

Reflections on the 100th Anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution

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The Source of the Awakening of Revolutionary Ideologies

The 100th anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution commemorates the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty by Dr. Sun Yatsen, the “Father of the Chinese Republic”, the establishment of a democratic Republic of China and the inauguration a new age in the history of the Chinese people. He dissipated the hatred arising from racial discrimination, and gave rise to the hope that different minority groups might be united under one Chinese nation. At the same time, he put an end to the corrupt bureaucracy and close-mindedness of the Qing dynasty. Through the revolution, Sun overthrew the old political system and founded a new one. Thus he created a breakthrough for China. This was the hope of Dr. Sun Yatsen and all young, enthusiastic intellectuals, and it was accomplished by their efforts. The life of the people was greatly affected by the decline of the Qing dynasty. The threat of war from the Western powers and the oppression of the unequal treaties hung over China. The fact that their motherland was gradually becoming a colony inspired the revolutionary actions of Dr. Sun Yatsen and other activists. This was indeed a great awakening of the mind and a significant outcry for progress in the history of modern China.

What followed the awakening of the mind was an urge for self-strengthening among the people. The aspirants sacrificed their selfish interests for the revolutionary cause. They hoped to save China from foreign occupation, so that the Chinese people might be united and that China’s national esteem might be restored.

The awakening of mind originated from serious reflections on historical events. It aroused in the minds of the Chinese people an awareness of their dignity and of their power of self-determination.

They became aware of their right to exist, and that the integrity of their homeland should be respected. The partition and occupation of China was tantamount to violating China's "right to exist", and meant that the country's dignity was disrespected. Amidst great suffering, the Chinese people sought to rediscover meaning for their lives and the right to exist. With their minds now awakened, the Chinese demanded from the absolute monarchy of the Manchus and from the Great Powers who had invaded China, the establishment of democracy, respect for the Chinese people's right to exist, and respect for the integrity of the national territory of China. They expressed their hope for a harmonious and just society which would contribute to the fraternity and peace of the whole world, based on the traditional values of Chinese culture, especially peace and a moral life.

Under the leadership of Dr. Sun Yatsen, the revolution awakened the consciousness of the Chinese people. His ideas were not only infused with the traditional humanitarian spirit of Confucianism, but also with Western (Christian) religious, philosophical and sociological points of views. The aim of Dr. Sun's revolutionary plan was to overthrow the absolute monarchy, which had ruled over China throughout the course of its history. He sought to unite the Han, Manchurian, Mongolian, Muslim and Tibetan groups into one big family of Chinese citizens. He wanted to protect the right to life by promoting the traditional values of loyalty, piety, charity, trust, justice and peace. He sought to build a society of harmony and justice based on the Chinese traditional values of peace and good morals. His thoughts were highly innovative and synthetic. To prevent bloodshed during the revolution, he accepted the doctrines of Marx and Lenin, "The purpose of seeking social progress is the survival of mankind." But he dispensed with class struggle in Marx's system of thought, which Marx had promoted to dissolve the huge gap between the rich and the poor.¹ He reflected on the truths of the Christian faith, finding in its doctrine of the salvation of mankind a way to save society and the country. He coordinated the doctrine of salvation in Christ with Confucian humanistic and ethical values. Through this

¹ 項退結著，《中國人的路》，〈十七：平實穩健的國父孫中山〉，臺北東大圖書公司，1988，285-290頁。

blending of Christian faith and Chinese culture, he was able to open the way for an awakening of the Chinese people:

“Dr. Sun said at a welcoming function in the first year of the Republic, ‘For many years, our comrades advocated and worked hard for the revolutionary cause, and since then they have never turned away from their goal. Most of these revolutionaries were members of the Christian churches. The establishment of the Republic of China was not the fruit of our comrades’ work, but the fruit of the Church.’ This speech not only pointed out the source of revolutionary ideas, but provided future generations with a clearer understanding of the revolutionary movements in the late-Ching period.”²

