

Reproduced from *Sun Yat-sen, Nanyang and the 1911 Revolution*, edited by Lee Lai To and Lee Hock Guan (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011). This version was obtained electronically direct from the publisher on condition that copyright is not infringed. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Individual articles are available at <<http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>>

# SUN YAT-SEN

## NANYANG AND THE 1911 REVOLUTION

The **Chinese Heritage Centre** was established in May 1995 to promote knowledge and understanding of people of Chinese descent outside China and their heritage through research, publications, conferences and exhibitions. It also houses the Wang Gungwu Library which has a specialized focus on the Chinese overseas and their heritage. As the first organization to specialize in the study of Chinese communities outside China, it is most appropriate that the Centre be housed in the former Nanyang University's historic Administration Block, which itself is a relic of the landmark establishment of the first and only Chinese-medium university outside China founded by the ethnic Chinese.

The **Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS)** was established as an autonomous organization in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute's research programmes are the Regional Economic Studies (RES, including ASEAN and APEC), Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS), and Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS).

**ISEAS Publishing**, an established academic press, has issued almost 2,000 books and journals. It is the largest scholarly publisher of research about Southeast Asia from within the region. ISEAS Publishing works with many other academic and trade publishers and distributors to disseminate important research and analyses from and about Southeast Asia to the rest of the world.

# SUN YAT-SEN

## NANYANG AND THE 1911 REVOLUTION

EDITED BY

LEE LAI TO • LEE HOCK GUAN

CHINESE  
HERITAGE  
CENTRE



*Singapore*

and



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

*Singapore*



# CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	ix
Introduction <i>Lee Lai To and Lee Hock Guan</i>	xv
<b>Keynote Address “Sun Yat-sen and the Origins of Modern Chinese Politics”</b> <i>Wang Gungwu</i>	1
<b>PART I: The Political Thoughts of Sun Yat-sen</b>	
1. The British Model in Sun Yat-sen’s Vision of Modernization for China <i>John Y. Wong</i>	17
2. On Sun Yat-sen’s <i>Three Principles of the People</i> : A Philosophy Approach <i>Tony See Sin Heng</i>	28
3. Sun Yat-sen’s Idea of Regionalism and His Legacy <i>Baogang He</i>	44
4. Sun Yat-sen and Japanese Pan-Asianists <i>Yoko Miyakawa</i>	61
<b>PART II: Sun Yat-sen, Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Chinese Revolution</b>	
5. Umbilical Ties: The Framing of Overseas Chinese as the Mother of Revolution <i>Huang Jianli</i>	75

6.	Thailand and the Xinhai Revolution: Expectation, Reality and Inspiration <i>Wasana Wongsurawat</i>	130
7.	An Historical Turning Point: The 1911 Revolution and Its Impact on Singapore's Chinese Society <i>Ching Fatt Yong</i>	148
8.	A Transnational Revolution: Sun Yat-sen, Overseas Chinese, and the Revolutionary Movement in Xiamen, 1900–12 <i>James A. Cook</i>	170
9.	Patriotic Chinese Women: Followers of Sun Yat-sen in Darwin, Australia <i>Julia Martinez</i>	200
<b>PART III: Reports/Remembrances of Sun Yat-sen and the 1911 Revolution</b>		
10.	(Grand) Father of the Nation? Collective Memory of Sun Yat-sen in Contemporary China <i>Ceren Ergenc</i>	221
11.	Historical Linkage and Political Connection: Commemoration and Representation of Sun Yat-sen and the 1911 Revolution in China and Southeast Asia, 1946–2010 <i>Wu Xiao An</i>	245
12.	Revolutionaries and Republicans: The French Press on Sun Yat-sen and the Xinhai Revolution <i>Alexander Major</i>	270
	<b>Concluding Remarks</b> <i>Prasenjit Duara</i>	313

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The year 2011 marks the 100th anniversary of the 1911 Chinese Revolution which began with the Wuchang Uprising on 10 October 1911 and concluded with the collapse of dynastic rule in China that stretched back more than 2,000 years and the establishment of the Republic of China, Asia's first republic. The 1911 Revolution was led by Sun Yat-sen and the Zhongguo Tongmenghui, which was first established in Tokyo in 1905 and followed by the formation of a Singapore branch and other branches in Southeast Asia. The Zhongguo Tongmenghui movement received massive support from the Overseas Chinese communities especially from the Nanyang. The latter contributed both manpower and funding to the 1911 Revolution and in that way played a role in the establishment of modern China.

In view of the 100th anniversary of the 1911 Revolution and Sun Yat-sen's close relations with the Nanyang communities, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and the Chinese Heritage Centre, Singapore came together to host a two-day bilingual conference on the three-way relationships between Sun Yat-sen, Nanyang and the 1911 Revolution in October 2010 in Singapore. Previously in 2006 in connection with the 100th Anniversary of the Singapore chapter of Tongmenghui, the Chinese Heritage Centre had collaborated with the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall to organize a workshop entitled "Tongmenghui, Sun Yat-sen and the Chinese in Southeast Asia: A Revisit". Professor Leo Suryadinata, Director of the Chinese Heritage Centre, kindly help to draft the concept paper for this international conference. The conference was jointly coordinated and convened by Professor Suryadinata, Lee Lai To and Lee Hock Guan.

We would like to thank the conference participants for devoting time and energy to prepare the papers for the conference. The two-day event went smoothly with constructive discussions all round. We were fortunate

to have Professor Wang Gungwu who agreed to deliver the keynote speech which, as usual, provided the conference with issues to discuss during the rest of the proceedings. At the end of the conference, we were privileged to have Professor Prasenjit Duara provide some concluding remarks to round up the conference.

We would like to thank the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall (SYSNMH) and the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) for their generous financial support for the conference. In particular, special thanks to Mr Alvin Tan, Director of Heritage Institution, National Heritage Board, Mr Wan Shung Ming and Mr Lee Peng Shu, Board Directors of SYSNMH, and Ms Angela Ye, Manager of SYSNMH.

Finally, we would like to thank Ambassador K. Kesavapany, Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, for his support for the conference and Professor Leo Suryadinata, Director of the Chinese Heritage Centre, for generously helping to conceptualize the project as well as convening the conference. Needless to say, the views expressed in the various chapters are the responsibility of the paper-writers alone. In that regard, for the documentation and transliteration of Chinese names and places, we have decided to respect the system adopted by the individual authors.

*Lee Lai To*  
*Lee Hock Guan*



## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

**James A. COOK**, born and raised in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia until he was six, has been working on transnational China since 1995. After completing his Honours Thesis on Chinese foreign policy in Southeast Asia at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1987, Professor Cook went on to complete his M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of California, San Diego. His advisors included Joseph Esherick, Paul Pickowicz, Dorothy Ko, and Takashi Fujitani, and his dissertation analysed Republican-era Xiamen. After completing two years at Peking University's Department of History, work on transnational China began in earnest at Xiamen University's Taiwan Research Center under Professor Lin Renchuan (林仁川) and Mr Hong Puren (洪朴仁). He began his teaching career at Central Washington University in 1998. Currently he is Director of the university's Asia/Pacific Studies programme and is the Principal Researcher of a National Science Foundation-funded grant looking at the history of water usage in northwest China. He is completing a book on Xiamen and transnational China.

**Prasenjit DUARA** is a historian of China and more broadly of Asia in the twentieth century. He also writes on historical thought and historiography. Duara was Professor and Chairman of the History department at the University of Chicago. Since 2008 he has been Director of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore where he is also Raffles Professor of Humanities and Director of the Asia Research Institute. Among his books are *Rescuing History from the Nation* (1995), *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (2003), an edited volume on *Decolonization* (2004), and *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942* (1988), which won

the Fairbank Prize of the AHA and the Levenson Prize of the AAS. In 2009 he published a collection of his essays, *The Global and the Regional in China's Nation-Formation*. Duara's essay, "Asia Redux: Conceptualizing a Region for our Times" (2010) may be accessed at <[http://journals.cambridge.org/repo\\_A79UNji6](http://journals.cambridge.org/repo_A79UNji6)>. His work has been widely translated into Chinese, Japanese and Korean.

