive Chinese response to its predicaments, leading to a strengthened national identity epitomised by the Nationalist Blue Shirts' motto to "Nationalize, Militarize, Productivize" (Eastman, 1972, p.10).

Yet, Fong (2022) notes how the GMD's student military training program aimed at instilling nationalist sentiments, failed to foster political allegiance, revealing a paradoxical militaristic culture emphasis on personal refinement over military readiness. This eclectic approach to citizenship training, blending military-style discipline, Confucian ethics, and liberal ideals, actually undermined the program's mobilisation potential, allowing students to pursue personal agendas and critique aspects of GMD governance (Fong, 2022). Similarly, Nakajima (2008) observes that the diverse strategies employed, including coercion, policing, publicity, education, and rituals, contributed to a dysfunctional sense of national identity and social cohesion.

2.4.3. Nationalism and Chinese Intellectual movements

The Chinese intellectual movement amid Japanese aggression in Manchuria witnessed divergent responses. Some advocated greater embrace of Western science and democracy for national unity and

resistance, while others prioritised reviving traditional Chinese culture to bolster national identity (Leibold, 2006). Notably, the marginalisation of educated elites in politics led to increasing radicalisation among intellectuals, with revolutionary intellectuals being seen as conservative due to the intensification of the radical movements they initiated (Xu, 2019).

Chiang Kai-shek reinforced the shame of disunity and the lack of respect for national symbols, such as the flag, as hindrances to a united country. However, his focus on victimisation and enduring humiliation hindered greater efforts to mobilise the population in support of the state, impacting national identity (Huang, 2011). Despite efforts to integrate culture into politics during the Republican era, such endeavours had limited impact due to detachment from political power, unrealistic political projects and the radicalisation of the intellectual sphere (Xu, 2019). The attempt to unify diverse ethnic groups within the Han-dominated Chinese nation underscored division, with racial nationalists emphasising common ancestry and pure race, while cultural nationalists focused on preserving ethnic and cultural diversity (Leibold, 2006). Not surprisingly, during the Nanjing decade, some Han Chinese scholars argued for social engineering and racial improvement as means to respond to Japanese aggression (Foreman, 2022).

2.4.4 Morality and corruption: a test of conservative national values and laws

The emphasis on Confucian morality resonated with the public, linking sexual fidelity to national strength, a theme central to modernising emerging nation-states (Tran, 2008). The Guomindang's discourse on gender equality led to equalitarian laws on adultery, associating individual morality with family and societal stability (Edwards, 2000; Tran, 2008). The previously celebrated Modern Girl, as the embodiment of modernity, gained a negative connotation with the rise of the New Life Movement. The created association with a consumerist, decadent and individualistic lifestyle contrasted her glamorous and often sexualised image with the preferred traditional feminine virtues championed by the movement (Edwards, 2000; Stevens, 2003; Zhou, 2019). Similarly, the government implemented bans on prostitution, though these efforts were generally unsuccessful and drove it underground, to be controlled by local administrators and a significant source of revenue (Marshal, 1976; Martin, 1995; Remick, 2003). Whilst an example of the dichotomy between the defended Nationalist government values and the present reality of corruption and law evasion, Remick (2003) contends that prostitution in southern China materially contributed to building a modern local state through taxation, providing social services, and exerting control over citizens.

As the international environment changed, conservative GMD policies fostered a perception of declining morale and increased corruption among officials. This corruption, marked by lavish lifestyles and misuse of public funds, starkly contrasted with the hardships endured by soldiers and civilians. Despite attempts to prevent and punish corruption, enforcement of laws and regulations proved

ineffective, with high-ranking officials involved in corrupt practices, exploiting the nation's crisis for personal gain (C. Wang, 2017). Inadequate state control created an environment conducive to bribery, while widespread perception of corruption within the GMD government severely undermined its governing capacity (C. Wang, 2017). Wei (2014) challenges the notion of the GMD government as highly corrupt and factionalised, showcasing its ability to professionalise and effectively advance its case against Japan through centralised foreign propaganda, despite acknowledging centralisation process challenges, including political conflicts, lack of skilled personnel, and infrastructure deficiencies.

Chin (2017) posits that the Nationalist Party's complex connections with local elites and Shanghai courts reveal internal distrust within the GMD. Through legal mechanisms, the party imposed one-party rule, politicising trials to quell dissent and enforce policies. This strategy exacerbated internal power struggles, particularly between the Political Study Group factions and the C. C. Clique factions, with the latter prevailing. Utilising bureaucratic networks and patron-client ties, the C. C. Clique conditioned judicial decisions, heavily influenced by social dynamics involving the Central Administration, Shanghai elites, and legal professionals (Chin, 2017). Similarly, the restructuring of law enforcement to centralise police and security structures sparked ideological clashes within the Nationalist party-state (Chan, 2020). The neglect of the Chinese concept of "police" led to conflicts among different ideological factions regarding policing visions, hindering true centralisation, and with factional leaders retaining significant power (Chan, 2020, p.68).

The GMD government also directly intervened and utilised personal connections to consolidate control over the financial sector, exemplified by the "bank coup of 1935" and successful currency reforms, thereby strengthening its authority (Kong & Ploeckl, 2022, p.671). The influence of political affiliations on individual bankers was notable, with those connected to the government assuming more prominent roles and influence. As money and finance became increasingly linked to societal notions of value and self-worth, the GMD employed a strategic approach involving collaboration with individuals from various backgrounds, including government ministries and criminal elements, to extend its control (Kong & Ploeckl, 2022).

2.5 The ideological shift from Sun Yat-sen's Influence to Authoritarian Conservatism

The GMD attempted to counteract the negative image of the party by portraying Sun Yat-sen as the patriarch of the Republic of China, aiming to reinforce party legitimacy and civic unity (Du, 2019). However, the newly state-defined cult of revolutionary martyrs diverged drastically with previous traditional practices (Harrison, 1998), resulting in diverging and competing interpretations of legacy

which weakened its effectiveness and aggravated factionalism during the Second Sino-Japanese War (Du, 2019).

The Nanjing decade's adoption of society-centred approaches and nationalisation of large enterprises faced challenges, concentrating power (He, 2014) and highlighting weaknesses such as factionalism, corruption, and bureaucratic inefficiency which impeded progress (Strauss, 1997). Chiang Kai-shek's critique of the GMD's lack of substance and "denouncing modern society for its frivolity and emptiness", underscored the need for party revival, leading to the increase of a new authoritarian conservatism, in an attempt to revive culturalist nationalism (Eastman, 1972, p.424, 1984b). This marked a departure from the previous emphasis on the coexistence of Confucian virtue and Western science, instead appropriating Confucian morality into the spirit of science (Xu, 2019). The militarisation of society and the embracing of social hierarchy and elitism into extreme political arrangements was, in large part, a response to the political and economic challenges confronting China in the 1930s, including the ongoing struggle between the GMD and the CCP, the influence of foreign powers like Japan, and the effects of economic depression (Eastman, 1972). While the GMD exhibited growing authoritarian tendencies, dissent suppression, and glorification of a mythical past, it was not ideologically uniform. As such, this period and its implementation of "Confucian fascism" or authoritarian conservatism offers insight into the political and cultural dynamics, linking the GMD's emphasis on "harmony" and "stability" to a lasting legacy in modern Chinese politics (Wakeman, 1997).

In summary, the discrepancy between modernisation ideals and reality resulted in a dysfunctional national identity which left a lasting impact on society. The envisioned image of a "powerful and moral" nation in the changing world order proved inadequate in the face of growing weakness and Japanese aggression, leading to a rift between society and government, with the GMD's internal struggles, ideological conflicts, and individual agendas ultimately leading to the Republic's demise in 1949.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological strategy of the research, justifying the options for the chosen method and the nature of the sources utilised. As Flick (2018) mentions, the stages of research planning and preparation are pivotal in conceptualising an effective study tailored to a specific context, thereby enhancing the research's success. Firstly, the object of study was defined, taking into consideration the initial research question and the proposed objectives. Consequently, documentary research was adopted as the primary method for data collection. Given the multiplicity of data and the complexity of the subject matter, which includes the historical moment studied (1934-1937), the decision was made to access primary sources from the period, namely speeches by the leader Chiang Kai-shek and illustrations in popular cartoon and caricature magazines. A content analysis was carried out on this data, supported by categories and subcategories anchored in the literature review. Each section of this chapter contributes to the validation of the methodological framework, striving to meet standards of integrity and rigour in research, spanning from the sample selection to the in-depth analysis of the data processed. In turn, this ensures transparency and allows the results to be used for prospective studies (Bryman, 2016). The aim is to offer different perspectives on this significant historical period, and to present conclusions on the study carried out.

3.1 Object of study

Based on the literature review on the subject of Nationalist government, external ideologies and secret societies during the Chinese Republican era (1911-1949), a methodological strategy was adopted that would allow us to understand the relationship between these major dimensions. Defining the object of study allows us to delimit the context in which empirical evidence, i.e. from concrete reality, will be collected and analysed (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Thus, the object of study of this research is the Nationalist government and its relationship with external influences and society in the Nanjing decade.

Initially, the research project was conceived with the exploratory aim of analysing the interaction between different crucial elements, namely foreign influences, ideology, modernity and national identity within the milieu of the Nationalist government in Republican-Era China. This period, covering the years from 1911 to 1949, has become increasingly prominent in the official political discourse of the Chinese government, as a defining element of Chinese identity and nationhood (Wang, 2008). Moreover, due to China's growing global influence, the historical roots of political power are considered a relevant area of research in historical narrative. This has given rise to debates in academia about its dynamic and evolutionary nature, origins, and future trajectory. Thus, the study of this period holds

great contemporary significance, as insights into China's political, social, and cultural evolution, along with its lasting impact, allow a more accurate comprehension of the social and political dynamics prevalent in present-day China.

During the Republican era, the Nanjing decade (1928-1937) saw the implementation of political tutelage by the Nationalist Guomindang (GMD) Party and various movements and initiatives, enabled by the relative stability of the government. However, given the scope of the period, it was decided to centre this research on the years between 1934 and 1937. The chosen timeframe (1934-1937) is justified as a phase of stabilisation and transformation in China during the Republican era, marked by the consolidation of nationalist power between two moments of conflict[17] and a subsequent shift towards a more authoritarian phase of governance (Wakeman, 1997; Xu, 2019). This period witnessed the growth of complex societal dynamics and a transition to heightened control through governmental initiatives (e.g. the New Life movement) aimed at modernisation, involving secret societies and foreign influences.

Based on the conducted literature review, which highlighted various ideological currents and external pressures, a main research question was formulated: "What was the relationship between the Nationalist government, secret societies and external influences in the Chinese Republic (1934-1937)?". This initial question stems from an identified gap in existing research, revealing a scarcity of interdisciplinary studies that relate to the aforementioned dimensions. Although academic studies analysing the history of this period exist, there are few that approach primary sources with differed methodologies. In order to analyse some of the dynamics that shaped this era, emphasis was placed on the nexus between state power, foreign influences and the role of secret societies.

This starting question, in turn, gave rise to secondary questions, namely: "How did the link between the government, external ideologies and secret societies shape the power structure of the time?" and "How was this link perceived by society?". The research outlined here was crafted to provide perspectives for answering these fundamental questions, by examining the dimensions of analysis, utilising a theoretical-analytical basis that underpinned the research´s design and methodological strategy.

Therefore, the general objective of this research is to analyse the relationship between the Nationalist government, secret societies and external influences, and their manifestations in the Nanjing decade. To achieve this goal, the following specific research objectives were delineated: i) To identify the various political lines (ideological stances) in President Chiang Kai-shek's rule during the Nanjing decade; ii) To analyse the representation of key government themes during the Nanjing decade, especially in the period 1934 to 1937; iii) To explore the relationship between government

---

[17] Namely the Northern Unification campaign and Civil conflict (1926-27), and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).

discourse and the perceptions of Chinese society. These objectives work together as a lens for interpreting the main themes of state ideology and action, secret society activity, identity, and social dynamics in the Nanjing decade. In this way, this research endeavours to present a nuanced understanding of the significant historical forces at play during this period.

3.2 Research rationale and strategy

To undertake the proposed study, this research employed a qualitative methodology, combining the collection of textual and imagery data during the period of the Nationalist government in the Nanjing decade. Flick (2018) indicates that qualitative methods, such as discourse and image analysis, are frequently used to explore meanings, practices and discourses. As such, this method can be associated with the study of relationships between political power and society in different contexts, allowing for a deeper understanding of how relationships and influences are constructed, realised, and contested by individuals and groups. Considering the previously described research objectives, the utilisation of a qualitative approach allows for a systematised analysis of multifaceted phenomena, capturing different perceptions, perspectives, and contextual subtleties, leading to an in-depth understanding of the object of study (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2018).

The adopted methodological strategy this research aims to test the following propositions: i) The rhetoric employed by the Nationalist government in President Chiang Kai-shek's speeches during the analytical period (1934-1937) reflects Western (external) ideologies and intrinsic Chinese values; ii) analysing the cartoon magazines of the Republican era (1934-1937) will reveal different societal perceptions and attitudes towards government policies and ideological constructs; iii) the close relationship between the Nationalist government, secret societies and external influences during the Republican era (1934-1937) significantly shaped power dynamics. These propositions derive from key elements defined in the research project, with the aim of addressing complex dynamics through a structured approach. Accordingly, following Bryman's (2012) insights, the formulation of hypotheses framed as qualitative questions enables the guidance of the research design, while also maintaining an exploratory approach conducive to discovering new conclusions or unforeseen answers.

3.3 Data sources and sampling

The process of selecting sources and data is a task that requires the researcher to make choices about the sampling method (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study will mainly concentrate on analysing primary sources, which allows for the interpretation of raw data and unedited content.

Based on the themes to be explored, the utilisation of primary sources aims to enhance the research's focus, without predefined variables or theoretical frameworks from interpretations, analyses, or discussions of primary sources undertaken by others (Bryman, 2016). Using the variety of

existing sources, it was decided to combine textual and imagery data during the period of the Nationalist government under study. Specifically, two types of primary sources were considered: i) speeches as textual sources; and ii) images and cartoons from entertainment magazines as visual sources. Given the wide range of possibilities and the methodological options outlined, a non-probabilistic and theoretical-intentional sample was used to select the speeches and images, based on their characteristics, experiences or specific information that is relevant to the established research questions (Vilelas, 2020). In this sampling technique, the selection criterion was not based on statistical considerations, but rather guided by the research objectives, aimed at identifying cases that can offer a comprehensive view and diverse perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation. Similarly, the sample size was not predetermined, and the point of data saturation cannot be predetermined (Bryman, 2012).

The primary textual sources chosen for analysis comprise speeches delivered by President Chiang Kai-shek. His speeches as leader of the GMD from 1924 to 1974, are key to understanding the government's strategies, policies, and interactions with external influences, providing a window into the complexities of governance and ideology in Republican-era China (CCFD, n.d.). This selection of source material was made due to its function as indicators of the official rhetoric and ideological stances of the Nationalist government during the Nanjing decade (1928-1937).

On account of the volume of speeches obtained, selection criteria were applied to prioritise those most pertinent to the study. The initial criterion entailed setting a temporal limit, confining the sample to speeches delivered between 1934 and 1937. Next, geospatial criteria were applied, favouring speeches made in urban centres[18]. Thirdly, a criterion of relevance to the topic was established (e.g. excluding technical-tactical lectures, speeches to military cadets, among others). This screening process made it possible to exclude speeches that did not address the themes or topics relevant to the research questions and objectives, thereby allowing more efficient subsequent data processing. To validate and clarify the selection procedure, a PRISMA-style diagram was created with the various selection stages and their respective criteria[19]. The final sample of textual sources totalled 49 documents (n=49), resulting in a manageable subset of discourses.

Cartoon magazines that circulated in urban centres during the same period were also selected as primary sources. From the collections available in the public domain of newspapers and periodicals from East Asia spanning 1850 to 1950, selection criteria were defined as publications from 1934 to 1937, followed by filtering based on magazine type and location, with a focus on Shanghai illustration

---

[18] Important urban cities close to the capital Nanjing and Shanghai, such as Nanchang and Hangzhou. Additionally, Wuhan was included due to its strategic location for trade and communications; and Lushan which was favoured by the GMD for conferences and party events during this period.
[19] See Annex A

magazines (*manhua*). The emphasis on publications from Shanghai is due to the city's status as a prominent economic, urban, and artistic hub, the significance of the publications, and, as discussed in Chapter 1, the location where the results of government initiatives were most tangible. Among the filtered sources with complete collections during the defined period of analysis, *Shidai Manhua* (Modern Sketch) was obtained. This magazine acts as a mirror of the zeitgeist, reflecting the unique perspective on society's perceptions, attitudes and reactions to government policies and ideological constructions. According to Crespi (2020), Shanghai's cartoon and caricature magazines were pioneers in China. With most illustrations capturing the essence of urban life and providing innovative visual critiques of the prevailing political and social landscapes, *Shanghai Manhua*[20] magazine initiated an exceptionally popular and influential art movement in 1928 (Laing, 2010). Following its closure, many artists transitioned to the Shidai (Modern) Publishing Group, which went on to create *Shidai Manhua*, regarded as one of the most significant magazines of the Republican period and the "centrepiece of China's golden era of cartoon art" (Crespi, 2011). *Shidai Manhua* was a monthly art and entertainment publication, issued from January 1934 to June 1937. Totalling 39 volumes, it enjoyed widespread popularity and, through its provocative imagery, portrayed the main crises and contradictions of the modern period with compelling visual impact (Crespi, 2011, 2020). The selection of images from the magazines was guided by various criteria to enable focused analysis of the visual content. In accordance with theories of visual salience, wherein factors such as size and contrast can influence impact (Itti & Koch, 2001; Wolfe & Horowitz, 2017), a selection criterion based on size was applied, selecting full-page format images. The additional selection criteria were based on the composition of the images, excluding those containing substantial blocks of text (more than a third of a page), sets of two or more comic strips, collections of short stories, advertisements, cropped or incomplete images, collections of documentary photographs, and images whose technical composition or quality precluded visual analysis. By applying these criteria, 656 images were selected for processing from a total of 1,732 pages (N = 656). Subsequently, a relevance criterion was applied, selecting images that corresponded to the cover, back cover and, if pertinent, centre section of each magazine volume and whose content could contribute to the defined objectives. The application of these selection criteria resulted in a final sample of 117 images from the visual sources, with the complete screening and selection process represented in the annex through a PRISMA-style schematic (n=117) [21].

3.4 Data collection and processing techniques

The data for this study were collected through documentary research, specifically focusing on the speeches made by President Chiang Kai-shek between 1928 and 1937, with a more detailed

---

[20] Shanghai Sketch, a weekly *manhua* magazine with 110 volumes, printed from 21 April 1928 to 7 June 1930.
[21] See Annex B

examination of data from 1934 to 1937. The same period was similarly delimited in the caricature magazines, namely *Shidai Manhua* (Modern Sketch), as previously mentioned. To ensure the reliability and rigour of the selected sources, preference was given to materials that allowed direct access to unaltered digital formats. Due to the age of the documents relevant to the study period, access to primary sources was facilitated through online repositories and digital archives.

