

The First German Photo- and Book-Exhibition
on Sun Yat-Sen

On January 1, 1912, acting as its Provisional President, Sun Yat-sen proclaimed the Republic of China and with it the birth of a radically new era in the history of the Chinese nation. People in all parts of China -- in Taiwan, in the People's Republic, and in Hong Kong -- as well as in many overseas Chinese communities commemorated this event last October in connection with the 70th anniversary of the 1911 Chinese revolution. No other single person has played a greater role in bringing about this historical transformation process and nobody has imparted to it a more lasting significance than Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the founding-father of China's revolutionary nation-building efforts. In his often very dramatic life experience he became a living symbol of China's processes of change and transition. Born into a simple Chinese farmers' family in a village close to Macao, he received a first basic schooling in the Confucian tradition. An emigrated brother helped him to enroll in an Anglican missionary school in Hawaii. Sun became the first prominent Chinese political leader who studied and practiced Western Natural Science (Medicine). His attitude towards the West was marked by ambivalence. While he greatly admired many of its civilizational achievements, he resented the humiliations imposed upon China by colonial imperialism. This provoked him into becoming a revolutionary. His kidnapping by agents of the Imperial Chinese Legation in London and his dramatic release made headlines in the international press. Among overseas Chinese activists he was opposed by such influential monarchist scholars as K'ang Yu-wei and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and initially rejected by students from the literati circles to which he did not belong. Yet his growing power of persuasion, his often daring activism and his magnetic personality finally prevailed to such a degree that he became in 1905 the founding president of the Chinese Revolutionary League Chung-kuo T'ung-meng Hui. Contrary to the two other important leaders of 20th century China, Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung, Sun Yat-sen not only spoke English and Japanese fluently but he also travelled extensively in North America, Western Europe, Japan, and Southeast Asia for the purpose of winning adherents, of raising money for the revolution, and of studying social and economic conditions abroad. Between 1895 and 1911 Sun took a leading role in no less than ten unsuccessful uprisings aiming at the overthrow or destabilization of the ruling Ch'ing-Dynasty. When the revolution

succeeded in 1911 Sun seemed destined to become the first president of the Republic of China. Yet, in order to avoid further bloodshed, he abdicated in favor of Marshal Yüan Shi-k'ai who controlled China's strongest armies. When republican China's initially democratic system of government was forcibly replaced by a military dictatorship and later by competing regional warlord regimes, Sun Yat-sen sought to defend China's democracy by founding in Kwangtung Province a national government for the protection of the constitution. After having lost initially high hopes for external support from the United States, the League of Nations, and Weimar Germany, Sun became in 1923/24 the co-founder of the first Sino-Soviet Entente (1924-27). In its founding document he demanded and obtained from Moscow a written pledge that Communism and Sovietism could not be practiced in China, that Russia's former unequal treaties with China would be renounced, and that Moscow had no intention "to pursue an imperialistic policy in Outer Mongolia or to cause it to secede from China." Sun wanted and obtained from Soviet Russia not ideology but money, arms, and advisors who could help to improve the military, organizational and propagandistic effectiveness of the Kuomintang. Rejecting outright Moscow's suggestions of a Kuomintang-Communist coalition, Sun, in the way of a compromise, permitted individual Communists (including Ch'en Tu-hsiu, Li Ta-chao, Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai) to join his own party. He founded East Asia's most famous military academy in Whampoa and appointed Chiang Kai-shek as its first commander. Due to his objective role as well as through the magnetic qualities of his personal charisma Sun became, in that period, the leader and the spiritual center of a heterogeneous but still united phalanx of revolutionary forces that included shoulder-to-shoulder future leaders such as Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi Minh, Wang Ching-wei, Chou En-lai, Hu Han-min and many others. Prior to his death on March 12, 1925 Sun persuasively appealed for a close relationship between China and Japan that had to be for a close relationship between China and Japan that had to be based upon equality, not on hegemony. After his death, his historical charisma and his symbolical relevance maintained an important but often manipulated significance. Throughout the Kuomintang era (1928-49) China officially adopted Sun Yat-sen's political and ideological legacy as the basis of its policy orientations. Sun Yat-sen became a common point of reference when China's two big parties decided to cooperate in 1937 for the purpose of a unified resistance against Japan, and in 1946 for the sake of China's

peaceful reintegration. Since the 1960s Moscow remembers Sun Yat-sen as a major symbol of Russo-Chinese friendship. In American perceptions Sun Yat-sen appears as the only genuine democrat among the key leaders of 20th century China. Japanese recall how strongly Sun Yat-sen had advocated that type of close and equal partnership between China and Japan that was brought about only recently after so much seemingly unnecessary suffering.

Prior to and besides Maoism, Sun Yat-sen's political philosophy or Sunyatsenism is the only other historically important ideological system that emerged from 20th century China. Relatively speaking, Sun Yat-sen is one of the most systematic political philosophers of the entire Third World. His system of ideology and development strategy actually represents, in a typological sense, a first basic model of a Third World nation-building ideology. Its basic component parts are: 1. National integration on the basis of a new democratic and poly-ethnic national self-identity. 2. National liberation through an anti-imperialism that includes China's historical ethnic mission to liberate other suppressed nations after the success of her own liberation. Sun perceived imperialism as a universal phenomenon that occurred also among industrialized countries and was thus not restricted to North-South relations. Long before Mao he advocated a world alliance of oppressed and liberated nations against the power policies of imperialism. 3. Gradually progressing democratization with the aim of achieving indigenous forms of constitutional democracy. 4. Social reforms seeking to apply to China's socio-economic learning processes from the industrialization of other countries, including protective social labor legislation and the nationalization of certain major industries and public enterprises. 5. A land reform making farmers the owners of the land that was concretely tilled by their labor. Sun thus wanted to avoid feudalist, capitalist and collectivist forms of alienation in agriculture. He believed in the incentive power of private ownership by the tillers of the land. 6. Land speculation was to be prevented through the nationalization of unearned increments of land value. 7. Sun regarded a socially fair and well-adjusted division of labor and not class warfare as the vehicle of socio-economic progress. He believed that Marx had been contradicted and disproved by the factual socio-economic developments that had occurred after his death. While respecting Marx's criticism of social diseases, Dr. Sun rejected his "social physiology" and Marx's related "social therapy". 8. Sun advocated a multi-national assistance ef-

