

AN ASIAN'S VIEW ON DEMOCRACY AMERICAN STYLE*

by

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Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of my delegation, first of all, I would like to express my sincere congratulations on the success of the 11th Annual International American Studies Seminar for 1976. Organized by the American Studies Association of Korea with sponsorship of the American Embassy in Korea in commemoration of the Bicentennial of American Independence, this conference is so well arranged systematically that the renowned scholars from different countries are able to present their significant views on the American Revolution from different aspects—History, Literature, Political Science, and Economics. Undoubtedly, their contributions constitute “a valuable asset to the success of the Seminar.” In addition, the generous hospitality shown by the host country makes us feel a sense of vacation which will be held dear in our memory for the rest of our life. So, our thanks and appreciations are fully extended to all of those who have made this conference possible and successful.

The subject of the round-up session, as assigned by the host country, is “The American Revolution and Its Asian Implications.” I, as a panelist representing my delegation from the Republic of China, would like to express the following remarks under the title of “An Asian’s View on Democracy American Style.”

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In commemoration of the Bicentennial of American Independence, people, especially scholars out of America, usually tend to review the past with a purpose to find out the American values and beliefs that have led the United States to prosperity and greatness. This approach has served certain goals in academic fields. For our purpose, however, this is not enough. The real meaning for our gathering here, it seems to me, aims at searching for and finding out those elements and beliefs of the American Revolution that we, the Asian people, need the most for our nation-building at the present time and for the future. In other words, we emphasize what and how the American experiences benefit us.

For the past two centuries, two vast continents, separated by the great Pacific Ocean, share geographically a similar environment, but result in different rates of progress. For over half a century, cultural and governmental relations between the United States and the Asian people have been considered intimate in terms of ideological and cultural imports, as well as material and technological assistance, to the Asian countries from the United States. The Asian people, per se, have gone through whatever channels they could find, chiefly including acceptance of regular education in America, in order to achieve their nation-building ideal. However, the Asian countries have failed to keep abreast of the United States in progress, irrespective of the fact that thousands of American-oriented Ph. D.s in arts, humanities, sciences, laws, or medicines, etc. have been working for their nation-building. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, our immediate responsibility is to examine the major ways that may lead our nation-building in relation to the orientation to political system and technological advancement with which the Americans have established a beautiful tradition and a significant achievement. Today, let us concentrate our discussion on the problem

of how the Asian peoples may realize democracy American style.

The success of the American Revolution gave Americans the opportunity to give legal forms to their political ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Today, the American people, standing firm by a declarative axiom that "they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," are so accustomed to living happily under such a solemn constitution that they take these rights for granted. This American idea also became the aspiration of the Asian people, especially when they were eager to struggle for freedom from the oppression of foreign powers. As Thomas Paine, a famous American philosopher, put it: "Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart." So, Paine urged that America should become the asylum for mankind seeking civil and religious liberty." Paine's call for action and immediate and complete separation from England has served the same cause for the Asian people's struggle for independence before and after the Second World War.

With equal importance to freedom, the idea of the right of self-government had its historical importance emerge from the American Revolution and has been widely respected as a holy and inviolable belief in the American mind. However, for the Asian people, a long period of monarchical rule had historically checked the growth of the idea of government by the people. So, in the course of nation-building, the Asian people need ideological orientation for a modern sense of political ideas and institutions, especially the notion stated by Thomas Jefferson that "Every man, and every body of men on earth, possess the right of self-government."

In today's Asia, the process of nation-building through the revolutionary means based on the ideology embodied in the Declaration of Independence had, generally speaking, been initiated and practiced from time to time. This is because the idea of this great document has greatly inspired the Asian people's fervor for the American cause that made independence possible. Moreover, this great idea has instilled into the minds of ordinary people a sense of their own importance, and has inspired them to struggle for "personal freedom, self-government, and a dignified place in society."

Ladies and gentlemen, we, the Asian people, have done our best for the establishment of what we sincerely hope to achieve with the help of the above-mentioned ideas. As a matter of fact, we did follow these ideas, and some basic forms have come into being thereby. However, on the other hand, we cannot but recognize the fact that our efforts for reaching our goal have not always been fruitful and our achievements are unsatisfactory. Although democracy has been absorbed and adopted into the political institutions and governmental structures, it cannot be measured by the same standard as the Americans see it. In other words, the same ideas are pursued, but different results are achieved.

If we are going to follow this line of argument, we are forced to find out why these different results have occurred. Frankly speaking, although we have given legal forms to our desired ideas, our problem is whether these legal forms can be supported and implemented in the same manner as maintained by the American people. On this point, I refer to the establishment of working political system. A working system is a living model of action, a pattern of actions, which people follow regularly and unquestioningly in their political lives. Furthermore, even if these legal forms have been upheld or are put into operation under formal structures, the

problem still lies in the fact that whether we have enough confidence to carry them out. Let me put my words in a simple way: "system" and "the faithfulness and determination to carry out the system" constitute our major concerns if we recognize the fact that we do not have the same political sense for the purpose of nation-building that the Founding Fathers had.

The Declaration of Independence only provides fundamental principles. It is necessary to take hundreds and thousands of practical measures, specific actions, and concrete steps to implement them. Fundamental principles may be applied to Asia as well as to the United States, but methods of implementation vary in terms of how they are implemented. Since the beginning of the American Republic, different kinds of practices, actions, and steps have been taken and transformed into fixed patterns and systems which ended with regulatory acts and general legislation. The American people regard them as norms and feel responsible to follow them faithfully. Their courage and faithfulness for advocacy of these working systems form a beautiful American political tradition. But we Asians are lacking in this tradition. In formulating a modern sense of working system, the Asian people need to learn from the American experience.

I am talking about the importance of working systems because I feel that the American Revolution has not only brought about ideal principles for nation-building, but also inspired the American people to strive for working systems by which the ideal principles may obtain firm support. Surely, the Founding Fathers did contribute a lot to the establishment of basic principles, but the working systems are attributed to the faithfulness and support of the mass of the American people. That is because the American people are better educated and more democratic-minded than the Asian masses. In Asia today, the desired working systems in support of

fundamental principles, in my opinion, are far from having been achieved satisfactorily. The ruler and the ruled lack confidence. Note that some basic principles were maintained and operated in good shape in certain periods. It is not because good working systems were put into practice, but because certain chief executives were uncommonly talented and the power used by them was effective. This kind of political pattern, based on one man's intention and leadership in dealing with political affairs, would be unsafe in case his successor is weak. Although this situation may be explained as a transitional phenomenon, it is evidently not done in the systematic manner of due process. To sum up, complete and strong working systems need to be established for the protection of the basic principles embodied in each constitution.

Apart from our vindication of the establishment of working systems, the reason why our concern also extends to whether we have courage and faithfulness to uphold the systems is that we are trying to maintain the real meaning of basic principles. Democracy American style is a reflection of the Declaration of Independence: "That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." However, democracy in the Asiatic style usually takes the pattern that although power in government comes in the name of the consent of the governed, it actually takes place prior to the consent of the people. Evidently, democracy with power not originally initiated from the will of the people will suffer damage in terms of how the Founding Fathers saw it. Generally, this is the major reason why democracy on the separate continents cannot have the same qualities. For sticking to the original meaning of democracy, it is my belief that only such courage and faithfulness as expressed by the majority of the American

people can produce strength for maintaining its basic spirit through the operation of sound working political systems.

I believe that this conference has produced fruitful results, and that the spirit of the American Revolution, after excellent explanations and comments, will not only benefit us today, but also brighten our future. Thank you very much.