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Sun Yat-sen: a Life Beyond Symbols. A Semiotic Approach to Modernity

Aglaia De Angeli

Queen's University Belfast, UK

Abstract Sun Yat-sen is the quintessential Chinese historical figure embodying modernity: a revolutionary representative of Chinese national identity still revered on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. This essay takes an interdisciplinary approach to Sun's emblems of modernity, drawing upon semiotics and the study of material culture. The symbols examined are: Sun's photographic portrait as Provisional President of the Republic of China; his photographic portrait as Director General of the National Railways; the suit which he created and which was given his name; and his mausoleum in Nanjing, which have all been deployed to perpetuate Sun Yat-sen's memory and appropriate it in support of later political agendas.

Keywords Sun Yat-sen. Modernity. Semiotic. Chinese identity. Politics mausoleum.

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1 Introduction

Sun Yat-sen¹ is the quintessential historical figure representing modernity in China.² He is the revolutionary archetype and the emblem of Chinese national identity. Sun embodies a modernity counterposed to the Confucian society governed by the ultra-conservative Qing court, whose power was limited to central and provincial institutions, and at the county level through the bureaucratic network. Sun's revolutionary programme succeeded in overthrowing this monarchical institution, but it did not achieve the distribution of power to the people through a form of democracy, as proposed in his political doctrine of "the three stages of the revolution" set out in the Three Principles of the People. The goal, according to Sun's Principles, was to free China - a "hypo-colony", in his own words - from foreign dominance, so that China could regain territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the people. Then, China would be a whole and free nation (Domes 1989). Sun's modernity, then, was Nationalist in the sense that it aimed to supplant both the foreign ruling dynasty and the imperial government, whilst remaining connected to the tradition of a Chinese government led by the Chinese people. Thus, as we will see in the discussion of the mausoleum below, there is no contradiction in talking about modernity whilst using symbols deriving from the Song and Ming dynasties, such as the proximity of Sun's mausoleum to the Ming tombs, or the choice of Nanjing as the capital of the newly established Republic of China. Imperial symbols such as these were appropriated to serve the purposes of Chinese cultural and political nationalism and modern state-building, and thus effectively contributed to shaping post-imperial Chinese identity.

This essay presents some preliminary research results on Sun's politics and legacy, examined through an interdisciplinary approach drawing upon semiotics and the study of material culture.

This essay discusses the use of symbols as signs of Chinese modernity. Referring to Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics, I scrutinise three symbols associated with Sun Yat-sen: his portraits and official

1 For in-depth overviews of Sun's life and political career, see Bergère 1998; Gordon 2010. On Sun's revolutionary activities and the revolution, see Schiffrin 1970; Wong 1986; Lum, Lum 1999; Lee, Lee 2015; Anderson 2021. On Sun's political views and experience, see Wells 2001; Tjio 2017; Cheng 1989; and on the relationship with the Soong family, see Hahn 1941.

2 Discourses of modernisation, according to Williams ([1976] 1988, 209), "have become increasingly common in C20 argument. In relations to institutions or industry they are normally used to indicate something unquestionably favourable or desirable". For an in-depth view of modernity and its consequences from cultural and epistemological viewpoints, see Giddens 1990, and for an overview of modernity in the Chinese context see Duara 1995; Yeh 2000; Zarrow 2006; Sun 2021.

photographs; Sun's suit, known to the West as the 'Mao jacket'; and Sun's mausoleum in Nanjing.³

The portrait and the suit are symbols that Sun Yat-sen himself chose. Consequently, his agency permeates them and they remain forms of self-representation which have long survived his death; while the mausoleum was planned and built by others to venerate his political legacy. In the mausoleum, Sun's embalmed body and persona is transformed into a symbol. Because this is a posthumous act, Sun's own agency and self-representation are absent from the mausoleum, but his physical presence invests it with the power of a *lieu de mémoire* (Cadot 2010).

Saussurean semiotics provides the intellectual framework within which the aforementioned signs are interpreted in order to understand the ideas of modernity that Sun sought to transmit to the Chinese people, as well as their legacy and contemporary reinterpretation.

