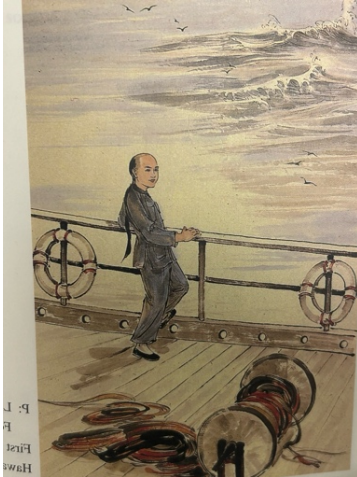# Sun Yat-sen 孫逸仙: Founding Father of Modern China

Sun in his 50s and at age 17

Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) was an important leader who helped create modern China. He wanted China to be a free, strong, and successful country. He promoted a three-part political philosophy for China, called the "The Three Principles of the People":

1. **People's Nationalism (Mínzú 民族)**: The country as a whole should be independent and strong.
2. **People's Democracy (Mínquán 民權)**: The nation's people should have a say in their own government.
3. **People's Livelihood (Mínshēng 民生)**: Each person should have a safe and good life.
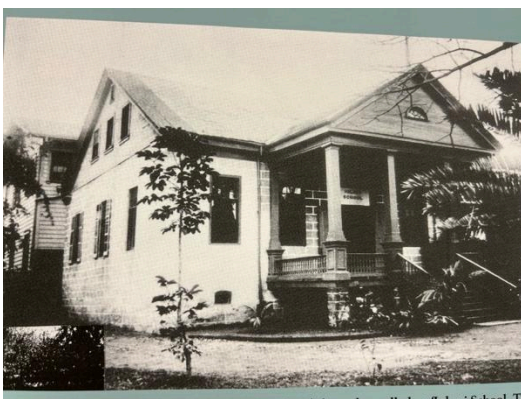
Early Life and Education

Artist's rendering of Sun's ocean voyage to Hawaiʻi. [University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa archives]

Sun Yat-sen was born in Cuiheng, a small farming village in Guangdong Province, China. When he was 13 years old, he moved to Hawaiʻi to live with his older brother, Sun Mei, who was a successful farmer and businessman.

Sun Mei's farm in Kula, Maui (ʻIolani School archives)

Sun attended two schools in Hawaiʻi:

ʻIolani School: He spent three years (1879-1882) on ʻIolani's original campus on the corner of Bates and Nuʻuanu Streets near Chinatown. He arrived speaking no English, and by the time he graduated three years later, was awarded a prize for English grammar by King David Kalakaua.

Punahou School (Oʻahu College): He continued his studies here for two semesters (winter and spring of 1883). Old School Hall on the Punahou campus is the last remaining building that was extant during Sun's time.

At school, Sun learned a great deal about Western (American and European) ideas and democracy, and about Christianity. These experiences helped shape his ideas for changing China.

Becoming a Revolutionary

Sun Yat-sen returned to China, earned a medical degree, and started working to change the government. In 1894, he started his first revolutionary group in Hawaiʻi called the **Revive China Society**. He wanted to end the rule of the Qing Dynasty, which had governed China since 1644.

Sun traveled all over the world—including the U.S., Japan, and Europe—appealing to Chinese people living abroad for funds and support for a revolution to establish a new and democratic China. Many Chinese in Hawaiʻi donated to his cause; some even gave their lives and were martyred in China.

After many bloody and unsuccessful rebellions, the **Wuchang Uprising** was finally successful in overthrowing the Qing Dynasty in 1911. On January 1, 1912, Sun Yat-sen became the first President of the new **Republic of China**.

Sun Yat-sen and Hawaiʻi

Sun visited Hawaiʻi six times. His first visits were for school and to help his brother's business. Later, he came back to raise money and support for his revolution. He even started his first revolutionary group in Hawaiʻi!

In 1904, Sun obtained a falsified "Certificate of Hawaiian Birth" with the help of his Hawaiʻi friends, which allowed him to travel to the U.S. even though there was a law (the **Chinese Exclusion Act**) that made it hard for Chinese people to enter the country.

China After Sun Yat-sen

Sun Yat-sen mausoleum in Nanjing, China

Sun Yat-sen died of illness in 1925, and Chiang Kai-shek became the leader of Sun's political party, the **Kuomintang (KMT)**. The Republic of China ruled mainland China until 1949, when the Communist Party took over and formed the **People's Republic of China**.

Chiang Kai-shek and his followers fled to **Taiwan**, where the **Republic of China** still governs today. Sun Yat-sen is respected in both Taiwan and mainland China for his role in modernizing the country.

Why Sun Yat-sen Loved Hawaiʻi
Sun Yat-sen felt a strong connection to Hawaiʻi. He once said, "This is my Hawaiʻi … here I was brought up and educated, and it was here that I came to know what modern, civilized governments are like and what they mean."

Sun Yat-sen's time in Hawaiʻi helped him learn about democracy and modern government. His ideas and efforts eventually helped China become a republic and move towards a better future.

For further information, see <sunyatsenhawaii.org>.