Sun Yat-sen as historian has not yet, to my knowledge, been subjected to special scrutiny. There has seemed to be little point in doing so previously, certainly as a topic in itself. Yet, as part of a general study to determine the effects of Asian nationalism on historiography to include a probe of Sun's thought in this area does not seem entirely unwarranted. Sun, after all, is not being selected for attention as an historian, but as a principal historical figure whose use of history would undoubtedly have some influence on the work of at least some Chinese historians, to say nothing of a more profound effect on a more popular appreciation of history among the Chinese people. Thus, since Sun was so important, and because he was so prominent a nationalist in the Chinese revolutionary movement, it is logical to pay him some regard in this respect.

But if it is legitimate to scrutinize Sun's use of history in such a general inquiry, it is vitally important to make a necessary qualification in the context of this particular panel's selection of national representatives.† This is to raise the fundamental question of equivalence. Without taking anything away from Sun himself, one might present a persuasive case for other Chinese representatives, and especially for one well-known living leader, as being more suitably comparable with Nehru and Sukarno. This is not only because of the immediately obvious generational difference, for Sun's day was that much earlier than the others on the scale of national revolution. Just as important, Sun did not live to see the achievement of his objective—national unification. This is a crucial comparative point, for whatever references to history Sun made in his writings were made in the course of the struggle toward an unattained major end. Unfortunately, therefore, there can be
no comparisons of historical references or reflections of the kind that are made after national unification which might mirror both the satisfaction of success and the new brand of problems and frustrations that follow. Finally, in terms of impact on the Chinese people as a whole, it must be conceded that Mao Tse-tung, and his references to Chinese history, is of a greater order. This last point is important, I should think, in terms of the over-all significance of such a study. Nevertheless, it is Sun Yat-sen we are assigned to deal with, and as we have already acknowledged, keeping our qualification in mind, this exploration might well be of some use in its own right.

Sun Yat-sen is a fascinatingly paradoxical personality. He certainly enjoys an eviable position in history. Despite much politically naive and compromising activity on his part in his day he uniquely commands the continued respect of Chinese of all political persuasions in our day. This is not to underestimate Sun's vital role, for there should be little doubt but that he constituted for a critical period a persevering, idealistic and positive symbol around which a people trying to find nationhood, political unity and liberation from imperialistic bondage might rally. And the symbol continues today for many Chinese to represent something that might yet be, however hopeless the prospects seem. Such was the magnetism and the inspirational optimism generated by this remarkable man. Of course, his sanctification by the Nationalists has had something to do with the general absence of critical Chinese attention. But aside from such officially-imposed restraint there persists, even among normally critical-minded and politically non-involved Chinese scholars, an intriguing propensity to view Sun through mercifully rose-colored glasses, and to give his writings unmistakeably charitable readings.

This instinctively favorable image of Sun extends to his knowledge of Chinese history as well. Yet this is an aspect of Sun's career that requires some working at, for Sun's historical knowledge, and the means by which he attained it are not exactly self-evident. One distinguished contemporary Chinese historian, currently residing in Hong Kong, explains that soon after Sun had returned from Honolulu, he retained a good tutor to coach him in Chinese history and literature. This same informant continues with this anecdotal story. While at the Canton Hospital School, Sun kept a full set of the twenty-four dynastic histories in his room.
One day, a fellow student picked one of the volumes at random and questioned Sun on its contents. It is reported that the student was surprised to discover that young Sun Yat-sen had read the work thoroughly. In this fashion then, is built the image of the revolutionary whose knowledge of his own nation's past was firmly grounded.

Yet if anything at all is clear about Sun Yat-sen's career, it should be that he had no real proclivity toward history. Aside from the required Chinese part of his curriculum at Queen's College in Hong Kong, an interest in history seems to be lacking completely in Sun's formal education, which in any case eventuated in a medical degree. But even if there was some interest in Chinese history, as manifested in his hiring of the tutor, it is even more evident that his historical curiosity was not matched by an equal amount of critical acumen as he internalized what he read of it. These then are basic considerations to be taken in hand from the beginning. Any question of the influence of nationalism momentarily aside, Sun's lack of interest in history led to a ready and unquestioning acceptance of the Chinese schoolboy's idealistic self-image of Chinese history, as taught among Western subjects in colonial Hong Kong. This left him without the slightest concern for the possibility of alternative interpretations of questionable historical points or problems, and also led to unabashed carelessness with respect to the accuracy of historical references.