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, considered, alongside Charles Sanders Peirce, a founder of semiotics,⁴ imagined a science for the study of signs "at the heart of the society": a science focussed on the relationship between various systems of codified symbols combining expressive form with meaningful content. Importantly, Saussure considered the relation between expressive form and meaningful content to be determined by a "relative motivation" limiting arbitrariness by some sort of rational connection with the society to which the symbols belonged (Parmentier 2015, 3-4). The symbols considered in this research are set in the China of the 1910s and 1920s, when the country was undergoing profound processes of modernisation. As Cerulo (1993, 244) noted in her study of symbols and the world-system, experiences of modernisation and position within the world-system "influence the structure of the symbols by which national leaders convey their nation's identity". Therefore, to understand the relationship between the adoption of symbols and the modernisation process, we need to examine the communication strategy that functions as a "limit to arbitrariness" between symbols and society as conceptualised by Saussure. To comprehend this "relative motivation", I use both semantic and syntactic analysis of symbols as proposed by Cerulo (1993, 246), who defines semantic analysis as a

3 An extensive study of Sun's mausoleum and Republican ritual symbolism was published by Rudolf Wagner (2011). The present study builds upon Wagner's work but is distinct from it, because the focus for Wagner was the ritual governance associated with the death and enshrinement of Sun in the mausoleum, while this essay focuses on the semiotic analysis of symbols associated with Sun as representations of Chinese modernity, and the mausoleum is just one of the three examined.

4 For the history of semiotics see Nöth 1995; Boklund-Lagopoulou, Lagopoulos 2021; and on Charles Sanders Peirce, the other founding figure (who never met Saussure), see Thellefsen, Sørensen 2014.

process that “isolates the symbol’s elements and focuses on the meaning of each of those elements”, and syntactic analysis as the process that “examines the meaning conveyed by a symbol’s structure – its design or configuration and the relationship between its parts”.

To fully understand the symbols associated with Sun and modern China, this essay presents a description of Sun’s symbols and their historical contextualisation. Sun’s portraits, Sun’s suit, and Sun’s mausoleum will be scrutinised according to the semantic and semiotic analysis in order to reveal their communication strategy and “relative motivation”, enabling assessment of the relation between Sun’s symbols and Chinese society, and the ways this relation impacted or reflected the modernisation process in China. Finally, I distinguish the signs according to “Peirce’s most used [...] distinction between sign relations based on formal resemblance or ‘icons’, relations based on physical contiguity or ‘indexes’, and relations based on arbitrary convention or ‘symbols’” (Parmentier 2015, 6).

Analysis of the ways these symbols and their indexical, iconic, and symbolic status were used to produce meanings reveals both Sun’s strategic communication with the Chinese people about the modernisation of their country; and how Sun himself became the symbol of an era associated with the beginnings of Chinese modernity.

2 Sun’s Portrait and Official Photographs

The revolution had been initiated in Wuchang on 10 October 1911, by members of the United League in alliance with rebellious elements of the military. The Wuchang uprising expanded to neighbouring provinces where insubordinate military commanders offered no resistance and by the end of 1911, the Qing dynasty had collapsed. In three months, a provisional government was established. Sun Yat-sen was elected Provisional President and when the First Year of the Republic was proclaimed, on 1 January 1912, Sun assumed office.

On that day, a photograph of him in his role was taken portraying the top half of his body, slightly in profile. Sun was wearing a military uniform with a fob watch in the left pocket. His hair was short and left parting, his moustache also short, but bristly. Sun’s glance was earnest but instilling confidence. This portrait presents Sun as a military leader and a revolutionary [fig. 1].

His modern military uniform aligned him with the revolution’s principles and distinguished him from the old Manchu dynastic regime. The visual rupture between this photograph and portrayals of imperial rulers in traditional robes is sharp. On the many official occasions where Sun appeared in his role as Provisional President, he dressed in a Western three-piece suit – jacket, waistcoat, and creased trousers – with a tie, and sometimes a hat. This form of dress maintained



Figure 1 Sun Yat-sen's portrait as Provisional President of the Republic of China. © McCormick 1913, 366

the association of Western dress with modernity and presented a visual contrast with the traditional robes of Manchu officials, but exchanged the military uniform of a revolutionary for the civilian attire of an established political leader. The other occasions on which Sun was photographed dressed in uniform, as for the official portrait, were in December 1911 on his journey from Shanghai to Nanjing to be nominated President, accompanied by Hu Hanmin, and during his participation in the visit of civil and military officials to the Ming imperial tomb in Nanjing on 16 February 1912. On the second occasion, he had already stepped down from the role of Provisional President of the Republic of China. In fact, six weeks after his provisional nomination, on 12 February, the Qing government abdicated and formally recognised the Republic, upon which, to avoid bloodshed, Sun Yat-sen resigned his position in favour of Yuan Shikai, who was trusted by both revolutionaries and the monarchy, having acted as a liaison between them.