**Ceren ERGENC** is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Political Science, Boston University. She has previously studied at Peking University for two years as a visiting graduate student and also at Taiwan Normal University, and worked at Fudan University as a programme coordinator. He was a research fellow at Renmin University during 2009–10.

**Baogang HE** is Chairman in International Studies at the School of Politics and International Studies, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Professor He is the author of 4 single-authored books, 3 edited volumes, and 45 international-referred journal articles. His research interests cover deliberative democracy, Chinese democratization, Chinese politics, comparative politics, political theory, Asian regionalism, and federalism in Asia.

**HUANG Jianli** is an Associate Professor with the History Department of the National University of Singapore. Within the university, he is concurrently a Research Associate with the East Asian Institute. His first field of study is on the history of student political activism and local governance in Republican China from the 1910s to 1940s. His second research area is on the post-war Chinese community in Singapore, especially its relationship *vis-à-vis* China and the larger Chinese diaspora. He has published a monograph on *The Politics of Depoliticization in Republican China: Guomindang Policy towards Student Political Activism, 1927–1949* (1996) and co-authored *The Scripting of a National History: Singapore and Its Past* (2008). He also has articles in journals such as *Modern Asian Studies*, *Journal of Oriental Studies*, *East Asian History*, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, *South East Asian Research*, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, *Journal of Chinese Overseas* and *International Journal of Diasporic Chinese Studies*.

**LEE Hock Guan** is a Senior Fellow at the Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSPS) Programme, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore. His research interests include civil society and democratization, nationalism, ethnicity and citizenship, and education and nation-state

formation in Southeast Asia, with special focus on Malaysia. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Brandeis University, Waltham, USA.

**LEE Lai To** joined the Department of Political Science at the then University of Singapore in Bukit Timah in 1974. He had been with the Department until 2010. During his stay at the University of Singapore and later on National University of Singapore (NUS), he was tasked to serve in various academic and administrative positions. He had also been active in international/regional academic and track two organizations. He left NUS in 2010 and joined the School of Humanities and Social Sciences as Senior Teaching Fellow and S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies as Adjunct Senior Fellow at Nanyang Technological University subsequently. Lee Lai To's major publications include three single-authored books, eight edited or co-edited books and a vast number of articles in regional and international journals. His major research interest is regional security in the Asia Pacific. This includes territorial disputes in the region and PRC-Taiwan relations. He is also interested in Chinese politics, particularly land issues in rural areas and selected issues related to "overseas Chinese" studies.

**Alexander MAJOR** is a Ph.D. candidate. His doctoral dissertation, "Money, Power and Civilisation: The French Agenda in Shanghai, 1870–1912", aims to demonstrate how the policies of the Third Republic were exhibited through: (1) government involvement in the economic development of Shanghai throughout the period; (2) French political machinations with respect to other Powers in the Shanghai theatre; and (3) government positions on civilizing enterprise, filtered through the relationship between the French and Chinese populations of Shanghai. In this research Chinese reformers and revolutionaries, particularly Sun Yat-sen, play an important role through influence on the totality of events in the later part of the period and for direct modifications to French imperatives. Prior to these studies Mr Major lived in China for eight years — teaching History, English and International Business at several colleges and universities, including Qingdao Chemical University, Informatics College (Shanghai) and Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

**Julia MARTINEZ** is a Senior Lecturer in History and Politics at the University of Wollongong. She has published in leading international journals on the themes of Indigenous Australian History and Asian History during the colonial period. Her current research interests include the history of Chinese diaspora, both in Vietnam and Australia; the history of

Indonesian labour migration to Australia (working with Professor Adrian Vickers) and a history of domestic workers in the colonial Asia-Pacific. Her doctoral thesis (2000) explored the history of the port city of Darwin and its Asian and Indigenous populations.

**Yoko MIYAKAWA** teaches “Modern Japanese History since Meiji” and “Nationalism in Japan” in the Department of History at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Currently she is finishing her Ph.D. dissertation on the construction of national identity in post-war Japan, analysing the shifting views of Japan and Japaneseness among Japanese conservative thinkers.

**Tony SEE Sin Heng** is the Associate Director (Asia) of the European Graduate School (EGS) and Senior Lecturer in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), Singapore. He is currently doing research on cultural politics. He is an experienced Lecturer in International Studies in Monash University, Sunway Campus, Malaysia where he delivered courses related to Globalization, Nationalism, Migration, Refugees and International Law. He has a research interest in political philosophy and cultural studies and has recently published a book entitled *Community without Identity: The Ontology and Politics of Heidegger* (2009). He was awarded the National University of Singapore (NUS) Research Scholarship in 1998 and is currently interested in doing research on political philosophy, cultural politics and Southeast Asia. He hopes to contribute towards United Nations (UN) efforts in peace, education, culture, human rights and the rule of law.

**WANG Gungwu**, National University of Singapore Professor (formerly Director, East Asian Institute) and Emeritus Professor of Australian National University. His books since 2000 include *The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy* (2000); *Don't Leave Home: Migration and the Chinese* (2001); 海外华人研究的大视野与新方向: 王賡武教授论文集 (2002); *Anglo-Chinese Encounters since 1800: War, Trade, Science and Governance* (2003); *Diasporic Chinese Ventures* (2004); 移民及兴起的中国 (2005); 离乡别土: 境外看中华 (2007); 中华文明と中国のゆくえ (2007); *Wang Gungwu in Conversation with Asad-ul Iqbal Latif* (2010). He recently edited *Nation-building: Five Southeast Asian Histories* (2005); and (with Zheng Yongnian) *China and the New International Order* (2008). He is a Fellow and former President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities; Member of Academia Sinica and Honorary Member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Science. In Singapore, he is Chairman of

the East Asian Institute, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. Professor Wang received his B.A. (Hons.) and M.A. degrees from the University of Malaya in Singapore, and his Ph.D. at the University of London (1957). From 1986 to 1995, he was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong.

**John Y. WONG** is Professor of Modern History at the University of Sydney, Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia and Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in Britain. His lifelong research on British imperialism is showcased in *Deadly Dreams: Opium, Imperialism, and the 'Arrow' War (1856–1860) in China* (1998). That on China's fate will crystallize in his forthcoming four-volume tome on *The Founder of Modern China Sun Yatsen (1866–1925) in a Rapidly Globalising World (1800–2024)*. His “Limits of Naval Power: British Gunboat Diplomacy in China from the Nemesis to the Amethyst, 1839–1949” is anthologized in *Naval History 1850–present* (2007).

**Wasana WONGSURAWAT** is a historian of modern China with special interest in Sino-Thai relations and the history of the Overseas Chinese in Thailand. She attained her doctoral degree in modern Chinese history from Oxford in 2007 and spent the next year as a postdoctoral research fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. At present she is a Lecturer in Chinese and East Asian history at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Her most recent publications include an article in *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity and Culture* (2009) which she co-edited with Tuong Vu.

**WU Xiao An**, Ph.D. at the University of Amsterdam, is Professor of History at Peking University and Director of Peking University's Center for the Study of Chinese Overseas. Among his publications is *Chinese Business in the Making of a Malay State, 1882–1941* (2003).

**Ching Fatt YONG**, Research Fellow, History Department, Flinders University, South Australia, has devoted the best part of his life researching the history of ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia of the colonial era. He is author of *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend* (1989), *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore* (1994), and *The Origins of Malayan Communism* (1997). He is a co-author, with R.B. McKenna, of *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912–1949* (1990). Currently, he researches on post-World War II Singapore Chinese political leadership to 1965.



