Opinion Forum

Ideals and Reality: Sun Yat-sen's Dream for Asia¹

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Abstract

When planning China's future revolution, Sun Yat-sen at one time used the model of the West. Since China is after all a part of Asia, however, and as his understanding of the corrupt and critical state of the Western system of capitalism grew, he eventually looked once again to Asia. He advocated collaborating with Japan, and approved of allying with various oppressed peoples in Asia. He planned to join forces with other Asian nations in order to stop Western encroachment in Asia. He divided the world into two major categories: the oppressors and the oppressed. He sought independence, equality, prosperity, and power for the oppressed, and proposed a new world order of peace and justice. He considered nationalism to be the basis of cosmopolitanism. Only by restoring national equality to the oppressed nations would those nations be able to move toward cosmopolitanism. For Sun, societies should deal appropriately with the relationship between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, both of which necessarily were to endure profound, universal judgment from people around the world. Humankind was to reawaken and rally together to help their own respective cultures. China's traditional morality was to spread to merge with the morally good elements of every country in the world, creating the foundation for building a new world citizen morality.

Key words: Sun Yat-sen, the Principle of Nationalism, cosmopolitanism, awakening of human nature

Foreword

Sun Yat-sen was born in a backward and closed agricultural clan-based society. He had very little knowledge of the outside world until he was

¹ The essay was written in relation with the Important Research Project in Philosophy and the Social Sciences commissioned by the Ministry of Education of China: "Xinhai geming de bainian jiyi yu quanshi" 辛亥革命的百年记忆与诠释(A Century of Memories and Interpretations of the 1911 Revolution)." (JZDW004)

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twelve years old and visited Hawaii: "When I saw the wonders of a steamship and the vast sea for the first time, I began to yearn for Western learning and the farthest reaches of heaven and earth." That was when he first realized that there was a big world outside of China—a Western world that already had a highly developed modern civilization.

Sun Yat-sen directly received a Western education through his regional and familial connections. As a result, he became relatively deferent toward the West early in his life. He strove to study the West and to use the American and French models for a future Chinese revolution. He placed his hopes on the West for the important implementation of and investment in the revolution. Of particular importance was the help of local, elite circles of overseas Chinese. Before the 1911 Revolution, the uprisings led personally by Sun Yat-sen were confined mainly to the southern coast of China, which was a natural outcome of this historical background.

But the West was relatively far from China. China is, after all, part of Asia. Sun's vision and thought could not but return to Asia.

I. Return to Asia

The year 1896 was a critical one. In October, while Sun was in hiding in London, he was trapped and arrested by the Qing legation. He was soon rescued, however, and subsequently spent over six months traveling around England. He read extensively in politics, economics, law, military affairs, and diplomacy. At the same time, he spent time in observation, interviews, investigations, research, and interaction with elite Western socialists and national purists from different countries who were gathered in London. Through this effort he gained an even more profound understanding of Western capitalism, which changed his views radically. He never again saw the West as a perfect, ideal paradise. He gained a clear understanding of the corruption in Western capitalistic development and the grave social crises attendant to it.

Because his appeals and speeches made in the US and Europe did not result in his obtaining practical help from the West as expected, he was compelled to look back to Asia, which is closer to China historically, culturally, and in terms of contemporaneous events. Neighboring Japan, which had already been successful in dealing with the West through the Meiji Restoration, was the first country to attract his attention.

In August 1897, Sun traveled to Japan by way of Canada. His most important accomplishment in Japan was making acquaintance with the

^{2 &}quot;Letter in reply to Zhai Lisi 翟理斯," in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 孙中山全集 *Collected Works of Sun Yat-sen* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局, 1981), Vol. 1, p.47.