Soon after stepping down as President, Sun toured the country to examine the actual conditions of the people, and subsequently advocated for the development of education and practical knowledge to modernise the nation. Sun was adamant that communications, particularly the railway network, were the backbone of the modernisation process, so it was significant that in August 1912, he was appointed Director General of the National Railways. Sun made tours of inspection of the various railways already built, whilst planning the construction of a further 200,000 miles of railway line over the following ten years. To study developments in railway construction, Sun visited Japan in February 1913 (Edmonds 1987).

Sun's second photograph portrays him on board of a train in Tianjin in August 1912, the month that he was appointed Director General of the National Railways [fig. 2].



Figure 2 Sun Yat-sen as Director-General of the National Railways, 1912. Source: Chinese Cultural Association, Faure C.M., and F.I.L. (1965). *A Pictorial Biography of Dr. Sun Yat-sen*. Hong Kong: Ertiantang yinwu youxian gongsi

This photo symbolises the modernisation process which was central to Sun's revolutionary movement. Since the formation of his first political association, the Revive China Society (Xing Zhong Hui 興中會), Sun had wanted China to modernise at the same pace as Japan, an Asian country he saw as an inspiration, to be able to deal with Western powers from a basis of technological and military equality.

Whilst Sun toured China in his role of Director General of the National Railways, he dressed in civilian clothes, the three-piece suits that he wore on other occasions. In the photograph taken during his tours of inspection of the railway system, Sun appears as a modern

official, dressed in Western style to represent progress and rupture with the conservatism of the dynastic past.

According to Peirce's scheme, Sun's portrait as Provisional President of the Republic of China - a solo image - may be seen as an iconic sign, its meaning based on the formal resemblance between Sun and his portrait. From a Saussurean perspective, the meaningful content of Sun's portrait lies in its visual expression of the values of Sun's revolutionary cause. At the same time, Sun's photographs as Director General of the National Railway, taken on board a train carriage whilst inspecting China's railway network in preparation for future development, are indexical signs, drawing attention to Sun's practical involvement in the modernisation process. Therefore, Sun's official portrait in uniform represents the success of the revolution, whilst his portrayal on a train in a civilian suit represents the modernisation process which followed.⁵

3 Sun Zhongshan's Suit

The second symbol through which Sun is remembered today is the 'Sun Yat-sen suit' or *Zhongshan Zhuang* (中山装), known in the West as the 'Mao jacket' or 'Mao suit'.⁶ Lu Hanchao (1999, 253-4) notes that the origins of the idea for the suit are not known, but that Sun acquired his in 1920 from the Rongchangxiang Woollen Fabrics and Western Suits shop in Nanjing Road, Shanghai, where he either bought a new suit or took one in a different style for alteration. The result was a civilian version of a military uniform. Sun's adoption of the suit during his time as Provisional President symbolised a rejection of both the traditional robes of the Qing bureaucracy and the civilian suits worn by Western political leaders. Rather, the suit presented an image which was both distinctively modern and distinctively Chinese. Consequently, the suit became the signature dress of the Nationalist revolution. Finnane (2008, 183) explains its symbolism:

⁵ Lu Hanchao (2010, 7) explains that a limited amount of visual material survived from the time of the Xinhai Revolution: "Because war correspondence was not an established profession and the camera was a rare apparatus in China at the time, very few photographs of the revolution were taken". Therefore, Lu points to three contemporary publications as repositories for the photographs of the Chinese revolution that still circulate today: Edwin J. Dingle's *China's Revolution, 1911 to 1912*; Frederick McCormick's *The Flowery Republic*, published in 1913; and the collection of Francis Eugene Stafford, available at the Hoover Institution website: <https://www.hoover.org/news/francis-eugene-stafford-photograph-collection>.

