A Revolutionary Formula for China's Revival

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81 ▼ *Sun Yat-sen, THE THREE PEOPLE'S PRINCIPLES AND THE FUTURE OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE*

By 1900 the prognosis for the Manchu regime had deteriorated from poor to critical. It had survived massive peasant revolts; military defeats at the hands of the British, French, and Japanese; and a series of humiliating treaties that made a mockery of China's self-image as the world's greatest power. But the Manchu government was doing little more than surviving. In 1898 a desperate attempt to revamp government, encourage education, promote agriculture and commerce, and strengthen the armed forces resulted in a flurry of decrees from Emperor Guangxu during the period known as the One Hundred Days' Reforms. The emperor's efforts, however, were scuttled by court reactionaries led by the Empress Dowager Cixi. Cixi then lent her support to the antiforeign secret societies known as the Boxers, who in 1899 and 1900 converged on Beijing intent on killing or driving away the foreigners. The Boxer Rebellion was suppressed by a multinational force, and China was forced to accept another humiliating treaty — one that included an indemnity of $333,990,000. Support for the government virtually disappeared, and many intellectuals, students, generals, secret society members, and Chinese living abroad began plotting the downfall of the Qing.

The leading revolutionary was Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), a man far different from previous Chinese reformers. Born to a poor rural family from the Guangzhou region, Sun was educated in Hawaiian and Chinese missionary schools and developed a world view more Western than Confucian. Galled by his nation's military impotence and Qing ineptitude, in 1894 he founded the secret Revive China Society, which in 1895 sought to overthrow the Guangzhou provincial government. The plot was uncovered, and Sun was forced into exile. After sixteen years of traveling, planning, writing, and organizing, his hopes were realized when the revolution that ended the Qing Era broke out in 1911.

On his return to China from the United States (he read about the revolution in a Denver newspaper while en route to Kansas City), he was elected provisional president of the United Provinces of China on December 30, 1911. Sun's moment of glory was short-lived. Without an armed force or an organized political party to back him up, Sun resigned as president in 1912 in favor of the military strong man Yuan Shikai, who one year later sent Sun into exile as part of his plan to establish a dictatorship. Sun returned to Guangzhou in 1917 and attempted to

establish a parliamentary government, but by then China had descended into the chaos of local warlord rule. When Sun died in 1925 the prospects of national unity and orderly government for China still seemed dim.

In the following selection Sun presents an early formulation of his "three people's principles," which served as the ideology of the United League, an organization he founded in 1905 in Tokyo that combined secret societies from China, overseas Chinese groups, and Chinese students in Japan. When the United League joined with several other groups to form the Guomindang, or Nationalist, party in 1912, Sun's three principles provided the platform for the new party. Sun presented the following analysis of his three principles in a speech to the United League in Tokyo in 1906 to help celebrate the first anniversary of the League's publication, *Min Pao* (*The People's Journal*).

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What is meant by Sun's principle of nationalism? Against whom are his nationalist sentiments directed?
2. What does he mean by the principle of democracy, and why does he feel it so important to the future of China?
3. What, according to Sun, have been the good and bad effects of what he calls the advances of civilization? Why have the benefits of these advances been so poorly distributed?
4. Briefly describe Sun's "land valuation procedure" and its relation to the principle of livelihood. What are its strengths and flaws?
5. What is Sun's attitude toward the West? How and in what ways will the future government and society of China be superior to those of the West?
6. To what extent are Sun's ideas inspired by Western ideologies and to what extent do they draw on traditional Chinese thought and practice?

A person always recognizes his parents and never confuses them with strangers. Nationalism is analogous to this. It has to do with human nature and applies to everyone. Today, more than 260 years have passed since the Manchus entered China proper, yet even as children we Han[1] would certainly not mistake them for fellow Han. This is the root of nationalism. On the other hand, we should recognize that nationalism does not mean discriminating against people of different nationality. It simply means not allowing such people to seize our political power, for only when we Han are in control politically do we have a nation. . . .

Let us pause to consider for a moment: Where is the nation? Where is the political power? Actually, we are already a people without a nation! The population of the globe is only one billion, several hundred million; we Han, being 400 million, comprise one-fourth of that population.

[1] *Han* in the Chinese language means the Chinese people. Essentially it applies to those who speak the Chinese language and share a common Chinese culture and history.