The Christian doctrine of salvation originates in salvation bestowed by God. One is called to repent, to do good and to avoid evil. It is from this doctrine that the “Christian spirit of revolution” is developed. “The ethical values of Christian revolutionaries find their source in God. The demand for democracy, the effort to save one’s country and its people, the humanitarian spirit of revolution, the willingness and bravery to sacrifice oneself for these ideals, the unselfishness of the revolutionaries, the manifestation of justice, the hatred of evil, and even the reliance on God’s power in the course of revolution... can be described as God’s morality being realized in human morality. It is an encounter between God’s will and the human will.”³

Dr. Sun Yatsen was baptized in 1885 at the Hong Kong Congregational Church. In 1886, he studied Medicine in Hong Kong and went to Macau to work as a doctor in 1892. After receiving baptism, he felt a desire to be a missionary. He displayed a spirit of saving others by working in the medical profession. He then saved China and all the Chinese people by his involvement in the revolutionary cause. He really demonstrated a Christian respect for life. He taught people to be willing to bear responsibility. If people have a sense of responsibility, then they will automatically

² 梁壽華著，《革命先驅—基督徒與晚清中國革命的起源》，香港宣道出版社，2007年初版，〈林榮洪序〉，viii頁。

³ Ibid., 〈自序〉，p. xv.

carry out their duties. He employed a Christian spirit and ideals of equality as slogans for revolution. He used the Christian religion to relieve the Chinese people from their suffering, without harming others. Through compassion, he realized the values of revolution. He brought about revolutionary justice through a spirit of fraternity and equality. All these come from the spirit of communion in the social doctrines of the Christian faith. The core of this communion is selfless love for all. Christ's love awakens the force of communion that transcends all divisions and suffering. It arouses in men and women a desire for harmony and unity. This unity is established by the love of all human beings, and in this love man perceives his "creative responsibility" for the unity of reality.⁴ Because of this "creative responsibility", the Chinese people "would not lose their identity as Chinese, if they became Christians. They could still bear responsibility for their motherland. The Christian faith would not weaken the love of the Chinese Christians for their country... Instead, it would strengthen their sense of responsibility towards their nation... The Christian doctrine of salvation reinforced the ideal of saving their country among Christians... It goes from the salvation of oneself to the salvation of society."⁵

In fact, the awakening of the people's minds was effective in arousing the enthusiasm of the people for the revolutionary cause. The process was not a smooth one. Many attempts at uprising ended in failure and frustration. Dr. Sun's way of instructing the members of his revolutionary party, as well as the maintenance of the party's morale, was particularly important in times of failure. The repeated failures of uprisings were a heavy burden. Since differences in opinion and conflicts among members were inevitable, Dr. Sun was very concerned about the party members' mindset. The small-group fellowship prevalent in Christian churches was founded upon the theme of unity. Communication

⁴ 潘能柏格著，李秋零、田薇譯，《人是什麼—從神學看當代人類學》，香港道風山基督教叢林出版，1994年，138-139頁。
(Translation of Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*).

⁵ Footnote 2, pp. 352-358.

was conducted through a group of five responsible for explaining ideas and rallying support. In this way, it was hoped that all might understand the importance of unity in the revolutionary party. Members should not waver in their unity... “Everybody knows that the revolutionary cause moves people. The Three People’s Principles provides guidance towards the correct direction. For this reason, once the call for revolution is sounded, it stirs up nationalist feelings and enlivens the spirit of the Chinese people.”⁶ Such a unity of mind and heart sustained the spirit of the *Tongmenghui* members in spite of previous unsuccessful attempts.