⁶ Cf. <https://fashion.sohu.com/20180102/n527002149.shtml>.

The jacket was close-fitting and buttoned down the centre, with square pockets at breast and waist, and was worn over trousers cut in Western style. In time, its unremarkable stylistic features were invested with deep political significance: the three buttons on each sleeve cuff stood for the Three Principles of the People, the four pockets for four Nationalist principles and the five front buttons for the five branches of the Nationalist government.

During the Republican period, the Sun Yat-sen suit became popular among students (Lu 1999, 254), and schools were prompted to adopt it as a school uniform as its central buttons did not distinguish between “left and right sides”, but it also had the advantage of being “economical since it used less fabric than the long gown, healthy because, unlike the long gown, [it is] beautiful, and will inculcate a martial spirit” (Harrison 2000, 176). The suit also became popular among revolutionaries in Canton in the 1920s (Finnane 2008, 183). Harrison explains that claims that the suit encouraged martial spirit made by those advertising school uniforms appealed to Nationalist supporters and became associated with revolutionary commitment. To wear the suit was to embody revolutionary spirit, to materially mark oneself as a moderniser committed to the revolutionary agenda.

After Sun’s death in 1925, the Sun Yat-sen suit remained fashionable and became increasingly popular even in rural areas, where it was seen as a symbol of a patriotic spirit, thanks to the Nationalist revolution. When the Northern Expedition ended successfully, the fashion spread from the South to the North of China, and men who continued to wear traditional gowns were seen as “old school, old regime”. The popularity of the Sun Yat-sen suit continued even after the end of the civil war of 1946-49 and the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. A photograph of Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek taken in Chongqing during the negotiations following the end of the anti-Japanese war suggests a case of ‘separation at birth’ which was not too far from the fact in political terms. Their suits were virtually identical: well cut, of good material, and faithful to the style established by Sun Yat-sen (Finnane 2008, 182-4).

This image is emblematic. In fact, both Chiang and Mao, representatives of the Nationalist and Communist parties of China respectively, wore the Sun Yat-sen suit, demonstrating their loyalty to his political doctrine, the Three Principles of the People. Wearing Sun’s suit was a way in which each leader sought to state publicly that they were the legitimate heir of Sun Yat-sen, that their political doctrine was faithful to Sun’s political vision [fig. 3].



Figure 3 Chiang Kaishek (left) and Mao Zedong (right) wearing the Sun Yat-sen suit in Chongqing, 1945.
https://www.sohu.com/a/410130947_523187

Sun's suit is a symbolic sign, because according to Peirce's scheme, its relation to Sun Yat-sen is an arbitrary convention based on the Chinese agreeing on the association of the Sun's suit design with Sun's doctrine, Nationalist ideology, and government structure. In Saussure's terms, Sun's suit – the expressive form – is associated with the meaningful content embodied by the revolutionary cause and ideology: the three buttons on the sleeve cuff representing the Three Principles of the People; the four pockets representing the four political and civil rights of the people (i.e. the power of election, the power of recall, the power of initiative, and the power of referendum) which aimed to balance power between the people and the government; and the five front buttons standing for the five branch-

es of the Nationalist government, the Executive Yuan, the Legislative Yuan, the Judicial Yuan, the Examination Yuan, and the Censorate Yuan.

Furthermore, according to Cerulo's theory, the symbolic structure of Sun's suit is a sample of complex or embellished syntactic structure, because the rich symbolism communicates a complex new political ideology and system. Sun's suit structure refers to and communicates with the heterogeneous and factionalised society that characterised China in the 1920s and 1930s. The complex symbols of the jacket - the three buttons on each sleeve cuff, the four pockets, and the five front buttons embody an embellished communication strategy requiring "universal attention from a factionalized audience" (Cerulo 1993, 245). The communication strategy adopts "a symbol structure that is variable, dynamic, and able to convey maximum amounts of information" (250), in this case a single garment represents the full scale of value of the Nationalist Party and its governmental apparatus.