fort by several industrialized nations for the purpose of China's industrial development. This assistance was to be placed under the politically neutralizing supervision of the League of Nations. Wanting to avoid the agonizing consequences of capital formation on the basis of agricultural exports from a poor country, Sun preferred this type of international development cooperation. 9. Culturally Sun Yat-sen advocated a synthesis between traditional Confucian and modern Western value systems and institutions. He rejected the self-contempt of westernizing Chinese iconoclasts and upheld the dignity and time-transcending validity of many traditional Confucian value concepts. For him "jen" or humaneness remained the cardinal virtue and objective of all human relations. 10. Sun's political philosophy culminated in the vision of a new world order based upon "right not upon might", upon national self-determination and racial equality and upon a universal interest to preserve social and international harmony.

The lasting appeal of Sun's historical charisma can, in part, also be explained in terms of some of his personal qualities. Richard Wilhelm once called him "the kindest of all revolutionaries" because of his inclination to avoid unnecessary violence, because of his readiness to forgive former opponents, and because he was free from that type of vicious cunning and cruelty that characterizes not a few revolutionaries of this and of other centuries. Sun survived series of crushing defeats and of shocking betrayals with a willpower that remained unimpaired because of his deep inner conviction that he was destined to lead China on the road to national reconstruction and liberation. Yet in dealing with others he remained amiable and free of arrogance. Millions in donated money passed through his hands but he remained poor in spite of the all-pervading corruption of his era. His ideology contains indeed quite a number of contradictions, errors, inconsistencies and simplifications, but many of its great objectives are expressing still existing aspirations of the Chinese and of other Third World nations. In this sense they are still significant.

In view of the actual and of the symbolical role played by Sun Yat-sen in the 20th century history of China, we felt that more attention should be paid to him. Relatively speaking, European research on and interest in Sun Yat-sen is lagging far behind the achievements of Chinese, Russian, American, and Japanese activities in this regard. Those sections of public opinion in Western Europe that are interested in China are mainly concerned with Chinese devel-

opments since World War II. There seems to be indeed a "cultural lag" or "Nachholbedarf" as far as the earlier decades of this century or the 19th century is concerned. In December of 1979 the generous support from the Austrian Straniak Foundation enabled us to organize with the University of Salzburg a first European Sun Yat-sen Symposium. Its proceedings shall be published within a few weeks. In Salzburg we experimented for the first time with a simultaneous photo- and book exhibition on Sun Yat-sen and his era in the history of China. The reaction to this admittedly amateurish effort to supplement spoken and printed informations on a decisive transformation era in Chinese history by the visual impact of photo documentation produced such encouraging results that we were hoping for a chance to repeat this exhibition in a larger framework. On the basis of the generous and understanding assistance by the Bavarian State Ministry of Education and Culture and by the Bavarian State Library we are now preparing a new exhibition that shall be on display in the Bavarian State Library in Munich from January 14 to February 27, 1982. About 200 enlarged historical photos grouped into 15 problem-oriented chronological sections will seek to portray major phases and problem areas in the political history of Sun Yat-sen and of China during his lifetime. The main theme is, of course, Sun Yat-sen himself. The photos shall be supplemented by a few historical maps showing domestic warlord groupings, foreign spheres of influence in post World War I China, and the worldwide scope of Sun's activities on behalf of the revolution. As far as space permits, Western language and Chinese literature on Sun Yat-sen and his era shall also be on display. Being fully aware of the fact that the name and charisma of Sun Yat-sen is often invoked in current political disputes among Chinese authorities or between Peking and Moscow etc. we have intentionally refrained from making related references or from involving directly committed parties in the planning and organization of the exhibition. As we see it, Sun Yat-sen belongs to the history of all the Chinese, to the history of the Third World and to the history of this century. We gratefully acknowledge the invaluable support from the side of Chinese historical archives and museums in Taipei, Macao, Peking and Singapore who allowed us the unrestricted use of available materials. We are particularly indebted to professors Chin Hsiao-yi and Huang Chi-lu in Taipei because they gave us direct access to a wide selection of original photos from which we could make our choice. Professors Li Xin and Shan Mingxuan from the Social Science Academy in Peking

supplied us with some new literature and allowed us to use a pictorial biography of Sun Yat-sen which they had composed. With equal generosity Dr. Fritz van Briessen permitted the use of some of the pictures from his beautiful volume "Shanghai Bildzeitung 1884-1898". Other photos were obtained from the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz. The Sun Yat-sen Research Association enthusiastically sent a number of very interesting publications. The silent unanimity of sympathetic support which we received for our projected Sun Yat-sen exhibition from the side of Nationalist Chinese, Communist Chinese and Overseas Chinese scholars and institutions was an experience in itself that throws a revealing light on the significance of Sun Yat-sen. In spite of support from many sides, we ourselves bear the full responsibility for the organization of the exhibition and for any shortcoming related to our presentation of its subject matter. Personally I feel deeply indebted to the prudent and persevering cooperation of Dr. Chen Yuan-chyuan from the University of Munich.

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