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# Chinese Cultural Studies:

## Sun Yat-sen:

### Fundamentals of National Reconstruction (1923 CE)



from Sun Yat-sen, *Fundamentals of National Reconstruction*, (Taipei: China Cultura; Service, 1953), pp. 76-83, as excerpted in Mark A. Kishlansky, *Sources of World History*, Vol. 2 (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 281-285

*[Kishlansky Introduction] Sun Yat-sen (1844-1925 CE) began life as the son of poor farmers, yet became the father of modern China. A younger son, he was brought to Hawaii by an older brother who had immigrated there as a laborer. Sun studied at a missionary school and ultimately earned a medical degree in Hong Kong. His years in the west induced in him a dissatisfaction with the government of China and he began his political career by attempting to organize reform groups of Chinese exiles in Hong Kong. In 1895 a coup he plotted failed, and for the next 16 years Sun was an exile in Europe, the United States and Japan. In Japan he joined dissident Chinese groups and soon became their leader. He was expelled from Japan and was in America when he learned of the successful rebellion against the Qing emperor. Sun immediately returned to China, headed the revolutionary movement for a time, and then went back into exile until 1923, when he finally emerged as president of China. He died two years later, having founded the Koumintang (Nationalist Party). Fundamentals of National Reconstruction is Sun Yat-sen's most important political statement. It enunciates his famous three principles whereby he set China on the road to modernity.*

## HISTORY OF THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

Following China's war with France (1883-1884) I made up my mind to devote myself to the revolution. In 1895 I started the first insurrection in Canton and the revolution of 1911 culminated in the establishment of the Republic.. Up to present the task of revolution, however, has not yet been completed. A span of thirty-seven years of my revolutionary work is to be chronicled by future historians from all manner of facts and incidents. An outline sketch is given below.

### I Principles of Revolution

The term *Kemin*, or revolution, was first used by Confucius. Incidents of a revolutionary' nature repeatedly happened in Chinese history after Tang (founder of the Shang Dynasty., 1766 BCE)

and Wu (founder of the Zhou Dynasty, 1122 BCE). In Europe revolutionary tides surged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and they have since spread over the whole world. In due course they created republics, they conferred constitutions on monarchies. The principles which I have held in promoting the Chinese revolution were in some cases copied from our traditional ideals, in other cases modeled on European theory and experience and in still others formulated according to original and self-developed theories. They are described as follows:-

### **1. Principle of Nationalism**

Revelations of Chinese history prove that the Chinese as a people are independent in spirit and in conduct. Coerced into touch with other people, they could at times live in peace with them by maintaining friendly relations and at others assimilate them as the result of propinquity. During the periods when their political and military prowess declined, they could not escape for the time from the fate of a conquered nation, but they could eventually vigorously reassert themselves. Thus the Mongol rule of China (1260-1333 CE), lasting nearly a hundred years was finally overthrown by Tai Tse of the Ming dynasty and his loyal follower. So in our own time was the Manchu yoke thrown off by the Chinese. Nationalistic ideas in China did not come from a foreign source; they were inherited from our remote forefathers. Upon this legacy is based my principle of nationalism, and where necessary, I have developed it and amplified and improved upon it. No vengeance has been inflicted on the Manchus and we have endeavored to live side by side with them on an equal footing. This is our nationalistic policy toward races within our national boundaries. Externally, we should strive to maintain independence in the family of nations, and to spread our indigenous civilization as well as to enrich it by absorbing what is best in world civilization, with the hope that we may forge ahead with other nations towards the goal of ideal brotherhood.

### **2. Principle of Democracy**

In ancient China we had the Emperor Yao (2357-2258 BCE) and Emperor Shun (2258-2206 BCE) who departed from the hereditary system and chose their successors. We also had Tang and Wu who overthrew kingdoms by revolution. Preserved in our books are such sayings as :Heaven sees as the people see; Heaven hears as the people hear." "We have heard of a person named Zhou having been slain, we have not heard of a monarch having been murdered " "The people are most important, while the king is of the least importance." All these sayings ring with democratic sentiments. Since we have had only ideas about popular rights, and no democratic system has been evolved, we have to go to Europe and America for a republican form of government. There some countries have become republics and others have adopted constitutional monarchism, under which royal power has shrunk in the face of the rising demand for popular rights. Though hereditary monarchs have not yet disappeared, they are but vestiges and shadows of their former selves.

All through my revolutionary career I have held the view that China must be made a republic. There are three reasons. First, from a theoretical point of view, there is no ground for preserving a monarchical form of government, since it is widely recognized that the people constitute the foundation of a nation and they are all equal in their own country. In the second place, under Manchu occupation the Chinese were forced into the position of the vanquished, and suffered oppression for more than two hundred and sixty years. While a constitutional monarchy may not arouse deep resentment in other countries and can maintain itself for the time being, it will

be an impossibility in China. This is from a historical point of view. A third reason may be advanced with an eye on the future of the nation. That in China prolonged periods of disorder usually followed a revolution was due to the desire of every insurgent to be a king and to his subsequent contention for the throne. If a republican government is adopted, there will be no contention. For these three reasons, I have decided for the republican form of government in order to realize the principle of democracy.

My second decision is that a constitution must be adopted to ensure good government. The true meaning of constitutionalism was discovered by Montesquieu. The threefold separation of the legislative, judicial, and executive powers as advocated by him was accepted in every constitutional country in Europe. On a tour of Europe and America I made a close study of their governments and laws and took note of their shortcomings as well as their advantages. The shortcomings of election, for instance, are not incurable. In the past China had two significant systems of examination and censoring and they can be of avail where the Western system of government and law falls short. I therefore advocate that the examinative and censorial powers should be placed on the same level with legislative, judicial and executive, thereby resulting in the five-fold separation of powers. On top of that, the system of the people's direct political powers should be adopted in order that the provision that the sovereign power is vested in the people may become a reality. In this way my principle of democracy may be carried out satisfactorily.