To collect data on the speeches, the online repository of the "Chung Cheng Cultural and Educational Foundation" (CCFD) was utilised. Established formally in 1985, this foundation aims specifically to preserve a vast array of historical archives of the GMD party, thus allowing greater accessibility for future academic research. Affiliated with Taiwan's Ministry of Education and the Party History Commission of the Guomindang Central Committee, this foundation stands as a valuable and credible source of primary documents (CCFD, n.d.). Through this resource, it was possible to access President Chiang Kai Shek's official speeches from 1928 to 1937. For the purposes of data collection and subsequent processing, it was necessary to process each online page individually in order to obtain the various segments of discourse. To be able to compile the complete speeches separately, it was necessary to copy and convert the different online segments into digital format (Word), organising them by speech and year. In this context, 2960 pages of text were processed, resulting in 378 complete speeches. Since the speeches were accessible in traditional Mandarin, additional formatting was required for each document, defining the title, date, and location as independent variables, before starting the translation process into English. While the task of individually translating the speeches before applying the selection criteria was time-intensive, it was an essential step to ensure the correct execution of the filtering process.

As for obtaining the magazines and images, given their historical significance, a diverse array of online platforms and repositories were consulted. *Shuge* was used to retrieve digitised copies of the original *Shidai Manhua* magazines. Committed to open sharing, this online library based in mainland China allows users proficient in the Chinese language to access digitised content from original sources such as old and rare books, calligraphy, paintings, and other cultural and artistic works relevant to Sinology (Shuge, n.d.). Through a Chinese download account, it was possible to obtain the journals in their entirety, and as in the previous process, for each document, the date and volume were defined as independent variables at the time of saving.

3.5 Data analysis techniques and procedures

The primary method of data analysis in this qualitative research was categorical content analysis, supplemented by matrix analysis. Following the collection and selection of sources, content was analysed using a system of categories and coding, following the recommendations of Vilelas (2020). MAXQDA software was used for this purpose. Categorical content analysis involved a systematic

examination of textual data to discern patterns, themes, and meanings. This technique helps to explore the content of documents, interviews, or other sources, identifying recurring topics or discourses (Bryman, 2012; Vilelas, 2020), encompassing the categorisation and coding of data based on predetermined criteria and themes derived from the conducted literature review.

Although qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAs) is increasingly popular in the social sciences, its application to study the period of Republican China is new and relatively unexplored. The MAXQDA Plus 2022 content analysis program was selected because the ISCTE institution provides students with a user license and training. The use of MAXQDA facilitated the organisation, coding, and analysis of extensive qualitative data from various types of primary sources. Additionally, the program's advanced analytical tools enabled the handling of complex datasets and enhanced the research's analytical capabilities (Gibbs, 2014). This allowed for a more structured and comprehensive content analysis of the relationships between themes and key concepts, generating reports and visualisation tables to support the research findings.

Document analysis followed a series of steps, including data management, coding/categorisation, and analysis of the qualitative data collected. Firstly, all speeches were imported into the MAXQDA corpus. For each speech, it was necessary to define and insert the independent variables, namely the date (year/month/day) and location, to subsequently create subsets/collections of documents on the platform. The process was then repeated for importing and assigning independent variables to each magazine, resulting in a differentiated collection of documents with subsets. This systematic approach was important for selecting and working with the documents in a methodical and sequential manner. Using these variables, we can observe the sample distribution of the analysed speeches[22] and magazines[23]. Next, a coding system was established based on the themes derived from the literature review and the initial reading of the speeches. The segments of the speeches were then coded according to the established system, and the content was analysed. At this stage, and in consideration of the analysis, it became necessary to refine the coding system by introducing first and second-level codes[24]. The analysis of the speeches employed the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which describes six phases for carrying out thematic analysis and the respective verification criteria. Thus, the analysis led to the identification of five (5) main code dimensions, while the final coding system generated 19 categories and 1715 coded segments. The same categorisation system was applied to the content of the images, and considering the aim of exploring thematic relationships, the coding system was not altered at this stage[25].

---

[22] See Annex C
[23] See Annex D
[24] In the MAXQDA programme, codes can take on different levels, creating specific subsets and categories that help organise coding.
[25] See Annex E

Image analysis utilised two theoretical reference frameworks: Saussurean semiotics, which provided a solid basis for analysing the relationship between key visual elements (signifiers) and the cultural meanings they convey (signifieds) (Aiello, 2006; Banks, 2014). Additionally, genre analysis was applied when needed, allowing for the identification of themes (i.e. political, social commentary and entertainment) and recurring conventions (e.g. exaggeration, symbolism, and stereotypes) (Winter, 2014).

After completing the coding phase for the speeches and images, matrix analysis was applied. This entailed organising and analysing quantitative data through connection matrices and tables, enabling comparison, pattern identification, and exploration of relationships between cases[26]. The quantitative data utilised in matrix analysis primarily consisted of coded information to frame the body of research, facilitating the mapping of distribution according to a set of variables. As these variables do not directly impact the research objectives, the qualitative methodological strategy remained unchanged. By constructing a table of connections between codes and documents, it was possible to triangulate the findings obtained from the data collected in both phases and identify the most significant dimensions and their interconnections. On this premise, the following content analysis focused on these links, utilising speech excerpts and a selection of images to complement the body of text. Through these components, the divergences and contested narratives are shown, thereby providing an understanding of the relationship between government discourse, societal perceptions, and the main cross-cutting themes of national identity during the specified period[27].

3.6 Ethical issues

Regarding the qualitative nature of this study, no foreseeable ethical issues required a pre-approval process, as the data collection did not directly involve human subjects. Ethical considerations for this research mainly concern upholding academic integrity during the collection, utilisation, and processing of documentary data (Bryman, 2016; OECD, 2007). Hence, the correct citation and referencing of all used information sources were ensured throughout the research.

The contents of the speeches and magazines from the analysis period are in the public domain, and therefore, their use does not violate copyright laws. By taking advantage of these digital resources, this study was able to access and analyse a comprehensive array of variables, thus enriching the research. Nevertheless, adherence to the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and its revised standards from the 2023 edition, has been maintained in referencing the sources used to ensure the originality of the work (ALEEA, 2023).

---

[26] See Annex F

[27] Throughout this process, the aim was to validate the mentioned research propositions and potentially uncover new relationships that had not been anticipated.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data, delving into the thematic relationships identified in Chiang Kai-shek's speeches during the Nanjing decade, as well as in the images from the *Manhua* entertainment magazines of the same period. To this end, the data were analysed and interpreted, showcasing the political ideas and narratives articulated in the official speeches and popular visual media of the time.

Since different sources and types of data were used, Chiang Kai-shek's speeches were first analysed using a coding structure, followed by the analysis of images from cartoon magazines. The employed coding structure for the analysis is explained in detail, illustrating the main dimensions of categorisation and coding in both the speeches and the images. Subsequently, content analysis was conducted by applying the coding matrix to the main themes addressed by Chiang Kai-shek in the speeches, along with a semiotic analysis of the images to identify the underlying symbols and messages.

4.1 Analysis of Chiang Kai-shek's speeches

The richness of President Chiang Kai-shek's speeches as primary sources offers a perspective that closely approximates the reality of the era, avoiding detachment from context or potential bias from third-party interpretations[28]. This analysis is based on a sample of 49 speeches[29], from which the main variables were identified. Identifying the main independent variables of the primary sources was crucial for understanding the context, recognising patterns, and conducting comparative analysis. This approach enhances the validity and reliability of the analysis, contributing to a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, the recognition of key variables was essential for ensuring a respectful and nuanced interpretation of the data.

All speeches were classified according to location and date, with the analysis identifying the distribution of the sample by year and location[30]. A relative homogeneity was observed in the distribution over the study period, with the year 1936 showing the highest incidence at 36.7% of the speeches (n=18), followed by 1934 with 30.6% (n=15). Both 1935 and 1937 accounted for 16.3% of the speeches (n=8 each). Analysing by spatial criteria reveals the predominance of Nanjing, the capital of

---

[28] The speeches were translated from the original Chinese language into English, facilitating their analysis and coding. Translation was done by the author himself, as he has an academic background in Asian studies, particularly China, and professional experience in teaching Mandarin and English.

[29] As mentioned in the previous chapter, a universe of 1,354 speeches by President Chiang Kai-shek between 1927 and 1974 was initially identified, and selection criteria were applied as shown in Annex A.

[30] See Annex C

the Nationalist government, with 61.2% (n=30) of the speeches, followed by Nanchang with 28.6% (n=14). The remaining three locations show very low prevalence, ranging from 2% to 6.1%, thereby reinforcing the significant contribution of Nanjing to the study.

4.1.1 Analysis of the Speeches' Code Matrix Structure

The created coding system enabled the analysis and organisation of different concepts and contents into dimensions and categories. To develop a code matrix structure, the literature review on the subject served as basis, from which various themes and sub-themes emerged, allowing for the formation of a categorisation system. The main dimensions of analysis led to the establishment of the coding system in the software MAXQDA to explore the relationships between different themes and key concepts present in the data: i) National identity; ii) Political system; iii) Socioeconomic sphere; iv) External influences; and v) Cultural and social aspects.

Within these dimensions, categories were organised based on an initial analysis of the speech transcriptions and the significant themes relevant to the study, adjusted after a preliminary phase of coding. The documents were coded, resulting in a total of 1,184 coded segments, which are distributed distinctly across various categories (Table 1).

Table 1 – Coding structure for dimensions and categories and coding segment distribution

Codes (dimension - categories)	No. coded segments	Code information
1 National Identity	**325**	Elements that shape a nation's sense of identity, including traditional values, nationalism, and specific concepts such as Confucian citizenship.
1.1 Traditional values	82	
1.2 Nationalism	146	
1.3 Confucian citizenship	97	
2 Political System	**291**	Explores the structures of power and leadership and examines how power is referenced and used, the role of militarisation and issues such as corruption, including morality, authoritarianism and oppression.
2.1 Power structures and leadership	112	
2.2 Militarisation	72	
2.3 Authoritarianism and oppression	51	
2.4 Corruption	56	
3 Socioeconomic Sphere	**130**	Socio-economic aspects of life in society, including the influence of financial power, the importance of education, the realities of urban life and the presence of discrimination and inequalities.
3.1 Financial power	16	
3.2 Education	86	
3.3 Urban life	18	
3.4 Discrimination and inequalities	10	
4 External Influences	**210**	Different forces that act on a country from outside its borders, such as relations and the impact of external influence, international relations, the influence of external and progressive ideologies, the impact of armed conflicts and the presence of foreign influence.
4.1 International relations	49	
4.2 Ideology (external)	34	
4.3 Armed conflict/war	31	
4.4 Foreign influence	96	

5 Cultural and Social Aspects	228	Integrates the cultural and social fabric of society, as well as the role of secret societies, leisure activities such as art, tourism and sport, the dynamics of gender relations and the role of women, as well as the ongoing modernisation process with all its elements.
5.1 Secret societies	35	
5.2 Leisure (art, sport, tourism)	14	
5.3 Gender	12	
5.4 Modernity	167	

Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

By employing comprehensive primary codes, categories were defined to identify patterns, relationships, and potential disparities within the sample. Additionally, a guide was created to support this process[31] , linking each dimension with its respective concepts and detailing the meaning of each category. The presentation of the coding structure used for analysis aids in understanding how code segments are distributed across categories and the contributions by documents[32]. In the analysis of the Code Matrix, certain categories were found to stand out from others due to the number of coded segments, thereby indicating differing weight and relevance. The following sections elaborate on the results obtained for each dimension.

4.1.1.1 National Identity

National identity (325 coded segments) is the most prominent dimension across all the speeches, with the category of *nationalism* (146 segments) being the most significant, referenced in 44 speeches (90%), or the vast majority. This is followed by the category of *Confucian citizenship* (96 segments) present in 33 speeches (67%), and the category of *traditional values* (82 segments) in 65% of the speeches.

Regarding the distribution by independent variable, specifically location, this dimension maintains its centrality throughout the study period without significant variations. The relationships between codes demonstrate that the categories are closely related to each other. For example, *nationalism* and *citizenship* intersect multiple times (20 points of connection), as do *traditional values* and *nationalism* (17 points of connection). As for the relationship between national identity and the political system, there is a clear connection in the speeches between *nationalism* and *power structures and leadership* (23 points of connection). In the socioeconomic sphere, there is a link between *citizenship* and *education* (19 points of connection). However, the strongest connections within this dimension are with the category of *modernity,* intersecting 38 times with *nationalism* and 32 times with *citizenship*, highlighting the importance of progressive ideas in Chiang Kai-shek's narrative, which will be discussed further.

---

[31] See Annex G
[32] See Annex H, Annex I, and Annex J

4.1.1.2 Political system

The dimension of the political system (291 coded segments) is the second most prominent dimension across the speeches. Within this dimension, the category of *power structures and leadership* (112 segments) is mentioned in 80% of the speeches, making it the third most significant category in this analysis. The category of *militarisation* (72 segments) is mentioned in 26 speeches (53%). Interestingly, the analysis by variable reveals that the category of *corruption*, despite not being the most prominent within the dimension (56 segments), appears in more speeches (55%) and has a higher incidence in the speeches from the year 1934 (27 segments). This indicates Chiang Kai-shek's concern with this issue during the year of implementing normative civic movements and moral rejuvenation initiatives, particularly the New Life Movement.

A clear relationship is observed between the category of *power structures and leadership* and the categories of *authoritarianism* (18 points of connection) and *modernity* (16 points of connection), which, as analysed in the previous dimension, are closely linked to *nationalism*. The category of *militarisation* displays several points of connection with *nationalism* (13 points of connection) and *citizenship* (15 points of connection). However, it is noteworthy for its strong association with *modernity* (24 points of connection) and *education* (16 points of connection), reinforcing the idea of militarisation as a modern form of civic education, i.e., with a significant influence of political and military power on the social, cultural, and economic aspects of society. Despite its lower prominence, a consistent connection is observed (7 points of connection) between the category of *power structures and leadership* and *secret societies*, as well as between *authoritarianism* and *secret societies*, reinforcing the idea of secret societies within the political system dimension. As expected, the category of *corruption* is more closely connected with the vices of *urban life* (9 points of connection), followed by the connections with *power structures and leadership* (7 points of connection), indicating a link between corruption and power in urban centres, evident in the critical tone and analysis conducted by President Chiang Kai-shek.

4.1.1.3 Socioeconomic sphere

The dimension with the least weight across all speeches is the *socioeconomic sphere* (130 coded segments), wherein there is a clear prominence of the category of *education* (86 segments) mentioned in over half of the speeches (56%), when compared to other categories within the same dimension such as *financial power* (16 segments), *urban life* (18 segments), and *discrimination and inequalities* (10 segments). The analysis by variable demonstrates a proportional balance in the distribution of the *education* category over time, highlighting its significance in the President's speeches.

As mentioned in the previous dimensions, there is a significant connection between *education* and *citizenship* (19 points of connection), as well as with *militarisation* and *nationalism* (both with 16 points

of connection). However, once again, the most prominent connection is with *modernity* (30 points of connection), indicating that education played a crucial role in shaping national strengthening frameworks and concepts. This modernity is accentuated by the association of *education* with *foreign influence* (10 points of connection) and *traditional values* (11 points of connection), suggesting that it should maintain traditional elements of self-cultivation and personal development in combination with external progressive ideas and techniques.

4.1.1.4 External influences

The dimension of analysis, *external influences*, totals 210 coded segments. The category of *foreign influence* (96 segments) is the strongest category within this dimension and ranks fourth across all speeches, being present in 71% of speeches. Although it is a significant category throughout the study period, it is most pronounced in the year 1934 (43 segments), decreasing in subsequent years. The second most relevant category is *international relations* (49 segments). However, the analysis by variable shows a temporal increase in the category of *armed conflicts* (31 segments), with a higher correspondence in the year 1937. This reflects Chiang Kai-shek's concern in his speeches about the changing world order and the successive danger of war with Japan by the Chinese government, particularly with the approaching armed conflict to the Nanjing capital.

Within the same dimension, the categories exhibit significant proximity to each other, with *foreign influence* closely linked to *ideology (external)* (14 points of connection) and *international relations* (10 points of connection). There are also very significant connections between the *foreign influence* category with *nationalism* (14 points of connection), *education* (10 points of connection), and *power structures* (10 points of connection), respectively. Additionally, the relationship between *international relations* and *nationalism* presents an interesting value with 14 points of connection. Nevertheless, it is essential to highlight the intense connection between *external influences* and *modernity*, particularly with *foreign influence* (51 points of connection) and *ideology* (16 points of connection). This relationship demonstrates a predominant influence from the external world during this period and in governance, which cannot be dissociated from the ongoing modernisation process undertaken by the Nationalist government.

4.1.1.5 Cultural and social aspects

In the dimension of *cultural and social aspects*, 228 segments were coded, of which 167 segments correspond to the category of *modernity*. This indicates that besides being the most prevalent category within this dimension, it also has the highest number of coded segments and ranks as the second most significant in relation to the total number of speeches (86%). The category of *modernity* is characterised by its transversal nature throughout the coding system, regardless of the distribution variable. Within

this dimension, segments referring to other categories such as *secret societies* (35 segments), which have already been analysed in relation to other dimensions, were coded, along with *leisure* (14 segments) and *gender* (12 segments). Although these categories have less prominence, they offer revealing elements of the rhetoric of Chiang Kai-shek's government.

As observed in previous analyses, the category of *modernity* intersects primarily with *national identity* (81 points of connection), followed by its connection with *external influences* (75 points of connection), the *political system* (49 points of connection), and the *socioeconomic sphere* (40 points of connection). This analysis reveals that modernity is a central theme in cultural and social discourses, permeating various aspects such as national identity, external influences, politics, and the economy. Conversely, the category of *secret societies* primarily intersects with *citizenship* (6 points of connection) and with the categories of *power structures* and *authoritarianism* (7 points of connection each). Regarding the *leisure* category, there is a relationship with *nationalism* (8 points of connection), but without significant connections with other categories (with 3 or fewer points of connection). However, the speeches indicate a new form of leisure aimed at fostering a new sense of contribution to the national effort. Surprisingly, there is limited reference to gender issues and the role of women in the President's speeches, compared to the literature review which highlighted this theme as crucial for the modernisation and social development of a revitalised China.

4.1.2 Content Analysis of Speeches

The structure and coding matrix served as a compass to guide the in-depth analysis of the differences between dimensions and categories, shedding light on their main relationships. Thus, the analysis of the content of President Chiang Kai-shek's speeches enables a comprehension of the multifaceted dynamics present in his contributions, as well as framing them with illustrative excerpts from his own speeches. Each excerpt taken from the original speeches is translated from Mandarin to English, with the city and date indicated when Chiang Kai-shek delivered them.

4.1.2.1 The strong interconnection between Nationalism and Confucian Citizenship

In President Chiang Kai-shek's speeches, numerous mentions of the need for the implementation of the New Life Movement demonstrate the intense connection between nationalism and Confucian citizenship, reflecting an attempt to revitalise national identity through the incorporation of traditional values. The president advocated a vision of nationalism that not only emphasised China's unity and independence in the face of external threats but also sought internal moral and cultural renewal.

> *"(…) to cultivate the national consciousness of ordinary citizens and improve their national concepts! Understanding the principles of etiquette, justice, integrity and the responsibilities of*

modern citizens means knowing that "every man is responsible for the rise and fall of the world" and " holding arms to defend the country", which is the duty of modern citizens!" (Nanjing, March 20, 1934).

A recontextualisation of Confucian-based citizenship was identified, with its principles of loyalty, filial duty, and social harmony serving as the ethical foundation for this revitalisation of a new national identity. Chiang Kai-shek sought to foster a sense of social cohesion and moral discipline that would sustain the modernisation of the country without forsaking its cultural roots, by integrating Confucian values into the policies and practices of the New Life Movement.