# INTRODUCTION

Lee Lai To and Lee Hock Guan

This volume is a collection of papers in English presented at our conference to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 1911 Revolution in China. While there are extensive research and voluminous publications on Sun Yat-sen and the 1911 Revolution, it was felt that less had been done on the Southeast Asian connections. Thus this volume tries to chip in some original and at times provocative analysis on not only Sun Yat-sen and the 1911 Revolution but also contributions from selected Southeast Asian countries.

This volume starts with the keynote speech given by Wang Gungwu. Wang's speech revisited his earlier thesis that Sun Yat-sen was China's first modern politician. By comparing Sun with other Chinese in the 1860s generation, Wang noted that Sun was different from students sent to the United States by the Qing Government and selected figures from the Overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. By and large, Sun was able to plant a vision of ideals from the West and graft it onto Chinese traditions that still mattered to the majority of his followers. Sun was definitely not following the traditional mandarin-literati framework or the way of the upper class. Instead, he was interested in pushing for western political ideas and combining them with some of China's popular ideas of legitimate authority and governance. Wang came to the conclusion that Sun's ability to project his mixed vision in times of uncertainty in China would carve out a political life for Sun and make him "the first to offer a dedicated political leadership for a cause that set China on its own path to modernity".

In the light of Wang's remarks, it is perhaps befitting to examine Sun's vision or thoughts on modernity and nation-building. Thus the chapters in Part I starts with an analysis of the British influence on Sun Yat-sen's vision

of modernization with special reference to the Three Principles of the People by John Wong. Wong would like to suggest that Sun's sojourn in London in 1896–97 had a lot of influence on his Three Principles of the People and his understanding of constitutional history. From various sources, Wong tried to highlight Sun's intellectual debts to the British. This did not go down well with present-day nationalists who would like to emphasize Sun's Chineseness as indicated in the chapter. However, to Wong, the construction of history by these nationalists is one-sided.

This discourse on the Three Principles of the People is continued in Chapter 2 by Tong See Sin Heng. See took a different approach by examining the Three Principles of the People from a philosophical perspective to see if there are theoretical consistencies or inconsistencies in Sun's political thought. In this regard, See differs from other scholars following basically the historical approach. Instead, he would like to explore if Sun's political ideas, particularly his principle of nationalism, are conceptually consistent and relevant to contemporary times. For that purpose, See briefly examined Sun's notion of nationalism by noting that Sun would emphasize national unity and reject cosmopolitanism. Sun would argue for limitations on the freedom for the Chinese people for the sake of national unity. As such, the rights and freedom of the state should come before individual liberties. If that was the case, See raised questions centering on the problems and practicality of Sun's ideas, particularly his proposal to unite the different ethnic groups into one. He also suggested that it is not unthinkable that Sun, as a political opportunist or shrewd politician, was putting forward a republican programme adjusted to Chinese conditions for political transformation. Such a critical approach may invite more debates on whether Sun was more than a mere political rhetorician.

Part I also deals with Sun's ideas on Pan-Asianism. Both Baogang He and Yoko Miyakawa took a closer look at Sun's speech on Pan-Asianism delivered in Kobe in 1924. For He, he started with the historical, political and cultural background of Sun's thinking on regionalism and then scrutinized Sun's lecture in Kobe closely. According to He, Sun's speech was a response to Japanese requests and reactions to the West. Thus, his speech on the revival of Asia noted the leading role played by Japan. Sun claimed that while occidental civilization championed the Rule of Might, oriental civilization would favour the Rule of Right. Nonetheless, military force would still be needed to get rid of western imperialists in Asia. Based on the principle of right against might, Sun argued for Pan-Asianism by promoting a shared regional culture to fight against Western imperialism. Sun's speech in Kobe was apparently



aimed at gaining support from the Japanese audience and promoting Sino-Japanese relations. It did not really have much impact on Japan although it was used by his followers like Wang Jingwei to justify Japanese rule in China later on. It must be added that Baogang He saw some continuity between Sun's Pan-Asian regionalism and present-day proposals for regionalism and that some of his normative principles for Asian regionalism could still be relevant and useful.

In Chapter 4, Yoko Miyakawa took a different route by focusing mainly on the Japanese scene with special reference to Sun's view on Pan-Asianism. In this regard, she surveyed Japan's Pan-Asianists in Meiji Japan and the thinking of Sun's Japanese collaborators. Having summarized Sun's speech in Kobe, Miyakawa examined briefly the interpretations of the speech by some scholars. As far as the impact on Japan was concerned, Miyakawa noted and agreed with He that the speech did not have much impact. The media did not pay much attention to the speech, and if it was reported, the focus was not on Sun's call for Japan to re-examine its Asian policies but more on Japan's positive role in inspiring other Asian nations. Miyakawa also noted the ambiguity about Sun's ultimate intention in promoting Pan-Asianism. To be sure, Pan-Asianism was used by Sun to connect with Japanese Pan-Asianists and by Sino-Japanese collaborators to justify Japan's invasion of China in the 1930s and 1940s. Unfortunately, Pan-Asianism did not succeed in solidifying Sino-Japanese relations, not to say all Asian nations. Pan-Asianism died together with Sun's death, signalling that it was the personality of Sun and not Pan-Asianism that China was able to get support from Japan's Pan-Asianists. In fact, Pan-Asianism failed miserably when Japan joined the "imperialist" club. After all, the forming of Pan-Asian solidarity among equal nations was problematic, "since the Japanese advocates envisioned Japan as its leader, while Chinese advocates such as Sun saw China as at least as the first among equals" according to Miyakawa.

Part II focuses on Sun Yat-sen, Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution. The relationships between Sun Yat-sen and the Overseas Chinese and between Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution have in recent years garnered renewed interest in view of the political and economic rise of China and what that means for the Overseas Chinese communities. For many years, Sun Yat-sen lived and worked with various Overseas Chinese communities especially in the Nanyang and appealed to and mobilized them to support political changes that he and his associates were struggling to bring about in China. Although Sun Yat-sen was instrumental in engaging the Overseas Chinese in the 1911 Revolution, the nature and extent of the Overseas Chinese's role

in the 1911 Revolution has remained a contentious subject. However, also what has frequently been overlooked is how Sun Yat-sen's activities and the 1911 Revolution impacted the local politics among the Overseas Chinese as well as their relationship with their host communities.

Huang Jianli's chapter examines the often repeated epithet "Overseas Chinese is the Mother of Revolution". For Huang, this epithet is "less of an honest evaluation of the past record and more of an exhortation in a desperate appeal to Overseas Chinese for further assistance to overcome the prevailing quagmire of crises" in China. Although the epithet was not coined by Sun Yat-sen, as frequently claimed, and was most likely an invention of the Overseas Chinese, it has persisted precisely because this epithet is "grounded upon both historicity and mythologization". Historically, the Overseas Chinese especially in Nanyang did play a role in the 1911 Revolution: Sun and his associates did live among the Overseas Chinese as well as mobilize them to support their political causes and the Overseas Chinese did contribute both manpower and funds to the revolutionary movement in China. Nevertheless Huang shows that the exaggeration of the Overseas Chinese's role in the 1911 Revolution became "entwined with the KMT-led mythologization and placement of Sun Yat-sen and his organizations onto a saintly pedestal". In particular, during the Cold War era, the ideological and territorial split between PRC mainland and ROC Taiwan enhanced the "debate about whether the Overseas Chinese on balance had contributed sufficiently to qualify for the exalted motherhood status". Predictably, the PRC and ROC staked out opposing position on the epithet with the former marking down and the latter exaggerating the Overseas Chinese role in the 1911 Revolution. However, in the post-Cold War era, the status of the epithet, and hence the exalted motherhood status of the Overseas Chinese, could be undergoing another round of re-evaluation and re-interpretation.