Miyazaki brothers (Miyazaki Tōten 宮崎滔天1871-1922; Miyazaki Hachirō宮 崎八郎、1851-1857; Miyazaki Tamizō 宮崎民蔵1865-1928; Miyazaki Yazō宮崎 弥蔵, 1867-1896) and Hirayama Shū 平山周(1870-1940). He asked them to become intermediaries through whom he could gain the preliminary understanding and assistance of important political leaders such as Inukai Tsuyoshi 犬養毅(1855-1932). Miyazaki Tōten advocated the doctrine of pan-Asianism: "To unite China and Japan to lead Asia, to restore fallen states by using our new strength to restrain the threatening Western powers that are encroaching eastward. This is what both heavenly principle and human mind agree upon." Sun agreed with the concept of an alliance between China and Japan. He also approved of the alliance of the various oppressed nations of Asia against the common problem of colonization and the "threatening Western powers that are encroaching eastward." He clearly explained that his own revolutionary ideals were "for the yellow Asian race, and even more, for the peoples of the world."4 His view differed fundamentally from the pan-Asianism advocated by Japanese militarists. In 1899, Sun and his Japanese friends, such as Miyazaki Tōten, helped Filipino revolutionaries purchase and transport weapons. This can be seen as Sun's first maneuver in "Asianism," which ultimately failed because the ship *Nunobiki-maru*, which was loaded with weapons for the Filipino revolutionaries, sank in a storm in 1899 before it could reach the Philippines.

After Sun resorted to Asia and focused on Japan, his greatest accomplishment was to become acquainted with countless patriotic, progressive youth from all provinces of China who were studying there. He treated the large number of revolutionary elites with particular sincerity and empathy. Together with them he promoted the alliance of a certain number of important small revolutionary groups, and founded the earliest national revolutionary political group, the Tongmenghui. Small streams converge into a great river. The rebellions that occurred sporadically throughout China grew into a nationwide revolutionary movement. It was just as Sun recollected: "On that day in the autumn of 1905, we gathered highly talented individuals from around the country and established the revolutionary Tongmenghui in Tokyo. I began to believe that the great undertaking of revolution could achieve success in my lifetime." The Tongmenghui was established with the assistance and even

^{3 &}quot;Yu Miyazaki Torazō deng bitan "与宮崎寅蔵等笔谈" Pen-Talk with Miyazaki Tōten, etc.", in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 孙中山全集 *Collected Works of Sun Yat-sen* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局, 1981), Vol. 1, p.181.

⁴ Miyazaki Tōten 宮崎滔天(Lin Qiyan 林启彦, trans.), *Sanshisannian zhi meng* 三十三年之梦*Thirty-three Year Dream* (Guangzhou: Huacheng Publishers 花城 出版社1981), p.123.

⁵ Sun Zhongshan quanji 孙中山全集 Collected Works of Sun Yat-sen (Beijing:

participation in multiple ways from Sun's Japanese friends, such as Miyazaki Tōten. Suenaga Misao 未永節 1869-1960) delivered a congratulatory speech in which he said: "To found the tricolored flag and ring the liberty bell, we can only count on Mr. Sun and all of you. One day in the future we may have a great alliance in Asia. Does today's conference mark the beginning?" It seemed that the founding of the Tongmenghui was expected to herald pan-Asianism.

Naturally, this was not at all simply the feelings of a small number of Japanese, but the consensus of a certain number of progressive individuals from Asian nations. In April 1907, revolutionary pioneers from both China and India established an Asian friendship association in Tokyo. According to the recollections of the people involved, this association could be called an alliance of fallen East Asian countries. In "the Regulations of the Asian Friendship Association" composed by Zhang Binglin, he asserted: "First we will organize an association of the two countries of India and China because among the old countries of the East, these two are the greatest. If they have the good fortune of attaining independence, they will provide protection for Asia....If there are some among Asian peoples who hope to attain independence, walk in the footsteps of China and India, and pledge to form an alliance, we welcome you with incense and prayers." Apart from India, the Filipino independence fighter Mariano Ponce (1863-1918), the Vietnamese revolutionary Phan Bôi Châu (1867-1940), and others all had at one time paid official visits to Sun Yat-sen to seek useful instruction and help. Sun once said to Phan: "When the Chinese Revolutionary Party succeeds, it will pour all of its efforts into helping Asian protégé countries become independent. We will start first with Vietnam."8

Sun's establishment of the Tongmenghui was not only the first step to establishing his position as leader of the national revolution, but also made him an esteemed pioneer for the patriots of other oppressed Asian nations.

Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局, 1985), Vol. 6, p.237.

