The Boy, the Man, and the Visionary

Have you ever wondered why Sun Yat-sen is the founding father of modern China? Dr. Sun Yat-sen revolutionized China through his Three Principles of the People and leadership in the Xinhai revolution, leaving a lasting legacy. As a boy, Sun traveled alone to Hawai‘i in 1878 for education and opportunities. His studies at ‘Iolani and Oahu College exposed him to new ideas that shaped his revolutionary ideas. Despite his traditional Chinese upbringing, his experiences in Hawai’i introduced him to self-government and influenced his vision for China.

Firstly, Sun’s education in Hawai‘i reshaped his ideals on self-government. As a young man attending Oahu College in 1883, Sun learned about political leaders like Abraham Lincoln and the republican government (Latham). Without learning about government and politics in Hawai‘i, Sun likely wouldn’t have developed the foundation needed to reform China.

In addition, his journey in Hawai’i gave him a new understanding of human rights and equality. Sun questioned imperialism as he witnessed the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy and the wave of nativism that Chinese immigrants faced due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Latham). After witnessing these events, Sun understood what a nation needed to stay in unity with its people. As a result, he learned that China needed a new rebirth.

However, critics argue that Sun’s revolutionary ideals originated in China because of his upbringing and early education to Confucian ideas about righteousness and government. Although these teachings shaped his foundation, he blended this with western ideals gained in Hawai‘i (Dr. Sun Yat-sen). This combination influenced the principles he brought to the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, demonstrating how his journey transformed his understanding of government for the people (Sun Yat-sen).

Furthermore, it was in Hawai‘i where Sun formed the Revive China Society. The purpose of this political group was to remove foreign influence in China, revive Chinese culture, and unite the Chinese central government into one without any division (Revive China Society Explained). His experiences in Hawai’i shaped his views on society and government, helping him work with fellow revolutionaries to promote his ideas and challenge the corrupt Qing Dynasty. In 1910, he called Hawai'i his second home, where he gained knowledge, witnessed new governments firsthand, and built friendships that supported his vision for China (Doo). As a revolutionary, he was exiled by the Qing government, but this second home gave him the right to stay and spread his beliefs.

Ultimately, Sun's education and experiences in Hawai‘i shaped his understanding of natural rights and inspired him to form the Revive China Society, helping transform China’s political future.Without his journey to Hawai‘i, Sun would never have encountered the Western history, geography, science, and Christianity that forever changed his beliefs. From a curious young boy to a man who challenged his nation, Sun Yat-sen’s experiences shaped him into a visionary, reminding us that an open mind can evolve not only an individual’s beliefs but also a legacy of hopes and dreams for a better society and future.

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Bibliography

Doo, Leigh-Wai. “Unifying China through Hawaii’s Sun Yat-sen.” *Archives Star Bulletin*, 3 Mar. 2007, https://archives.starbulletin.com/2007/03/03/editorial/commentary.html. Accessed 8 Oct. 2026.

The article gave information on Hawaii being Sun Yat-sen's second home since he learned a lot about government and overall education in a Western country. This builds an overall good impression that Sun Yat-sen’s journey to Hawaii was more than just a visit.

“Dr. Sun Yat-sen.” *‘Iolani School*. https://www.iolani.org/school/history/dr-sun-yat-sen. Accessed 2 Oct. 2026.

This webpage gave me insight into how Sun Yat-sen combined both his Western and Chinese learning to develop his revolutionary ideals. I used evidence from this source to support my rebuttal.

Latham, Mike. “Roots of a Revolution: Sun Yat-sen’s Formative Time at Punahou - Punahou School.” *Punahou School*, 18 July 2025, https://bulletin.punahou.edu/roots-of-a-revolution-sun-yat-sen/. Accessed 2 Oct. 2026.

This article gave me information on how Sun Yat-sen learned about the rulers in the U.S., his personal experience with the Chinese Exclusion Act, and the impact of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. This supported my claim that Hawaii reshaped his ideals on government and human rights.

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"Revive China Society Explained." *EverythingExplained*, 2009, https://everything.explained.today/%5C/Revive_China_Society/. Accessed 8 Oct. 2026.

This source stated the purpose of the Revive China Society in the revolution. Because the Qing government kicked Sun Yat-sen out of China for his ideas, he had to start the organization in Hawaii instead. I used this source to show the importance of starting the Revive China Society in Hawaii.

"Sun Yat Sen: Sun Yat Sen: The Founding Father s Vision for the Republic of China." *Faster Capital*, 25 Aug. 2026, https://fastercapital.com/content/Sun-Yat-sen–Sun-Yat-sen--The-Founding-Father-s-Vision-for-the-Republic-of-China.html. Accessed 2 Oct. 2026.

This website argued for the opposing side that the influence of Chinese traditions and practices in Sun Yat-sen's youth was what mainly supported his revolutionary ideals. The next point adds information that supports the rebuttal that Western ideals were really important as well, which Yat-sen combined both.