Wasana Wongsurawat's chapter evaluates the interpretations and expectations of the 1911 Revolution by the ethnic Chinese and progressive Thai journalists on the one hand and by conservative Thai journalists especially in the writings of King Vajiravudh, who wrote mostly under his pseudonym Asawaphahu, on the other hand. The expectations invoked by the 1911 Revolution were problematic because it was a republican revolution and Thailand then was an absolute monarchy state. The ethnic Chinese and progressive Thai journalists had to tread carefully in their expectations of the 1911 Revolution given the republican character of the Revolution and also the fact that it had inspired a failed anti-monarchy rebellion in Thailand in 1912. However, the author argues that despite the Thai Chinese supporters of the

1911 Revolution “repeated denials of any ill intentions towards the existing political system in Siam during Vajiravudh’s reign, they actually contributed much more to undermining the absolute monarchy in Thailand”. Indeed, even Asawaphahu persistent criticisms of the 1911 Revolution and of the Thai Chinese for importing an “alien” idea into Thailand did not deter the Revolution from inspiring the 1932 Revolution which transformed Thailand into a constitutional monarchy.

The impact of the 1911 Revolution on the Overseas Chinese community in colonial Singapore is the focus of Ching Fatt Fong’s chapter. The 1911 Revolution invariably enhanced the Singaporean Chinese society’s political ties with China as well as entrenched a China-oriented political tradition in the colony. However, when Yuan Shikai started to crackdown on the Kuomintang (KMT), and eventually banning it, and usurped power shortly after the 1911 Revolution, it led to a political fragmentation of the Singapore’s Chinese society, with one side supporting Yuan Shikai and another supporting KMT. Subsequently, the 1911 Revolution also “left behind two major legacies [in Singapore], one a KMT movement in British Malaya with Singapore as its nerve centre and the other, a non-partisan leadership led by Tan Kah Kee which was in full swing during the years of national salvation, 1937–41”. Despite the Singaporean KMT connections with the Chinese Government, the British felt threatened by the movement and thus banned the KMT on three occasions (1925, 1930 and 1949). In contrast to the KMT, the non-partisan movement led principally by Tan Kah Kee was given the leadership of the China national salvation activities in the colony by the British. Nevertheless, both the KMT and non-partisan movements left various legacies in the colony especially in the areas of education and culture.

At the turn of the twentieth century, political, economic, and social pressures in China and Southeast Asia contributed to the political integration of Hokkien communities on both sides of the South China Sea. James Cook’s chapter studies the role of the Nanyang Hokkiens in the growth of a transnational movement in Xiamen. Alienated by colonial racist, exclusionary social policies in Southeast Asia and spurred by the rising Chinese nationalism led an increasing portion of the Nanyang Hokkiens to direct their political aspirations towards China, rather than their host communities in Southeast Asia. Sun Yat-sen’s activities and revolutionary cause helped to inspire and instil a China-oriented Chinese transnationalism among the younger generation of Hokkiens in Singapore and British Malaya. In turn, the politically awakened Hokkiens played a significant role in the politics of China through their direct and indirect participation in the revolutionary affairs of Xiamen, their place

of origin in China. Many of the politicized Hokkiens “began to re-examine their homeland ... through the lens of their experience abroad, a past that was distinctly colonial and hegemonic in nature”. Consequently their image of modernity was distinctly transnational in nature; “neither attached to a distinct piece of territory nor the creation of a nation-state”. This migrant Hokkien transnationalism indeed was facilitated by the movement of people, products, and ideas between Xiamen and the Nanyang over time.

Julia Martinez’s chapter examines “the lives of the young men and women who organized the Darwin Branch of the Kuomintang (KMT) during the 1920s and 1930s, in particular looking at the role of Chinese women in politics”. The role of Chinese women in politics in Darwin in the 1920s and 1930s pitted an older conservative group against a KMT group whose members were younger and educated. In general, the former subscribed to the traditional view that women should not be political leaders while the KMT group, consistent with Sun Yat-sen’s view, was supportive of women’s active participation in society and politics. Martinez focuses on the political involvement of Lena Lee in the Darwin KMT to illustrate the politics of gender among the Darwin Chinese community. Lena Lee was the only female leader in the KMT and her being a leader in the organization had strong support from the mostly male KMT membership. Tragically, Lena Lee took her own life at the age of thirty-two years by consuming an overdose of opium in part because of the conservatives’ vociferous criticisms of her being a woman and thus should not be playing a leadership role in politics.

While there is no doubt that Sun Yat-sen and the 1911 Revolution are historically significant, it would be interesting to note the ways and means in which they have been commemorated or reported. Thus the chapters in Part III in this volume may shed some light in this area. For Ceren Ergenc’s chapter, it noted the economic, ideological and collective psychological reasons for the rise of Sun Yat-sen’s image although it also cautioned that there are factors which may not help promote the memory of Sun in post-Mao China. After a brief discussion on collective memory emphasizing that such memory is selective and open to negotiation, change and needs of the day, Ergenc examined the different agents and levels in the construction of Sun Yat-sen’s image. Essentially, these included elite/state level construction and local and bottom-up forces/responses. By going through official speeches, academic writings, productions by the media/literature/internet, and presentations in museums, Ergenc came to the conclusion that the most important sources or agents of the collective memory of Sun Yat-sen in reform China are mostly official and elite. Sun has also been depicted

as a source of legitimacy for both the PRC and Taiwan. However, Ergenc would refute the claim that Sun may eventually replace Mao's portrait above the Gate of Heavenly Peace. She would admit that Sun's image is or can be popular.

The next chapter by Wu Xiao An continues the analysis on the commemoration of Sun Yat-sen and the 1911 Revolution, but with special reference to China and Southeast Asia. Based on a close reading of *Renmin Ribao* (the People's Daily) from 1946 to 2010, Wu came up with a construction and reconstruction of the commemoration and representation of Sun and the 1911 Revolution in the two places. Having examined the importance of Nanyang as a base for fund-raising and organizational support for his revolution, Sun's influence on non-Chinese nationalists in Southeast Asia, and the commemorations of Sun and the 1911 Revolution in contemporary China and Southeast Asia, Wu came to the conclusion that for both China and Southeast Asia, the construction and reconstruction of Sun and the 1911 Revolution are not conducted as scholarly intellectual pursuits but to fit into their own domestic agenda. For China, its agenda was initially more on the rationalization of the ideological basis and justification of the 1949 Revolution and Chinese Communist Party-Kuomintang (CCP-KMT) relations. It then shifted to the concern with cross-strait ties, notably the issue of national unification of China. For Southeast Asia, it was initially the Overseas Chinese communities and selected newly independent Southeast Asian countries commemorating Sun and the 1911 Revolution. It was not until the rise of China starting from the 1980s that more Southeast Asian countries, notably Singapore and Malaysia, began to rediscover the legacy of Sun and the 1911 Revolution to further mutual political and economic interests between Southeast Asia and China. On the whole, the commemorations of Sun and the 1911 Revolution in China and Southeast Asia, according to Wu, "have been dominated by politics whose agenda is influenced by revolution and ideology in the early decades and by culture, ethnicity and history in the later years". For revolution and ideology, they were most obvious in the CCP-KMT confrontation and conflicts between nationalism and colonialism or imperialism. For culture, ethnicity and history, they were instrumental in promoting the agenda of political economy. Despite different agendas, Wu seems to be happy to see that the construction and reconstruction of Sun and the 1911 Revolution has become useful in cross-strait relations and Sino-Southeast Asian relations.