^{6 &}quot;Ji Dongjing liuxuesheng huanying Sunjunyixian deng" 纪东京留学生欢迎孙君逸 仙等 "Report on the foreign students welcoming Mr. Sun Yat-sen and others in Tokyo," *Minbao* 民报(November 25, 1905), No. 1.

⁷ Tang Zhijun 汤志钧, "Yazhou heqinhui yuezhang" 亚洲和亲会约章 "Regulations of the Asian Friendship Association," in *Xinhai gemingshi congkan* 辛亥革命史 丛刊, *Serialized Publications of the History of the 1911 Revolution*, Collection No. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局, 1980).

^{8 &}quot;Pan Peizhu nianbiao "潘佩珠年表" Chronology of Phan Bội Châu,"cited from Chen Xiqi, ed., in *Sun Zhongshan nianpu changbian*孙中山年谱长编 *Detailed Chronology of Sun Yat-sen*, (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局, 1991), Vol. 1, p.357.

II. The Dream of Asia

Sun Yat-sen is the most prominent world citizen among political leaders of early modern China. Whether throughout the period of planning armed uprisings or after the founding of the nation, Sun paid close attention to world events and bestowed a modern meaning to *Tianxia weigong* 天下为公("what is under Heaven is for all") and *shijie datong* 世界大同("a world of harmony, equality, and justice"). All his life he not only dreamed of a China that followed the guidelines of Three Principles of the People (三民主義), but also yearned for an Asia and a world that differentiated between a hegemonic way 霸权主义and a kingly way 王道.

The October Revolution and the May Fourth Movement combined gave further impetus to Sun Yat-sen's understanding of Asia and the world in his later years. Not only did he continue seeking national independence, equality, wealth, and power, but also ardently appealed for the building of a peaceful, just, and equitable new world order. He no longer simply classified the world according to region and complexion, but realigned the entire world into two groups: the oppressors and the oppressed. The former were the imperialist powers, while the latter were the regions of colonial and semi-colonial states, including China, or the so-called "suppressed peoples" (受屈人民). However, even among the oppressor peoples, the laboring masses belonged to this same category of the suppressed. Russia was originally an oppressor nation, but by abolishing imperialism through the October Revolution, the country adopted socialism. In this sense Russians had sided with the suppressed peoples. Sun Yat-sen believed that imperialism was the ultimate cause of oppression and discrimination against the peoples of the world. The oppressed were to unite with the suppressed peoples among the oppressors. They were to seek cooperation with Soviet Russia, which was thought to be inclined to fight injustice on behalf of oppressed peoples to join them in opposing imperialism.

Sun Yat-sen called this type of anti-imperialist struggle the Principle of Nationalism (民族主義), which is an inevitable historical stage. But the Principle of Nationalism was not the final objective; it was merely the foundation for advancing toward cosmopolitanism. The true spirit of cosmopolitanism is averse to brute force—a morality that speaks nothing of violence. To him, the optimal approach was to appeal to the Russian people to create a base for Western cosmopolitanism, and to the Chinese people to create a foundation for Asian cosmopolitanism. Later expansion was expected to realize total universalism. It can be seen that an egalitarian world was Sun Yat-sen's ideal, and that he strove toward this end his entire life.

Sun's cosmopolitanism in his later years was not only a political project; in some respects it was a moral appeal. It could possibly be described even as a return to Asian cultural traditions. In "Letter to Inukai Tsuyoshi," written in

1923, Sun recommended that Japan "ally with Russia as a partner country." He believed that "the Soviets have already embodied what Confucius said of the great harmony." He also cited as evidence the entire passage of *Liyun datongpian* 礼运大同篇 ("The Age of Great Community") from the *Classic of Rites* 礼记. Sun borrowed traditional language to portray an ideal world, delineating the essential difference between Eastern and Western cultures in terms of the ancient categories of the "kingly way" and the "hegemonic way," respectively. "Eastern culture appeals to the kingly way; Western culture appeals to the hegemonic way; the kingly way emphasizes virtue and morality, while the hegemonic way emphasizes material gain and brute force. Virtue and morality use justice and universal truths to reform people's behavior. Material gain and brute force use guns and cannons to oppress people."9