"(…) based on our traditional Chinese founding spirit, I feel that the New Life Movement that is in line with etiquette, justice, integrity and suitable for modern survival is the current national salvation, founding and rejuvenation." (Nanchang, February 19, 1934).

This fusion of nationalism and Confucian citizenship, combining elements of external and progressive influences (e.g., science, physical education) with traditional values (self-cultivation, harmony, discipline), resulted in a new political line. We can observe this concept in the speeches of the President towards the end of the Nanjing decade.

"(…) to complete the revolution, develop our nationalism, develop our inherent morality and new science at the same time, and build a new country." (Nanjing, June 15, 1937).

This ideology aimed to strengthen civic spirit and individual responsibility, promoting an environment where citizens were simultaneously patriotic and morally upright. This was a crucial condition for the national revitalisation project advocated by the Nationalist government. Yet, in this project, Chiang Kai-shek supported the idea of non-resistance to Japan, attempting to instrumentalise this position and a narrative of victimisation as a means of national consolidation. This is evident in how he refers to this historical phase as a period of national sacrifice for the sake of unification and strengthening the spirit of the Chinese people. The connections present in his discourse demonstrate how the concept of nationalism was imbued with external influences and conflict, evolving into an idea of revenge for past national humiliation.

4.1.2.2 Political power, authoritarianism, modernity, and nationalism: an explored relationship
Analysing the connection between political power, authoritarianism, modernity, and nationalism present in the speeches, one can identify that Chiang Kai-shek wielded his political power in an authoritarian manner. Excerpts from the speeches demonstrate an attempt to promote a modernisation project akin to the German and Japanese models, thereby aiming to strengthen the nation against internal and external threats.

> *"Obedience is the foundation of responsibility." (Nanjing, April 6, 1936).*

> *"The new principles can be implemented in accordance with my plan. I dare to say to all comrades that within three to five years, we can avenge and revive. I hope that you will understand my intention, and obey my orders (…)." (Nanjing, February 22, 1937).*

Nationalism was central to this endeavour, serving as a tool to unify the country under a common ideal of national revitalisation with a progressive yet conservative character. The concept of modernity, in turn, was pursued through reforms aimed not only at economic and technological development but also at the moral and social renewal of China. As such, the speeches contain several references to the need to centralise the power structure, industrialisation and infrastructure projects, and administrative reforms that should adhere to normative standards similar to those abroad.

> *"Wash away all the decadent, sloppy, messy and rough habits. This kind of responsibility should of course be shouldered by the chiefs of the central ministries and commissions (…)." (Nanjing, March 1, 1936).*

However, these projects are linked to broader concepts of "duty to contributively improve" towards the nation, an idea strongly reinforced by President Chiang Kai-shek throughout this period. The New Life Movement exemplified this agenda by emphasising discipline, hygiene, civic education, and traditional values as duties of the population in service to their country, and as foundations for the construction of a modern and robust society.

> *"The New Life Movement launched by our brothers last year is to enable all people across the country to cleanse themselves of old filth and renew their spirit, so as to rejuvenate our nation and build a modern country." (Hangzhou, January 1, 1935).*

> *"The New Life Movement, to put it bluntly, is to modernise the spirit and actions of the people across the country. We know that modern times are the "era of science", and the so-called "modernisation" means "scientific", "organised" and "disciplined". In a nutshell, it is "militarisation." (Nanjing, February 19, 1936).*

Therefore, there was a normative trend with this movement, in which the ideas of progress and discipline served as references to the need for the militarisation of society, and consequently, its submission to Chiang Kai-shek's governing structure. Whilst this idea was not explicitly stated in his speeches, it was subtly present and replicated in various cities, aiming for society to mirror his narrative. As before, it underlines a whensoever sacrificial willingness towards one's country.

"What is the new life movement that I am advocating now? To put it simply, it means that the militarisation of the lives of the citizens across the entire country! Be able to develop the habits and instincts of being brave, quick, hard -working, and especially consistent, and be able to sacrifice for the country at any time!!" (Nanchang, February 19, 1934).

These political initiatives reinforced Chiang Kai-shek's authority while propagating a vision of modernity rooted in nationalism and Confucian values, creating a synergy between political control, national identity, and social progress. It is intriguing to comprehend and reflect on how this conservative vision diverges from the main historical landmarks of the preceding Republican era.

4.1.2.3 Moral Corruption and Leadership

The themes of corruption and leadership are particularly interesting to analyse due to how Chiang Kai-shek addresses the issue of moral corruption and its impact on leadership. The President perceived these phenomena as among the greatest obstacles to national regeneration and the construction of a strong and modern China. In his speeches, he frequently emphasised the need for upright and morally exemplary leadership as the foundation for effective and respected governance, connecting these concepts as a means of modernisation and progress.

"We must remove all bad and corrupt individuals and even the entire society and country, in other words, old thoughts, actions, habits, and habits (...) Then we can become a modern person, and then our country can build a modern country." (Nanjing, February 19,1936).

The New Life Movement appears conceived as a response to these challenges, promoting values as antidotes to moral decay. Within this moral deterioration, Chiang Kai-shek encompasses various distinct elements. For example, he highlights the inefficiency, lack of commitment, and lack of rigour in meeting administrative schedules and deadlines. The speeches also mention the negative effect of the vices and trends of young people in urban centres, emphasising the connection to a new, more libertarian lifestyle that does not align with the more conservative progressive vision of the government.

"If you are not careful in what you do and say, great fraud will occur. And because you are not strong-willed, all the corrupt habits in society are more likely to seduce you onto the path of depravity, especially in places like the Shanghai Concession." (Hangzhou, January 1, 1935).

A target of particularly strong criticism is the performance of the police, which the President considers completely ineffective in addressing national issues, and as a source of corruption and oppression in society. Chiang Kai-shek sought to transform, through campaigns of civic and moral education, the leadership positions that could act locally and serve as an example.

"But now our police in China are useless and harmful (…) Corruption, extortion, even collusion with bandits, oppression of good people, and all kinds of evil! (…) It is best to abolish them all." *(Nanjing, May 10, 1936).*

Rather than simply criticising the police, and disqualifying it, the president attempted to influence the people, encouraging a culture of virtue that could sustain the modernisation effort and strengthen the social fabric. This approach underscored his belief that true leadership could not exist without a solid moral foundation and that the eradication of corruption was essential to achieve effective governance and lasting national rejuvenation.

4.1.2.4 Education as a gateway to modernity and national strengthening

In the context of the Nanjing decade, education stands out as a fundamental pillar for modernity and national strengthening. Chiang Kai-shek believed that China's modernisation could not be achieved without a robust educational system that promoted both intellectual and moral development of citizens.

"To achieve great success, we must understand the principles of science, exert the spirit of science, and use scientific methods." (Nanjing, February 14, 1936).

While highlighting the need for an education that integrates traditional Confucian values of discipline, respect, and responsibility, the speeches supported the incorporation of modern scientific and technical knowledge. The integration of external ideologies and foreign influences brought practical benefits to the educational system. Thus, ideologies such as the scientific method and practical training based on skills and applicability became focal points and reinforced the role of schools and universities. However, this process in no way diminished the validity of traditional philosophical knowledge, as it was defined as a natural consequence based on the same foundational learning ideals.

"We must study and do things with a scientific spirit and scientific methods to revolutionise and build a country, we must first pay attention to continuous research (…) left to us by our ancients, and it is worthy of our continued efforts to carry forward." (Nanjing, May 20, 1937).

Education was considered a means to improve the technical skills of the population and as a tool to instil a sense of civic duty and patriotism. By educating the youth in principles of hygiene, civics, group sports, athleticism, and morality, Chiang Kai-shek aimed to create a new generation of citizens who could lead the nation, following a more militarised-style structure.

"This means that the government should be responsible for teaching ordinary people to understand military affairs, have martial arts, and especially to understand how to be a human

being. The truth is that only by knowing the responsibilities of citizens can we defend ourselves and the country." (Nanjing, March 20, 1934).

An example which can be identified in the speeches is education and youth scout associations. Replicating models prevalent in more modern countries became central to his national revitalisation strategy, once again emphasising militarisation and discipline as an identity-forming process in society, with athletic abilities as the foundation for a more defensively capable and modern China.

"Because the people of the country, especially your dear young Boy Scouts, can believe in the Three People's Principles, support the National Government, obey the orders of the country, and abide by revolutionary disciplines (…)" (Nanjing, October 10, 1936).

Hence, the modernity conveyed in the speeches and implemented policies was not a final objective but rather a process to attain a strong and self-sufficient China, united under a renewed sense of national identity and prepared to confront the challenges of the 20th century.

4.1.2.5 Foreign influences and external ideology on Chinese identity and modern nationalism

In the context of Republican China, Chiang Kai-shek's speeches and his advocacy for the New Life Movement reflected how foreign influences and external ideology shaped Chinese identity and its concept of modern nationalism. During this period, exposure to a wide array of ideologies and modernisation models from the West and Japan had a profound impact on the country's development strategies. Chiang Kai-shek, recognising the need for modernisation to resist external pressures, repeatedly praised the German context as a successful case.

"(…) I took Germany as an example. Regarding the rejuvenation of the country and the nation, it is not the strength of the force, but the wisdom of the people." (Nanjing, February 19, 1936).

As observed in other passages, there are several references indicating an attempt to integrate authoritarian elements of foreign ideology with traditional Chinese values, often referencing discipline, education, and militarisation as a means of national recovery. Similarly, there is even an appeal for the imitation and adoption of foreign habits as a way to create new ways of being.

"How could Turkey, Italy and Germany complete their revolutions and build new countries so quickly, while our revolution has failed today? The fundamental reason is that ordinary citizens know etiquette (…) especially in Germany and Italy. None of them fails to abide by social order and strictly observe group disciplines. By extension, they are loyal to the country and nation and fulfil their national responsibilities." (Nanchang, March 5, 1934).

Chiang Kai-shek's speeches make no direct mention of fascism, although it is implied in some of his shared ideas. There is an apparent desire on the part of the President to incorporate into China a renewed leadership model by integrating these external influences which would favour his governance.

> *"(…) we advocate a new life. Where to find a practical role model? I think the life of ordinary foreigners in China is the best practical model for the new life (…) their spirit and rules of life, their daily routine, behaviour and attitude, and all their good habits, such as loving cleanliness, keeping order, helping each other, being gregarious, etc., are almost all things that we Chinese people lack and should imitate immediately."* *(Nanchang, November 19, 1934).*

Several references to modern practices and principles from Japan also exist, particularly related to the New Life Movement and its emphasis on hygiene, efficiency, and civic education. These practices were adapted to the Chinese context and reinforced with Confucian principles.

> *"For example, when I was an enlisted student in Takata, Japan, the coldest place, no matter how heavy the snow was or how cold the weather, I always wiped my body with cold water every night before going to bed and washed my face with cold water after getting up in the morning. After the habit is formed, it will not stop for a long time."* *(Nanjing, February 14, 1936).*

> *"It would be best for Britain and the United States to sponsor or acquiesce in allowing Soviet Russia to participate in the Far East War and work together with China to overthrow Japanese imperialism."* *(Nanjing, November 5, 1937).*

The selective adaptation of foreign elements reinforced a highly pragmatic component, which was observed throughout the speeches, highlighting factors considered beneficial and detrimental to the modernisation effort. This perspective helped shape a modern nationalism that valued both cultural heritage and the need for progress and innovation.

4.1.2.6 Leisure and secret societies: a lesser, yet still significant interconnection with nationalism and citizenship

In the Nanjing decade, leisure and secret societies played distinct yet interconnected roles in the expression of nationalism and citizenship. Political elite secret societies worked behind the scenes to organise social and popular initiatives, seeking to shape a new sense of civic identity and strengthen the nationalist cause. In this context, speeches mention the power of the Church and the connectivity between different associations that should assume leadership positions among the population. Furthermore, references to leisure times emphasise that they should be seen as opportunities to improve civic behaviour and contribute to national development.

"(...) the power of the Church is now so widespread and deep in Chinese society that it is beyond the reach of the government, the party, and any organisation! ... we should take advantage of the situation and cooperate (...) so that the spirit of our New Life Movement can be infused into the church!" (Nanchang, November 19, 1934).

Although on a smaller scale, the interconnection between secret societies, leisure, civic participation, associativism, nationalism, and citizenship allowed for a reflection of the complexity and diversity of the political and social context of the time.

"(...) there are more than twenty gentlemen present at the meeting today. If everyone, (...) can directly and indirectly fulfil the responsibilities of publicity, persuasion, supervision and execution. This power must be more powerful than an ordinary 200,000 people." (Nanjing, February 1, 1936).

The speeches, albeit not explicitly, mention the presence of organisations undermining social cohesion, linking them to the inability to fully achieve revolution and social transformation. The critical references to trade unions are interesting, revealing a dichotomy between those who contribute and those who destabilise the national effort.

"Since you volunteer to be a special agent, you must sacrifice all personal freedoms to contribute to the group, absolutely obey the orders of the chief, and abide by the will of the chief." (Hangzhou, January 1, 1935).

In this regard, the role of elite secret societies and associations is highlighted, emerging as a resolution element. These groups, in turn, should strengthen obedience to the leader and assist in the creation of similar associations. In other words, coercion to follow the daily order imposed by the central state was encouraged, reinforcing the legitimacy of associations that exerted pressure on the population, thereby validating the use of authoritarianism and oppression as instruments for national reinforcement.

The speeches analysed revealed that the leader's vision was heavily influenced by external factors, shaping modernity during the Nanjing decade. Under Chiang Kai-Shek, Chinese identity was redefined to include a strong national consciousness based on discipline, sacrifice, and militarisation. Moral corruption and weakness were seen as barriers to this idealised development, thus justifying the use of secret society elites and authoritarian measures for a rejuvenated modern China.

4.2 Analysis of the Manhua entertainment magazine images

The analysis of images published in the magazine *Shidai Manhua* (Modern Sketch) during the Nanjing decade, particularly between 1934 and 1937, provides a critical and multifaceted approach to Chinese society during a period of intense transformation. These magazines contain caricatures and cartoons through which artists explored themes such as foreign influence, urbanisation, political corruption, authoritarianism, and profound social and cultural changes. Examining the image sample by year and volume revealed a balanced distribution over the study period[33]. Of a total of 117 images analysed (N=117), both the years 1934 and 1935 accounted for 31%, with each year contributing 36 images (n=36). The following year, 1936, contributed 27 images, corresponding to 23%, followed by 1937 with 15% (n=18). The slight decrease in the final year is explained by the discontinuation of the publication in July, coinciding with the worsening Sino-Japanese conflict and the consequent evacuation of Shanghai. The analysis by volume reflects the same trend and considering that all images come from the same publication in Shanghai, a geospatial analysis was deemed unnecessary.

4.2.1. Analysis of the Image's Code Matrix Structure

In this phase of analysis, the coding structure and dimensions remained unchanged, preserving the foundational structure and coding matrix for analysing the images. By employing the same codes and subcodes, the study aimed to investigate the primary thematic relationships among the images. The coding process resulted in a total of 531 coded segments, allowing for an examination of their characteristics and distribution[34]. Since each image is in full format per page, and unlike the cases of speeches, there is no advantage in fragmenting into multiple segments, and a given code will only be applied once per image. Each image can be coded with different categories, reflecting the richness of the images' representativeness. Exceptional cases may apply to images with multiple frames (e.g., panel images with various scenes that form a single image).

Given that the same dimensions of analysis were employed for the sample, the following subsections detail the specificities of segment coding for the images. Additionally, the most significant contributions by the document are identified. Similar to the procedure used in the analysis of speeches, the Image Code Matrix[35] reveals categories that stand out from others, suggesting different weights and relevance among the categories. These points of connection serve as focal points for interpretation.

---

[33] See Annex D
[34] See Annex K.
[35] See Annexes I, K and L.

4.2.1.1 National Identity

The dimension of *national identity*, unlike what was observed in the speeches, has the least weight in the totality of the images (69 segments). Nevertheless, there are still references to the concept of *nationalism*, which is the most prominent category within this dimension, being present in 33 images (28%). The category of *traditional values* is observed in 24 images (21%), while *Confucian citizenship* is referenced in only 12 images (10%). Thus, in entertainment magazines, nationalism, though represented, is not one of the primary themes, and even less attention is given to Confucian citizenship.

When analysing the most significant relationships between categories, three connections stand out: the link between *nationalism* and *power structures and leadership* (24 points of connection), *foreign influence* (19 points of connection), and *modernity* (15 points of connection). Another noteworthy connection is between *traditional values* and *modernity* (12 points of connection) and *discrimination and inequalities* (11 points of connection). These connections highlight how nationalism interacts strongly with structures of power and leadership, foreign influence, and modernity. Meanwhile, traditional values are in tension with modernity, also revealing persistent issues of discrimination and inequality.

4.2.1.2 Political System

Regarding the dimension of the *political system* (127 segments), it is the second most prominent dimension in the images, with two categories being worthy of reference: *corruption* (46 segments) and *power structures and leadership* (44 segments), which correspond to approximately 38% of the images analysed. It is notable that these are also the third and fourth most represented categories in the total images, respectively. The category of *authoritarianism and oppression* appears 28 times in the images, but *militarisation* (9 segments), despite its significance in the discourse and ideology of Chiang Kai-shek, is barely represented here.

In addition to the aforementioned representativeness, there is also a high level of interconnectivity among these categories. According to the analysed data, graphical references to *power structures and leadership* are connected to *corruption* (20 points of connection) and to *authoritarianism and oppression* (14 points of connection). This idea is reinforced by the link between *authoritarianism* and *corruption* (16 points of connection), demonstrating how the images in the magazine associated these issues. In contrast, the category of *militarisation* shows weak connections within its dimension or with other categories. The most significant connections in the dimension are between *corruption* and *modernity* (20 points of connection), *corruption* and *discrimination* (19 points of connection), *power structures and leadership* with *foreign influence* (19 points of connection), and closely followed by the connection with *modernity* (18 points of connection). This indicates a significant nexus between

modernity, foreign influence, and the categories of the political system, which was also evident in the President's speeches, albeit from a different analytical perspective.

4.1.2.3 Socioeconomic Sphere

In the *socioeconomic sphere* dimension (95 segments), *urban life* (present in 35 images, 30% of the documents) and *discrimination and inequalities* (referenced in 38 images, 32% of the documents) are the most prominent categories. The *financial power* category appears in 28 images, but the significant difference lies in the *education* category, which only had 4 segments coded. This marks a substantial difference compared to the speeches, as noted in the previous discourse analysis, where education was the most significant category in this dimension and the sixth most prominent category.

Analysing the nodes in this dimension, the *urban life* category shows significant connectivity with *modernity* (27 points of connection), representing the strongest relationship in this dimension. However, this category is also linked to *discrimination and inequalities* (18 points of connection) and *foreign influence* (16 points of connection). There is also a strong relationship between *discrimination and inequalities* in *modernity* (21 points of connection). Considering the previously mentioned connections with *corruption*, it can be inferred that urban life depicted in the images is influenced by external forces and a modernisation process that creates complex, discriminatory, and unequal dynamics in society.