The last chapter in Part III is not so much on the commemoration, but more on depiction or perceptions of Sun and the 1911 Revolution by

the French media. The chapter writer, Alexander Major, ploughed through conservative daily *Le Figaro* and the intellectual newspaper *Le Journal des Debats politiques et litteraires* from mid-October 1911 until May 1912 to size up the French press presentation of Sun and the Revolution in three areas, namely, the road to revolution: Sun Yat-sen and the French, the reporting on the 1911 Revolution in the French press, and the French press and the shaping of French public opinion. Major's observations were that while both newspapers seemed to favour the revolution in the early days, *Le Figaro* became more critical of it over time, preferring the strongman, Yuan Shikai to Sun's republicanism while *Le Journal des Debats* "maintained an overall objectivity with a preference for a republic". Otherwise, the two Paris dailies were about the same in the coverage of the revolution in the choice of events to cover and the type of coverage given. Both acknowledged that the Manchu dynasty had abused its position and it was natural for the revolutionaries to take action against it. To be sure, there were differences between the two dailies in some areas, notably in their analysis over the consolidation of the republic and the presidency. It remains to be noted that despite some harsh criticisms against Sun and being overtaken by Yuan Shikai as the most prominent and preferred character of the revolution, Sun would be rehabilitated when the suspicions about the hidden agenda of Yuan were proven true. However, as noted by Major towards the end of the chapter, it must be added that in-depth knowledge of Sun and his revolution is still "limited to scholarly investigation" in France.

From the chapters covered in the book so far, one could see that there is quite a bit of politicization in the assessment and presentation of Sun and the 1911 Revolution. For the more academically inclined, they just hope that there could be more objectivity in such endeavours.

Prasenjit Duara's concluding remarks focus on the three terms "Sun Yat-sen", "Nanyang" and "1911 Republican Revolution" and their rather complex relation with one another. While Nanyang refers to the geographic area of the South Seas, usually referring to Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines, it is also used to mean the Chinese in the region. In the early 1900s upset by their failure to mobilize the Nanyang, Chinese nationalists disparaged the latter by claiming they "did not know their Chinese names; they did not know the language; they did not even know who they were". Also, when the Nanyang became interested in affairs of their motherland, it was the conservative nationalists who at first had the upper hand before losing their advantage among the Nanyang to Sun Yat-sen and his revolutionary supporters. But, what does "revolution" mean to Sun Yat-sen and to the

different Chinese groups in Nanyang and China? Duara claims that for the Chinese then the meaning of “revolution” is linked to the Franco-American idea of citizenship and republicanism, Social Darwinism and the traditional idea of mandate from heaven. For the 1911 Revolution, he asserts that it was inspired by the emancipatory goals espoused by the Enlightenment on the one hand and the traditional Chinese idea of mandate from heaven on the other. The revolutionaries including Sun Yat-sen frequently would conflate the Enlightenment and traditional Chinese understanding of revolution. Lastly, he looks at the role and significance of Sun Yat-sen and the Overseas Chinese through the framework of “insiders and outsiders in history or the inside and the outside of history-making”. Broadly speaking, while Sun Yat-sen and Nanyang in different ways were outsiders in China, both were trying to influence insiders in China. For his Nanyang supporters, Sun Yat-sen appealed to them because both were outsiders with shared emotional attachment to China and who wanted to create a new modern China which they could be proud of.





**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**“SUN YAT-SEN AND THE  
ORIGINS OF  
MODERN CHINESE POLITICS”**

Wang Gungwu

Professor Leo Suryadinata reminded me that when I first wrote about Sun Yat-sen in 1952, it was twenty-seven years after his death and just over forty years after the 1911 Revolution. Some of the people I spoke to at the time had known Sun Yat-sen and they spoke of him with respect while admitting that they did not find it easy to understand him. Was he a failed politician but a great leader? Now he has been dead for eighty-five years and we are commemorating 100 years of the Revolution that he will always be identified with. We now know much more about him. Many scholars have worked on his life and work and each has sought to evaluate his place in history and especially his role in that Revolution. I have little to add to what has been published. But there is something I would like to revisit. I once described Sun Yat-sen as China's first modern politician when he emerged as a leader of a revolution at the end of the nineteenth century. What kind of politics did he promote? In what ways were his politics modern?

Modernity is a concept that has been much debated about, especially when juxtaposed with the word “tradition”. Most of the debates linked with Western attitudes towards China are not relevant here. The word “modern” was first used in the West to mark the progress that followed the struggles against tradition that its peoples were engaged in. It was not a word applied

to Asia. For Asian leaders, Western power was the reality, and the question was how far to westernize if they were to defend their countries against being dominated or worse, either conquered or colonized. The first decisive response had come from the young Japanese samurai who helped to overthrow Tokugawa Shogunate. They were prepared to go all out to learn everything they needed from the West in order to fight back. Other Asian leaders were less ready to westernize to that extent and continued for the rest of the nineteenth century to reject any idea that their established ways needed to be changed by imitating the West. If they thought about being modern at all, it was in terms of learning to act like the West.

The Japanese were the first to realize that the challenge they faced was not only superior military power or even economic power but also a system of ideas that was fundamentally different from their traditions of politics and government. It took several decades before what they learnt proved to be successful in catapulting the country to be a modern power alongside the Western Powers. Sun Yat-sen was born two years before the Meiji Restoration, in 1866, and grew up during the first decades of Japan's road to that modernity. Many like him who grew up in the coastal areas of China open to Western trade, as well as those born in European colonies, were ready to understand how the Japanese saw the West differently.

For these Chinese, the key feature of Japan's quest for power was the dramatic and forceful way its young leaders overthrew the feudal Shogunate and restored central authority to the Emperor. By the time Sun Yat-sen took up the cause of rebellion in the 1880s and 1890s, many Chinese leaders were aware of what Japan had achieved. They were impressed by the careful way the Japanese studied European methods of military, economic and political reform, certainly much more systematically than the Chinese ever did. But few thought that the new kinds of politics being practised, through political parties established in imitation of those in Britain and Germany, were in any way responsible for Japan's successes. The most radical mandarins were still calibrating what they thought were the optimal Western methods the Qing imperial system needed to become strong again. None who did that were described at the time as a politician, least of someone modern.

Why should Sun Yat-sen be considered a modern politician? Why not Kang Youwei and his young followers who actually reached positions of power in 1898 and, after the failure of their attempts at reform, organized a political party called the Baohuangdang (保皇党, Protect Emperor Society)? Kang Youwei's political activities deserve recognition as something that broke with the past, but Sun Yat-sen was organizing political rebellions in new ways before Kang's Hundred Days' Reform. The Xingzhonghui (兴中会,

Restore China Society) that he founded in Hawaii in 1894 and in Hong Kong in 1895 was an even more recognizable political party with deep roots in Chinese practice. In revisiting the subject today, I want to re-examine the background to the decision to organize such a society and the origins of his thinking, and compare Sun Yat-sen with others of his generation who had educational and political experiences similar to his. Sun Yat-sen was born in 1866, so I shall focus on those born in the 1860s, a few years before and after him. By doing this, I am going further back beyond this conference's celebration of the 100th anniversary of the 1911 Revolution. I shall not, however, neglect the Nanyang and will make comparisons with those of the same generation who lived through the same times and shared other challenges in common.

Let me sum up what were Sun Yat-sen's experiences that were most relevant to his becoming the rebel that he was. When he was growing up in his hometown in Xiangshan county, he had heard stories of the Taiping rebels who had drawn on some ideas of the West to attack and nearly destroy the ancient Chinese political system. He was only two years old at the time that rebellion was finally crushed and what he heard would have been his first glimpse of armed revolts that were associated with a "Chinese" Christianity. The rebellion failed in part because the Western Powers rejected the Christianity as false. By the time he left home at the age of thirteen to join his brother in Hawaii in 1879, it was known that the Japanese had consolidated their westernizing transformations. Four years later, Sun returned to China and was then sent to Hong Kong to continue his studies. There he was immersed in learning from a British colonial government whose stability impressed many of his compatriots. He then went on, from 1887 to 1892, to study medicine in the first College of Medicine for Chinese in Hong Kong.

Sun Yat-sen was not the first to study abroad in foreign schools. Many other fellow Cantonese had done that before him. They included several who had studied and converted to Christianity in Robert Morrison's Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca (later in Macao and Hong Kong) and those like Yung Wing (容闳, Rong Hong) who went to college in the United States and Wong Foon (黄宽, Huang Kuan) who studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh. Other prominent figures that followed included Ng Choy (伍才), or Wu Ting-fang (伍廷芳) and Ho Kai (何启, He Qi) from the colony of Hong Kong; both gained high positions of trust in the Qing and British administration. They were a generation older than Sun Yat-sen and achieved successful careers as professionals and functionaries of the Chinese and British imperial systems. There was no room for any of them

to contemplate any kind of modern politics. I shall, therefore, not dwell on them but focus attention on those who were of the same generation as Sun Yat-sen, those born in the 1860s.