Only in this way can one explain the surprising and numerous overly-facile historical generalizations and outright errors to be found even in the most cursory reading of Sun's writings. Perhaps the simple comment by Sun that Marco Polo "occupied an official post under Genghis-Khan, of the Yuan dynasty," might be overlooked even though it contains a double error (since Marco Polo served under Kubilai Khan, and there was as yet no Yuan dynasty in the time of Genghis Khan), because it is of such little importance. But Sun's claim that Cheng Ho visited all the islands of the ocean (ostensibly the Pacific) "and even reached San Francisco" certainly merits some notice. Incidentally, Sun was amiss on the date for this supposed expedition as well. Sun was much taken with the pat concept of China's irresistible assimilatory capability, and on more than one occasion referred to it. He noted that China was never "enslaved" by foreign invaders but on the contrary the latter "were assimilated by the Chinese as easily as the moving of
In case one might raise the question of the Mongol experience, as perhaps a singular exception, Sun elsewhere explicitly affirmed that they too were absorbed by the Chinese, thanks to the fact that “the character of the Chinese race was higher than that of other races.” In making this point Sun incidentally raises a further historical question when he says that the Ming dynasty “fell twice” to the Manchus.

Of course, one might surmise that some of Sun’s historical distortions are generalizations intended for forensic effect. The exaggerated assimilation concept may be in this category, as well as such claims as “Everyone in China, beginning with emperors and kings, and ending with the common people, even robbers and pirates, all have been able to value and delight in literature as an art.”

But such observations by Sun, as well as the stress on China’s erstwhile moral power for absorption, are also part of a more general idealized appreciation of the past in which history and mythology blend indistinguishably together. As a matter of fact, history seems to be, for Sun, an almost dimensionless pastiche to which reference might be made indiscriminately. Thus the manifold allusions to the legendary emperors and to other historical personalities and folk heroes, without the slightest demonstrated concern for accuracy or authenticity. The “Emperor Fu-Shi” wrote the “Eight Diagrams,” thus initiating the Chinese written language. Of all the emperors throughout Chinese history only “Yao, Shun, Yu, T’ang, Wen Wang and Wu Wang” were the ones “who shouldered the responsibility of government for the welfare and happiness of the people.” The statement “you have all read a good deal of Chinese history; I am sure almost everyone here has read particularly The Story of the Three Kingdoms,” with striking ingenuousness prefaces a brief story illustrating Chu-kuo Liang’s “splendid character,” but neglects to suggest the difference between evidence provided by historical documentation and the imaginative renditions of fictional literature. Recounting the contributions of the legendary figures of Sui Jen Shih, Shen Nung, Hsien Yuan and Yu Ch’ao Shih, respectively the alleged inventors of cooking, medicine, clothing and housing, Sun declared: “So in Chinese history we find not only those could fight becoming king; anyone with marked ability, who had made new discoveries or who had achieved great things for mankind, could become king and organize the
government.” In fact, he noted that the “general psychology of the Chinese is that a man possessing marked ability should become king.” Viewed in the most charitable way possible such an impression of history for a twentieth century revolutionary seems strangely incongruous. But incredibly enough, Sun was making such comments at the very moment when Ku Chieh-kang and others were making electrifying discoveries in Chinese historiography, one of the more exciting dimensions of the New Culture Movement of the 1920’s. These revolutionary currents seem to have had little effect on Sun.

Sun Yat-sen also enjoys the distinction of having contributed a unique historical theory to historiography. One of his most ardent contemporary admirers has affirmed that of “all theories of history, the social interpretation of history” of Sun Yat-sen “seems to be most illustrative of the truth of social evolution, as revealed in the legends of ancient China.” Yet this theory seems to be of rather minimal consequence. Drawing on ideas supplied by the American dentist, Maurice Williams, Sun is primarily at pains to set aside Marx’s concept of class struggle. Williams contended that the struggle for subsistence is the law of social progress and the central force of history. From this Sun reasoned that since the struggle for existence is the same thing as the problem of livelihood, “therefore the problem of livelihood can be said to be the driving force in social progress.” With this insightful formula Sun could now refute Marx, for class warfare was clearly not the cause of social progress. Sun could say that conversely, since class warfare is the end product of the social disease caused by the inability to subsist, this made Marx a social pathologist for he had concentrated upon the study of social disease, not the central element in social progress itself. However much such reasoning reveals Sun’s basic humanitarian impulse, and certainly much of the rest of his writing on the subject of the People’s Livelihood confirms this happy feature of Sun’s personality, it presents an historical theory of but limited value.

