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Reading 53

Sun Yat-sen's *Three Principles of the People*

Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) was educated in China, the British colony of Hong Kong, and the United States. Dr. Sun practiced medicine for a short time but gave it up following China's defeat in its war against Japan in 1894–95. He came to believe that the imperial government was thoroughly rotten, and nothing short of a revolution would restore China's greatness. After the **Boxer Rebellion** (1898–1900), revolutionary forces gained momentum among Chinese patriots. As a result, the Manchu dynasty was overthrown in 1911 and the Republic of China was established. One of the founders of modern China, Dr. Sun delivered a series of lectures at the Senior Normal School in Canton between January and August of 1924. He presented six lectures on nationalism, six on democracy, and four on Chinese people's livelihood. On the day before his death, Sun Yat-sen wrote, "The work of the Revolution is not yet done." Little did he realize that his prophetic words would ring true: when Mao Zedong arrived on the Chinese political scene about ten years later, he continued the work Sun Yat-sen had begun.

On Nationalism (27 January 1924)

What is the Principle of Nationalism? I would say briefly that the Principle of Nationalism is equivalent to the "doctrine of the state." The Chinese people have shown the greatest loyalty to family and clan with the result that in China there have been family-ism and clanism but no real nationalism. The unity of the Chinese people has stopped short at the clan and has not extended to the nation.

My statement that the principle of nationalism is equivalent to the doctrine of the state is applicable in China but not in the West. For the reason that China, since the Ch'in and Han dynasties, has been developing a single state out of a single race, while foreign countries have developed many states from one race and have included many nationalities within one state. For example, England, now the world's most powerful state, has, upon the foundation of the white race, added

Sun Yat-sen, *The Three Principles of the People* (Taipei: China Cultural Service, 1981), 1–5, 39–45, 99–109, passim.

brown, black, and other races to form the British Empire. Hence, to say that the race or nation is the state is not true of England.

There is a definite line between them. In simple terms, the race or nationality has developed through natural forces, while the state has developed through force of arms. To use an illustration from China's political history: Chinese say that the *wang-tao*, royal way or way of right, followed nature; in other words, natural force was the royal way. The group molded by the royal way is the race, the nationality. Armed force is the *pa-tao*, or "the way of might"; the group formed by the way of might is the state. Since of old, no state has been built up without force. But the development of a race or nationality is quite different: it grows entirely by nature, in no way subject to force. Therefore, we say that a group united and developed in the royal way, by forces of nature, is a race; a group united and developed by the way of might, by human forces, is a state. This, then, is the difference between a race or nationality and a state.

Again, as to the origin of races. Man was originally a species of animal, yet he is far removed from the common fowl and the beasts; he is "the soul of all creation." Dividing further, we have many subraces. The forces which developed these races were, in general, natural forces, but when we try to analyze them we find they are very complex. The greatest force is common blood. The blood of ancestors is transmitted by heredity down through the race, making blood kinship a powerful force.

The second great force is livelihood; when the means used to obtain a living vary, the races developed show differences. The abode of the Mongolians, for instance, followed water and grass; they lived the life of nomads, roaming and tenting by water and grass, and out of these common nomadic habits there developed a race, which accounts for the sudden rise of Mongol power.

The third great force in forming races is language. If foreign races learn our language, they are more easily assimilated by us and in time become absorbed into our race. So language is also one of the great forces for the development of a race.

The fourth force is religion. People who worship the same gods or the same ancestors tend to form one race. Religion is also a very powerful factor in the development of races.

The fifth force is customs and habits. If people have markedly similar customs and habits, they will, in time, cohere and form one race. When, therefore, we discover dissimilar peoples or stocks amalgamating and forming a homogeneous race, we must attribute the development to these five forces—blood kinship, common language, common livelihood, common religion, and common customs—which are products not of military occupation but of natural evolution. The comparison between these five natural forces and armed force helps us to distinguish between the race or nationality and the state.

Considering the law of survival of ancient and modern races, if we want to save China and to preserve the Chinese race, we must certainly promote Nationalism. To make this principle luminous for China's salvation, we must first understand it clearly. The Chinese race totals four hundred million people; for the

most part, the Chinese people are of the Han or Chinese race with common blood, common language, common religion, and common customs—a single, pure race.