In spite of the increasing frustration due to the many failures from the first revolutionary attempt to its final success, Dr. Sun and his followers never lost their heart for the revolutionary cause; their enthusiasm continued to grow. The revolutionaries followed the Three People’s Principles, bearing in their awakened minds the spirit of liberty, equality, fraternity and democracy, hoping to build up a just and harmonious society. On April 27, 1911, Huang Xing led the revolutionaries in the siege of the governor’s office in Guangzhou. The military uprising ended up in failure and the death of 72 revolutionaries, who were buried at Huanghuagang. The defeat, however, aroused the people’s revolutionary zeal, and within 5 months (on 10th October, 2011) the revolutionaries in Wuchang undertook their revolution. They followed in the footsteps of their predecessors, who sacrificed their lives for the revolutionary movement, not fearing the pain and death they might have to go through. Success was finally achieved.⁷

From the Awakening of Minds to Reflections on the 100th Anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution

After the success of the 1911 Revolution, Dr. Sun Yatsen returned to China from Europe and the United States. He arrived in Shanghai on December 25, 1911. (6th November, Year of Xinhai, in the lunar calendar). On 28th December (9th November, Year of

⁶ 譚永年主編、甄冠南編述，《辛亥革命回憶錄（下冊）》，香港榮僑書店，民47年（1958），17-19, 31頁。

⁷ 楊玉如編著，《辛亥革命著記》，香港文化資料供應社出版，1978年五月重版，〈第一章：辛亥武昌革命朔源〉，7-8頁。

Xinhai, in the lunar calendar), he called a preparatory meeting in Nanjing for the election of an acting president. On the tenth day of the eleventh month of the Year of Xinhai (December 29, 1911), the official election was held. Each of the 17 provincial representatives was given one vote, hence making a total number of 17 votes. Dr. Sun got 16 votes and became the acting president of the Republic of China. The provincial representatives assumed the authority of the Senate according to No. 16 of the General Instructions on the Establishment of the Provisional Government of the Republic of China. On 12th November (December 31, 1911 in the Gregorian calendar), a telegram was delivered to all provinces announcing the change of calendar: 12th November in the Year of Xinhai would be counted as the first day of the first Year of the Republic of China.⁸

Dr. Sun became the president on 1st January in the first Year of the Republic of China. The inauguration ceremony was held in Nanjing. In the ceremony, he made the following oath:

It was the people's wish that the totalitarian government of the Manchus be brought down, the Republic of China be established and the welfare of the people be provided for. I have tried to realize these, so as to serve my country and its entire people. I hereby pledge before all citizens that I take this obligation of acting president, until totalitarianism is completely overthrown, the current unrest is settled, and the Republic is well established and is internationally recognized.⁹

From the content of the oath, we can see the ardent spirit and charitable mind of Dr. Sun. He was eager to see justice and unity realized in society, the rule of a despotic government abrogated and the welfare of the people taken care of. He dedicated his whole life to the service of his fellow human beings, and in this sense his spirit was manifestly Christian. When Dr. Sun assumed the office of president, he stated his purpose in the declaration issued at that time, "To eradicate all the pernicious effects of totalitarianism, to establish the rule of the Republic, and to protect the livelihood of

⁸ Ibid., see Chapter 9: 〈南北和議成、清朝君主退位、中華民國建立〉, pp. 248-249.

⁹ Footnote 6, p. 332.

the people... The foundation of a nation lies in its people. The unity of hearts is the basis for the unity of all the people, including the Han Chinese, the Manchus, the Mongolians, the Muslims, the Tibetans and all minority groups..."¹⁰ Based on this foundation, the livelihood of the people is guaranteed and charity is realized. The unity and peace established in the Republic was, indeed, the fruit of the awakening of the Xinhai revolution, and can be called a "communion."