4 Sun's Mausoleum

The death of Sun Yat-sen was a political event of national importance. A few months before his death, in November 1924, Sun issued a *Manifesto on Going North*, in which he reaffirmed the Three Principles of the People as the political path towards a reunified China and the achievement of modernisation. The manifesto, launched during his last battle, was transformed from a political programme to a political will after his death in Beijing on 12 March 1925.⁷

Two funerals were held for Sun in Beijing on 19 March: one was a private Christian ceremony according to his and his family's wishes, whilst the second was secular and public. The private funeral was a Baptist service held in the Great Hall of the Beijing Union Medical College. Immediately after the ceremony, Sun's coffin was moved to the park adjacent to the imperial palace buildings. Those drawing and escorting the hearse represented other groups symbolically claiming Sun as their forefather - his Guomindang (GMD) followers, dressed in formal gowns and black satin jackets, his student admirers carrying banners, and his Russian supporters. The coffin was draped with the GMD flag. After three weeks, during which the coffin lay in state while the public filed past in homage, it was moved to the Temple of Azure Clouds in the Western Hills, Beijing, before being moved to Nanjing for burial, in accordance with his expressed wish. The burial in Nanjing was a national event, in

⁷ For an in-depth study of Sun's doctrine, see Cheng 1989.

which Sun's coffin was entombed in the mausoleum especially built for the 'Father of the Nation' under the aegis of the Nationalist Party, which was creating a cult of personality around their deceased leader (Bergère 1998, 407-8).

On 27 May 1929, the final journey of Sun's coffin from Beijing to Nanjing began.⁸ The funeral procession, composed of three trains, made several stops along the way to allow the nation to pay tribute to Sun Yat-sen, and on 1 June 1929, the coffin of the late President was transferred to the Mausoleum of the Purple Mountains, in the neighbourhood of Nanjing (*North China Herald* 1929; *The China Press* 1929). During the national funeral led by Chiang Kai-shek and the principal Nationalist leaders, accompanied by an army escort, punctuated by the sound of cannons and attended by the diplomatic corps and thousands of ordinary citizens, Sun Yat-sen was interred in his last resting place (Howard 1929). The monumental character of his tomb, fronted by a huge flight of steps, the beauty of the surrounding wooded hills, and the proximity of the burial mounds of the ancient Ming emperors, to whose shades Sun Yat-sen had prayed at the founding of the Republic in 1912, all combined to enhance the solemnity of the setting and to encourage reverence (Lai 2005) [fig. 4].

The mausoleum design was explained by the *North China Herald* on 26 September 1925:

The winning design is of the Sung dynasty style, which from above formed the shape of a bell. At the entrance is a gate after the Ming style, and eight flights of steps and causeways lead from the entrance, the elevation of which will be about 180 feet. At the top of the steps is the memorial hall, after which one enters a second hall, where the tablets are to be erected. Behind the memorial hall will be found the tomb, an open space, where upon looking down, the coffin will be seen. The interior is strictly in accordance with Chinese style, the regular columns standing from floor to roof, these beams being of fine marble and granite. The roof will be of bronze.⁹

⁸ A detailed account on the funeral procession, regulation, timing etc. was reported by Wagner (2011, 259-63).

⁹ The same text appeared in an article, published on 3 October 1925 in *The China Weekly Review*, entitled "Prize Winning Design of Mausoleum for Body of Dr. Sun Yat-sen Is Won by Shanghai Architect" (*The China Weekly Review* 1925). Finally, the roof was not built in bronze, as stated by the press, or in copper, as designed by the architect, but in blue tiles to limit material costs (Wagner 2011, 248).

中山陵平面图

Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum

Plane figure

- 1 石牌坊 Stone memorial gateway
- 2 墓道 Path leading to the tomb
- 3 陵门 Mausoleum gate
- 4 碑亭 Tablet pavilion
- 5 石阶 Stone steps
- 6 祭堂 Memorial ceremony hall
- 7 墓室 Coffin chamber