4.1.2.4 External Influences

The dimension of analysis of *external influences* totals 108 coded segments, with the most relevant category being related to *foreign influence* (52 segments), which also represents the second most important category across all images (44%). *Armed conflict* (23 segments) and *international relations* (22 segments), both appearing in approximately 18% of the images, are the second and third most relevant categories in this dimension. Representations of elements that were related to the category *ideology (external)* only appear coded in 11 segments.

The analysis of the code relationship matrix shows a close connection within this dimension, notably between *international relations*, *foreign influence*, and *armed conflict/war* (17 points of connection), reflecting a global order that was reorganising itself amid the international war scenario. Despite the previously mentioned prominence of the category *foreign influence* due to its connections with *nationalism* and *power structures* (19 points of connection), *urban life* (16 points of connection), and now additionally with *leisure* (15 points of connection), its primary link is observed with *modernity* (37 points of connection). This connection between *foreign influence* and *modernity* carries significantly more weight compared to the other mentioned connections, indicating that the external

world was intrinsically associated with elements of modernity and progress, continuously and jointly influencing the dynamics existing in the Nanjing decade.

4.1.2.5 Cultural and Social Aspects

Comprising 132 coded segments, *cultural and social aspects* emerge as the most substantial dimension in the analysed images. The most relevant category throughout the analysis is *modernity* (65 segments), observed in over half of the images used in this study (56%). Besides its prominence in this dimension, modernity is a cross-cutting theme throughout the coding system, regardless of the distribution variable, as also observed in Chiang Kai-shek's speeches. Additionally, within this dimension, the coding includes categories such as *secret societies* (19 segments), *leisure (art, sport, tourism)* (28 segments), and *gender* (20 segments), with the latter two showing more prominence in the images than in the President's speeches.

The category and theme of *modernity* intersect primarily with *foreign influence* (37 points of connection) and *urban life* (27 points of connection), followed by its connection with *leisure* (24 points of connection). This demonstrates a nexus of intense connectivity, indicating its capability to shape social habits and dynamics in urban centres. Further observations can be made, such as analysing *modernity*'s strong connections with *discrimination and inequalities* (21 points of connection), *corruption* (20 points of connection), and even *power structures and leadership* (18 points of connection). This may lead to the reflection that although modernity is a central and ubiquitous theme in society, its impact is portrayed as harmful and dangerous. Regarding the *gender* category, it presents interesting characteristics, intersecting with *modernity* 16 times, but also with *urban life* (11 points of connection) and *leisure* (10 points of connection), suggesting a shift in the social role of women in certain contexts. As for the *secret societies* category, the relationship between *authoritarianism and oppression* (10 points of connection) and *corruption* (15 points of connection) is highlighted. While there is correspondence with *power structures* and *modernity* (both with 6 points of connection), the links of secret societies to authoritarian and repressive programs, as well as to networks of corruption and criminal organisations, become apparent when compared to the low index of connectivity with other categories.

4.2.2 Semiotic Content Analysis of Images

The matrix analysis of relationships revealed that various dimensions and categories are intertwined, with modernity emerging as a central theme permeating several dimensions, which would be expected given that the analysed magazine had a progressive character. These data were recognised and elaborated upon in the previous section, where the weight of modernity as the most expressive analytical category was noted, along with its connections to other dimensions and categories. However,

this concept proves to be versatile, as modernity is associated with both negative aspects (such as corruption and inequalities) and positive ones (lifestyle and innovation). This critical view enriches and challenges the analysis, enabling an interpretation of the data in light of the results obtained, as well as their meanings. The contents of the magazine and the representations in the various images are more than just documentation of their time. They are repositories of knowledge serving as platforms for artistic, political, and social expression, capturing the complexities and contradictions of a China in full transition, which are particularly relevant due to their authenticity and origin. Consequently, the content analysis of the images and the symbolism used, combined with historical and social contextualisation, allows for an understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play.

4.2.2.1 Foreign influence and its impact on national identity

As a magazine from the city of Shanghai, the main port hub, it reflected the expression of a privileged epicentre of cultural and economic interaction with the West and Japan. The magazines captured the duality of foreign modernity[36], often alluding to Art Deco style, graphic representations of jazz habits and culture, and the growing culture of consumerism regarding overseas goods, imports, and fashions, thus emulating the styles present in major European cities. An example where the idea of modernity can be observed is in the presence of themes such as the 'modern girl and boy' in the caricatures, illustrating the adoption of Western lifestyles that gained prominence (Figures 1 and 2). These figures were depicted with a mixture of glamour and critique, often in leisure situations inaccessible to much of the population.

Figure 1 - A young "mother" and her "son"   **Figure 2 – A Modern Couple**

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.3 (March 1934)   Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.8 (August 1934)

---

[36] The images in the *Shidai Manhua* magazine signalled the profound impact of foreign influence on Chinese national identity during the Republican China period, showing both assimilation and resistance to it.

By downplaying more traditional and antiquated styles, the representations depict this drastic transformation simultaneously as a source of fascination and repulsion. These new habits also displayed a social status and financial power, indicating an ambiguity in the acceptance of these foreign influences.

On the other hand, national identity in the images was often linked to themes of nationalism, political power, and modernity, being influenced by how the government responded to external pressures. Although foreign influence was associated with modernisation and progress, it raised significant questions in society about the loss of traditional values and the threat to national integrity. The Japanese invasion during the Nanjing decade and the territorial concessions to Japan, signed in 1936 by the Chinese government, revealed Chiang Kai-shek's attempt to create a nationalist sentiment focused on the internal enemy, notably against the Chinese Communist Party and the loss of Confucian morals in society, neglecting the external Japanese threat. Indignation towards growing Japanese aggression is evident in images depicting Japanese individuals violating or kidnapping Chinese women while observers remain passive (Figure 3). References to Japanese aircraft flying over and invading Chinese territory, and acts of collaboration with Japanese military and government officials (Figures 4 and 5), serve similar purposes, reinforcing the common negative stereotype. These representations illustrate factors of social transformation, with satirical images about Japan portraying a real threat while simultaneously criticising the government's narrative of victimisation and passivity.

Figure 3 – The guest's view and support

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.18 (June 1935)

It can be seen that Chinese identity has been shaped by various factors, such as imperialism and war, government censorship regarding traditional Chinese ethics, industrialisation, and Western influences resulting in rampant capitalism, among others. This process has resulted in an amalgamation of different concepts and a culturally challenging definition.

Figure 4 – Viewing the East Sea at sunrise

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.24 (December 1935)

Figure 5 – The losing chess pawn

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.31 (October 1936)

The different graphic representations show how these elements blend in a chaotic manner, suggesting that Chinese identity can be approached humorously, critically, or even as the expected outcome of a modern democratic process, albeit disjointed (Figure 6 and 7). This approach also contrasts with the government's project to create a modern identity for a strengthened China, demonstrating a failure of the New Life Movement and identity confusion instead of national cohesion.

Figure 6 – The Shanghai landscape

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.1 (January 1934)

Figure 7 – Typical Chinese man

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.25 (January 1936)

The critique of Chiang Kai-shek's authoritarian government and its policy of appeasement toward Japanese aggression reflected a concern for national sovereignty that influenced the sense of Chinese identity and citizenship. Issues of national identity were often portrayed in relation to political power, external influences, and the process of modernisation, demonstrating an interdependence amongst

these elements in social and economic transformation. In this context, nationalism came under criticism, being associated with power structures deemed ineffective and potentially corrosive foreign influence on society, reflecting the dilemma of the interaction between traditional values and modern progress in the face of a sovereignty crisis.

4.2.2.2 The Complexity of urban dynamics: external modernity as internal discrimination

During the Nanjing decade, Shanghai, and other Chinese cities experienced intense urbanisation driven by modernisation policies and the presence of foreign communities with extraterritorial rights. This rapid transformation was influenced by external forces that generated tensions and social challenges, resulting in processes of discrimination and inequality. Consequently, modern urban life became a rich source of inspiration for *Shidai Manhua* artists, who portrayed the city as a space of contrast between progress and decay. Their images expressed a profound ambiguity regarding urban life, highlighting issues such as housing, lack of space in new urban centres, accelerated lifestyles, traffic problems, as well as poverty (Figures 8 and 9).

Figure 8 – Modern life seduction	**Figure 9 – The old violin player**
Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.8 (August 1934)	Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.34 (January 1937)

Modernisation brought the promise of progress but also revealed social inequalities and moral degradation. Blending elements of real life with the fantastical, artists depicted a city marked by the problem of prostitution and the criminal organisations that controlled it, along with a population increasingly engaged in modern vices. The frequent representations of prostitution illustrated the decadence of society (Figures 10 and 11), serving as a metaphor for an increasingly weakened China oppressed by external powers with greater financial capacity.

Figure 10 – In the dead of the night
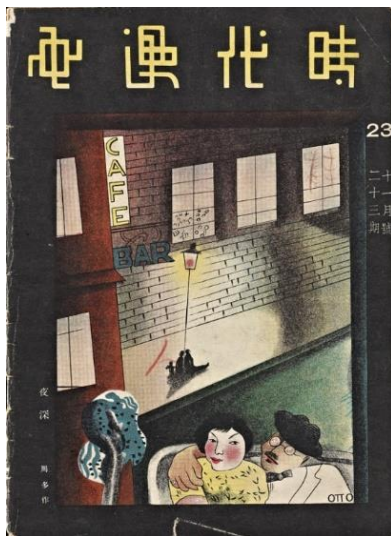
Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.23 (November 1935)

Figure 11 – Effective soliciting
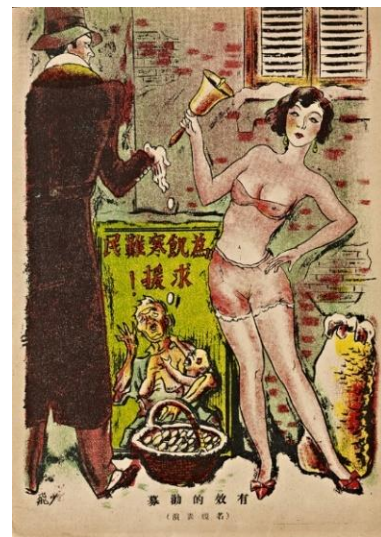
Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.2 (January 1937)

Urban life was often associated with themes of modernity, social discrimination, and foreign influence, reflecting a complex network of sociocultural dynamics. The representation of dogs driving or engaging in dubious acts was frequently used as a symbol for foreign citizens, criticising their distinctive social status of superiority over local communities. While buildings appeared as compact spaces for various illicit activities, the prohibition of walking on certain streets in urban centres, reserved for commerce by the economic elites, evidenced social segregation and class differentiation (Figures 12 and 13).

Figure 12 – Spring in the city

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.34 (January 1937)

Figure 13 – The new colonial situation

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.13 (January 1935)

Images referencing different treatments based on socioeconomic status highlight the transformation of social and cultural roles. Furthermore, caricatures of urban life reveal the influence of foreign lifestyles while also criticising corruption and inequality resulting from rapid modernisation.

4.2.2.3 Corruption and Political Power: symbols and symbolism of a 'modern' government

The close interconnection between corruption, political power, and modernity underscored a network of influence permeating the political system, suggesting that modernisation could be associated with corrupt practices and oppressive power structures. The *Shidai Manhua* magazine explored this link through incisive visual criticism of Chiang Kai-shek's authoritarian government. In various images, representations of corrupt officials, individuals receiving bribes, and situations of complicity with criminal activities were common, indicating the perception that political power was deeply rooted in corruption (Figures 14 and 15). Symbolism such as blindness and sunglasses, as well as bags of money, frequently appeared in this context, highlighting a deliberate intent for personal illicit enrichment (Figures 14 and 16).

Figure 14 – Nothing to see here

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.29 (August 1936)

Figure 15 – Public officials misconduct

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.19 (July 1935)

Figure 16 – Over the weight capacity

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.6 (June 1934)

One of the main targets of criticism was President Chiang Kai-shek and the New Life Movement. Presenting himself as a defender of impeccable morality and the ideals of traditional Chinese values, the movement sought to restore a moral compass in society and instil a sense of discipline and honesty in the population. However, the frequent references to the New Life Movement's inability to solve national problems led to its portrayal as a series of superficial actions and sanitisation efforts, demonstrating how the movement itself functioned as a governmental advertising campaign to clean up its image. Additionally, the president's actions and his well-known connections with criminal organisations did not allow him to escape an image of duplicity that contrasted with his speeches. The promotion of known criminals from Shanghai to administrative structures, financial ties with the criminal underworld for military operations against the Communist Party and funding of the Nationalist Party, and his long history of vices and gambling problems were directly referenced in the magazine's images, resulting in issues with censorship (Figure 17).

Figure 17 – Who would believe that there wasn´t any other choice?

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.15 (March 1935)

The images often reference the global uncertainty of the time and how this volatility influenced political power. Faced with the international context, characterised by the rise of fascism, communism, and liberalism, as well as the escalation of conflicts in Europe and Japan, China struggled to define its position in relation to these actors. Thus, the increasing authoritarianism of the government was depicted alongside fascist ideology, portraying a new world in chaos. Representations of Chinese individuals giving the Nazi salute or being pressured by various foreign ideological lines reflected the preference of the Chinese Nationalist government for a militaristic progressive ideology in a world destined for war (Figures 18 and 19).

Figure 18 – New battle lines?

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.1 (January 1934)

Figure 19 – World of lines

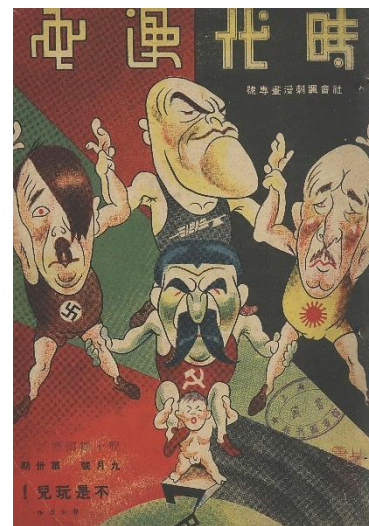Source*: Shidai manhua*, Vol.33 (December 1936)

Nonetheless, there was an avoidance of explicitly representing government leaders, opting instead for indirect implication. Equally intriguing were the portrayals of the Catholic Church, depicted as an integral part of global conflict rather than a deterrent. In light of Chiang Kai-shek's increasing valorisation of the Catholic Church, advocating for the harmonisation of these ideals with Confucian tenets, satirical images demonstrate resistance to the imposition of new conservative or religious foreign ideologies (Figure 20).

Figure 20 – Pity mankind and God will provide

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.23 (November 1935)

Figure 21 – Funny games

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.30 (September 1936)

In the 1930s, fascist leaders like Adolf Hitler in Germany and Benito Mussolini in Italy ruled with authoritarian control, leveraging aggressive nationalism and militarism to consolidate power. They viewed war as a strategic tool to assert dominance and as a demonstration of their regimes' strength

and ideology. By framing war as a game for achieving their imperialistic ambitions, the artists reference its leverage on world affairs and its attractiveness for the weakened Chinese Nationalist government (Figure 21) The increasingly authoritarian nature of the Nationalist government is also heavily referenced in the images, associating the notion of a progressive government with totalitarianism and imposition.

The representations infer that the connection between modernity, corruption, and authoritarianism did not contribute to fostering a nationalist sentiment and a sense of sacrifice as advocated by the government, but rather generated a feeling of injustice and inequality among the population, especially among the most vulnerable in the nation. The images depict repressive actions of the central power against the young or disadvantaged, unnecessary deaths in futile campaigns in the name of national symbols, and false justifications for violence against the oppressed in the name of national strengthening (Figure 22). Police actions are also criticised, closely associated with corruption and violence promoted by the government (Figure 23). Therefore, police violence is presented as a reflection and outcome of government policies, rather than as separate or external factors to central leadership.

Figure 22 – A Glorious day for our nation	**Figure 23 – Office is open**
Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.28 (July 1936)	Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.36 (March 1937)
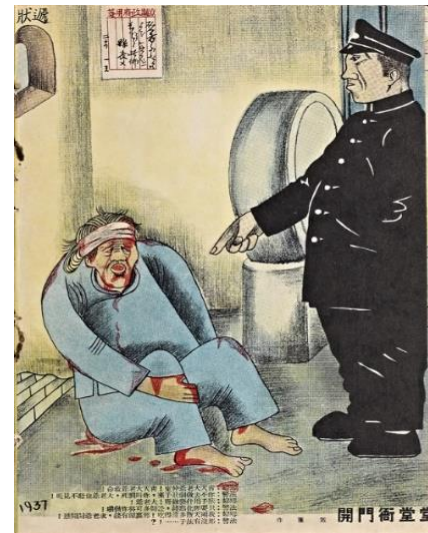
Consequently, the connection between authoritarianism, modernity, and corruption in the caricatures reflects the artists' critique of how power was exercised, satirising the figure of President Chiang Kai-shek and other political leaders to expose the weaknesses of the government. In the images, the presence of leaders wearing coloured glasses or representations of a rigid hierarchy highlights the disconnect of governmental leadership from the real issues of the population (Figures 24). The hierarchical representation has a dual significance, portraying the different power struggles among internal factions within the Guomindang, emphasising a continuous "game of musical chairs" and the

duality between an apparently strong but unstable party. The depiction of the ministerial structure as the Chinese football team, subject to domestic ridicule for its poor international performance, and President Chiang Kai-shek as the captain reinforces the idea of governmental inefficacy and incapacity (Figure 25).

Figure 24 – Who "counts" in China
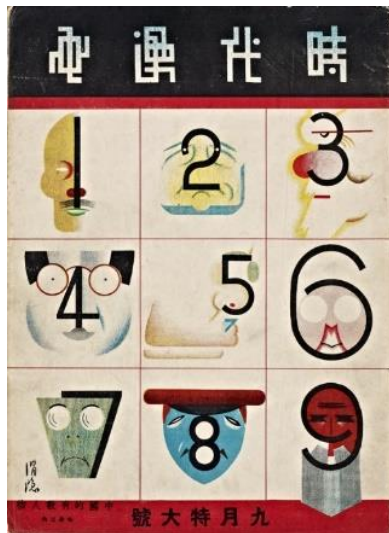
Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.9 (September 1934)

Figure 25 – Choosing China´s team for football

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.24 (December 1935)

Considering that the connection between corruption and power structures was a recurring theme, addressed both directly and indirectly, artists expressed a sense of disillusionment with the political leadership present in society. In addition to a negative assessment of the authoritarian tendency of power structures, resembling the fascist movements of Europe and Japan, there was a growing perception of the government's ineffectiveness in addressing national problems. Naturally, the diversity of representations reflected an undeniable foreign influence and elicited interpretations of how the modernisation process was politically managed, associated with corrupt practices and illicit enrichment, as well as being a factor of inequality and discrimination.

4.2.2.4 Corruption and authoritarianism: the hidden influence of secret societies on the political landscape

Secret societies, as depicted in *Shidai Manhua*, were often associated with corruption and authoritarianism, indicating a perception of the existence of hidden forces manipulating Chinese politics and society. The caricatures connected these secret entities to power structures and corruption, highlighting their negative influence on the political landscape. By symbolically representing the involved actors as puppets, artists illustrated the relationship between these societies and the government, visually criticising the lack of transparency and the manipulation of power (Figure 26).

Additionally, there was a direct symbolism of influence, whether over law enforcement entities through bribery or over political-military decisions through coercion (Figure 27). This imagery underscored the connection between financial power and the exacerbated inequality by these secret society elites.

