

Chinese revolutionary leader and Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) founder Sun Yat-sen is revered in both the People's Republic of China and in Taiwan. At the start of the 20th century, he was the most important campaigner for the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), which in its final years was unable to handle the growing economic, social, and diplomatic problems in China. In this excerpt from *A Program of National Reconstruction* (1918), Sun explained his plan for the transition from monarchy under the old Chinese imperial system to a new form of republican government.

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## From *A Program of National Reconstruction*

By Sun Yat-sen

[*The Three Phases of National Reconstruction*]. As for the work of revolutionary reconstruction, I have based my ideas on the current of world progress and followed the precedents in other countries. I have studied their respective advantages and disadvantages, their accomplishments and failures. It is only after mature deliberation and thorough preparation that I have decided upon the Program of Revolution and defined the procedure of the revolution in three stages. The first is the period of military government; the second, the period of political tutelage; and the third, the period of constitutional government.

The first stage is the period of destruction. During this period martial law is to be enforced. The revolutionary army undertakes to overthrow the Manchu tyranny, to eradicate the corruption of officialdom, to eliminate depraved customs, to exterminate the system of slave girls, to wipe out the scourge of opium, superstitious beliefs, and geomancy, ... and so forth.

The second stage is a transitional period. It is planned that the provisional constitution will be promulgated and local self-government promoted to encourage the exercise of political rights by the people. The *xian*, or district, will be made the basic unit of local self-government and is to be divided into villages and rural districts—all under the jurisdiction of the district government.

The moment the enemy forces have been cleared and military operations have ceased in a district, the provisional constitution will be promulgated in the district, defining the rights and duties of citizens and the governing powers of the revolutionary government. The constitution will be enforced for three years, after which period the people of the district will elect their district officers. However, if within the period of three years, the Self-Government Commission of a district can wipe out the evils enumerated above, get more than half of the population to understand the Three Principles of the People and pledge allegiance to the republic, complete the compilation of a census, determine the number of households and carry out constructive measures regarding police, sanitation, education, and highways in accordance with the minimum requirements prescribed in the provisional constitution, the district may also elect its own officials and become a full-fledged self-governing area.

In respect to such self-governing units the revolutionary government will exercise the right of political tutelage in accordance with the provisional constitution. When a period of six years expires after the attainment of political stability throughout the country, the districts which have become full-fledged self-governing units are each entitled to elect one representative to form the National Assembly. The task of the Assembly will be to adopt a five-power constitution and to organize a central government consisting of five branches, namely, the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, the Judicial Branch, the Examination Branch, and the Control Branch [Censorate].

When the constitution has been determined, the people of the various districts shall elect by ballot a President to organize the Executive Branch and representatives to organize the Legislative Branch. They are, however, not responsible to the President or to the Legislative Branch. All the five branches will be responsible to the National Assembly. Members of the various branches suspected of delinquency in duty will be impeached by the Control Branch before the National Assembly. Delinquent members of the Control Branch will be directly impeached by the National Assembly and dismissed when found guilty. The function of the National Assembly consists in amending the constitution and

checking misconduct on the part of public functionaries. Qualifications of members of the National Assembly and of the five Branches and all other officials will be determined by the Examination Branch.

When the constitution is promulgated and the President and members of the National Assembly are elected, the Revolutionary Government will hand over its governing power to the President, and the period of political tutelage will come to an end.

The third phase is the period of the completion of reconstruction. During this period, constitutional government is to be introduced, and the self-governing body in a district will enable the people directly to exercise their political rights. In regard to the district government, the people are entitled to the rights of election, initiative, referendum, and recall. In regard to the national government, the people exercise the rights of suffrage, while the other rights are delegated to the representatives to the National Assembly. The period of constitutional government will mark the completion of reconstruction and the success of the revolution. This is the gist of the Revolutionary Program.

[*The Necessity of Political Tutelage*]. What is meant by revolutionary reconstruction? It is extraordinary reconstruction and also rapid reconstruction. It differs from ordinary reconstruction which follows the natural course of society and is affected by the trend of circumstances. In a revolution extraordinary destruction is involved, such as the extermination of the monarchical system and the overthrow of absolutism. Such destruction naturally calls for extraordinary reconstruction.

Revolutionary destruction and revolutionary reconstruction complement each other like the two legs of a man or the two wings of a bird. The republic after its inauguration weathered the storm of extraordinary destruction. This, however, was not followed by extraordinary reconstruction. A vicious circle of civil wars has consequently arisen. The nation is on the descendent like a stream flowing downward. The tyranny of the warlords together with the sinister maneuvers of unscrupulous politicians is beyond

control. In an extraordinary time, only extraordinary reconstruction can inspire the people with a new mind and make a new beginning of the nation. Hence the Program of Revolution is necessary....

Before their independence the thirteen American colonies had been in an autonomous state and local self-government had developed to a remarkable degree. Consequently, since the founding of the republic, the country has been progressing notably well in the political field. This is because the political structure of the country was built on the foundation of a strongly developed autonomy....

It is not so with France. Although France was an advanced and cultured country in Europe with an intelligent, energetic people, and although for a hundred years before the revolution she had been under the influence of democratic theories and, further, had the American precedent to follow, she was still unable to attain a republican constitutional government with one leap out of revolution. What is the reason? It lies in the fact that her political system had always been an absolute monarchy and that her government had long been centralized; she possessed no new world as an area for development and no self-government as a foundation.

China's defects are similar to those of France, but in addition the knowledge and political ability of our people are far below those of the French. And yet I have hoped to attain a republican constitutional government in one step after the revolution. How could this be brought about? It is to get out of this difficulty that I have devised a transitional period, during which a provisional constitutional government would be established to train the people for local self-government.

It is not to be denied that the Chinese people are deficient in knowledge. Moreover, they have been soaked in the poison of absolute monarchy for several thousand years.... What shall we do now? Men of the Yuan Shih-k'ai type argue that the Chinese people,

deficient in knowledge, are unfit for republicanism. Crude scholars have also maintained that monarchy is necessary.

Alas! Even an ox can be trained to plow the field and a horse to carry man. Are men not capable of being trained? Suppose that when a youngster was entering school, his father was told that the boy did not know the written characters and therefore could not go to school. Is such reasoning logical? It is just because he does not know the characters that the boy must immediately set about learning them. The world has now come to an age of enlightenment. Hence the growing popularity of the idea of freedom and equality, which has become the main current of the world and cannot be stemmed by any means. China therefore needs a republican government just as a boy needs school. As a schoolboy must have good teachers and helpful friends, so the Chinese people, being for the first time under republican rule, must have a far-sighted revolutionary government for their training. This calls for the period of political tutelage, which is a necessary transitional stage from monarchy to republicanism. Without this, disorder will be unavoidable.

Source: *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 2. de Bary, William Theodore, et al., eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"The Three Stages of Revolution," *Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000*. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.