Sun Yat-sen's return to Eastern traditional culture reflected the ideas shared by some pioneer intellectuals around the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Those ideas were critical of the Western view of historical progress that gained prevalence after the industrial revolution. After WWI people reflected on their devastating experience. In The Decline of the West, Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) unequivocally pointed out that the West was already under the control of mechanization. According to Spengler, this was an era characterized by mercenariness and hedonism, which inevitably led to a path of decadence. Consequently, some Chinese and foreign philosophers advocated using Eastern values and morality to offset the West's shortcomings. Sun Yat-sen himself believed increasingly that the Western world's good qualities were merely technology and developments in material civilization. Sun said, "But when it comes to their new culture, it is still not as comprehensive as our traditional political philosophy." What Sun esteemed as the "political philosophy that was most systematic" is contained in a formula elaborated in the *Great Learning* (大学Da xue): "investigating things, attaining knowledge, being sincere, rectifying the mind, regulating the family, putting the state into good order, and pacifying all under Heaven." He combined the categories of morality and knowledge. He believed that people should start first by seeking personal knowledge, self-reflection, and self-discipline. Only after attaining personal morality and the qualities of civilization could people discuss regulating the family and ruling the nation. Yet this final ideal was to use "traditional morality and love of peace as a foundation to unify the world

^{9 &}quot;Dui Shenhu Shangyehuiyisuo deng tuanti de yanshuo" 对神户商业会议所等团体的演说"Speech to the Kobe Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Other Groups," in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 孙中山全集 *Collected Works of Sun Yat-sen* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局, 1986), Vol. 11, p.407.

and create a great harmonious rule. This is the great responsibility of our four hundred million people."¹⁰ Perhaps this could be called an annotation to "pacifying all under Heaven" in the new era.

Of course, Sun Yat-sen did not believe that this great ideal could be turned into a reality by the four hundred million Chinese people alone. It would necessarily require the assistance of many outside China, but the country he most ardently wished to depend on first was Russia. Neighboring Japan, which had already crossed the threshold to become a "great power," could no longer belong to the category of suppressed peoples. Sun, however, still admonished them: "You Japanese have already acquired the Western culture of the hegemonic way, and have the essence of the Asian culture of the kingly way. From now on, you will ultimately either become lackeys of the Western hegemonic way in your future relations with the world, or a champion of the Eastern kingly way. It is a choice that you Japanese as a nation must carefully choose."¹¹

III. What Direction is the Way?

Sun Yat-sen's dream for Asia was truly honest, sincere, and beautiful, but in the final analysis it was too distant from reality. Unfortunately, Sun died young from illness. He did not live long enough to see that the good aspects of the national alliances he facilitated quickly evaporated. He also didn't see the later alienation of Russia, which gradually strove to become the top world hegemonic power.

The hopes Sun had for Japan were mainly that the Japanese people would awaken and "carefully make their choice." But after Sun died, Japan traveled increasingly down the road of the hegemonic way. On September 18, 1931, the Kwangtung Army flagrantly invaded and occupied China's northeast region (the provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang today). In 1932 Japan concocted the country of Manchukuo. When the May 15 Incident occurred, Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi, who had been relatively moderate, was assassinated by a fanatic faction of the Japanese Navy. Party politics completely broke down. The Ministry of War used "all national politics" to unite and control the entire state apparatus, thereby weakening the power of

¹⁰ Sanmin zhuyi, Minzu zhuyi 三民主义·民族主义 Three Principles of the People, Principle of Nationalism, in Sun Zhongshan quanji 孙中山全集 Collected Works of Sun Yat-sen (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局, 1986), Vol. 9, p.253.

^{11 &}quot;Dui Shenhu Shangyehuiyisuo deng tuanti de yanshuo" 对神户商业会议所等团体的演说"Speech to the Kobe Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Other Groups," in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 孙中山全集 *Collected Works of Sun Yat-sen* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局, 1986), Vol. 11, p.409.

the Japanese people as a whole. Given this situation, how could the Japanese as a nation "carefully make their choice"? In 1937 Japan mobilized an overall invasion of and war against China. They also colluded with German and Italian fascists to start WWII. It could be said that they took the idea of the "culture of a hegemonic way" to its extreme.