Our nation is the most populous, most ancient, and most civilized in the world, yet today we are a lost nation. Isn't that enormously bizarre? The African nation of the Transvaal has a population of only 200,000, yet when Britain tried to destroy it, the fighting lasted three years.[2] The Philippines have a population of only several million, but when America tried to subdue it, hostilities persisted for several years.[3] Is it possible that the Han will gladly be a lost nation?

We Han are now swiftly being caught up in a tidal wave of nationalist revolution, yet the Manchus continue to discriminate against the Han. They boast that their forefathers conquered the Han because of their superior unity and military strength and that they intend to retain these qualities so as to dominate the Han forever. . . . Certainly, once we Han unite, our power will be thousands of times greater than theirs, and the success of the nationalist revolution will be assured.

As for the Principle of Democracy, it is the foundation of the political revolution. In the future, to be sure, the vicious politics of today will be swept away after the nationalist revolution triumphs, but it will also be necessary to eradicate the roots of such politics. For several thousand years China has been a monarchical autocracy, a type of political system intolerable to those living in freedom and equality. A nationalist revolution is not itself sufficient to get rid of such a system. Think for a moment: When the founder of the Ming dynasty expelled the Mongols and restored Chinese rule, the nationalist revolution triumphed, but his political system was only too similar to those of the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties.[4] Consequently, after another three hundred years, foreigners again began to invade China. This is the result of the inadequacy of the political system, so that a political revolution is an absolute necessity. . . . The aim of the political revolution is to create a constitutional, democratic political system. In the context of the current political situation in China, a revolution would be necessary even if the monarch were a Han. . . .

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Now, let me begin by discussing the origins of the Principle of the People's Livelihood, a principle that began to flourish only in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Before that it did not flourish because civilization was not as highly developed. . . . As civilization advanced, people relied less on physical labor and more on natural forces, since electricity and steam could accomplish things a thousand times faster than human physical strength. For example, in antiquity a single man tilling the land could harvest at best enough grain to feed a few people, notwithstanding his toil and trouble. Now, however, as a result of the development of scientific agriculture, one man can grow more than enough to feed a thousand people because he can use machinery instead of his limbs, with a consequent increase in efficiency. . . .

Once we adopt this method, the more civilization advances, the greater the wealth of the nation, and then we can be sure our financial problems will not become difficult to handle. After the excessive taxes of the present have been abolished, the price of consumer goods will gradually fall and the people will become increasingly prosperous. We will forever abolish the

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[2]The reference is to the South African War, also known as the Boer War (1899–1902), fought between Great Britain and Transvaal and the Orange Free State, the two Afrikaner, or Boer, states in south Africa. It resulted from cultural friction and political conflict between the British settlers and administrators in the region and the Dutch settlers of the two states.

[3]Between 1899 and 1901 Filipinos under the leadership of Emilio Aguinalado fought against their new colonial master, the United States, after the United States took over the Philippines from Spain at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War.

[4]The Han (202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), Tang (618–906 C.E.), and Song (960–1279 C.E.) were dynastic periods in Chinese history.

vicious taxation policies that have prevailed for several thousand years. Even Europe, America, and Japan, although rich and powerful, impose taxes and rents that are too heavy on their people. After China's social revolution is accomplished, private individuals will never again have to pay taxes. The collection of land revenues alone will make China the richest nation on earth.

In short, the objective of our revolution is to promote the well-being of our people as a whole. Because we are unwilling to let a small number of Manchus enjoy all the privileges, we want a nationalistic revolution. Because we do not want one man, the monarch, to enjoy all the privileges, we want a political revolution. And because we do not want a small number of rich people to enjoy all the privileges, we want a social revolution. Anything short of these three revolutions will not fulfill our original aims. When they have been accomplished, our nation of China will be a most perfect nation.

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Obviously, . . . it is necessary to give considerable attention to what the constitution of the Republic of China should be. . . . The British constitution embodies the so-called separation of powers into executive, legislative, and judicial, all mutually independent. . . . The Frenchman Montesquietu later embraced the British system and melded it with his own ideals to create his own school of thought. The American constitution was based on Montesquietu's theories but went further in clearly demarcating the separation of powers. . . . As to the future constitution of the Republic of China, I propose that we introduce a new principle, that of the "five separate powers."