What is the standing of our nation in the world? In comparison with other nations we have the greatest population and the oldest culture, of four thousand years' duration. We ought to be advancing in line with the nations of Europe and America. But the Chinese people have only family and clan groups; there is no national spirit. Consequently, in spite of four hundred million people gathered together in one China, we are in fact but a sheet of loose sand. We are the poorest and weakest state in the world, occupying the lowest position in international affairs; the rest of mankind is the carving knife and the serving dish, while we are the fish and the meat. Our position now is extremely perilous; if we do not earnestly promote nationalism and weld together our four hundred millions into a strong nation, we face a tragedy—the loss of our country and the destruction of our race. To ward off this danger, we must espouse Nationalism and employ the national spirit to save the country.

On Democracy (9 March 1924)

What is the People's Sovereignty? In order to define this term we must first understand what a "people" is. Any unified and organized body of men is called a "people." What is "sovereignty"? It is power and authority extended to the area of the state. The power to execute orders and to regulate public conduct is called "sovereignty," and when "people" and "sovereignty" are linked together, we have the political power of the people. To understand "political power" we must know what government is. Briefly, government is a thing of the people and by the people; it is control of the affairs of all the people. The power of control is political sovereignty, and where the people control the government we speak of the "people's sovereignty."

The word democracy—popular sovereignty—has only lately been introduced into China. All of you who have come here today to support my revolution are naturally believers in democracy. Which, autocracy or democracy, is really better suited to modern China? If we base our judgment upon the intelligence and the ability of the Chinese people, we come to the conclusion that the sovereignty of the people would be far more suitable for us. Confucius and Mencius two thousand years ago spoke for people's rights. Confucius said, "When the Great Doctrine prevails, all under heaven will work for the common good." . . . Thus China more than two millenniums ago had already considered the idea of democracy, but at that time she could not put it into operation. Democracy was then what foreigners call a Utopia, an ideal which could not be immediately realized.

Now that Europe and America have founded republics, we whose ancients dreamed of these things should certainly follow the tide of world events and make use of the people's power if we expect our state to rule long and peacefully and our people to enjoy happiness. . . .

Since the beginning of human history, the kind of power which government has wielded has inevitably varied according to the circumstances and tendencies of the age. In an age which revered gods, theocratic power had to be used; in an age of princes autocratic power had to be used. But now the currents of the world's life have swept into the age of democracy and it behooves us quickly to study what democracy means. Because some of the treatises upon democracy, such as the *Social Contract* of Rousseau, have been a bit inconsistent with true principles, is no reason why we should oppose all that is good in democracy as well. Nor must we think that democracy is impracticable because the monarchy was restored after the revolution of Cromwell in England or because the revolution stretched out for so long a time in France. The French Revolution lasted eighty years before it succeeded. The American Revolution accomplished its aims in eight years, but England after two hundred years of revolution still has a king. However, if we observe the steady progress of the world from many angles, we are assured the day of democracy is here; and that, no matter what disappointments and defeats democracy may meet, it will maintain itself for a long time to come upon the earth.

Thirty years ago, therefore, we fellow revolutionists firmly resolved that, if we wanted China to be strong and our revolution to be effective, we must espouse the cause of democracy. Those Chinese who opposed democracy used to ask what strength there was in our Revolutionary Party to be able to overthrow the Manchu emperor. But in 1911 he fell with one push, another victim of the world tide. This world tendency has flowed from theocracy on to autocracy and from autocracy now on to democracy, and there is really no way to stem the current. . . .

Today I am speaking about the people's sovereignty and I want you all to understand clearly what it really means. Unless we do understand clearly, we can never get rid of imperial ambitions among us, ambitions which will make even brethren in a cause and citizens of the same country fight one another. The whole land will be torn year after year with civil strife and there will be no end to the sufferings of the people. Because I wanted us to avert such calamities, I lifted up the banner of democracy as soon as the revolution began and determined that we should found a republic. When we have a real republic, who will be king? The people, our four hundred millions, will be king. This will prevent everybody from struggling for power and will reduce the war evil in China.

On Livelihood (3 August 1924)

The subject of my lecture today is *Min Sheng Chu I*, the "Principle of the People's Livelihood." *Min Sheng* is a worn phrase in China. We talk about *Kuo Chi Min Sheng*, "national welfare and the people's livelihood," but I fear that we pay only lip service to these words and have not really sought to understand them. I cannot see that they have held much meaning for us. But if, in this day of scientific

knowledge, we will bring the phrase into the realm of scientific discussion and study its social and economic implications, we shall find that it takes on an immeasurable significance. I propose today a definition for *Min Sheng*, the People's Livelihood. It denotes the livelihood of the people—the existence of society, the welfare of the nation, the life of the masses. And now I shall use the phrase *Min Sheng* to describe one of the greatest problems that has emerged in the West during the past century or more, and that is a social problem.

