

I Got My Ideas in Hong Kong

By Sun Yat-sen

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Sun Yat-sen, was born on November 12, 1866, in Xiangshan County [now Zhongshan], in Guangdong province, and died on March 12, 1925, in Peking. During his life-time he was leader of the Kuomintang, and was widely revered as the 'Father of the Nation', and is so to this day both in Mainland China and the Republic of China on Taiwan. Though Sun returned home briefly to undergo an arranged marriage, he spent his late teens and early twenties from 1887 studying medicine in Hong Kong, at the College of Medicine, forerunner of the University of Hong Kong. After graduation in June 1892, he went to Macao, where Portuguese authorities refused to give him a license to practice medicine. By the time Sun returned to Hong Kong in the spring of 1893, he had become more interested in politics than in medicine. He was influential in overthrowing the Manchu dynasty and served as the first provisional president of the Republic of China (1911–1912).



During this visit to Hong Kong, I feel as though I have returned home, because Hong Kong and this University are my intellectual birthplace. I have not prepared a speech, but I would like to answer

a certain question which has been put to me so many times and which, no doubt, many of those present would also like to ask. I have never before been able to answer it properly, but I feel I can today. The question is: 'Where and how did I get my revolutionary and modern ideas?' I got those ideas in Hong Kong.

More than thirty years ago, when I was studying in Hong Kong, I spent a great deal of my spare time walking the streets of the colony. Hong Kong impressed me a great deal, because there was orderly calm, and because there was artistic work being done without interruption. I went to my home in Xiangshan twice a year and could immediately notice the great difference. There was disorder instead of order, insecurity instead of security. I even had to be my own policeman, and had to ensure my rifle was in order.

Then I compared Xiangshan with Hong Kong. Although they are only fifty miles apart, the differences impressed me so much that I began to wonder why it was that foreigners have done such marvellous things with this barren rock in only seventy or eighty years, whilst China with several thousand years of civilisation has not even one place like Hong Kong.

I once tried to persuade the village elders to start improving the village in a small way, such as making streets and a roadway to the next village. They thought the idea a very good one, but said they had no money. I offered my own labour during vacations and got others to help voluntarily. But they soon began to encroach on the land of the neighbouring village and there was trouble, in consequence of which I dropped the scheme. Later, I approached the magistrate of the district, who was very sympathetic and promised

to help during the next vacation. But when that next vacation came round I found that there was a new magistrate—a man who had paid \$50,000 for the post and who had bought the previous man out.

So there was nothing to be done but to return to Hong Kong—not to study the streets, but to study the government. And I found that among the government officials corruption was the exception and purity the rule.

It was the contrary in China, where corruption among officials was the rule. I then thought I would try higher up, to the provincial government, but I found that the higher the government the more corrupt were its ways. Finally I went to Peking but I found things there one hundred times more corrupt even than in Canton, and I was forced to the opinion that, after all, village government was the purest government in China.

I was told by elders that the good governments in England and Europe were not at first natural to those places, but that men had brought about a change in themselves. In England years ago there was just the same corruption, just the same dishonesty in the courts, and the same cruelty, but the English loved liberty, and the English said: 'We shall no longer stand these things, we shall change them.' Then I got the idea in my head: 'Why can we not change things in China?'

We in China can imitate what has been done elsewhere, and the first thing to do is to get a change of government so as to make everything else possible. The strongest thing in present-day society is a well-organised government, but in China then we had no government—we had only mis-government for many centuries. So,

immediately after I had graduated from college I decided that it was necessary for me to give up the profession of curing men's bodies, and take up the task of curing my country.

When I called myself a revolutionist, people said all sorts of things about me: they misunderstood the fact that a Chinese 'revolutionist' was in fact only a moderate man after all. I was not fighting for something extreme, I was fighting for a moderate government, for a good government. After many years of work and organisation I succeeded in overthrowing the Manchu dynasty. I established a republic in its place. That republic has lasted for twelve years and it means to stay—it will be everlasting.

Of course, during the past twelve years there has been a great deal of trouble, the people have suffered more than before, and they blame the revolutionists, saying they started all the trouble and that the old monarchy is better. But they disregard important questions. Under a republic the people are supposed to be the masters, and my aim is to make the 400 million people of China their own masters. But the people do not yet understand that or realise how it can be secured. The position reminds me of the pulling down of an old house and the building of a new one. We have pulled down the old Manchu monarchy, but the new building is not completed. The suffering now is a small price to pay for what I hope will be the future happiness of China, although the majority of Chinese do not understand the republican form. But we have many friends outside China—many sympathisers as well as opponents and critics. Critics say that China is not ripe for a republic and that it would be better to restore the monarchy. Twice during the past twelve years

attempts have been made to restore the monarchy, once by Yuan Shikai and once by the Manchu emperor. But both attempts have failed.

We have not succeeded very well with the republican form yet because the movement has not run its full course. We are in a transitional stage. If we want to look for permanent peace in China, we must first get the task of change accomplished—we must finish the structure of the new house.

The elements that have disturbed the revolutionists have been many. Firstly, there are the Manchus putting up a strong fight to exterminate the new ideas; secondly, there is the mandarin class seeking to obstruct; and then there are provincial governors and militarist classes. It is only when such obstacles are gone that China will have permanent peace. We are still fighting for good government and as soon as we have good government the Chinese people will be contented and peaceful. That much can be proved by Hong Kong and the Straits Settlements, for there are over one million Chinese in the south and about 600,000 here, and whatever they may have been before they went to such places, they are now peaceful and good citizens. The Chinese people are easily governed.

My fellow students, you and I have studied in this English colony and in an English university and we must learn by English examples. We must carry this English example of good government to every part of China.