

SUN YAT SEN AND CHINA

By KENNETH N. GRIGG (President, Henry George Foundation of Australia)

It was my signal honour to participate in the Conference on the History of the Republic of China held in Taipei, Taiwan in August 1981, at which I presented a paper which dealt with western influences upon Sun Yat Sen, in particular the social philosophy of Henry George, and which also annotated the manner in which that same social philosophy was highlighted in Antipodean social ferment at the turn of the century at precisely the same time Sun Yat Sen was crystallizing his own ideas.

Subsequently, I took part in a Symposium on Sun Yat Sen in Hong Kong. Out of my experiences at both seminars two major facets emerged:

1) The practical application of Sun Yat Sen's land reform proposals in Taiwan have not been fully successful.

2) There is a strong religious dimension in western influences on the young Sun Yat Sen. He was introduced to Henry George by the evangelical missionary, Rev. W. E. Macklin.

Therefore during the course of both seminars I addressed myself to each of these matters as they emerged.

With respect to (1), Taiwan has a system of public purchase of land, redistributing it and collecting future increments in land value. This benefited farmers for a number of years but problems are arising with respect to the uneconomic size of farms in relation to modern methods of production, and the persistence of land speculation. The real solution is an annual land rental tax which by transferring equity in the value of land to the community, forces down the price of land, destroys speculation, allows other taxes to be correspondingly abolished and brings home ownership within the bounds of possibility.

With respect to (2) the missionaries James Cantlie and W. E. Macklin did their job well. One can see shining through the pages of Sun Yat Sen's life the Christian gospel of "reconciliation." His deep abiding optimism can be explained from that same source. And the realization of "the Kingdom of God on Earth" was the very phraseology of Henry George to whose concepts Sun Yat Sen was introduced by Rev. Macklin.

The Taipei Conference was attended by 145 scholars from various parts of the world and it was sponsored by various influential and academic organizations. The occasion was the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Republic. One of the participants, Dr. Gottfried-Karl Kindermann made an observation to the effect that there is a danger of Sun Yat Sen being deified along with his "san min cu i" to the point of their being of no practical use! It is the ideas that must be translated into practical politics.

It is my hope that the practical politics of Henry George will yet be brought to fruition on Taiwan as one of the fruits of the Conference on the History of the Republic. It is essential that Taiwan gets it right, because not only she, but the mainland and many a third world country is going to equally depend on it.

 "WHY can the West not solve the social problem? Because it has not solved the land problem. After China has practised the social revolution, private individuals will never pay taxes. There will be only this one item of land tax and China will become the richest country in the world." - Sun Yat Sen (1906)