The problem of livelihood is now rising like a tide in every country. Yet the problem is comparatively new, with a history of not much over a century. What has caused the sudden emergence of this question in the last hundred years? Briefly, the rapid progress of material civilization all over the world, the great development of industry and the sudden increase in the productive power of the human race. Candidly speaking, the problem arose with the invention of machinery and with the gradual substitution of natural power for human labor in the most civilized nations. . . .

On account of this [industrial] revolution the workers suffered greatly. This is why, during the last few decades, a social problem has come into existence, the result of an effort to relieve this kind of suffering.

It is this social problem that I am discussing today in the Principle of Livelihood. Why not follow the West and speak directly of socialism? Why use the old Chinese term *Min Sheng* in its stead? There is a very significant reason for this which we shall consider. Since its first development, and especially since the Industrial Revolution, machinery has become a serious social problem and has stimulated the rise of socialistic theories. But although socialism has been a growing force for several decades, Western nations have not yet found a solution for the questions involved in it, and a severe dispute is still raging over them.

Is the Principle of Livelihood really different from socialism? Socialism deals primarily with the economic problems of society; that is, the common problem of living. Since the introduction of machinery, a large number of people have had their work taken away from them and workers generally have been unable to maintain their existence. Socialism arose as an effort to solve the living problem, and from this standpoint, the social question is also the economic question, and the principle of livelihood is the main theme of socialism. But now every country's socialism has different theories and different proposals for social reconstruction.

[Karl] Marx worked out the theory that all human activity upon the globe which has been preserved in written records for succeeding generations can be called history; and all human history, viewed in this way, gravitates about material forces. This latter point was the new emphasis which Marx gave to history. If the material basis of life changes, the world also changes; human behavior, moreover, is determined by the material environment, and so the history of human civilization is the story of adaptation to material environment. . . . But the facts of Western history, in the seventy-odd years since Marx, have directly contradicted his theory.

The world now is making steady progress and initiating new reforms daily. Take, for example, the new practice of socialized distribution, also called cooperative societies. These societies are organized by a union of many workers. If

the workers buy the clothing and food which they need indirectly through retail merchants, the merchants will demand a profit and make a lot of money, while the workers will have to spend much more upon their purchases. In order to buy good articles at a low price the workers themselves effect an organization and open their own store to sell them what they need. In this way they can buy all goods which they ordinarily use from their own store. The supplies are handy and cheap and at the end of every year the surplus profit which the store makes is divided among the customers according to the proportion of their purchases. It is on account of this division of profits in proportion to the amount of purchase that the stores are called consumers' cooperative societies. A large number of banks and productive factories in Great Britain are now managed by these co-operative societies. The rise of these societies has eliminated a great many commercial stores. Those who once looked upon these stores as unimportant commercial shops now regard them as powerful organizations. For due to the rapid spread of such organizations the big British merchants have now all become producers. The development of these co-operative societies as a solution for the social problem is a side issue, yet it has disproved Marx's conclusion that capitalists would be destroyed before the merchant class. This inconsistency of Marx's deductions with modern facts is another evidence that my theory—that knowledge is difficult, action easy—cannot be effaced. . . .

Livelihood is the center of government, the center of economics, the center of all historical movements. Just as men once misjudged the center of the solar system, so the old socialists mistook material forces for the center of history. The confusions which have resulted may be compared to those which followed the convulsions of the old astronomers that the earth was the center of our solar system. If we want to clear away the confusions from within the social problem, we must correct this mistake in social science. We can no longer say that material issues are the central force in history. We must let the political, social, and economic movements of history gravitate about the problem of livelihood. We must recognize livelihood as the center of social history. When we have made a thorough investigation of this central problem, then we can find a way to a solution of the social problem.

Study Questions

1. According to Sun Yat-sen, how are nationalism, democracy, and livelihood pragmatically related?
2. How did the ideals of Western liberal democracy influence Sun's thinking?
3. According to Sun, why is a state only as strong as its national economy?
4. How do Sun's convictions about his country differ from the traditional views of imperial Chinese bureaucrats and literati?