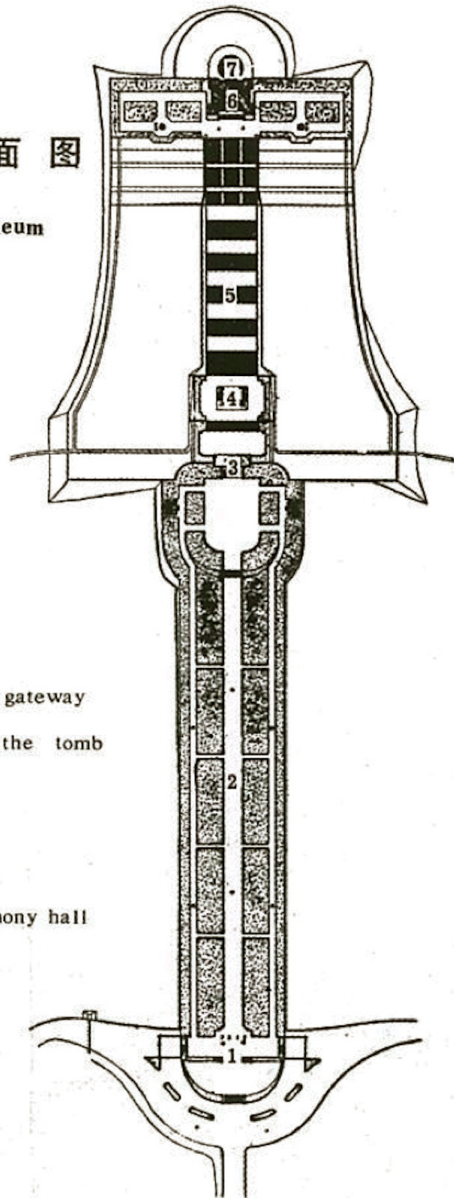


Figure 4 Plan of the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum and Park, Nanjing. Lü Yanzhi (1925). *Yao Qian and Gu Bing*, Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, 80, quoted in Wagner 2017

According to Lai Delin, “the mausoleum should express a Chinese identity in addition to permanence and public character, two characteristics that were associated with architecture of the West and thus stood for modernity” (2005, 25).¹⁰ The character of Sun Yat-sen’s distinctive revolutionary politics, which aimed to preserve Chinese identity by the appropriation of Western knowledge, had to be displayed by a monument aspiring to an international culture: a monument which broke with the past in its form and materiality. The shape of the *enceinte* walls was designed to form the silhouette of a bell, visible only from above, which was symbolically associated with the awakening of China. But despite the desired rupture with the imperial past, the mausoleum still used some of the conceptual framework from which it sought to break. In fact, the choice of the location was made based on geomancy: facing south like any imperial building (Wagner 2011, 236, 239). Nevertheless, the choice – made by Sun himself – to be buried next to the Ming tomb in Nanjing was a sign of rupture with Qing rule and at the same time, a reconnection with the Han ruling tradition.

As explained in the introduction, these elements of tradition are understood as forms of Chinese cultural nationalism legitimating the revolutionary act represented by the figure of Sun Yat-sen. They interpret the Xinhai Revolution and the establishment of the new Republic as restoring to the Chinese people the power to rule the Chinese nation, in the form of the new nation-state. The modernity symbolised by the mausoleum, then, is embedded in a rupture with the imperial past in general, which opens a path to break the shackles of foreign imperialism. Moreover, commentary on the links with the Song and Ming traditions in the contemporary press can be seen as references to a time of national unity and Han leadership of the Chinese nation (*The China Weekly Review* 1925).

Wydra (2012) has argued, in the Soviet context, that to understand symbolisation as rites of passage and constructions of origins and ends, we must understand the creativity of political symbolism. In the process of constructing modern Chinese nationhood and identity, Sun’s mausoleum is the epitome of such creativity. In the mausoleum we find the architectural representation of a changing Chinese ideology which nevertheless derives much of its legitimacy from the past. The iconography and architecture reveal signs of authority (Shirvani 2018) and transition from the past to modernity: thus the past is an essential element of the modernising process.