Even after WWII was over, the world was still not able to enjoy true peace and calm. The world was divided; there was contention between the American and Russian camps. The Cold War lasted a long time, and local wars raged continuously. Japan, having lost the Pacific War, was occupied by the United States and its foreign policy was completely under the direction of that country. In particular, after the Korean War broke out in 1950, Japan became a US base in Asia to oppose the new China, and for a long time both the United States and Japan colluded to support the Guomindang on Taiwan. Even though diplomatic relations were normalized between Japan and China in 1972, the malicious manipulation of some anti-Chinese forces resulted in continual disturbances, disputes, and confrontations.

Sun Yat-sen from his early years held limitless hopes for Sino-Japanese cooperation in compelling Asia to achieve the goals of national liberation and peaceful democracy. Could this be an illusion without any hope of realization?

I do not believe so. History, after all, always moves forward, the circumstances of which are more powerful than any individual. World War II and later continuous local wars caused Asian peoples utmost suffering, but Asian countries ultimately won independence and achieved progress through their valiant resistance against Japan. Heralded as the "Four Asian Tigers," they were on the fast track one after another to economic and social development. Today, Asia can never again be humiliated as a "sick man"; it is now full of youthful vitality and prosperous rising nations.

Since the world entered the era of globalization, regional integration and even global cooperation have created unstoppable trends. Therefore, Sun Yat-sen's remark has proven an aphorism: "World trends are vast and mighty; those who embrace them prosper, while those who go against them perish." How can we decide to embrace or resist them? The wise know at a glance. In fact, Sun saw clearly the distance between the ideal and the reality. He believed that oppressed peoples first should restore national freedom and equality before they could be ready to move toward cosmopolitanism. "Therefore, before we move toward cosmopolitanism, we certainly should achieve nationalism first, as is specified in *The Great Learning:* 'those who wish to pacify all under Heaven should first rule the country.' We should restore the nationalism that we lost long ago, and make it flourish, and then

we will be qualified to talk of cosmopolitanism. This is the reality."12

But what was even more valuable was Sun's great foresight. His genius of vision provided a feasible solution to the serious strife in the world and among all Asian nations. Where was the path? It lay underfoot. In simple terms, it was the correct dispensation of the relationship between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Today, however, recovering nationalism lost in the past is no longer of cardinal importance for many nations and regions. On the contrary, it is the flourishing of nationalism that has exacerbated world conflicts and disputes, including in all Asian countries. A small number of developed nations have borrowed the term "cosmopolitanism" to promote what is in fact, world hegemony to wantonly violate the territorial rights of weak, small countries, and cause harm to the lives and property of millions of people. This type of flourishing nationalism is naturally diametrically opposed to Sun's original concept. Sun believed that only after a people rid themselves of colonial oppression and recovered their inherent right of independence and sovereignty would it become possible for them to deal equally with other nations and discuss together a lasting program of cosmopolitanism. Many people in the past attacked Sun's ideas as utopian, but Sun himself was never a utopian. His elaboration on the relationship between cosmopolitanism and nationalism was exceptionally pragmatic and deliberate. What he was advocating could perhaps be considered the inception of the current concepts of global-local relationships or glocalization.

The pendulum swings back, and once adversity reaches an extreme, felicity follows. Today human civilization is facing an unprecedented crisis. It is as some learned scholars today say: economic growth, political antagonism, and indulgence of human desire have all reached their extremes. All three aspects have collaborated to produce deleterious results that extend to all aspects of societies around the world. Humans are currently destroying their environment, thereby making it possible ultimately to destroy themselves. Yet we needn't be pessimistic and there is no reason to despair. It is as it is written in the refrain in the Chinese version of *The Internationale*:

There has never been any savior of the world,

Nor deities, nor emperors on which to depend.

To create Mankind's happiness

We must entirely depend on ourselves!

People must depend on their own awakening to atone for their own offenses.