Figure 26 – The World's New Low

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.19 (July 1935)

Figure 27 – Don't arrest the driver, take my card instead
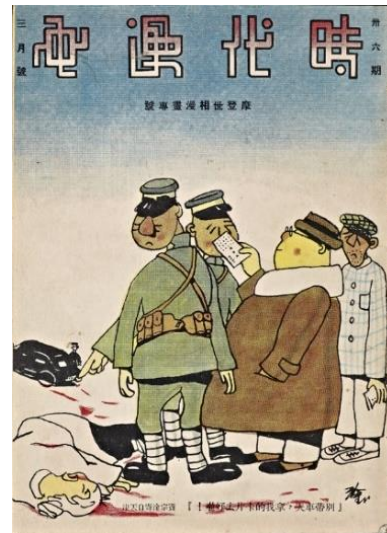
Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.36 (March 1937)

As mentioned previously, secret societies are closely linked to the criminal networks of the underworld in Shanghai, with representations critical of these elements being much more subtle compared to those related to the government. The images highlight the outcome of these connections, exposing the normalisation of opium and prostitution networks, which, although criticised by the central government, instrumentalised them as a source of profit.

Figure 28 – Birth of the local "snakehead"

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.16 (April 1935)

Figure 29 – Shanghai's Fresh Milk

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.17 (May 1935)

Therefore, artists often resorted to metaphorical symbolism to emphasise these interconnections (Figures 28 and 29). By portraying wealth as differently sized fish, a common symbol associated with fortune due to the phonetic similarity between the terms, they demonstrated the elites' control over others. This power is also represented by food chains, with the symbolism being more explicit. Yet, these metaphors had a deeper meaning, as the hierarchical nature present in the pictures mirrored the rigid social structures promoted by Confucian principles, highlighting the subjugation and exploitation inherent in such a system.

The relationship between societies, elites, and corruption not only exacerbates authoritarian control in the city of Shanghai but also triggers internal struggles among criminal factions. Symbolically, the images portray the city of Shanghai as a nest of venomous snakes, with these secret elites feeding crime, oppression, and social inequality, which consequently ensured their political influence. The presence of secret societies highlighted the atmosphere of distrust and fear permeating Republican China. The caricatures suggested that, beyond the visible problems of corruption and authoritarianism, there was an additional layer of hidden manipulation, aggravating the sense of injustice and oppression.

4.2.2.5 Social and Cultural Transformations: an urban, foreign, leisurely, and increasingly modern lifestyle

Modernisation directly impacted cultural and social aspects, including changes in gender roles and societal dynamics, revealing a process of transition and continuous reconfiguration. However, the magazines portray this modernity as a process associated with discrimination, inequality, and corruption, suggesting a critical and harmful influence on society, and revealing underlying tensions. By addressing new forms of leisure based on foreign models, such as tourism, holiday trips, summer beach resorts, among others, as well as a new lifestyle focused on relaxation and physical stimulation, the caricatures also highlight social inequality and injustice. These representations expose how these new habits were exclusive to a restricted group of society, using the darkened tone of skin to emphasise this exclusivity. The tanned skin of urban elites is presented similarly to the dark skin of agricultural workers, underscoring the harsh reality of the poor and the exploitation of labourers (Figures 30 and 31).

These themes were particularly relevant in a society marked by an unequal distribution of wealth and power, highlighting the role of the central government. Thus, the images also refer to the government's inability to address such issues, indirectly reinforcing the relationship between the political system and profound social transformation.

Figure 30 – New season opens

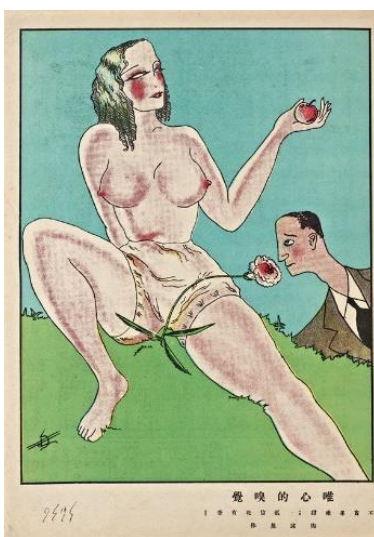Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.28 (July 1936)

Figure 31 – Wilderness hunger victims
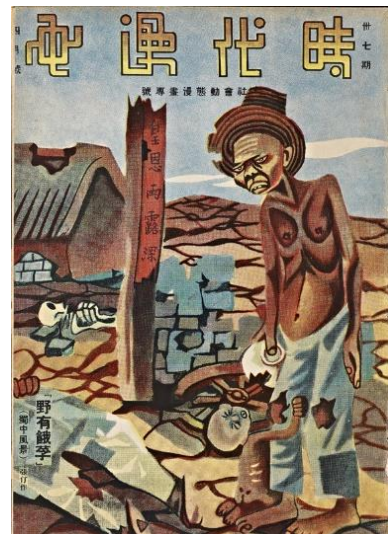
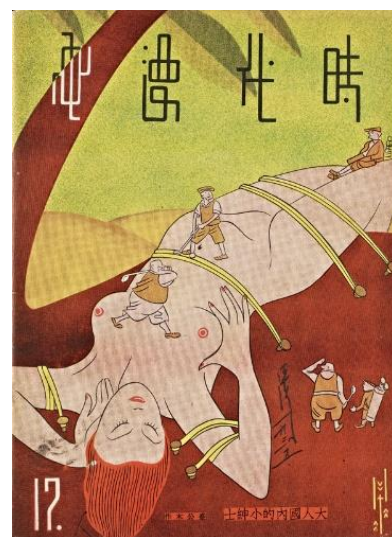Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.37 (April 1937)

Progress via foreign-styled modernisation brought rapid changes in values and social behaviours, mirrored in the images of urban life and modern figures. In this context, one can observe a greater creative and sexualised freedom in the representation of women, where the more assertive role of the modern woman in society carries connotations of power and control over men. Although the use of the female body, in an attractive or sensual manner, aimed to increase magazine circulation, the erotic imagery also contained political subtexts, criticising the degradation of women and the moral hypocrisy of society. Through sexualisation, the images reflected a culture of voyeurism and objectification of women, while also denouncing their exploitation (Figures 32 and 33).

Figure 32 – Idealistic sense of smell

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.5 (May 1934)

Figure 33 – The superior country´s small gentleman

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.17 (May 1935)

The freedom of expression in the magazine allowed for an open critique of authority figures and of the established order, providing a platform for cultural and political resistance. One of the characteristics of *Shidai Manhua*'s artists is that they used their works to resist and criticise the injustices they observed. As a result, this critique was multifaceted, encompassing various elements simultaneously.

By utilising animal imagery in allegorical format, the artists referenced traditional values of Chinese culture, such as the importance of the Chinese zodiac and the traditions of Spring festivals (Figure 34). Yet still, by depicting these animals in specific actions, they transformed them into representations of colloquial idiomatic expressions, signifying exaggeration, greed, extortion, and abuse, among other aspects of modern society, to expose insightful political messages. Similarly, the depiction of divine entities succumbing to the vices of modern life demonstrated the existing dichotomy, and how tensions between modernity and tradition significantly shaped Chinese national identity.

Figure 34 - A world of beastly creatures

Source: *Shidai manhua*, Vol.32 (November 1936)

Therefore, the images in *Shidai Manhua* addressed a wide variety of topics relevant to modern China, such as economic inequality, semi-official corruption, the growing authoritarianism of the political system, rural-urban divide, student protests and oppression, tastes of urban middle-class elites, Japanese depredations, representations of women, among many others.

Understanding these themes as transversal elements of national life, the magazine served as a mirror of Chinese society at the time, displaying its tensions, challenges, and aspirations through a critical and satirical lens. The diversity of styles and contexts represented highlights how closely the artists observed their environment, both locally and internationally, creating a distinctive language that

portrayed this specific historical reality. Despite the critical and acerbic tone influenced by artistic movements abroad, their images did not simply copy European models. Through Chinese artistic production, they sought not only to denounce what they considered wrong but also to show that the irreversible process of modernisation in which they found themselves did not need to be externally conditioned, encouraging readers to seek new cultural and social solutions.

Discussions of the results

In this chapter, the discussion of the results is presented, triangulating the data obtained with their implications in relation to the formulated research objectives and questions. Thus, the analysis focuses on the relationships between discourses and images, resulting from the main thematic connections, in light of the principal theoretical and historical frameworks. This section begins with an examination of the link between the government and power structures, particularly concerning the ideological representations of President Chiang Kai-shek during the late Nanjing decade. This is complemented by popular perspectives and social criticism, which lead to a reflection on the interactions between the Nationalist government, secret societies, and external influences.

5.1 Politics and Governance in the Republican Era: Ideological Positions and Representations of President Chiang Kai-shek during the Nanjing Decade

Governance in the Republican era in China, particularly during the Nanjing decade (1928-1937), was characterised by profound political, social, and ideological transformations. The leadership of Chiang Kai-shek and the implementation of the Nationalist Party's (Guomindang, GMD) policies played a crucial role in this period, reflecting a complex balance between modernisation, authoritarianism, and the legacy of Sun Yat-sen (Bian, 2010; Eastman, 1984a; Hsü, 2000). In this context, it is pertinent to understand how Chiang Kai-shek and his government positioned themselves in relation to external ideologies and secret societies, particularly in the period preceding the Sino-Japanese War, and how they were socially represented.

Chiang Kai-shek's speeches demonstrated his desire to shape the ideological direction of the party, with the results of the discourse analysis indicating a strong connection between authoritarianism and modernity. National identity and nationalism were the most prevalent ideas in the content of his speeches. This reinforces the views shared by Wakeman (1997) and Xu (2019), who noted that Chiang Kai-shek, upon assuming leadership of the GMD, steered the country towards a path of authoritarian conservatism, which became evident during the Nanjing decade. This marked a departure from the path set by Sun Yat-sen, who emphasised a combination of nationalism, democracy, and social welfare.

Another aspect to highlight from the analysis of Chiang Kai-shek's speeches and representations during the late Nanjing decade was the adoption of authoritarian conservatism, as discussed by Dirlik (1975) and Strauss (1997), in direct response to internal and external crises threatening China's stability. Chiang Kai-shek's role in shaping the GMD's ideology and his attempts to revitalise the nation

through the New Life Movement is evidence of his efforts to balance modernisation with traditional values. These efforts faced significant challenges due to corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and the constant threat of war, as mentioned by Ferlanti (2010) and Spence (2012). Consequently, Chiang Kai-shek's leadership style was affected by this reality, as reflected in his speeches. On the one hand, he was influenced by elites close to him who promoted the incorporation of progressive practices from abroad. On the other hand, he was also heavily influenced by his own traditional military ideals. It becomes evident how President Chiang Kai-shek sought to implement his ideological revitalisation for the Chinese people, particularly in the realm of power structures, emphasising education and discipline through militarisation. Thus, he exercised authoritarian leadership that appealed to modern times while being grounded in the doctrine of traditional values and Confucian citizenship.

Throughout the speeches, the idea of militarisation as a modern form of civic education is consistently reinforced, with a strong influence of political and military power on the social, cultural, and economic aspects of life in society. An increase in the intensity of the speeches and arguments aimed at militarisation and societal discipline was observed. This idea is exemplified by the rise of stricter control measures and censorship, utilising authoritarianism and violence. These elements demonstrate an evolution in Chiang Kai-shek's ideological position, favouring adaptation and learning from external influences over merely implementing foreign administrative models. This resulted in an increasingly centralised power structure revolving around the leader as a totalitarian figure, who in turn became increasingly critical of society and his own party. The leader's criticism of the superficiality and frivolity of modern society was a recurring theme in his speeches, where he denounced the lack of substance within the GMD and the need to revitalise the party through strong leadership. He viewed modernisation as essential to confronting political and economic challenges, including the communist threat and Japanese aggression. Thus, the analysis of Chiang Kai-shek's speeches during the late Nanjing decade reveals his commitment to building an image of stability and moral strength. The President's emphasis on social order, discipline, and hierarchy reflected his commitment to a centralised and authoritarian government as a means to achieve modernisation and address the crises of the 1930s. However, it is noteworthy that the images do not indicate an interest in promoting this ideological and political line, as there are no visual representations that consistently support the message propagated in the official speeches.

To achieve this commitment, external influences played a crucial role, with the Nationalist government selectively adapting foreign ideologies and practices to bolster its modernisation efforts. This revealed a significant interaction with external ideologies and governance models in their discourses, such as the integration of components from fascist movements in Europe and Japan, which were perceived as beneficial for national recovery and China's modernisation process. Notably, the incorporation of authoritarian elements from foreign ideologies, such as those from Italy, Germany,

and Japan, was seen as promoting discipline, order, and rapid national development. Despite some structural and practical similarities between the GMD and foreign authoritarian movements, there was a complex fusion of classical Confucian principles, a Christian ethical code, and military ideals, extending far beyond Eastman's (1972) characterisation. This resulted in a reformist culturalism with Chinese characteristics, leading to a period characterised by conservative and progressive authoritarianism. This concept is ambiguous, as it merges traditional social relationships, traditional military rectitude, and certain aspects of totalitarian fascist ideology into a deeply nativist concept under Confucian moral ideals. This ambiguity is also strongly represented in the images, which, despite a clear association with authoritarianism, show the government navigating various ideological lines (fascism, liberalism, socialism, conservatism, traditionalism) in an attempt not to deviate from its foundational revolutionary doctrine.

It is also important to mention the role of paramilitary associations, such as the Blue Shirts and other groups subservient to Chiang Kai-shek, which in his speeches served as examples of leadership and strength before society, simultaneously promoting a nationalist and authoritarian vision. Similarly, secret societies of political elites, like the Inspirational Society and the Vigorous Practice Society, often operated behind the scenes, aiming to define flags, political programs, and national objectives to unify the country under nationalist ideals. It is therefore pertinent to highlight the New Life Movement and how its normative framework resulted from the actions of these forces in connection with President Chiang Kai-shek's governmental structure. The movement sought to shape a new citizen identity by integrating leisure and participation with responsibility and duty, thereby strengthening commitment to the nationalist cause. Regarding Chiang Kai-shek's stance on criminal secret societies, which included the police, these were used as arguments for the President to delegitimise them while elevating his power, ideology, and narrative of re-educating the populace through discipline.

5.2 The Nationalist Government, Secret Societies, and External Influences: Popular Perceptions and Social Satire

The growing presence of a more Western lifestyle in Chinese cities highlighted economic inequality, which widened throughout the Nanjing decade. Cultural representations and social satire frequently criticised this disparity, emphasising the contradiction between the image of progress and modernisation propagated by the government and the reality of increasing poverty and economic hardship in Chinese society. In this context, the emergence of figures that served as symbols of modernity and change in Republican China (e.g., Modern Girl and Modern Boy) represented new aspirations and lifestyles influenced by Western culture. This starkly contrasted with Chiang Kai-shek's speeches, which promoted a vision of modernisation rooted in rigid conservative morality.

The Nationalist government under President Chiang Kai-shek faced several internal challenges, including the influence and activity of organisations like the Green Gang, which had deep roots in Chinese society and played complex roles as both agents of resistance and collaborators with local authorities (Martin, 1995; Ownby, 1996). The analysed images depict an intricate relationship between the Guomindang government and these clandestine entities. The Nationalist government attempted to control and, in some cases, co-opt these societies to strengthen its power base, as they could be seen as potential threats to central authority due to their mobilisation capacity and social influence. The nexus identified between modernity, corruption, and discrimination demonstrates an interdependence between the modernisation process implemented by the central government and the blatant corruption present in society. It was observed that, unlike the speeches, the images primarily focused on elements associated with cultural and social life. Numerous representations allude to modernity, foreign influence, and corruption. As Chin (2017), Wakeman (2003), and Wang (2017) noted in their research of internal reports and historical documents from the GMD and secret societies, a strong social transformation driven by the political system is confirmed, which is inseparable from the corruption depicted in the images analysed. The influence of secret societies was particularly significant in Shanghai, where they were involved in illicit activities such as opium networks and prostitution, as mentioned by Marshall (1976), Martin (1995), and Stapleton (1996). Thus, despite being condemned by the central government, these activities were used as sources of profit. The magazine images demonstrated how society was aware of the influence trafficking, illustrating the negative perception and impact of these entities on society.

By using symbolism, these images criticised the corruption, inefficiency, and complicity of the government with the secret societies that benefited it. These secret societies, whether political or financial entities, were often perceived as hidden forces manipulating Chinese politics and society. The representations in magazines contrasted with the analysed speeches, which valorised these elites as useful instruments for shaping a new form of modern nationalism tailored to China's characteristics and needs. Thus, the images not only exposed the regime's failures but also provided an outlet for popular discontent, allowing people to express their frustrations indirectly. References to urban life, where opium, police violence, and criminal associations were increasingly normalised, reveal biting criticisms of Chiang Kai-shek's regime, highlighting the contradictions between official statements and the reality experienced by ordinary people. By showcasing the disparity between Chiang Kai-shek's words and actions, the images employed social satire as a critical weapon. While official speeches painted a picture of progress and morality, popular images frequently depicted a government that was corrupt and complicit with clandestine elements and foreign influences.

Another significant factor in the images is the foreign influence in China, including that of Japan, the Soviet Union, and Western powers, which played significant roles in Chinese politics. Foreign

presence appears as a frequent theme in social satire, where authors and artists criticised the Nationalist government's reliance on foreign aid and the influence of these powers on China's internal policies. By depicting foreign figures as manipulative, predatory, or exploitative, the images reflect popular resentment towards external interference and the loss of national sovereignty. This sentiment of disillusionment influenced the issue of national identity. The various thematic relationships identified demonstrate an interaction between Chiang Kai-shek's speeches and the social context, highlighting how the President's messages were designed to influence public perception and behaviour. This connection is evident in the detailed analysis of how external ideologies were adapted to fit Chinese values.

Faced with the Chinese government's passivity, which advocated for the need for national strength and honour, the non-confrontational tactic towards an increasingly aggressive Japan in Chinese territory created a sense of incomprehension in society. The images reflect a patriotic sentiment and cohesion in the face of the Japanese invasion, not due to government initiative, but by criticising the notion of sacrificial nationalism that the government promoted. Although these representations do not directly reference the issue of national identity, there are numerous allusions to this feeling of impunity and humiliation. One can infer that, despite nationalist efforts to create a modern identity, society had to adapt to an increasingly unjust and unequal reality, resulting in identity confusion rather than patriotic cohesion.

Consequently, the latter period of the Nanjing decade was crucial in forming a new Chinese nationalism, strongly marked by the military conflict against Japan. The Japanese invasion, culminating in the brutal occupation of Nanjing in 1937, left deep scars and served as a social catalyst, fostering a sense of resistance and national unity. Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang promoted a strong sense of national identity, articulated as a response to external threats and as a means to unify a country fragmented by internal conflicts and regionalism. This nationalism influenced diplomatic relations during the CCP's governance, with the communist government using the memory of resistance against Japan to reinforce national cohesion and legitimise its control.

Conclusions

Throughout this research, it was observed that Chiang Kai-shek led the GMD towards a path of authoritarian conservatism, which became evident during the Nanjing decade, with the external world influencing his vision for modern China. However, this period was characterised by an attempt to reaffirm traditional Chinese values in response to the internal and external pressures China faced. Chiang Kai-shek's speeches frequently emphasised the need for discipline, morality, and national unity, portraying the President as an image of stability and moral strength, highlighting the importance of Confucian ideals and modernisation for China's progress. Yet, this image starkly contrasted with the realities of corruption, inefficiency, and violence associated with his regime. This contrast underscored the discrepancies between the official propaganda and the daily experiences of the Chinese people, where the duality between official rhetoric and governmental practice created an environment of distrust and cynicism among the population.

