

**SELECTIONS FROM A PROGRAM OF NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION:
"THE THREE STAGES OF REVOLUTION" (1918)**
By Sun Yat-sen

Introduction

In 1918, the Republic of China, established in 1912, had collapsed into chaos. President Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), who had no use for democracy and ruled with an iron hand, had died in 1916. Without him, the various military commanders of the country (many of whom had not been happy with Yuan to begin with) became de facto rulers of whatever territory they could control — which ranged from a county or two to one or more provinces. The central government itself continued to exist in Beijing, but had no real power within the country.

Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) hoped to make his Guomindang, or Nationalist Party, into a strong organization that could bring coherence, unity, and effective government back to China. In doing so, Sun prepared statements of his ideology and goals. *A Program of National Reconstruction*, published in 1918, was part of that project. This document drew on statements of Sun's revolutionary thought going back to the period before the 1911 Revolution. Thus, some of the rhetoric addresses issues (such as the need to overthrow the Manchus) that had been resolved by 1918.

In the excerpt below, Sun explains his ideas on the "three stages of revolution."

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

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The first stage [of revolution] 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, to abolish the obstructive *likin* trade tax 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. ...

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The third phase is the completion of reconstruction. During this period, constitutional government is to be introduced, and the self-governing body of a district will enable the people directly to exercise their political rights. ...

...

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. ...

...

... China ... 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 farsighted 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.

Questions:

1. How does Sun Yat-sen understand the roles of the revolutionary government and of the people respectively? How do the two (people and government) relate to each other, and how is that relationship to develop and change over time?
2. How does Sun view the Chinese people? Compare his view to that of Liang Qichao in his observations on his trip to North America.
3. How does Sun imagine the revolutionary government developing and changing over time? What factors might lead government to develop in directions different from those that Sun imagines?
4. How long might it take to complete these three stages of revolution?

Longer Selection

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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

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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, to abolish the obstructive *likin* trade tax 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. ...

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 that 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 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 destruction 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. ...

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 Shikai 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 farsighted 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.