Sun Yat-sen's understanding of what the West represented came to him in three parts: by listening to stories of the Taipings, reading the textbooks in his schools in Honolulu taught by his missionary teachers and in the schools in Hong Kong, and through the tutelage of British medical scientists at the College. His generation of Chinese was the first to experience the systematic application of European theory and practice to Asian life and thought. Although the Cantonese and other coastal Chinese had been conscious for centuries of the Western presence, their contacts with Europeans had been desultory. Even in the nineteenth century, British Hong Kong remained in the Cantonese sphere among people only slightly open to western ways. European ideas about business were not new to them, but the Chinese were very comfortable with their culture, their confidence in the superiority of Chinese ideas and institutions had never wavered, and western cultures did not evoke much respect. As for the Qing Government in Beijing, places like Guangdong and Macao were far away and, until close to the end of the century, the mandarins still thought that the Europeans were relatively easy to control.

The Japanese thought differently. The Tokugawa leaders noted how the British navy defeated the obsolete Chinese forces, and how the murderous Taiping rebellion threatened the Qing dynasty. Thus when Commodore Perry's "Black Ships" turned up in Tokyo Bay, it was an ominous moment. Although the Japanese had dealt with the Portuguese, Spanish, the Dutch and the English for over 300 years prior to the arrival of the U.S. fleet, that experience had been during times when Qing China was powerful and the West was not a threat to the East Asian order. There was no sense that western ideas of "modernity" could be transformative.

The Qing court also became aware of the new challenges the country faced by the end of the Second Opium War in 1860. Twelve years later, only four years after the Meiji Restoration, they decided on a bold experiment. Thirty of Sun Yat-sen's contemporaries, all born in the 1860s, were sent to study in the United States to learn how to deal with the challenges. For four years, between 1872 and 1875, thirty students were sent each year, making a total of 120 altogether. Much has been written about these privileged young boys, mostly aged between twelve and fifteen. We have a record of what they did in the eastern states of Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York where most of them were sent. We know how they spent their years there and how the Qing Government became increasingly concerned about

the way they were being westernized. I use “westernized” because it was this concern that eventually led the project to be cancelled in 1881. That year, most of the young students were brought back to China without completing their studies and the experiment was abandoned. The Qing court decided that these students had been sent out too young. They did not understand the traditions of China well enough and, in their innocence, were vulnerable to the ideas of the West. They were thus learning not only western scientific knowledge but also ideas and values drawn from the Christian faith. They were losing sight of what it meant to be Chinese. In other words, the mandarins saw the young minds being contaminated by western ideas that were not in the interest of China.

So the young men came home and continued their studies in China. Many were placed in minor positions, rather like interns, in various government departments. They had been sufficiently well trained in English and had basic knowledge of science and mathematics. Most of them were extremely bright and several went on to notable careers afterwards. Of those who succeeded in their work for various Chinese institutions, many made contributions to the development of China, the most famous being Jeme Tien Yow (詹天佑, Zhan Tianyou), the railroad engineer. Some became presidents of, and professors in, universities; others became officials in the customs and postal services; yet others went into the mining business. Some of them were active in foreign affairs, notably Tang Shaoyi (唐绍仪) and Liang Dunyan (梁敦彦). Two of them, Liu Yuling (刘玉麟) and Liang Cheng (梁诚), became well-known as ambassadors to the United Kingdom and the United States, respectively. The most successful of them contributed to the early industrialization of China and helped the country to respond to the western challenge.

However, neither politics nor modern were words that would have arisen in their minds. Their job was to translate the new knowledge gained from the West to enable China to be prosperous and strong again. How could they do that and, at the same time, help China to withstand the multi-layered pressures from the West? This experiment in American education was supported by reformist leaders like Li Hongzhang and Zhang Zhidong and reflected the prevailing values of that era. The young men did not depart from those values when they pursued their careers after their return. None could be described as having any sustained interest in the conflict of political cultures or the ideas and practices of governance that the West represented. At least, there is no evidence of their thinking about such matters before 1911. Thus there was no question of any of them considering what it meant to be a

politician. They were functionaries of the Qing Government and its agencies, and they did their best to defend the interests of the Qing Empire.

Sun Yat-sen was born two years later than the youngest of the 120, who were all born between 1860 and 1864. Almost all of them came from the Pearl River Delta area, Cantonese from counties like Nanhai, Xinhui and Shunde and those nearby, including Sun's own, Xiangshan. At least one of them, Zhou Shouchen (周寿臣), was born in the British colony of Hong Kong. Thus Sun Yat-sen came from a background similar to theirs. There was, however, an important difference from the start. Most of the 120 came from families with business or scholarly interests, sons of minor local scholars and small business people, families that were not rich but educated enough to have official ambitions for their sons. The young boys were also selected through an examination process and they were deemed to have been very bright.

Sun Yat-sen would not have made the grade. He came from a poorer background, peasant families that needed to send their sons overseas. That was why his brother had gone to Hawaii, to try to make a better living than what the rural conditions in Xiangshan would have allowed. Thus, Sun Yat-sen as the younger brother of a peasant sojourner would not have been one of the 120 even if he had been born a few years earlier. But, in other ways, Sun Yat-sen's life was comparable. He also studied abroad and was open to the same ideas that influenced the 120 others who went to New England. The Iolani School that Sun Yat-sen went to in Honolulu was an Anglican mission school. He was taught more or less the same subjects, perhaps presented with a British slant instead of an American point of view. He would have encountered the same kind of teachers who taught European and American history; and was possibly using the same textbooks and reading the same literature texts taught in the English-speaking world at that time. He would have been introduced to ideas of politics in Britain and America, names like Cromwell and Napoleon, Washington and Jefferson, and even contemporary politicians like William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli, Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses Grant.

And Sun Yat-sen was equally subject to Christian influences. In fact, it was his interest in Christianity that led his brother to worry that he would become a convert, so much so that he arranged to have him sent back home to be properly instructed. Like the others, Sun Yat-sen was not adequately trained in the Chinese classics or steeped in traditional ideas and practices to be able to resist the kind of Western influence that children from Chinese literati families might have been able to do. But there was another important, even crucial, difference. Hawaii was not New England. It was culturally

pluralistic, an independent kingdom where there were not only Hawaiians, Americans and Europeans, but also many Chinese who were active in business. Although no more than 5 per cent of the population, the Chinese were already a significant community.

In contrast, in New England, the young students sent there would have been without any Chinese community whatsoever. They were totally exposed to the western schools that they were sent to whereas Sun Yat-sen had his brother living close by. Even though he did go to an English school, he would have been living among other Chinese. In fact, almost all the Cantonese in Hawaii were from his own county of Xiangshan. Also relevant is that, through his brother and through the local community, he would have been familiar with the political background in which the Xiangshan migrants in Hawaii organized their secret societies to protect the interests of their compatriots and sustain the political ideal of restoring a Han Chinese Ming Dynasty.

This had a special relevance to Sun Yat-sen's induction to political action. During the early days of plotting rebellions, it was through such secret societies with their anti-Manchu traditions that he first understood the kind of politics that ordinary Chinese cared about. We know that when he founded the Xingzhonghui in Hawaii twenty years later, in 1894, it was the kind of secret society that everyone there was familiar with, the kind that had always supported the idea of returning power to the Han Chinese. Thus, in contrast to the 120 young students who went to New England, the big difference was that Sun Yat-sen maintained his community consciousness in Hawaii and, through his brother, remained in touch with traditional Chinese institutions like the secret societies. That link was not through the great philosophers and the Confucian texts, but through the ideas that inspired ordinary Chinese workers and small merchants to operate such societies. This was, of course, not peculiar to Hawaii. Similar societies were established in Southeast Asia where local variations of such semi-political organizations were available to all Chinese communities.