The 100th Anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution reminds us of an important historical fact: Dr. Sun overthrew the Manchu dynasty. Republican rule was established after ten unsuccessful attempts. Success was finally achieved on the tenth attempt (the Xinhai Revolution). A hundred years have passed since then. What insights can we gain from this historical event? What hope has the awakening of the Xinhai Revolution brought to the Chinese people? Is the hope being realized today? Or has the hope been forgotten by the new generation of the Chinese people as time passed by? Has it been lost due to the corruption in people's hearts and changes in the social and political systems? Or do we think that there is no use for this commemoration? Or do we consider the Xinhai Revolution a failure, and the "People's Revolution" as the real success worth remembering? ¹¹ If we do not reflect upon this seriously, the spirit of democracy, awakening and unity, which were the themes of the Xinhai Revolution, will be consigned to oblivion. Values like freedom, equality and fraternity will also be forsaken. At a time when progress in technology, aerospace engineering, construction and economics gives rise to consumerism, post-totalitarianism, technology and self-interested hedonism, the awakening of people's minds is crucial for a life of integrity. Real riches lie not in material affluence, but inner contentment. Therefore, the question we need to ask is: What is the meaning of life? What makes one's life meaningful? What is human dignity? The 100th Anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution is a call for awakening and self-awareness. In the last 100 years, have the Chinese people been living in harmony

¹⁰ Footnote 6, p. 250.

¹¹ 參閱方志欽著，《辛亥革命簡史》，廣東人民出版社，1980年6月，第一版，〈十一·歷史的啓示〉，171-174頁。

with one another, in the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity? Have unity and mutual support been achieved among the different ethnic groups in China? Dr. Sun overthrew the absolute rule of the Manchus with the hope that the Chinese people would be emancipated. However, another totalitarian government has emerged. China was caught in the political division between “the Republic of China” and “the People’s Republic of China”. Is it possible for China to progress towards unification? This is the hope of all the Chinese people; it is also the hope of all Chinese Catholics. Let there be no more divisions. The Catholic Church wishes to see unity among different nations and cultures and the disappearance of division. Unity is a blessing for a country, for it is only when conflicts are dissolved that love, unity and harmony are possible. Unity is important for preserving the cultural, intellectual and moral heritage, which draws all members of a society together into one nation.

Václav Havel¹² saw the changes in Czech society. Man sees himself as the master of all. He can control and change the natural environment. The earth is created for man’s use and exploitation. Human beings can do harm to each other and to the natural environment for greater economic development. Mankind loses its reality and lives in falsity. This is why Havel exhorted mankind to abandon specious ideologies, to reclaim their moral strength, and to rebuild an interdependent and harmonious relationship with other people and the world, and to live in reality.

The Xinhai Revolution was a “rational” revolution. There were not many casualties in the process, and the destruction of lives and properties was reduced to a minimum. There was no large-scale ostracization of the Manchurians. It was not the overthrow of one social stratum by another, not an event in which “the winner takes all”, and it was not simply a change of dynasty. It was an

¹² Václav Havel was the last President of Czechoslovakia (1989-92) and the first President of the Czech Republic (1993-2003). In 1994 he proposed the concept of “the way to save the contemporary problematic situation”. He was a fighter for democracy, a wise man who cared for the civilization of humankind; his thinking aimed at “exposing the lie of ideology”, giving modern people the contents for reflection. See 《明報》 (*Ming Pao*), 5 October 1994, Wednesday, Hong Kong.

awakening of rationality and civilization. It brought about a change in the political system which enabled China to catch up with the rapid progress of the outside world. It strengthened China in a time of foreign invasion. It brought hope for the Chinese people that their lives might be improved. It opened the way for China to progress towards rationality and the unification of all the ethnic groups within its borders under one Republic. As written in "The Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China", "the sovereignty of the Republic of China belongs to all citizens". It stated that "all citizens of the Republic of China are equal before the law, without any racial, social or religious distinction".¹³ All these are positive values that the Xinhai Revolution inculcated in the minds of the Chinese people. It was an ongoing call for awakening for all Chinese. Dr. Sun wrote in his will before his death, "The ultimate success of the revolutionary cause has not been attained yet. Comrades still need to work hard for its realization!"