### ***3. Principle of Livelihood.***

With the invention of modern machines, the phenomenon of uneven distribution of wealth in the West has become all the more marked. Intensified by crosscurrents, economic revolution was flaring up more ferociously than political revolution. This situation was scarcely noticed by our fellow-countrymen thirty years ago. On my tour of Europe and America, I saw with my own eyes the instability of their economic structure and the deep concern of their leaders in groping for a solution. I felt that, although the disparity of wealth under our economic organization is not so great as in the West, the difference is only in degree, not in character. The situation will become more acute when the West extends its economic influence to China. We must form plans beforehand in order to cope with the situation. After comparing various schools of economic thought, I have come to the realization that the principle of state ownership is most profound, reliable and practical. Moreover, it will forestall in China difficulties which have already caused much anxiety in the West. I have therefore decided to enforce the principle of the people's livelihood simultaneously with the principles of nationalism and democracy, with the hope to achieve our political objective and nip economic unrest in the bud.

To sum up, my revolutionary principles in a nutshell consist in the Three Principles of the People and the Five Power Constitution. Those who have a clear knowledge of the general tendency of the world and the conditions in China will agree that my views are practical and must be put in practice.

## **II Fundamentals of Revolution**

In the age of autocracy, the masses of the people were fettered in spirit and body so that emancipation seemed impossible. Those who worked for the welfare of the people and were

willing to sacrifice themselves for the success of revolution not only did not receive assistance from the people but were also ridiculed and disparaged. Much as they desired to be the guides of the people, they proceeded without followers. Much as they desired to be the vanguards, they advanced without reinforcement. It becomes necessary that., apart from destroying enemy influence, those engaged in revolution should take care to develop the constructive ability of the people. A revolutionary program is therefore indispensable.

According to my plan, the progress of our revolution should be regulated and divided into three stages: First, military rule; second, political tutelage; third, constitutional government. The first stage is a period of destruction, during which military rule is installed. The revolutionary: army is to break doom (as it did) Manchu despotism, sweep away official corruptions, and reform vicious customs.

The second stage is a transitional period, during which a provisional constitution (not the present. one) will be promulgated. Its object is to build a local self-government system for the development of democracy. The *Hsien* or district will be unit of self-government. When disbanded troops are disposed of and fighting ceases, every district should accept the provisional constitution, which will regulate the rights and duties of the people and the administrative powers of the revolutionary government. It will be in force for three years, at the end of which period the people will choose their district magistrates. Even before the expiration of the period, the people in a district may be empowered to choose their own magistrate and become a complete self-governing body on the following conditions:

That the self-government bureau of the said district has already cleaned the district of its long-standing corruptions; that it has succeeded in getting more than half of its population to understand the Three Principles of the People and devote themselves to the republic; that. it has fulfilled the minimum requirements of the provisional constitution in regard to census-taking, residence registration, police, health, education and road-building. In reference to the self-government body, the revolutionary government may exercise the power of political tutelage only in accordance with the provisional constitution. Six years after the whole nation is restored to peace and order, each district which has attained complete self-government. may elect. one delegate, and these delegates will form the People's Congress to adopt the five-power constitution.

The central government will have five yuan or boards. The five yuan. will be (1) The Executive Yuan, (2) The Legislative Yuan, (3) The Judicial Yuan, (4) The Examination Yuan, and (5) The Censor Yuan. Following the promulgation of the constitution, citizens of the various districts will elect the President by vote for the formation of the Executive Yuan, and elect representatives for the formation of the Legislative Yuan. The heads of the three other yuan will be appointed by the President with the consent of the Legislative Yuan, but they will not be responsible to the President and the Legislative Yuan. All the five yuan will be responsible to the People's Congress. Members of a yuan, in case of failure to discharge their duties, may be impeached before the People's Congress by the Censor Yuan. In case the members of the Censor Yuan fail in their duties, the Congress will directly impeach them and remove them. The duty of the Congress is solely to attend to the amendment of the constitution and the punishment of public servants. The qualification of the employees in the Congress and the five yuan as well as be high and junior officials of the whole nation will be determined by the Examination Yuan. Following the adoption of the five-power constitution and the election of

the President and representatives, the revolutionary government will be turned over to the President elected by the people, whereupon the period of political tutelage will terminate.

The third stage, which marks the completion of national reconstruction, will usher in constitutional government. During this period the self-governing bodies in the various districts should exercise the direct political powers of the people. In district political affairs citizens should have the rights of universal suffrage, initiative, referendum and recall. In national political affairs they should, while directly exercising the right of election, delegate the three other rights to their representatives in the People's Congress. This period of constitutional government marks the completion of national reconstruction and the successful conclusion of the revolution.

If we can proceed according to the revolutionary fundamentals that have been briefly out-lined, not only can we clean the Augean stable of autocracy and carry out the rights of the people, but we can also strengthen and safeguard the constructive power of the people against the manipulations of politicians and the unscrupulousness of militarists. It becomes obvious that the principles of revolution must depend upon the fundamentals of revolution for a thorough realization.

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#### [Kishlansky Questions]

1. Why did Sun Yat-sen write his Fundamentals of National Reconstruction?
2. What did Sun Yat-sen learn from his time in Europe and the United States?
3. What does the author hope to achieve through revolution?
4. What does Sun Yat-sen mean by his three fundamental principles of nationalism, democracy, and livelihood?