The symbolism of Sun’s mausoleum is complex and multi-layered. In this analysis, I distinguish between the mausoleum as an edifice

10 On how the committee designed the competition, made the selection, and scrutinised the ways in which the proposed projects for the mausoleum embedded Sun’s political doctrine in the final planning, see Lai 2005, 24-38.

and the mausoleum as Sun's burial place. The mausoleum as an edifice was built in an area adjacent to, but at a higher altitude than, the Ming mausoleum on the Purple Hills of Nanjing. The choice of location may be seen as an indexical sign pointing to the legitimacy of Sun Yat-sen as ruler of China. The design and outline of the mausoleum, with its three ramps of stairs symbolising the Three Principles of the People and the *enceinte* in a bell shape representing the awakening of China, have a symbolic status. As Sun's burial place, the mausoleum communicates many additional semiotic meanings: first, Sun's sculptured figure lying in state on the tomb lid is clearly an iconic sign which transmits meaning through the resemblance between the sculpture and Sun.¹¹ Secondly, regulations since Sun's interment have prevented the construction of other tombs nearby, protecting the sacredness of the place, and highlighting again the indexical character of the tomb's proximity to the burial place of the Ming; and finally, the funeral procession for the transfer of Sun's body from Beijing to Nanjing in 1929 assumed a symbolic status, the train journey demonstrating the modernisation that Sun had initiated and the stops along the way allowing the Chinese to pay homage to the 'Father of the Nation' were a display of the national unity achieved thanks to the success of the Northern Expedition led by Chiang Kai-shek, but planned by the late Sun Yat-sen. Sun's mausoleum remains an important symbol of Chinese national unity: whenever representatives of the PRC and Taiwan governments meet officially, they begin proceedings by a joint visit to Sun's tomb.

Finally, the mausoleum is also a symbolic sign transmitting Sun's legacy to future generations, because it honours his memory and remains a place of visitation for those still wishing to offer their respect to Sun.

5 Semiotics: Sun's Communication Strategy and Chinese Modernisation

Hitherto, the essay has focussed individually on the semiotic analysis of Sun's portrait, Sun's suit, and Sun's mausoleum. Here, I focus on the syntactic analysis of Sun's symbols to understand how Sun and his followers used them to legitimate his formal authority, and how his supporters used them after his death. As Cerulo explains (1993, 244-5, 248-9), the syntactic structure of a symbol consists of the relation between each symbol's parts and represents a communication

¹¹ Sun's tomb had been originally planned to be like Lenin's, a casket of silver with a crystal lid, but the one sent by the USSR was not air-tight and moreover, was made of tin with a glass lid. The solution was to substitute it with a stone sarcophagus surmounted by a sculpted figure of Sun (Wagner 2011, 235).

strategy. Therefore, the selection of a symbol, which conveys the national identity, can be scrutinised against the process of modernisation and the position of the country within the world-system. Since both modernisation and membership in the world-system have consequences for cultural and economic development, and the process of political modernisation is vital to a country's development, we should ask how the modernisation and location within the world-system affect the symbol's syntactic structure.

As the communication strategy aims to convey national identity, Cerulo explains (1993, 244) that there are many variations to be taken into account, from those with a minimal impact, such as national colonial influence, geographical position and creative style of the symbol according to the period of adoption, to those with a higher impact, such as wars, revolutions, independence movements or changes in forms of government, to those of the highest impact such as the modernisation process and position in the world-system which significantly affect the economic development of a country.

On the basis that the adoption of a symbol and its inherent communication strategy serves as a tool of legitimacy and conveys national identity, we may conclude that only Sun's portrait adopted a basic syntactic structure, while Sun's suit and the mausoleum adopted an embellished syntactic structure. In fact, Sun's photograph follows the most common standard for a portrait of an institutional figure, a half-bust portrait from the front, dressed in a manner denoting his role as the new Republican President, a revolutionary and a political leader. It fits perfectly among portraits of other nations' leaders and serves as a national symbol of modern China in a well regulated area. Sun's portrait as the successful leader of the revolution that brought down the Chinese empire has a basic syntactic structure, which corresponds to a high level of internal command, as Sun assumed the role of Provisional President of the Republic of China. It stands as symbol of the political modernisation process that consolidated under the leadership of a single, centrally organised government led by Sun.

Sun's suit, on the other hand, has a complex syntactic structure with the buttons on the cuffs and on the front, as well as the front pockets, each making specific references to elements of Nationalist ideology and governance. The same is true of the mausoleum with its ramps of stairs, *enceinte* walls, decorative elements, sculptures etc. The embellished syntax of the symbols is a demanding communication strategy (Cerulo 1993, 245, 265-6), which aims to include into its structure as many elements or elaborations as necessary and represents the comparatively low level of domestic control commonly experienced by national leaders of "semi-peripheral nations", who uses "information-laden representations of national identity [...] to compensate for the weak implantation of power" (251). Cerulo suggests that the embellished syntactic structure of "symbols is adopt-

ed in heterogenous or factionalized social settings" (250) such as was China in the Republican period.