In a similar theoretical vein Sun also spoke briefly of universal political stages of history as traversed by mankind. These stages, the first being that of the great wilderness, the second of theocracy, and the third of autocracy culminate in the fourth, which history has proved to be the best, democracy. This very loose set of generalizations is part of Sun’s discussion of democracy itself, so
that the pseudo-historical background is merely intended to highlight the logical existence and desirability of this final political form. Again, this is not an acutely reasoned historical-theoretical construct.

Sun's indifferent use of history — his inaccuracies, his unquestioned acceptance of a heavily and simplistically idealized vision of the past and his limited ability for historical theorization — was an aspect of his behavior that can be largely abstracted; it was a disposition apart from his nationalistic or emotional impulses. For Sun Yat-sen was never interested in history. He was a man completely the revolutionary; his entire being concentrated upon changing the present. And like other Chinese revolutionaries of his day, confronted with awesome tasks and frustrated at every turn, history, China's vast arsenal of history, stood at hand as a ready source of ammunition to be used as necessary, for the only all-important struggle. Not unlike Li Ta-chao, who even as Professor of History at Peita, was less interested in discovering the actual way history developed as its psychological usage for the present.¹³ Sun also used his little understood history for practical revolutionary purposes. This pragmatic political concern largely set the limits of Sun's interest in history and determined his usage of it.

This is all by way of saying that nationalism alone is not to be held accountable for Sun's distortions of history. Nationalism, to be sure, is inextricably a part of Sun's make-up, but Sun is so unique a Chinese type for his period, and is so much the revolutionary that nationalism manifests itself in a rather special way through him. It is almost a managed attitude in his hands, so that his use of it is as great as its influence on his use of history.

Once again, I would not underestimate Sun's dedication to China, nor his earnest life-long efforts to resolve China's difficulties, to see his country free and strong, and constituting a progressive force in the comity of nations. Sun cannot and should not be faulted on these grounds. I am only saying that Sun helped to evolve the feeling and the concept of nationalism in China, and he did this while being a rather atypical Chinese on the whole. Sun's Western education and experience abroad, rather than his having had traditional Chinese training in depth in China, set him apart from the overwhelming majority of Chinese. Likewise, his social background distinguished him from most intellectuals of the
period. This produced for him an identity problem of sorts, and may explain the hiring of the Chinese tutor, but it also produced a rather cosmopolitan man. This familiarity with the real political world made Sun personally aware of China's relative position in the world, as a nation among nations. He was unencumbered by the traditional culturalism that inhibited a clearer-cut and timely appreciation of nationalism on the part of many of his peers. And Sun, as pragmatic revolutionary, early recognized the mobilizing efficacy of nationalism. His problem was that of finding the way of "turning-on" the Chinese people by means of it.

Yet the "nationalism" that Sun articulated is a difficult concept to pin down, as Lyon Sharmon's excellent analysis has shown. Min-ts'u, Sun's term for nationalism, means the people's clan. Prior to 1912 it had meant Chinese solidarity against the Manchus, but afterwards was re-interpreted to mean the unity of all races in China, including the Manchus, on an equal basis. Almost until the end of his life this concept of nationalism was interpreted in moderate terms. As late as 1923 it carried two connotations, or aspects. The first was the internal one of unity of races within China; the second, external, aspired for an equal place of respect for China among the nations of the world.

However, in 1924 the San Min Chu I lectures muddied the issue considerably. Suddenly, there was evinced in Sun a bitterness against imperialism that was uncharacteristic of the man, but probably explainable in terms of accumulated disappointments at the lack of Western support and, at the same time, of increasing Russian influence. This sudden antipathy toward imperialism was contradictory, incidentally, to Sun's own erstwhile plans to solicit incredibly large amounts of foreign economic assistance for China. Unfortunately too, this final form of nationalism had again a strong racist connotation. Sun expressed in alarmist fashion the fear that the Chinese people, because their population was allegedly static at a time when the West's was increasing, would be absorbed by the racially alien foreigners. Sun made race then, and fear, a part of his nationalism. He also was at pains to demonstrate now how it was that China's nationalistic spirit had declined historically. This he laid directly to the Manchus whose superior techniques of denationalization allegedly robbed China of her "precious jewel." This is not exactly persuasive, and one is left to wonder further at his concept of nationalism when he
speaks of its use by the secret societies. He said that since the secret societies saw "the impossibility of overthrowing the Tai-Tsings, they seized then on the idea of nationalism and began preaching it, handing it down from generation to generation. Their main object in organizing the Hung-Men societies was the overthrow of the Tai-Tsing dynasty and the restoration of the Ming dynasty. The idea of nationalism was for them auxiliary." Perhaps this is but a reflection of the obvious fact that his own nationalistic spirit along racial lines had been artificially wrought. Sun, after all, had not initially been anti-Manchu. His memorial of 1894 to Li Hung-chang, suggesting reforms, contained no such references. Yet, characteristically, Sun would bury this fact in the recounting of his own personal history, for ignoring the memorial to Li Hung-chang altogether, he said in his Memoirs that his anti-Manchu revolutionary course had begun in 1885, nine years earlier.