Conclusion: Rebuilding a Harmonious Society

It was a happy coincidence that, on the 100th Anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution, the University of Hong Kong also celebrated its 100th anniversary. It was originally a joyous occasion, but an incident took place concerning freedom and authority, which aroused indignation among the students, and led to some serious reflections about the issue of freedom. This spirit of reflection is exactly the same as the awakening of minds at the time of the Xinhai Revolution. What is the significance of this event for Hong Kong and China? In his article "The Tragedy and Crisis of the University of Hong Kong", Professor Xu Guoqi of the History Department of HKU pointed out the following matters concerning the university:

1. The focus of the university should be on its academic excellence, the outstanding achievements of its intellectual

¹³ 馮崇義、楊恒均著 (University of Technology, Sydney), 〈辛亥革命的正面價值〉, in Hong Kong: *Open Magazine* (《開放雜誌》), March 2011, pp. 74-79.

masters and the students' freedom in their search for knowledge, not the accumulation of money or support from politicians. The University of Hong Kong can maintain its status as the tower of academic excellence and the lighthouse of liberty, provided that the students know how to learn from their mistakes and improve themselves.

2. It is a crisis caused by the tendency to value the study of natural sciences over the humanities.¹⁴

This is indeed an awakening of the mind. It inspires students to re-consider the "core values" of human life. It helps us reflect on the humanitarian spirit of our culture, and the co-existence of different cultures, peoples, groups and religions. In the development of human civilization, the core values of respect for the uniqueness of each individual, the freedom of individuals and basic rights, which should not be ignored, as well as democratic ideals, and law and order. The humanitarian spirit should be revived and affirmed in an age when scientism prevails. Human beings should rediscover their once-possessioned integrity and communion with the whole world. In this way, they can best preserve truth, goodness, beauty and the sanctity of life. They can develop a greater understanding of the reason for their existence on earth. The new world order should be built upon respect for human rights.

When we put these values into practice, we will truly respect our rights as well as those of our neighbors. We will make good use of our potential, our knowledge and our rights. In an environment where love and freedom are predominant, everybody can develop an awareness of mankind's basic goodness. All people from different strata can live together without class struggle. With a spirit of unity and charity, they can cooperate with each other in building up a happy and ordered society. The possibility of conflict will be reduced. On the other hand, long-term conflicts will inevitably lead to more violent disputes and chaos. After the Xinhai Revolution, Dr. Sun disseminated the ideas of unity and harmony among various ethnic groups. He stressed the cultural heritage passed on by China's ancient "saintly emperors". He realized the urgent need for harmony

¹⁴ 徐國琦著《港大的悲哀與危機》，see《明報》(*Ming Pao*), A32, 6 September 2011, Tuesday.

in the Republic of China, not social unrest. Similarly, after the renunciation of Confucianism during the great proletarian Cultural Revolution, the People's Republic of China underwent significant changes under the ideological leadership of the government.

From the awakening of minds to the search for the meaning of life, the Chinese people have faced many challenges and much suffering, which were often tedious and agonizing. Yet they did not give up easily. Their ultimate goal was always harmony — harmony with Nature and with their families. The idea of toleration comes from such an emphasis on harmony.

From the Xinhai Revolution to its 100th anniversary, we can see that the Chinese people have experienced many disastrous events. Nevertheless, they always insisted upon a spirit of harmony and toleration. Indeed, we should be thankful to our Chinese ancestors for laying the foundation of our cultural heritage, which by the same token should be handed down to future generations. It prompts us to reflect on our history, strengthening our harmonious relationship between mankind and the world, so that we may contribute to the harmony and unity of our country. Blending natural, social and spiritual values into our moral and religious beliefs, we should summon our courage to initiate changes and contribute to the unity and communion within our country. We need:

1. The courage to reflect on the weaknesses and points for improvement in our political system;
2. The courage to develop a greater awareness of our morality and social responsibility, and to root out the harmful atmosphere of corruption and fraudulence;
3. The courage to promote religious freedom and the separation between religion and politics;
4. The courage to show concern for an educational system, which would with emphasize humanitarian values;
5. The courage to solve the problem of poverty and to bridge the huge gap between the rich and the poor;
6. The courage to respect the dignity, freedom and equality of human beings;
7. The courage to recognize the contribution of religion and the Church for building up a harmonious society.