The President's speeches reinforced that, instead of copying foreign models, a process of hybridisation occurred, involving the adaptation of foreign elements complemented by the reinforcement of traditional Chinese values. An example of this pragmatic approach by leader Chiang Kai-shek is the combination of classical traditional values with modern scientific methods to create a unique blend of modern education, illustrating the exploration of different ideological positions during his government. The introduction of the New Life Movement exemplifies this approach in various speeches, where the President sought a moral and cultural revitalisation through Confucian discipline and morality, combined with elements of Western modernisation. In this effort, political initiatives became crucial, focusing on the militarisation and civic education of the population. The numerous references and connections to the New Life Movement with national salvation highlight the leader's concern with counteracting the existing moral degradation. At the same time, it confirms the existence of a fragmented, weakened country with clear social divisions.

Based on the analysed data and in alignment with other authors (e.g., Eastman, 1979; Wakeman, 1997; Mitter, 2013), we can assert that Chinese identity under Chiang Kai-shek's leadership was redefined according to foreign models to include a robust national consciousness. This identity was able to appropriate external influences without losing its cultural roots, promoting a sense of pride and national cohesion crucial for the country's resistance and revitalisation. The strong thematic interactions present in the speeches—among national identity (composed of traditional values, Confucian-inspired citizenship, and nationalism), power structures and leadership, foreign influence, and modernity—demonstrate an interdependence between these elements. The recurrence of these themes also supports Wakeman's (1997) assertions, revealing the existence of a nationalist military

and civil education system that developed a new form of political thought focused on progress, modernity, and control. In other words, the government managed to integrate modern fascist ideology into its political system while acknowledging fundamental Confucian traditions to redefine the concept of Chinese identity. Conversely, moral corruption and weakness were seen as barriers to this necessary and idealised development. President Chiang Kai-shek's ideas were not limited to political speeches but were also reflected in the caricatures and popular images of the time. By using exaggeration, symbolism, and stereotypes, these images served to reflect and critique Chiang Kai-shek and his policies. These popular representations show how the President and his government were perceived by the public, often highlighting the disparity between the government's aspirations and the realities faced by the population.

While Chiang Kai-shek's speeches provided an articulated and detailed perspective on the political and cultural ideologies of the time, as well as the national problems and important initiatives considered by the President, the images in *Shidai Manhua* magazine critically captured the social and cultural changes through rich and multilayered visual representations, challenging what the President said. Popular perceptions and social satire played a crucial role in scrutinising and assessing Chiang Kai-shek's government policies. The duality between official speeches and popular representations reveals the tensions and contradictions inherent in the regime, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the government and the ways in which the Chinese population responded to these pressures.

Secret societies were intimately linked to corruption, authoritarianism, and criminal networks. They played instrumental roles in various aspects, including law enforcement, policing, political-military decisions, and legislation, often through coercion and bribery. The presence of secret societies and their connection with the government were seen as factors that exacerbated corruption and authoritarian control, contributing to social inequality and oppression. Artists highlighted these interconnections, depicting the control of elites and the normalisation of corrupt practices. The images portrayed hierarchies of wealth and power, emphasising the manipulation and exploitation by the elites of secret societies, which further fuelled societal distrust and criticism of the government. This connection exacerbated social inequality and a sense of impunity, fostering an atmosphere of doubt and fear in Republican China.

Therefore, when analysing the main question of the relationship between the Nationalist government, secret societies, and external influences in the Chinese Republic (1934-1937), one can define it as intertwined, mutually supportive, and multifaceted. The Nationalist government, led by Chiang Kai-shek, actively engaged with influential secret societies, integrating them into its power structure. Concurrently, it incorporated various external influences from fascism, communism, socialism, and Western modernisation efforts. These elements became interconnected, creating a

pragmatic nexus of dependency that merged into a distinctly Chinese approach. The Nationalist government developed a unique strategy "with Chinese characteristics", rooted in its historical and revolutionary foundations. This approach, infused with "Chineseness" aimed to align foreign ideas with China's distinctive cultural and social contexts.

Although this study does not aim to make unequivocal conclusions about governance during the Nanjing decade, it seeks to provide an accurate analysis and interpretation of the sources, based on recognised authors and reference works. However, some limitations should be mentioned, such as the use of a small sample compared to the universe of magazines from the period, despite a careful selection process given the study's context. Additionally, given the volume of available data and considering this study is a dissertation, the focus was placed more heavily on data from the end of the Nanjing decade, as this period preceded the Sino-Japanese War. For future research perspectives, it is recommended that further studies invest in a broader range of sources and data over time and diversity, allowing for the continuation of this study in a doctoral programme.

References

Aiello, G. (2006). Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 26(2), 89–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/23796529.2006.11674635

ALLEA [All European Academies]. (2023). *The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity – Revised Edition 2023*. https://doi.org/10.26356/ECOC

Banks, M. (2014). Analysing Images. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 394–408). SAGE Publications.

Barrento, A. (2019). The nationalization of the hardship of travel in China, 1895–1949. In A. Baumler (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Revolutionary China* (pp.302–317). Routledge.

Baum, E. (2015). Controlling Minds: Guo Renyuan, Behavioral Psychology, and Fascism in Republican China. *The Chinese Historical Review*, 22(2), 141–159. https://doi.org/10.1179/1547402x15z.00000000050

Baum, E. (2017). Healthy Minds, Compliant Citizens: The Politics of "Mental Hygiene" in Republican China, 1928–1937. *Twentieth-Century China,* 42(3), 215–233. https://doi.org/10.1353/tcc.2017.0021

Bian, M. L. (2010). Building a New Nation State: An Examination of Chiang Kai-Shek's Critical Contribution to the Making of Modern China. *The Chinese Historical Review*, 17(1), 6–15. https://doi.org/10.1179/tcr.2010.17.1.6

Bianco, L. (1972). Secret Societies and Peasant Self-Defense, 1921-1933. In J. Chesneaux (Ed.), *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China 1840- 1950* (pp.213–224). Stanford University Press.

Billingsley, P. (1981). Bandits, Bosses, and Bare Sticks. *Modern China*, 7(3), 235–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/009770048100700301

Botjer, G. F. (1979). *A short history of Nationalist China, 1919-1949*. G.P. Putmam's Sons.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brook, T. (2019). *Great State: China and the World*. Penguin Books.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Ch'en, J. (1983). The Chinese Communist Movement to 1927. In J. K. Fairbank (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of China* (pp. 505–526). Cambridge University Press.

Ch'en, J. (1991). The Communist movement, 1927–1937. In L. E. Eastman, J. Ch'en, S. Pepper & L. P. V. Slyke (Eds), *The Nationalist Era in China, 1927–1949* (pp. 53–114). Cambridge University Press.

Chambers, D. I. (2015). Shanghai's "Mysterious Westerner": The Walden Affair and Soviet Military Intelligence Operations in China, 1933–1935. *Twentieth-Century China*, 40(2), 105–125. https://doi.org/10.1179/1521538515z.00000000057

Chan, K. (2020). Destructive construction. *Social Transformations in Chinese Societies*, 16(1), 57–74. https://doi.org/10.1108/stics-04-2019-0009

Chang, M. H. (1979). 'Fascism' and Modern China. *The China Quarterly*, 79, 553–567. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741000038315

Chaoguang, W. (2012). Aftermath of the Revolution: Experiments in Western-style Democratic Politics in Early Republican China. *China Report*, 48(4), 393–405. https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445512466618

Chesneaux, J. (1973). *Peasant Revolts in China, 1840–1949*. Thames & Hudson.

Chin, S. J. (2017). The politics of the Shanghai courts: the state, local elites, and social networks in Nationalist China, 1927–1937. *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, 11(1), 29–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/17535654.2017.1308100

Chor, S. W. (2002). The Making of the Guomindang's Japan Policy, 1932-1937. *Modern China*, 28(2), 213–252. https://doi.org/10.1177/009770040202800203

Chung Cheng Cultural and Educational Foundation (CCFD). (n.d.) 總統蔣公思想言論總集 (*Collection of President Chiang Kai-shek's Thoughts and Speeches*). Yangzhongzheng Cultural and Educational Foundation. http://www.ccfd.org.tw/

Clinton, M. (2017). *Revolutionary Nativism: Fascism and Culture in China, 1925-1937*. Duke University Press Books.

Clinton, M. (2019). The New Life Movement and national sacrifice. In A. Baumler (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Revolutionary China* (pp. 173–184). Routledge.

Coble, P. M. (2007). China's "New Remembering" of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, 1937–1945. *The China Quarterly*, 190, 394–410. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741007001257

Coble, P. M. (2023). *The Collapse of Nationalist China: How Chiang Kai-shek Lost China's Civil War*. Cambridge University Press.

Coco, O. (2020). The Penetration of Italian Fascism in Nationalist China: Political Influence and Economic Legacy. *The International History Review*, 43(2), 264–280. https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2020.1754273

Cody, J. W. (1996). American planning in republican China, 1911-1937. *Planning Perspectives*, 11(4), 339–377. https://doi.org/10.1080/026654396364808

Crespi, J. A. (2011). *China's Modern Sketch, the Golden Era of Cartoon Art*. MIT Visualizing Cultures. https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/modern_sketch

Crespi, J. A. (2020). *Manhua Modernity: Chinese Culture and the Pictorial Turn*. University of California Press.

Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. P. (2017). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Culp, R. J. (2012). Theorizing citizenship in modern China. *Journal of political science and sociology*, 16(5), 123–148. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/145753568.pdf

Dirlik, A. (1975). The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 34(4), 945–980. https://doi.org/10.2307/2054509

Dirlik, A., & Krebs, E. S. (1981). Socialism and Anarchism in Early Republican China. *Modern China*, 7(2), 117–151. https://doi.org/10.1177/009770048100700201

Du, Y. (2019). Sun Yat-sen as Guofu: Competition over Nationalist Party Orthodoxy in the Second Sino-Japanese War. *Modern China*, 45(2), 201-235. https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700418787519

Eastman, L. E. (1972). Fascism in Kuomintang China: The Blue Shirts. *The China Quarterly*, 49, 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741000036481

Eastman, L. E. (1974). *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937*. Harvard University Press.

Eastman, L. E. (1979). Fascism and Modern China: A Rejoinder. *The China Quarterly*, 80, 838–842. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741000046075

Eastman, L. E. (1984a). *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937-1949*. Stanford University Press.

Eastman, L. E. (1984b). New Insights into the Nature of the Nationalist Regime. *Republican China*, 9(2), 8–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/08932344.1984.11720034

Eastman, L. E. (1991). Nationalist China during the Nanking decade, 1927–1937. In L. E. Eastman, J. Ch'en, S. Pepper & L. P. V. Slyke (Eds), *The Nationalist Era in China, 1927–1949* (pp. 1–52). Cambridge University Press.

Edwards, L. (2000). Policing the Modern Woman in Republican China. *Modern China*, 26(2), 115–147. https://doi.org/10.1177/009770040002600201

Esherick, J. W. (2010). The Many Faces of Chiang Kai-Shek. *The Chinese Historical Review*, 17(1), 16–23. https://doi.org/10.1179/tcr.2010.17.1.16

Fairbank, J. K., & Goldman, M. (2006). *China: A New History* (2nd ed.). Belknap Press.

Fenby, J. (2009). *The Penguin History of Modern China: The Fall and Rise of a Great Power 1850 to 2009*. Pinguin Books.

Ferlanti, F. (2010). The New Life Movement in Jiangxi Province, 1934–1938. *Modern Asian Studies*, 44(5), 961–1000. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x0999028x

Flick, U. (2018). *Designing Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Fong, S. (2022). Militarization as Personal Cultivation: Student Military Training in Guomindang China, 1928–1937. *Modern China*, 49(4), 480–514. https://doi.org/10.1177/00977004221134211

Foreman, M. W. (2022). Racial modernity in Republican China, 1927-1937. *Asian Ethnicity*, 23(2), 377–397. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2020.1792765

Fox, J. P. (1970). Max Bauer: Chiang Kai-shek's first German military adviser. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5(4), 21–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/002200947000500402

Fung, E. S. K. (1983). The Sino-British Rapprochement, 1927–1931. *Modern Asian Studies*, 17(1), 79–105. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x0000891x

Furth, C. (1983). Intellectual change: from the Reform movement to the May Fourth movement, 1895–1920. In J. K. Fairbank (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of China* (pp. 322–405). Cambridge University Press.

Gibbs, G. R. (2014). Using Software in Qualitative Analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 277–294). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243.n19

Glang, N. F. (2015). Germany and Chongqing: Secret Communication during WWII. *Intelligence and National Security*, 30(6), 871–889. https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2014.930585

Gregor, A. J., & Chang, M. H. (1979). Nazionalfascismo and the Revolutionary Nationalism of Sun Yat-sen. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 39(1), 21–37. https://doi.org/10.2307/2053502

Gries, P. H. (2005). *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*. University of California Press.

Harrison, H. (1998). Martyrs and Militarism in Early Republican China. *Twentieth-Century China*, 23(2), 41–70. https://doi.org/10.1179/tcc.1998.23.2.41

He, Y. (2014). The San-Min Doctrine and the early legislation of the Nanjing government. *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, 8(1), 87–104. https://doi.org/10.1080/17535654.2014.899040

Hong, F. (1999). Blue shirts, nationalists and nationalism: fascism in 1930s China. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 16(4), 205–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/09523369908714106

Hsü, I. C. Y. (2000). *The Rise of Modern China* (6th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Huang, G. C. (2011). Speaking to Posterity: Shame, Humiliation, and the Creation of Chiang Kai-Shek's Nanjing Era Legacy. *Twentieth-Century China*, 36(2), 148–168. https://doi.org/10.1353/tcc.2011.0002

Iechika, R. (2013). The basic structure of Chiang Kai-shek's diplomatic strategy. *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, 7(1), 17–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/17535654.2013.794994

Itti, L., & Koch, C. (2001). Computational modelling of visual attention. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 2(3), 194–203. https://doi.org/10.1038/35058500

Keay, J. (2009). *China: A History*. HarperCollins Publishers.

Kirby, W. (1984). *Germany and Republican China*. Stanford University Press.

Kogan, N. (1969). The Origins of Italian Fascism. *Polity*, 2(1), 100–105. https://doi.org/10.2307/3234092

Kong, L., & Ploeckl, F. (2022). Modern Chinese banking networks during the Republican Era. *Business History*, 64(4), 655–681. https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2020.1754801

Kuo, T. C. (2009). A Strong Diplomat in a Weak Polity: T. V. Soong and wartime US–China relations, 1940–1943. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 18(59), 219–231. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560802575994

Kuzuoglu, U. (2018). Chinese cryptography: The Chinese Nationalist Party and intelligence management, 1927–1949. *Cryptologia*, 42(6), 514–539. https://doi.org/10.1080/01611194.2018.1449146

Lai, S. X. (2023). What Concerned Chiang? A Survey and Analysis of Chiang Kai-Shek's Wartime Diaries. *The Chinese Historical Review*, 30(1), 36–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/1547402X.2023.2191361

Laing, E. J. (2010, October). *Shanghai Manhua, the Neo-Sensationist School of Literature, and Scenes of Urban Life*. Ohio State University, MCLC Resource Center Publication. https://u.osu.edu/mclc/online-series/shanghai-manhua/

Lams, L., & Lu, W. (2018). Puppets, Compatriots, and Souls in Heaven: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Chiang Kai-shek's Early Wartime Rhetoric. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 47(2), 87–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261804700204

Leibold, J. (2006). Competing Narratives of Racial Unity in Republican China. *Modern China*, 32(2), 181–220. https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700405285275

Lin, J. C. (2023). Rethinking nationalistic history in China: Towards a multicultural Chinese identity. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 23(2), 178–194. https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12395

Liu, W. (2013). Redefining the Moral and Legal Roles of the State in Everyday Life: The New Life Movement in China in the Mid-1930s. *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, 2(2), 335–365. https://doi.org/10.1353/ach.2013.0022

Liu, X. (2010). Chiang Kai-Shek's (Invisible) Marathon to the West. *The Chinese Historical Review*, 17(1), 24–30. https://doi.org/10.1179/tcr.2010.17.1.24

Lua, F. S., & Lina, H. T. (2008). Chiang Kai-Shek's Diaries and Republican China: New Insights on the History of Modern China. *The Chinese Historical Review*, 15(2), 331–339. https://doi.org/10.1179/tcr.2008.15.2.331

Lyu, Z., & Zhou, H. (2023). Contesting Master Narratives: Renderings of National History by Mainland China and Taiwan. *The China Quarterly*, 255, 768–784. https://doi.org/10.1017/s030574102300019x

Marshall, J. (1976). Opium and the Politics of Gangsterism in Nationalist China, 1927–1945. *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 8(3), 19–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1976.10404414

Martin, B. G. (1995). The Green Gang and the Guomindang State: Du Yuesheng and the Politics of Shanghai, 1927—37. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 54(1), 64–92. https://doi.org/10.2307/2058951

Martin, B. G. (1996). *The Shanghai Green Gang: Politics and Organized Crime, 1919-1937*. University of California Press.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Mitter, R. (2002). Contention and Redemption: Ideologies of National Salvation in Republican China. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 3(3), 44–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/714005487

Mitter, R. (2008). *Modern China: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Mitter, R. (2013). *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Mitter, R., & Moore, A. W. (2011). China in World War II, 1937–1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy. *Modern Asian Studies*, 45(2), 225–240. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x10000387

Morris, A. (1997). Mastery Without Enmity: Athletics, Modernity and the Nation in Early Republican China. *Republican China*, 22(2), 3–39. https://doi.org/10.1179/repc.1997.22.2.3

Murdock, M. G. (2009). Exploiting Anti-Imperialism: Popular Forces and Nation-State-Building During China's Northern Expedition, 1926—1927. *Modern China*, 35(1), 65-95. https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700408318986

Myers, R. H. (2000). The Chinese State during the Republican Era. In D. Shambaugh (Ed.), *The Modern Chinese State* (pp. 42–72). Cambridge University Press.

Nakajima, C. (2008). Health and Hygiene in Mass Mobilization: Hygiene Campaigns in Shanghai, 1920–1945. *Twentieth-Century China*, 34(1), 42–72. https://doi.org/10.1353/tcc.0.0008

OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development]. (2007). *Best Practices for Ensuring Scientific Integrity and Preventing Misconduct*. OECD Global Science Forum. https://web-archive.oecd.org/2012-06-15/129568-40188303.pdf

Ownby, D. (1996). *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early and Mid-Qing China*. Stanford University Press.

Ownby, D. (2001). Recent Chinese Scholarship on the History of Chinese Secret Societies. *Late Imperial China*, 22(1), 139–158. https://doi.org/10.1353/late.2001.0004

Ownby, D. (2019). The "Redemption" of Redemptive Societies. *Review of Religion and Chinese Society*, 6(2), 209–228. https://doi.org/10.1163/22143955-00602004

Paxton, R. O. (1998). The Five Stages of Fascism. *The Journal of Modern History*, 70(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1086/235001

Pepper, S. (1986). The KMT-CCP conflict 1945–1949. In J. K. Fairbank & A. Feuerwerker (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of China* (pp. 723–788). Cambridge University Press.