And so, Sun's use of history, when it is an effect of nationalism or is influenced by it, must necessarily reflect his unusual and uncertain appreciation of nationalism itself. Sun the iconoclastic revolutionary was not as Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao, for example, alienated from a tradition he had personally and deeply known. He did not, therefore, feel as intensely the lingering emotional tie to it. He was consequently less disposed to an indulgence in too heavy a dose of cultural nationalism, in trying to preserve a semblance of identity for China in the face of extensive borrowing from the modern West.

But of course, Sun did feel the need to make some prideful assertions regarding what he believed to be superior features of China's past. We see in this a certain amount of cultural nationalism, but Sun's purpose as often as not had a practical political purpose in mind. He asserted, for example, the superiority of China's ancient virtues. "Loyalty, Filial Devotion, Kindness, Love, Faithfulness, and such are in their very nature superior to foreign virtues, but in the moral quality of Peace we will further surpass the people of other lands." Such is the source of the old moral power by means of which China could absorb the barbarians of the past. Likewise in politics, Sun declared that China had "a specimen of political philosophy so systematic and so clear that nothing has been discovered or spoken by foreign statesmen to
equal it."\textsuperscript{20} However this might be, Sun also conceded that it had not been implemented. Sun noted too that in the halcyon days of the Chou dynasty, which he saw as the period of maturity or the Golden Age of Chinese civilization, "the political, economic, and educational systems, literature and the arts, attained in China the same development roughly, as they have today in the modern Western countries."\textsuperscript{21} This period "of great and unlimited liberty," was succeeded by 2,000 years of decline. But because of reforms during the Golden Age, China's despotism was reduced sufficiently so that it was never as severe as it was in the West, or so Sun claimed.\textsuperscript{22} Whatever pride or identity serving purposes such remarks may have had, they were also among those which made for Sun more practical points as well. Such a view of history served to illustrate Sun's philosophical dictum that knowledge was difficult and action easy. Thus China's historical decline had been caused by too much intellectual reflection in the centuries following the Golden Age. Therefore, it was a revolutionary call to the Chinese people for more practical action, a necessary revolutionary ingredient which was Sun's main purpose and concern.\textsuperscript{23} Such a view of history was also designed to support the not entirely unreasonable contention that China need not seek to borrow all of its modern political forms from the West, because China had certain distinctive needs for which suitable political forms should be created.\textsuperscript{24} Whether or not the political forms Sun went on to suggest were suitable or not is something else. The point here is that the nationalistic implications of Sun's use of history were strongly action-orientated, designed to mobilize people behind his revolutionary program. The identity-serving side is there, but it is a blurred image of China's past. While containing elements of the traditional self-image, it represents as many pragmatically-necessitated departures from it, and a number of misunderstandings of it as well.

In summary then, while it is certainly legitimate to presume the influence of nationalism on Sun Yat-sen's use of history, it is a factor requiring careful qualification. Nationalistic influences there were, but there are also problems of Sun's personal identity and his shifting appreciation of the meaning of nationalism. Beyond this was his tendency to use history as seemed required or desirable for what he considered practical political programming. Finally, and most fundamental of all, was a basic lack of interest in his-
torical accuracy, either for detail or theory, a reflection of Sun’s indifference to the past and the problems its recovery poses. Nationalism can be the cause of historical distortion, but it might be kept in mind that it is not necessarily the only such cause when history is written by nationalist revolutionaries. As history itself, the subject can be considerably more complex.

NOTES

2 Ibid., p. 55.
3 Ibid., pp. 38-39.
6 Ibid., p. 38.
7 *San Min Chu I*, pp. 117-118.
8 Ibid., pp. 118-119.
9 Ibid., p. 122.
11 *San Min Chu I*, p. 163.
12 Ibid., p. 57.
17 Ibid., p. 143.
19 *San Min Chu I*, p. 41.
20 Ibid., p. 42.
21 *Memoirs*, p. 79.
22 *San Min Chu I*, p. 84.
24 *San Min Chu I*, p. 111.