

"OUR FINAL AWAKENING" (1916)
By Chen Duxiu

Introduction

Beginning around 1917, Chinese intellectuals began to engage each other in serious discussion and debate on culture, history, philosophy, and related subjects — all with an eye to the bigger problem of China's weakness and the possible solutions to that problem. This period of intellectual debate, labeled the May Fourth Movement, lasted to around 1921.

Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) was one of the leading intellectuals of the May Fourth movement. Dean of Peking University in 1916, and, in 1921, co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party, Chen also edited and published the popular *New Youth* magazine. The passage below is an excerpt from his article entitled "Our Final Awakening," published in *New Youth* in 1916.

Document Excerpts with Questions

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We, having been living in one corner of the world for several decades, must ask ourselves what is the level of our national strength and our civilization. This is the final awakening of which I speak. To put it another way, if we open our eyes and take a hard look at the situation within our country and abroad, what place does our country and our people occupy, and what actions should we take? ...

Our task today can be said to be the intense combat between the old and the modern currents of thought. Those with shallow views all expect this to be our final awakening, without understanding how difficult it is to put [constitutional government] into practice. ... There is no difference between the shameful disgrace of submissiveness of men of ancient times hoping that sage rulers and wise ministers will practice benevolent government and present day men hoping that dignitaries and influential elders will build a constitutional republic. Why should I reject the desires of dignitaries and influential elders, who are after all a part of the people, to build a constitutional republic? Only because a constitutional republic cannot be conferred by the government, cannot be maintained by one party or one group, and certainly cannot be carried on the backs of a few dignitaries and influential elders. A constitutional republic which does not derive from the conscious realization and voluntary action of the majority of the

Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on "OUR FINAL AWAKENING," BY CHEN DUXIU

people is a bogus republic and bogus constitutionalism. It is political window-dressing, in no way like the republican constitutionalism of the countries of Europe and America, because there has been no change in the thought or the character of the majority of the people, and the majority of the people have no personal feeling of direct material interest.

Questions:

1. As you read this excerpt, what conclusions can you draw about Chen Duxiu's attitude toward traditional Chinese culture and philosophy?
2. Compare Chen's attitude toward tradition with that of Liang Shuming.
3. How does Chen Duxiu's understanding of the creation of a constitutional republic compare to Sun Yat-sen's ideas as laid out in his speeches on the "Three Stages of Revolution" and on democracy?