Reilly, J. (2011). Remember History, Not Hatred: Collective Remembrance of China's War of Resistance to Japan. *Modern Asian Studies*, 45(2), 463–490. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x11000151

Remick, E. J. (2003). Prostitution Taxes and Local State Building in Republican China. *Modern China*, 29(1), 38–70. https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700402238596

Sang, T. D. (2015). The Modern Girl in Modern Chinese Literature. In Y. Zhang (Ed.), *A Companion to Modern Chinese Literature* (pp. 411–423). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118451588.ch25

Shaoqing, C. (1984). On the Origin of the Gelaohui. *Modern China*, 10(4), 481–508. https://doi.org/10.1177/009770048401000406

Shuge. (n.d.). 关于书格Shuge.org. https://www.shuge.org/about/shuge/

Spence, J. D. (2012). *The Search for Modern China* (3rd ed.). W. W. Norton & Company.

Stapleton, K. (1996). Urban Politics in an Age of "Secret Societies": The Cases of Shanghai and Chengdu. *Republican China*, 22(1), 23–63. https://doi.org/10.1179/repc.1996.22.1.23

Stevens, S. E. (2003). Figuring Modernity: The New Woman and the Modern Girl in Republican China. *NWSA Journal*, 15(3), 82–103. https://doi.org/10.1353/nwsa.2004.0020

Strauss, J. C. (1997). The Evolution of Republican Government. *The China Quarterly*, 150, 329–351. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741000052504

Stroup, D. R. (2022). Chinese Nationalism: Insights and Opportunities for Comparative Studies. *Nationalities Papers*, 51(3), 497–511. https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.99

Tai, H. (1985). *The Red Spears, 1916–1949* (R. Suleski, Trans.). University of Michigan Press.

Tanner, H. M. (2010). *China: A History (Volume 2) From the Great Qing Empire through The People's Republic of China, (1644 - 2009)*. Hackett Publishing Co, Inc.

Taylor, J. (2009). *The Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China*. Harvard University Press.

Taylor, J. (2014). Chiang Kai- Shek and Chinese Modernization. In R. Guha (Ed.), *Makers of Modern Asia* (pp. 40-64). Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674735781.c3

Tien, H. M. (1972). *Government and Politics in Kuomintang China, 1927-1937*. Stanford University Press.

Tien, H. M. (2019). Factional Politics in Kuomintang China, 1928–1937: An Interpretation. In F. G. Chan (Ed.), *China at the Crossroads: Nationalists and Communists, 1927-1949* (pp. 19–35). Routledge.

Tran, L. (2008). Sex and Equality in Republican China. *Modern China*, 35(2), 191–223. https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700408327254

Tsui, B. (2018). *China's Conservative Revolution: The Quest for a New Order, 1927–1949*. Cambridge University Press.

Vilelas, J. (2020). *Investigação: O processo de construção do conhecimento* (3rd ed.). Edições Sílabo.

Wakeman, F. (1997). A Revisionist View of the Nanjing Decade: Confucian Fascism. *The China Quarterly*, 150, 395–432. https://doi.org/10.1017/s030574100005253x

Wakeman, F. (2003). *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service*. University of California Press.

Wang, C. (2017). The dark side of the war: corruption in the Guomindang government during World War II. *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, 11(2), 249–263. https://doi.org/10.1080/17535654.2017.1391006

Wang, Z. (2008). National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China. *International Studies Quarterly*, 52(4), 783–806. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2008.00526.x

Weatherley, R. D., & Zhang, Q. (2017). History and Legitimacy in Contemporary China: Towards Competing Nationalisms. In C. Kuo (Ed.), *Religion and Nationalism in Chinese Societies* (pp. 143–178). Amsterdam University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zkjzkd.9

Wei, S. (2014). News as a weapon: Hollington Tong and the formation of the Guomindang Centralized Foreign Propaganda System, 1937–1938. *Twentieth-Century China*, 39(2), 118–143. https://doi.org/10.1179/1521538514z.00000000039

Wilbur, C. M. (1984). *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923–1928*. Cambridge University Press.

Winter, R. (2014). Cultural Studies. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 247–261). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243.n17

Wolfe, J. M., & Horowitz, T. S. (2017). Five factors that guide attention in visual search. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1(3), 0058. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0058

Wood, M. (2020). *The Story of China*. Simon & Schuster UK.

Woods, J. S., & Dickson, B. J. (2017). Victims and Patriots: Disaggregating Nationalism in Urban China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 26(104), 167–182. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2016.1223100

Worthing, P. (2018). A Tale of Two Fronts: China's War of the Central Plains, 1930. *War in History*, 25(4), 511–533. https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344516685927
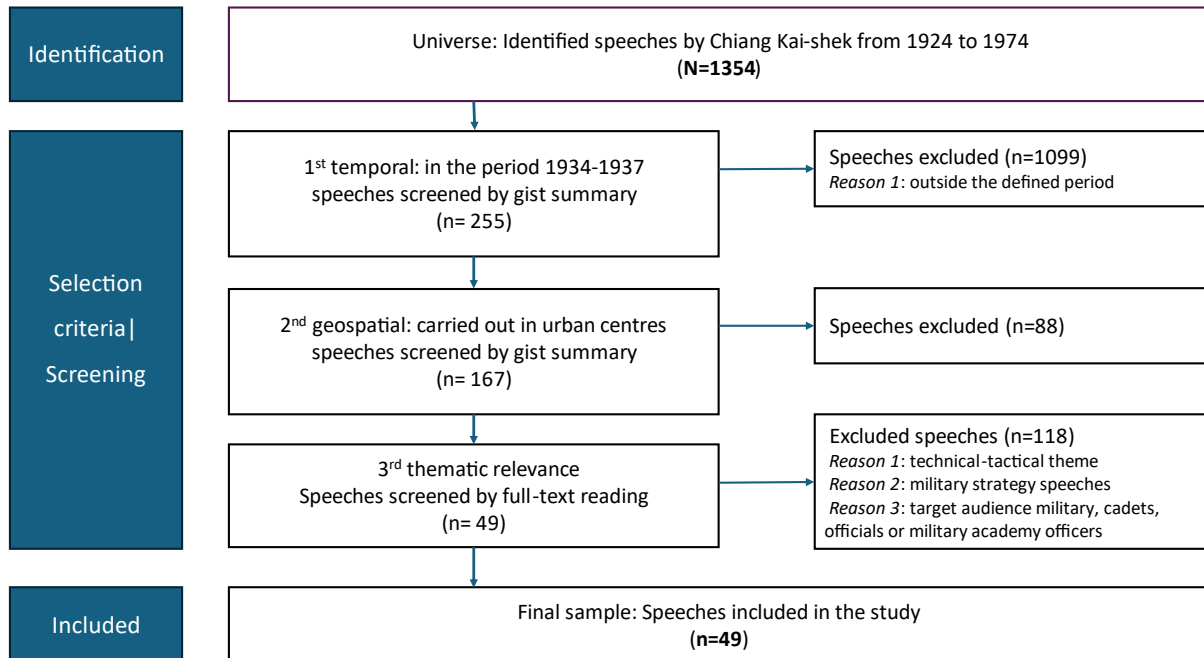
Wu, X. (2022). Why Boy Scouts? The prevalence of the Scouting movement for child training in Republican China, 1911–1925. *History of Education*, 51(5), 670–689. https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2022.2033330

Xu, A. (2019). Mapping Conservatism of the Republican Era: Genesis and Typologies. *Journal of Chinese History*, 4(1), 135–159. https://doi.org/10.1017/jch.2019.35

Yeh, W.-H. (1989). Dai Li and the Liu Geqing Affair: Heroism in the Chinese Secret Service During the War of Resistance. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 48(3), 545–562. https://doi.org/10.2307/2058639

Young, E. P. (1983). Politics in the aftermath of revolution: the era of Yuan Shih-k'ai, 1912–16. In J. K. Fairbank (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of China* (pp. 208–255). Cambridge University Press.

Zhang, Q., & Weatherley, R. D. (2013). The rise of 'Republican fever' in the PRC and the implications for CCP legitimacy. *China Information*, 27(3), 277–300. https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203x13500458

Zhang, S. (2018). Shaping the New Woman: The Dilemma of Shen in China's Republican Period. *Dao*, 17(3), 401–420. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11712-018-9617-7

Zhao, S. (2013). Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: the strident turn. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 22(82), 535–553. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.766379

Zhou, D. (2019). *Behind her Cosmopolitan Beauty: Transnational Modern Girl in Japan and Republican China*. Proceedings of the 2019 3rd International Seminar on Education, Management and Social Sciences (ISEMSS 2019). https://doi.org/10.2991/isemss-19.2019.130

Annexes

Annex A

Speech selection criteria

Identification	Universe: Identified speeches by Chiang Kai-shek from 1924 to 1974 **(N=1354)**
Selection criteria | Screening	1st temporal: in the period 1934-1937 speeches screened by gist summary (n= 255) → Speeches excluded (n=1099) *Reason 1*: outside the defined period
	2nd geospatial: carried out in urban centres speeches screened by gist summary (n= 167) → Speeches excluded (n=88)
	3rd thematic relevance Speeches screened by full-text reading (n= 49) → Excluded speeches (n=118) *Reason 1*: technical-tactical theme *Reason 2*: military strategy speeches *Reason 3*: target audience military, cadets, officials or military academy officers
Included	Final sample: Speeches included in the study **(n=49)**

Source: author's own elaboration

Annex B

Selection criteria for magazines and images

Identification	Universe: East Asian newspapers and periodicals from 1850 to 1950 **(N=378743)**	
	1st temporal: in the period 1934-1937 (n= 61042)	Excluded publications (n=317701) *Reason 1: outside the defined period*
Selection criteria| Screening	2nd thematic: magazine type (Manhua漫画) (n= 129)	Excluded publications (n=60913)
	3rd geospatial: Shanghai magazines screened by editorial info (n= 127)	Excluded publications (n=2)
	4th relevance of the magazine [Modern Sketch 时代漫画] (n= 39)	Excluded magazines (n=88) *Reason 1: black and white* *Reason 2: single-themed magazines* *Reason 3: incomplete collections | no continuity in the time period analysed*
	5th relevance of images [Full-page images] **(N=656)** Image relevance in the magazine [Cover + Backcover + significant Centrepage] (n=117)	Excluded Images (n=539) *Reason 1: photographs | compilations* *Reason 2: blocks of text larger than 1/3 of a page* *Reason 3: adverts | newsletters* *Reason 4: sets of comic strips and/or short stories*
Included	Final sample: Images included in the study **(n= 117)**	

Source: author's own elaboration

Annex C

Distribution of the sample by year of the speeches analysed
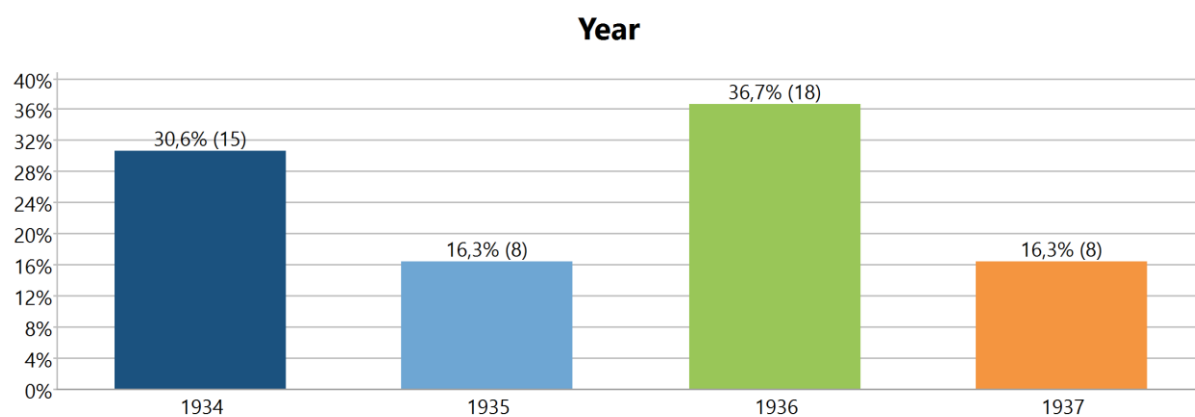
Year

Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

Distribution of the sample by speech location

Location
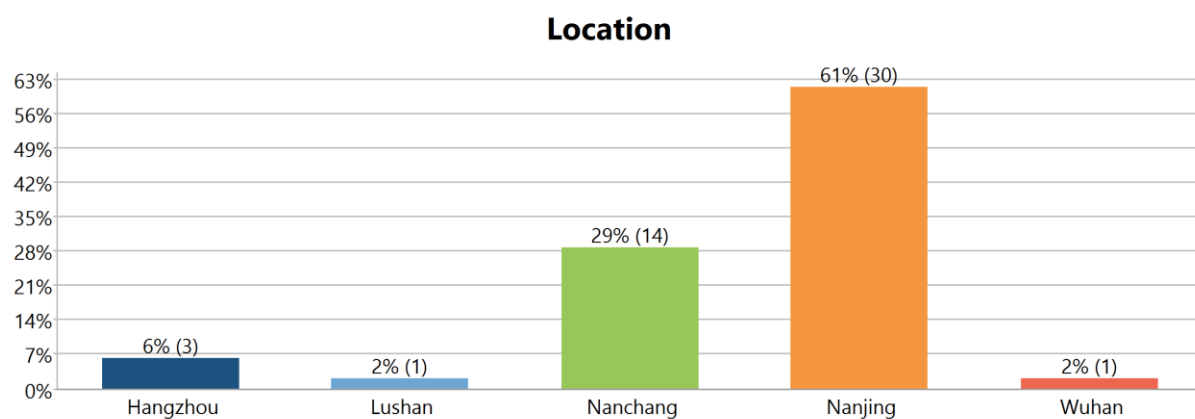
Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

Annex D

Distribution of the sample by magazine year

Year

	1934	1935	1936	1937
	31% (36)	31% (36)	23% (27)	15% (18)
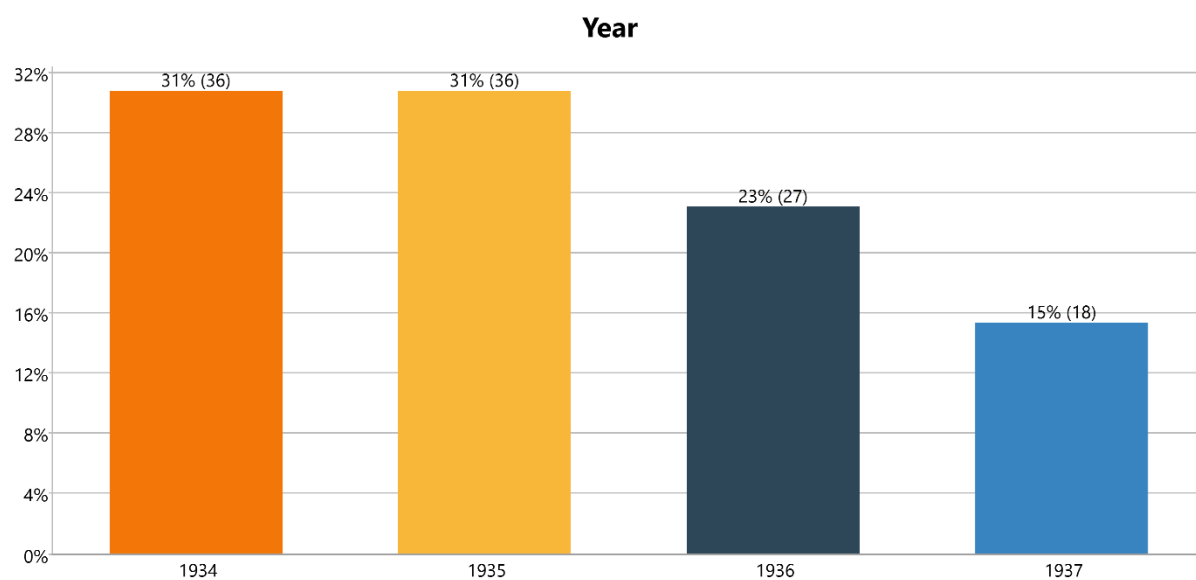
Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

Annex E

Final coding system

1 National Identity	**394**
1.1 Traditional values	106
1.2 Nationalism	179
1.3 Confucian citizenship	109
2 Political System	**418**
2.1 Power structures and leadership	156
2.2 Militarisation	81
2.3 Authoritarianism and oppression	79
2.4 Corruption	102
3 Socioeconomic Sphere	**225**
3.1 Financial power	34
3.2 Education	90
3.3 Urban life	53
3.4 Discrimination and inequalities	48
4 External Influences	**318**
4.1 International relations	71
4.2 Ideology (external)	45
4.3 Armed conflict/war	54
4.4 Foreign influence	148
5 Cultural and Social Aspects	**360**
5.1 Secret societies	54
5.2 Leisure (art, sport, tourism)	42
5.3 Gender	32
5.4 Modernity	232

Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

Annex F

Full Code Relations Matrix (speeches + images)
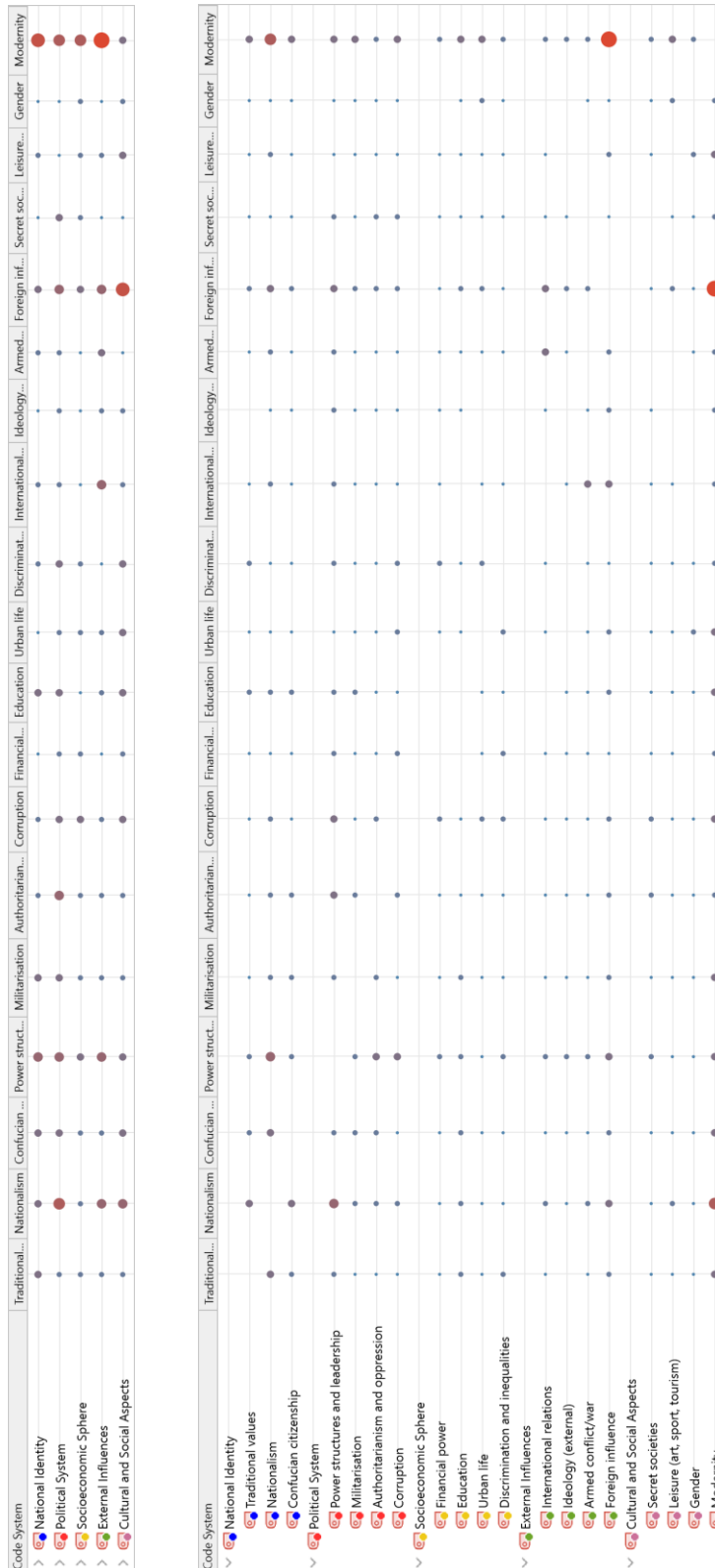
Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