¹² Sanmin zhuyi, Minzu zhuyi 三民主义·民族主义Three Principles of the People, Principle of Nationalism, in Sun Zhongshan quanji 孙中山全集 Collected Works of Sun Yat-sen (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局, 1986), Vol. 9, p.231.

When I spoke with Ikeda Daisuke, I explained that I had not only seen the dark, but had seen the light as well:

To see growing numbers of people all over the world who are against the hegemonic way and war;

To see growing numbers of people who seek social justice and fairness, To see growing numbers of people unafraid of danger and aiding the poor in all parts of the world;

To see growing numbers of people enthusiastically protecting the environment—"protect the environment, conserve energy" has already become the most important consensus of humankind, encouraging increasing numbers of men of conscience to make lifelong contributions:

To see increasing numbers of NGOs with the aim of benefiting humankind; the more they become mature, the more there is step-by-step progress toward transcending borders. This is where lies the ultimate hope for social progress and human civilization.

The reason for keeping hopeful is that, while human civilization is continuing to deteriorate, it is also evolving. Yet it is from this evolution that a clear-headed awareness is made possible. The harsh realities of the world today are apparent. Destruction of the environment and squandering of resources have proven to be the most detrimental results that the trend of globalization has brought us. No country or region is exempt from these problems. But it will only be through joint global efforts that people can seek incremental improvements and resolution. I liken these common advantages and disadvantages that are facing humankind to the mathematical concept of the "greatest common factor." They are the best teachers for humankind. They are also the greatest cohesive force for humanity. More and more people are conscientiously considering how to manage accurately the relationship between benefits for humans as a whole and national profit. For a long time, nationalism, whether ethnic or national, was seen as inviolable; it is necessary for this concept to undergo new universally accepted criteria from the global village to contribute to the elimination of pollution and to search for the public good.

It is undeniable that what dominates the trend of globalization today is still the capitalist market economy. The main force of the market economy derives from the pursuit of profit. This holds true on each level, from the individual, to the collective, to the national. Thus, competition for the market and resources cannot be completely avoided, and conflict between nations over profits intensifies, becoming the impetus for more war. Through the twentieth century, the cruel lessons of the two World Wars have perhaps convinced the leaders of many nations to not resort to war willfully.

However, since national interests often overshadow the rationality of both government and individuals, wars of this kind can hardly be expected to cease completely. National interests exist objectively, and legitimate national interests should be given the necessary respect and protection. But the exclusiveness of national interests is also objective; history has left us many negative historical legacies of conflicts over national interests that would be very difficult to eliminate entirely in a period of one or two generations. We have no time to wait for one or two generations to solve the serious environmental pollution that transcends national borders. Every national government and people must quickly join forces so that we may save ourselves. Perhaps a civil society has not yet developed in China, but a global civil society is already taking shape. Whether each individual is aware or not, we ourselves have already become members of this new, developing society. Only a most inclusive society such as this can ultimately decide on the way forward for human civilization during the 21st and 22nd centuries.

The history of human civilization is the history of human transformation of the environment and the accomplishment of self-perfection during that transformation. The first awakening of humankind led us to discover ourselves in the process of discovering the world. Ultimately we can leave the darkness of the Middle Ages and enter an era of modern industrial civilization. The current magnificent but ill modern society is calling for a second human awakening, which urges us to reevaluate the world and ourselves. Perhaps in the not-too-distant future, global pollution will arouse a sense of crisis, and the joint struggle to eliminate pollution will produce a new self-awareness, facilitating the birth of a new public virtue in the world's citizens. This would provide true well-being and happiness for the earth and humankind. Even if our generation does not achieve this, our hearts will yearn for it.

Sun Yat-sen's chartered path toward world harmony excessively emphasized China's "traditional virtues and peacefulness as a base," which obviously does not lack bias. But he took the crux of the problem and resorted to perfection of the self, especially the establishment of common core values. This philosophy still seems instructive today. What needs to be modified is a broadening of China's traditional morals to include the good components of those of other countries in the world to make a new global moral base. But it is imperative that formation of a new common global value system be grounded in current world and national conditions. The most important of all is that there is concern and responsibility for the fate of all humankind.

Perhaps this is still a dream, but I feel this dream is not too distant to be realized.