Under this system, there will be two other powers in addition to the three powers just discussed. One is the examination power. . . . American officials are either elected or appointed. Formerly there were no civil service examinations, which led to serious shortcomings with respect to both elected and appointed officials. With respect to elections, those endowed with eloquence ingratiated themselves with the public and won elections, while those who had learning and ideals but lacked eloquence were ignored. Consequently, members of America's House of Representatives have often been foolish and ignorant people who have made its history quite ridiculous. As for appointees, they all come and go with the president. The Democratic and Republican parties have consistently taken turns holding power, and whenever a president is replaced, cabinet members and other officials, comprising no fewer than 60,000–70,000 people, including the postmaster general, are also replaced. As a result, the corruption and laxity of American politics are unparalleled among the nations of the world. This would seem to be entirely due to the inadequacy of its civil service examinations. . . . Therefore, the future constitution of the Republic of China must provide for an independent branch expressly responsible for civil service examinations. Furthermore, all officials, however high their rank, must undergo examinations in order to determine their qualifications. Whether elected or appointed, officials must pass those examinations before assuming office. This procedure will eliminate such evils as blind obedience, electoral abuses, and favoritism. . . .

In view of this, everyone in Europe and America should be living in a state of plenty and happiness undreamed of in antiquity. If we look around, however, we see that conditions in those countries are precisely the opposite. Statistically, Britain's wealth has increased more than several thousandfold over the previous generation, yet poverty of the people has also increased several thousandfold over the previous generation. Moreover, the rich are extremely few, and the poor extremely numerous. This is because the power of human labor is no match for the power of capital. In antiquity, agriculture and industry depended completely on human labor; but now, with the development of natural forces that human labor cannot match, agriculture and indus-

try have fallen completely into the hands of capitalists. The greater the amount of capital, the more abundant the resources that can be utilized. Unable to compete, the poor have naturally been reduced to destitution. . . .

Indeed, this constitutes a lesson for China. . . . Civilization yields both good and bad fruits, and we should embrace the good and reject the bad. In the countries of Europe and America, the rich monopolize the good fruits of civilization, while the poor suffer from its evil fruits. . . . Our current revolution will create a nation that not only belongs to the citizenry but is socially responsible. Certainly, there will be nothing comparable to it in Europe or America.

Why have Europe and America failed to solve their social problems? Because they have not solved their land problem. Generally speaking, wherever civilization is advanced, the price of land increases with each passing day. . . . In China capitalists have not yet emerged, so that for several thousand years there has been no increase in land prices. . . . After the revolution, however, conditions in China will be different. For example, land prices in Hong Kong and Shanghai are currently as much as several hundred times higher than those in the interior. This increment is the result of the advance of civilization and the development of communications. It is inevitable that, as the entire nation advances, land prices everywhere will rise accordingly. . . . Fifty years ago, land along the banks of the Huang-p'u River in Shanghai was worth up to a million dollars a *mou*.[5] This is evidence of the clearest sort, from which we can see that in the future the rich will get richer every day, and the poor, poorer. In another ten years, social problems will become even more pressing. . . . Consequently, we must come up with a solution now. . . .

With respect to a solution, although the socialists have different opinions, the procedure I most favor is land valuation. For example, if a landlord has land worth 1,000 dollars, its price can be set at 1,000 or even 2,000 dollars. Perhaps in the future, after communications have been developed, the value of his land will rise to 10,000 dollars; the owner should receive 2,000, which entails a profit and no loss, and the 8,000 increment will go to the state. Such an arrangement will greatly benefit both the state and the people's livelihood. Naturally, it will also eliminate the shortcomings that have permitted a few rich people to monopolize wealth. This is the simplest, most convenient, and most feasible method. . . .

The other power is the supervisory power, responsible for monitoring matters involving impeachment. For reasons that should be evident to all, such a branch is indispensable to any nation. The future constitution of the Republic of China must provide for an independent branch. Since ancient times, China had a supervisory organization, the Censorate,[6] to monitor the traditional social order. Inasmuch as it was merely a servant of the monarchy, however, it was ineffectual. . . .

With this added to the four powers already discussed, there will be five separate powers. That constitution will form the basis of the sound government of a nation that belongs to its own race, to its own citizens, and to its own society. This will be the greatest good fortune for our 400 million Han people. I presume that you gentlemen are willing to undertake and complete this task. It is my greatest hope.

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[5]A *mou* equals 1.5 acres.

[6]The Censorate, or Board of Censors, was a unique feature of Ming and Qing government. Members of the board reviewed the conduct of officials, both in the provinces and in Beijing, and reported to the emperor when they discovered dereliction of duty. They were considered the "eyes and ears" of the emperors.