Annex G

Coding System Script

1 National Identity	Traditional values	Social norms, beliefs, customs, Confucian cultural legacy, traditional philosophers (Laozi, Mencius), references to classical works, ancient dynasties, values shared by Chinese society, family dynamics, filial piety, social roles, shared cultural characteristics, common history.
	Nationalism	A sense of patriotism and pride in the country, an emphasis on national symbols such as the flag, veneration of the leader and revolutionary ideals, movements and initiatives aimed at strengthening the country, concepts of national rejuvenation, unity and cohesion in the country.
	Confucian citizenship	Concept of citizenship based on Confucian ethics, emphasising duty and social responsibility, self-cultivation, following discipline, Confucian concepts of loyalty, respect and social harmony in which new citizens have duties and responsibilities to contribute to the group for the sake of the individual, focus on the role of the family and education in the formation of a new citizenship.
2 Political System	Power structures and leadership	Contribution of the different forms of government (democracy, authoritarianism, etc.), political institutions and their distribution of power, different roles of institutions, functions of political leaders, examples of good and bad leadership, training needs for the future, relations of domination and subordination (hierarchy), President Chiang Kai-shek's guidelines, programmes and initiatives promoted by the state to ensure continuity of government (e.g. New Life Movement).
	Militarisation	references to the need for militarisation, the growth of military power and its role in society, education with the militarisation of society, practical training in favour of theoretical training, military academies and cadets, the need for society to discipline itself and follow militaristic virtues, military as national power.
	Authoritarianism and oppression	Discourse based on authoritarianism as a progressive ideology, concentration of power, repression of dissent, cases of violations of human rights and civil liberties, characteristics of authoritarian governments and repressive regimes, elements of oppression and the use of force to control society, paramilitary or fascist organisations, elements advocating totalitarian control, censorship, purges, violence, arguments for or against mechanisms of social control and repression of dissent.
	Corruption	elements that show abuse of power for personal gain, different forms of bribery, nepotism, embezzlement, etc., moral corruption, vices, individualistic fashions, inappropriate dress code, distortion of Confucian concepts defended by the government, inefficiency, slowness or laziness as moral corruption of institutions.
3 Socioeconomic Sphere	Financial power	the impact of financial power on public policies and/or people's lives, displays of power and financial capital, concentration of wealth, financial elites, opulence, status based on wealth, financial institutions, the country's financial needs, financing, the economy as an engine for international empowerment and development.
	Education	The role of education in individual and social development, the quality of teaching, education as a factor in correcting inequalities, the importance of schools, universities as elements of intellectual development, intellectuals, intellectual movements, teachers, students, training.
	Urban life	Characteristics of cities (population, infrastructure, services, etc.), challenges of urban life (traffic congestion, pollution, violence, etc.), ways of life in urban centres, social problems, buildings and flats, quality of life in cities, access to basic services, consumption patterns, emerging social movements, activism, social contestation, social change.

	Discrimination and inequalities	Social inequalities based on gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, etc., different forms of discrimination (prejudice, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, etc.), impacts of discrimination on people's lives and on society, unequal access to resources, poverty, lack of social mobility, social exclusion, unethical practices.
4 External Influences	International relations	Diplomatic relations between China and other countries, international organisations, relations with and between the great powers, unequal treaties, international cooperation, the new world order, international tensions and their impact.
	Ideology (external)	Influence of ideas and ideologies from other countries, namely fascism, liberalism, communism, anarchism, transnational social and political movements, scientific method.
	Armed conflict/war	war of resistance against Japan, Japanese invasion, situation in Manchuria, causes and consequences of armed conflicts (political, social, economic, etc.), impact of armed conflicts on the civilian population, fight against communism, armed efforts against bandits.
	Foreign influence	The impact of globalisation on local culture and identity, resistance to external influence and affirmation of one's own culture, cultural, political or economic influence from other countries, new westernised habits and lifestyles, cases of foreign intervention in China's internal affairs, anti-imperialist movements based on colonialism and neo-colonialism by foreign powers present in China, economic and geopolitical dependence on other countries, the impact of imports of foreign products on Chinese markets, a hybrid experience or one with eastern and western characteristics, addictions, scientific and technological knowledge, industrialisation.
5 Cultural and Social Aspects	Secret societies	The role of secret societies in politics, the economy and society, societies of authoritarian control and the use of violence, corrupt elites, secret police, elements that portray or refer to criminal societies, gangsters, prostitution, gambling clubs, illegal activities, protection of criminal syndicates, underground fights, opium.
	Leisure (art, sport, tourism)	Leisure activities and their importance in culture and society, the entertainment industry, nightlife, impact on popular culture, sport as a tool for socialisation, individual development, new leisure and tourism habits, the beach, seaside resorts, swimming, new fashions related to tourism, influence on the local economy, new forms of artistic expression, cultural manifestations, the role of art in society.
	Gender	Gender relations and the social roles of men and women, gender inequality and discrimination against women, the sexualisation of women, social norms about sexuality, the modern woman and the classical woman, feminist movements, violence against women, the exploitation of women, their role in the family system.
	Modernity	The modernisation process and its impact on culture and society, new habits and ways of life not present at the beginning of the 20th century, social, economic and technological changes associated with modernity, activities resulting from globalisation and its effects on the most developed centres, attempts to accelerate growth based on foreign knowledge, focus on science and technology, individualism and secularism as characteristics of modern society, challenges and contradictions of modernity, social movements emerging from the modernisation process.

Source: author's own elaboration

Annex H

Code frequency for speeches
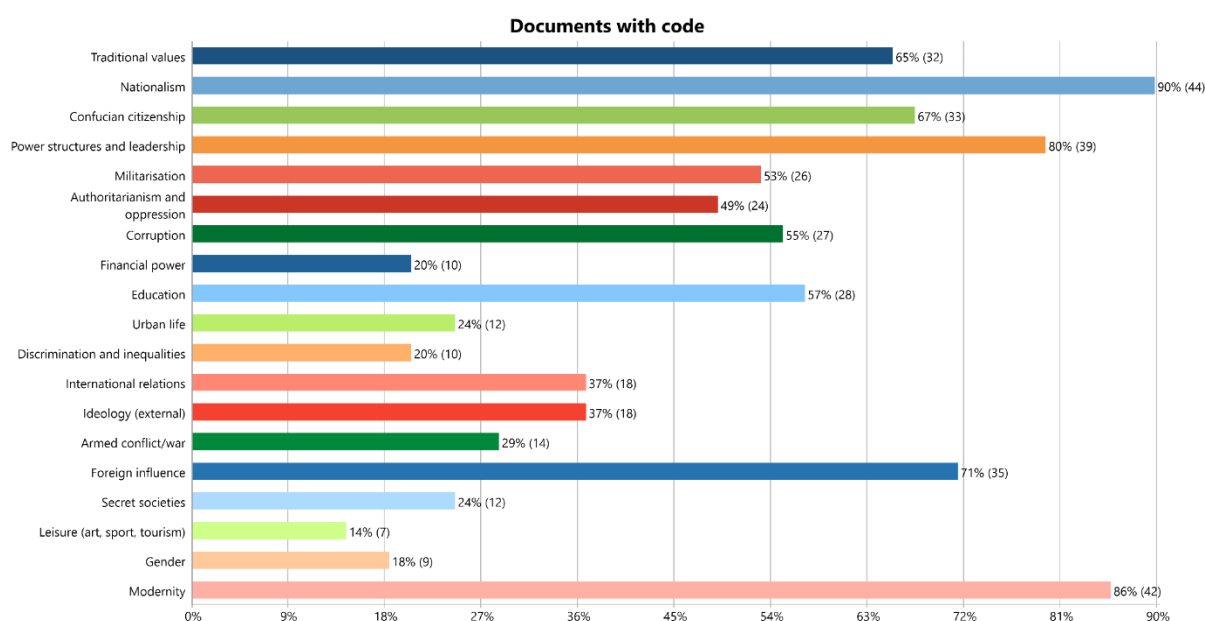
Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

Code frequency for speeches by variable Year

	Year = 1934	Year = 1935	Year = 1936	Year = 1937	Total
National Identity					
Traditional values	30	15	28	9	82
Nationalism	40	21	59	26	146
Confucian citizenship	38	14	37	8	97
Political System					
Power structures and leadership	41	16	41	14	112
Militarisation	29	6	34	3	72
Authoritarianism and oppression	14	15	17	5	51
Corruption	27	3	21	5	56
Socioeconomic Sphere					
Financial power	5	3	7	1	16
Education	32	17	26	11	86
Urban life	6	3	7	2	18
Discrimination and inequalities	4	1	4	1	10
External Influences					
International relations	21	7	3	18	49
Ideology (external)	16	8	6	4	34
Armed conflict/war	8	4	6	13	31
Foreign influence	43	15	24	14	96
Cultural and Social Aspects					
Secret societies	6	17	12		35
Leisure (art, sport, tourism)	4		6	4	14
Gender	4		6	2	12
Modernity	51	29	69	18	167
∑ SUM	419	194	413	158	1184
# N = Documents/Speakers	15 (30,6%)	8 (16,3%)	18 (36,7%)	8 (16,3%)	49 (100,0%)

Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

Annex I

Code Matrix Browser for speeches and images

Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

Annex J

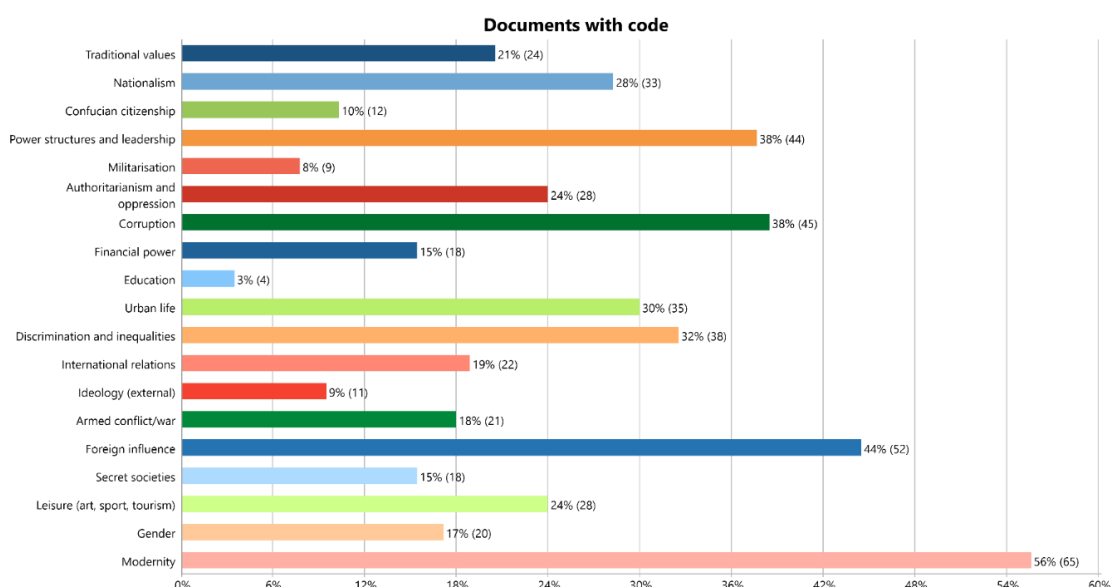## Code Relation Matrix Speeches
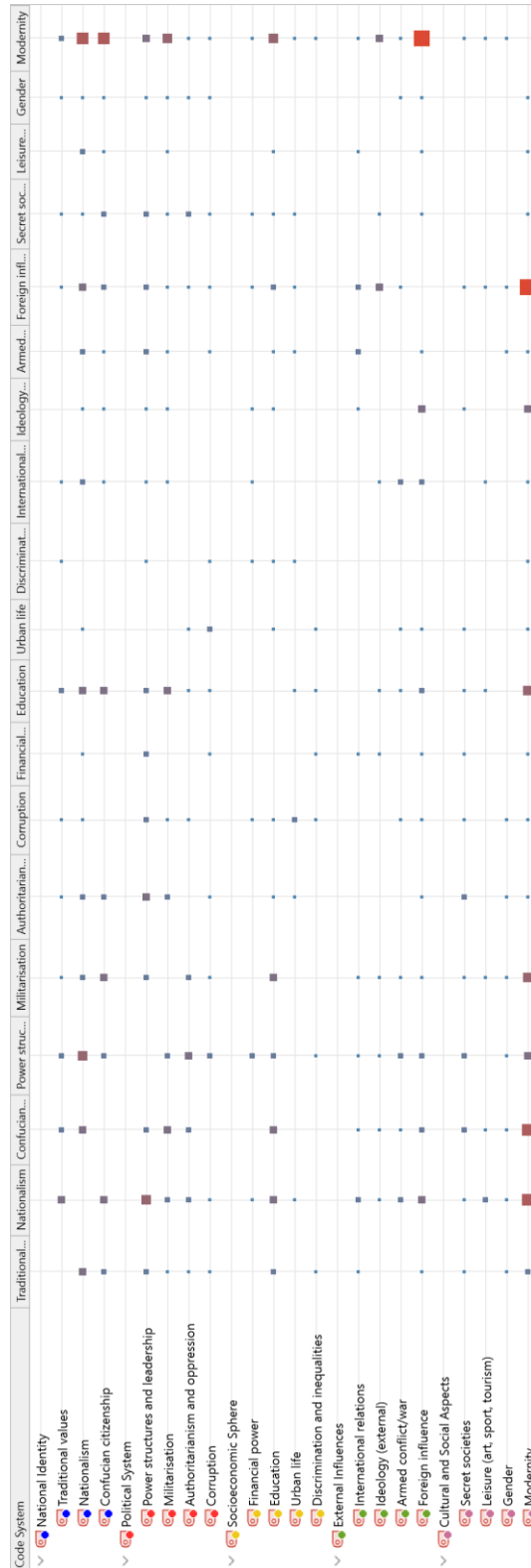
Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

Annex K

Code frequency for Images

Documents with code

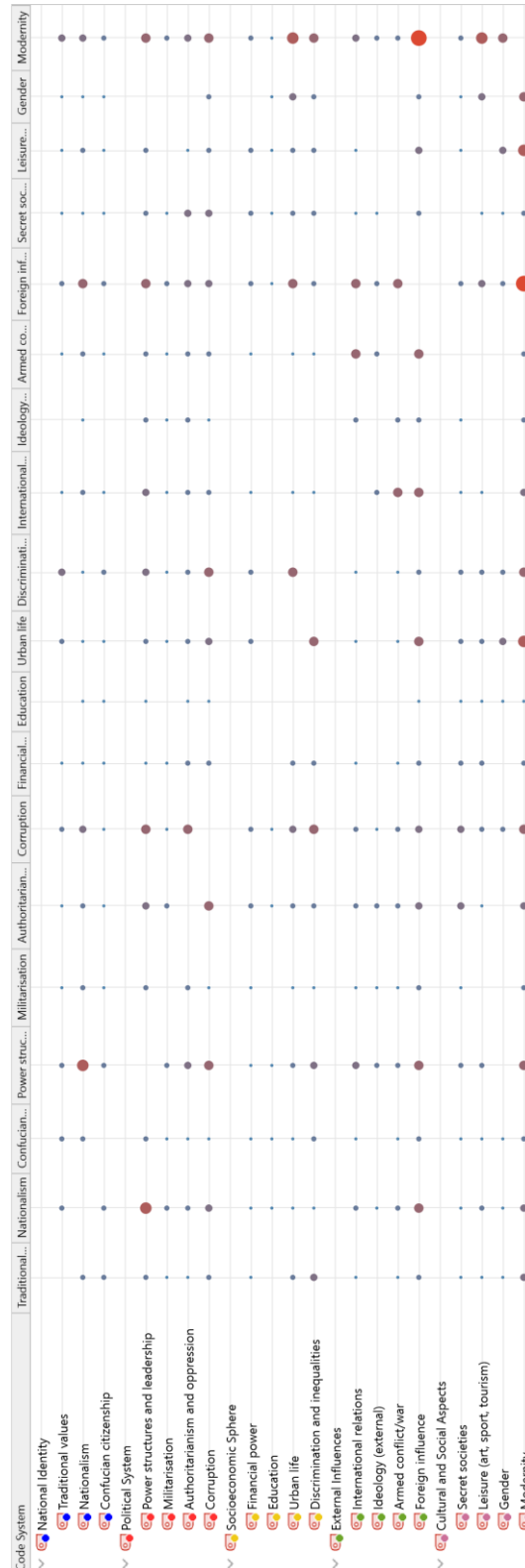| Code	Percentage (count)
Traditional values	21% (24)
Nationalism	28% (33)
Confucian citizenship	10% (12)
Power structures and leadership	38% (44)
Militarisation	8% (9)
Authoritarianism and oppression	24% (28)
Corruption	38% (45)
Financial power	15% (18)
Education	3% (4)
Urban life	30% (35)
Discrimination and inequalities	32% (38)
International relations	19% (22)
Ideology (external)	9% (11)
Armed conflict/war	18% (21)
Foreign influence	44% (52)
Secret societies	15% (18)
Leisure (art, sport, tourism)	24% (28)
Gender	17% (20)
Modernity	56% (65)

Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

Code frequency for images by variable Year

	Year = 1934	Year = 1935	Year = 1936	Year = 1937	Total
National Identity					
Traditional values	5	9	6	4	24
Nationalism	7	10	11	5	33
Confucian citizenship	2	4	5	1	12
Political System					
Power structures and leadership	9	15	16	4	44
Militarisation	3	2	3	1	9
Authoritarianism and oppression	6	7	11	4	28
Corruption	13	15	8	10	46
Socioeconomic Sphere					
Financial power	8	4	3	3	18
Education		1	2	1	4
Urban life	11	11	3	10	35
Discrimination and inequalities	5	12	10	11	38
External Influences					
International relations	3	8	10	1	22
Ideology (external)	5	3	3		11
Armed conflict/war	3	9	9	2	23
Foreign influence	14	15	17	6	52
Cultural and Social Aspects					
Secret societies	6	5	3	5	19
Leisure (art, sport, tourism)	14	7	4	3	28
Gender	7	5	3	5	20
Modernity	21	17	14	13	65
Σ SUM	142	159	141	89	531
# N = Documents/Speakers	36 (30,8%)	36 (30,8%)	27 (23,1%)	18 (15,4%)	117 (100,0%)

Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA

Annex L

Code Relation Matrix Images

Source: author's own elaboration using data obtained from MAXQDA