Thus, the 120 students who returned to China remained half-educated young people who brought back the skills they had acquired and, conforming to prevailing traditions, went on to serve the Qing dynasty loyally. None of them challenged that framework during their working careers. Only after 1911 and the fall of the dynasty did a few of them engage in the kind of politics demanded in the new republican system that the revolution established. Sun Yat-sen, on the other hand, owed nothing to the state. When he studied in Hawaii, he lived in a community of ordinary Chinese. When he showed interest in Christianity, his brother packed him off back to



his village. In his village, he was hostile to the practices he saw, traditional beliefs that his Christian teachings taught him were superstitions. When he demonstrated his stubborn rejection of these local practices, his actions reflected a deeper shift in mindset and may have been his first steps towards a sense of modernity.

In the end, to save him from further trouble at home, he was sent to Hong Kong. Being Christian in the late nineteenth century was not necessarily associated with European wealth and power; it was possible to remain culturally Chinese while nursing his new Christian faith. As a student in Hong Kong, he went on to develop a deeper understanding of the West and would have become familiar with the emerging ideas of modernity. In the school established by the colonial government, he received an Anglo-Chinese education more secular than that he received at the missionary Iolani School in Honolulu. This prepared him for medical studies at the new College of Medicine founded by second-generation Christians like He Qi (Sir Kai Ho Kai) as a modern institution, with doctors trained in Britain doing the teaching. But throughout all that time he remained a Christian and had several Christian friends who were equally dedicated to the task of saving the country.

The College was carefully presented to the local Hong Kong people as an institution that trained young Chinese so that Western medicine could complement and support the traditions of Chinese medicine. Medical science was not yet trumpeted as superior to, and ultimately to replace, Chinese medicine. Sun Yat-sen was thus brought up in a mixed environment in which he could feel that what the West offered as new knowledge could also enhance and help preserve his Chinese heritage. Still, the time had not come when anyone spoke in terms of a dichotomy between what was modern and what was not. A key indicator of the intertwining of the new ideas that the West had to offer and the Chinese institutions that Sun Yat-sen depended on was the way his Christian friends joined him in appealing to secret societies to support their rebellious activities. Among his closest friends were men like Lu Haodong (陆皓东), Chen Shaobai (陈少白) and Zheng Shiliang (郑士良) whose Christianity was an inspiration and no barrier to their rebellious activities. Zheng Shiliang was, in fact, an active member of a local secret society in his hometown and he worked hard to bring other secret societies to support Sun Yat-sen's first rebellions, both in Guangzhou in 1895 and in Huizhou (惠州, Waichow) in 1900. It was significant that the Christian window through which Western innovative ideas were made available actually left the door open for many to use well-practised methods in organizing



uprisings against the Manchu regime. It was a unique mixture of lofty ideals and popular means that made the politics relatively modern.

The situation in the Nanyang, in the European colonies of Southeast Asia, was different. The Europeans were totally in charge and they saw the cultures of Overseas Chinese, like those of the local native populations, as steeped in superstitions and clearly backward. Sun Yat-sen did not visit the Nanyang until 1900. By that time, he was already a politician, a revolutionary, who was able to use his newfound and developing skills effectively among the Chinese communities there. The Qing forces had been thoroughly defeated by the Japanese. The reformers in Beijing were determined to learn from Japan and sent thousands of young civil and military students there. This was also when western armies were marching into Beijing and Chinese everywhere were angry, bewildered or in despair. Sun Yat-sen's broader perspective of world affairs came from his having travelled in North America and Western Europe; he had learnt a great deal about political action from his dramatic escape from the Chinese legation in London in 1896. His experiences confirmed that China needed to learn from the more advanced western administrative and economic systems. He was already clear why the Chinese must master the modern ways that the West had begun to promote.

Sun Yat-sen was now thirty-four years old. He had contacts among local-born peranakan Chinese like fellow-doctors Lim Boon Keng (林文庆) and Yin Suat Chuan (殷雪村), who were all younger and more influenced by the West than he was. Thanks to the pioneering work of Song Ong Siang, five years younger than Sun, on the history of such Chinese, we know much about the peranakan. That work has now been added to by recent research about the communities in the Straits Settlements. At the time, Sun Yat-sen was probably aware that, while these local-born Chinese had adapted to local institutions and cultures, they also retained the practices and values their ancestors had brought from China. They believed that these were what made them Chinese. While most of them were quick to learn from the West and adapted well to the prevailing systems of trade and governance, they did not seem to have been impressed by the idea of becoming more western and were certainly constrained by their local conditions from engaging in local or China politics.

Sun Yat-sen was aware that large numbers of newcomers had come from China during the nineteenth century and that they had transplanted and updated the values from home and given the local communities a fresh sense of their Chinese roots. Throughout the Nanyang, the Chinese rarely lived as small isolated groups. On the whole, new migrants moved into towns and cities where they formed the biggest minorities. In this way,

although there was an increasing range of cultural contacts and exchanges with natives and Europeans, most Chinese held strongly to received ways. But, unlike in China, theirs were the common traditions of ordinary people and not determined by the literati elites. These included religious institutions, and specific customs and practices identified by different groups. They also supported, until successive efforts by colonial governments to suppress them proved successful, the semi-political secret societies, each of which had their distinctive and exclusive rituals. The merchant classes were organized and offered leadership to help their members compete or collaborate with their European counterparts, and they also tried to understand how the West became so successful. This included learning about western business methods, science and technology, and special areas of medicine. They learnt to utilize the western laws introduced by the British and the Dutch. In that context, they knew enough about the West to recognize where the West provided advances and improvements on their older methods, yet most of them were absorbed in their respect for Chinese customs and practices.

A few of the Overseas Chinese of Sun Yat-sen's generation did go to English schools like Sun Yat-sen did in Hawaii and Hong Kong. Schools like Raffles Institution and Penang Free School were attracting the children of well-established families. Increasing numbers were exposed directly to British education and some of them, of the generation after Sun Yat-sen, went further and studied in the West. There were other differences. For example, modern though he was as a British-trained doctor, Lim Boon Keng went back to Chinese ways because he was brought up as a Peranakan. He remained involved in the Chinese business community and also served as a bridge between the community and the colonial authorities. Later, after the 1911 Revolution, he found it natural to become president of Xiamen University as a modern medical scientist who was also devoted to upholding traditional Confucian values. Song Ong Siang (宋旺相), on the other hand, came from a Christian family that had given up Chinese customs and practices in favour of a deep commitment to Christian life. But he had no political interests and was content to serve the colonial system as a loyal professional. That was modern enough for him.

There was one exceptional case, someone who was older than Sun Yat-sen. He was Gu Hongming (辜鸿铭), born nine years earlier in 1857, and his experience was more like that of the boys from the Pearl River delta sent to New England. Gu Hongming was born in Penang but sent at the age of thirteen to be educated in Britain, Germany and France. He studied longer years abroad than Sun Yat-sen and was more fully exposed to western ideas and institutions than any other Chinese had been. When he came back

to the British colony and then went on to China, he became increasingly critical of the European ways that he had been brought up with. He knew the West better than any other Chinese of his time and was probably the most Europeanized Chinese in the nineteenth century. Yet his reaction was to turn against the West and dig deep into the classical Confucian tradition in defence of Chinese ways. Clearly, he had no truck with any idea of modernity.

These familiar examples from Anglo-Chinese backgrounds similar to that of Sun Yat-sen illustrate how that generation of Chinese in different places responded to the West. In acquiring western education and new ideas, they were on the cusp of recognizing what the West was conscious of. Many westerners already thought of themselves as modern. For the young Chinese who were sent to the West to study at the end of nineteenth century, their experiences told them how progressive the West was, and how it provided the newest ideas that they wanted to bring back to their own people. Without exception, they were committed to using their knowledge to improve China's position in the world. The differences among them were brought about by the way this identification with western success led them to seek different means to achieve their goals.

Elsewhere in the Nanyang, other kinds of encounters with the West produced different results. The Chinese in the Philippine of Sun Yat-sen's generation, for example, were mostly descended from those who had adapted to Spanish Catholicism for over two hundred years, and that experience had completely changed their way of life. Although the example of Jose Rizal attracted some hispanized Chinese to join Emilio Aguinaldo's rebellion, and the Filipino rebel leaders are known to have sympathized with Sun Yat-sen's political party as something equally modern, they played no part in inspiring Sun Yat-sen to his political awakening. As for the newcomers from China who arrived in the Philippines in the second half of the nineteenth century, they encountered Filipino nationalism as an anti-Spanish response to western dominance and had little direct knowledge of western developments. For all of them until the American occupation early in the twentieth century, the idea of modernity was not apparent.

In Thailand, the experience of the West was minimal, as the Chinese responded to the values of Thai Buddhism in most traditional ways. However, the Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies produced very interesting responses. The Peranakan communities there were largely influenced by local cultures while adapting to Dutch institutions. They accepted that they were cultural hybrids and were even seen through Dutch eyes as some kind of Chinese sub-nationals. Nevertheless, for business as well as for other sentimental reasons, they remained conservative about the Chinese values

that they inherited. Whether they were Chinese enough is less important than the fact that they preserved their heritage with great affection and responsibility. It was not meaningful for any of them to think in terms of being western or modern.

But there were interesting exceptions. Let me take the example of someone who was, coincidentally born the same year as Sun Yat-sen. He was Oei Tiong Ham (黄仲涵, Huang Zhonghan) of Java who was born in 1866 and died one year before Sun Yat-sen, in 1924. Oei Tiong Ham's father had come from China and, as a member of the rebel Xiaodaohui (小刀会, Small Sword Society) in Fujian, was anti-Manchu like the Taipings whom Sun Yat-sen so admired. He was part of the anti-Qing secret society tradition and asserted a kind of South China Han patriotism. He escaped when the rebellion failed and began a new life in Semarang. His son was born in Java and brought up as a Chinese, but his mother was from a local family. Oei Tiong Ham married a Peranakan and became accustomed to the Peranakan response to western rule. But he seemed to have inherited his father's rebellious instincts about institutions in China, because he went on to rebel against the ideas that governed Chinese ways of doing business.

By the 1890s, he had totally changed his mind about Chinese family commerce. He probably was the first Chinese to fully adopt western business methods in the expansion of his business empire. He chose to do so quite deliberately and his company Kian Guan (建源, Jianyuan) eventually became famous for being run like a European company, ultimately almost a typical Dutch multinational. Oei Tiong Ham saw himself more as a modernizer than a westernizer but, western or modern, he saw that as the way to go. A pragmatic realist in the competitive world of business, he would have thought that being modern or western was neither here nor there. He would have seen no real difference. But it would have been pointless for him to have contemplated, either for China or for the Netherlands East Indies, anything that could be described as political.

The comparisons above point to some of the conditions necessary for someone to be a modern politician in China before 1895 and also suggest others that made it possible for Sun Yat-sen to behave as one. For his time, the basic conditions were two. One was that sufficient numbers of people agreed that the Qing regime was failing and that radical change was essential when no political challenge was possible within the system. The other was that people agreed that new ideas and institutions from outside could greatly help China to recover greatness, but they must be those that enabled the Chinese to change without having to abandon its values of

morality, civilization and governance. At no time did Sun Yat-sen succumb to the idea of *quanpan xihua* (全盘西化, “total Westernization”) as a precondition of modernity. And, till the end of his life, he never doubted that the ideological pillars that supported the imperial system were no longer viable and that the republic he established was consistent with the political culture that the Chinese people practised.

But taking the first step was always difficult and it had to be taken by organizations with a credible local base. In 1895, Sun Yat-sen had his *Xingzhonghui*; in 1900, this was augmented by secret societies operating in Huizhou where the rising was launched. Similarly, Kang Youwei’s supporters of the *Baohuangdang* of the Yangzi valley, in its one and only attempt at an uprising in 1900, also drew support from that region’s secret societies. The price of failure, everyone knew, was high. In Sun Yat-sen’s first two efforts at rebellion in 1895 and 1900, many died, including two of his closest Christian friends, Lu Haodong and Zheng Shiliang and many other Christian and secret society supporters. And the *Baohuangdang* rising in 1900 cost the lives of Tang Caichang (唐才常) and other secret society leaders. After the failures, Sun Yat-sen remained committed to armed political action. He had been inspired by his Christian faith to formulate a clear vision of the ideals from the West that could be grafted onto the traditions that still mattered to the bulk of his Chinese followers. His ability to do this, while Kang Youwei stayed loyal to the emperor he had served, became an increasingly important factor in Sun Yat-sen’s stature as a politician as more and more people observed the imperial system unravelling. No less important to his cause was the role of students who studied western goals and methods in Japan, found them attractive and became eager to introduce them on their return to China. When more and more were ready to engage in political acts, it was Sun Yat-sen who was widely acknowledged as the man who had established the new politics of revolution dedicated to replace the old system altogether.

The students sent to New England in the 1870s returned with western skills to serve a resilient political structure. In contrast, Sun Yat-sen lost faith in that system and became engaged, almost as in a new profession, in the radical politics of saving China from both its elite heritage as well as from the domineering West. He seems to have been aware that modernity did not have to be separated from a people’s heritage. He believed that Christianity was a powerful belief-system that supported Europe’s road to modernity and a great source of its strength. He saw modernity in the West as something that came out of the work of sifting, rejecting and improving on its very rich traditions. In the China that he knew, there had not been the opportunity to do that. Instead, the West had thrust its values on a weak

and corrupt China. The struggle therefore was to adapt to their challenging modern values without abandoning the traditions that people needed in order to retain their self-respect. Sun Yat-sen was doing what many others were also trying to do, but he was the first to take his ideas for change onto a political stage that was rooted in Chinese practice but built outside the mandarin-literati framework.

Although he had embraced a new world-view drawn from Christian concerns for society, he was imaginative enough to adapt a Chinese political organization for his revolutionary purposes. He took something that was common to the ordinary Chinese among whom he grew up, that is, the Chinese communities in Hawaii and Hong Kong, and was also found among the Overseas Chinese in the Straits Settlements and elsewhere. It was a political tradition long regarded as normal in Chinese rural and small town society. It was alive, much stronger than upper class Chinese appreciated, and its sustained power at this basic level was something that the elites totally misread. Thus, in formulating the ideas that eventually became central to his political party after the 1911 Revolution, he brought together a wide range of ideas that had converged in his mind. What he proposed was to choose a number of western political ideas, including concepts like sovereignty, democracy, republic, citizen-state, and concerns about people's welfare and livelihood, and combine them with some of China's own popular ideas of legitimate authority and governance. His eclectic ideas were not profound, his Christian faith not dogmatic, but they provided him with an alternative vision of China's future and triggered his decision to lead. In his own way, he had learnt that this kind of inclusiveness was necessary to become a successful Chinese politician.

What brought him to that confluence of ideas? At its core were the people and practices of the Xiangshan communities in China and in Hawaii. Add to these the schools he attended, the Christian values that he absorbed there and the Christian friends who shared his ability and willingness to harness secret society institutions to a moral and godly cause. In the end, unlike all others of his 1860s generation, it was Sun Yat-sen's unique ability to project his mixed vision onto an increasingly insecure and uncertain Chinese people that made the difference and led him to carve out a life in politics. After revisiting the question, I have to admit that it is not important whether he was the first modern politician or how modern he was. But he was certainly the first to offer a dedicated political leadership for a cause that set China on its own path to modernity.