Following this semiotic analysis, both semantic and syntactic, we can claim that all symbols associated with Sun represent steps towards modernisation in China. Sun's portrait, with its basic symbolic syntax, communicates Sun's impact as a revolutionary leader on the political modernisation. Sun's suit and mausoleum, conversely, with their complex symbolic syntaxes, communicate the imprint that they wish to achieve on modernisation processes within China.

So far, we have approached these signs largely from the perspectives of those creating them. Their meanings, however, also depend upon the ways that they are received by their audience. Since their dissemination, Sun's symbols have been widely accepted as emblems of Chinese modernity within China. Foreign audiences have responded differently, however, either showing little interest, perhaps because they were not the targets of the communication strategy, as in the case of Sun's suit, or assuming a questioning stance, as in the case of Sun's mausoleum. This discrepancy between Chinese and foreign view offers an opportunity to assess the communication strategy in relation to the world-system.

The communication strategy of indexing the greatness of Sun Yat-sen as a symbol of Chinese modernity appears to have been highly effective in regard to Chinese people, whether in the People's Republic of China or Taiwan. A letter to the editor of *The China Weekly Review* entitled "An Objection to Views, on the Late Dr. Sun Yat-Sen (*The China Weekly Review* 1929) suggests that it was less effective in relations to other audiences. The letter-writer called on the editor to account for his decision to publish two supposedly "very ill written articles" by foreigners, "The Sun Yat-sen that China Worships" by Upton Close (1929), and "Why Sun Yat-Sen Rules Even in Death" by Count Carlo Sforza (1929). According to the complainant, the articles were "misleading and the content but full of cynicism". The writer went on to assert that the articles "injure the life and work of a really great man, at least in the history of 400,000,000 people, and their unjustifiable cynicism can only reflect upon their honor and reputation". The complaint to the editor highlights a discrepancy between national and international perceptions of Sun Yat-sen after his death. Whilst the embellished syntactic structure of the communication strategy adopted for Sun's burial ceremony and the engraving of his casket in the mausoleum appeared to be effective in establishing his greatness for Chinese, this was not the case with foreigners. The 'lionisation' of Sun did not lead to China being instated among the core nations of the world-system as Chinese modernisers had hoped, yet it disclosed the rupture with the past and an ongoing modernisation process that was recognised abroad but was considered embryonic and far from fully accomplished.

6 Conclusions

From the Xinhai Revolution onward, Sun Yat-sen assumed the role of unifier of the Chinese nation. His death made him part of its 'mythology'. Both Nationalist and Communist parties "made equal use of Sun Yat-sen, presenting him as a symbol of revolution, national emancipation, modernism, and socialism. [...] The facts were adapted to the demands of ideology and propaganda. And when, as Lenin had put it 'those facts proved too intractable, they were simply swept out of sight'" (Bergère 1998, 408).

The three emblems of Sun's legacy presented above all refer to the modern Chinese nation. First, Sun's photographic portrait as the first Provisional President of the Republic of China stands for the success of the Republican cause, while Sun's portrayal in his role as Director General of the National Railways is a symbol of his political aspiration to modernise China. These two photographs may be seen as icons, in that they represent Sun through resemblance to his appearance.

Secondly, the suit style that Sun created and that was given his name is a symbol of his power and was appropriated by those seeking to legitimate their own political positions by claiming his legacy. This was true of both Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong in the 1940s, but in more recent times we have also seen Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping wearing it on the national day. In these contexts, the suit can be seen as an indexical sign pointing directly to Sun Yat-sen.

Finally, the mausoleum represents Sun's legacy to the Chinese people, and shows how in the early years of the Republic, architects sought to express the new Republican ideals, support the cause of modernisation, and represent a new Chinese identity in an international arena. The mausoleum is a multi-layered symbol which associates Sun Yat-sen with the modern Chinese nation he sought to create.

We may conclude that all three forms of sign identified by Peirce, icon, index, and symbol, have been deployed to memorialise Sun Yat-sen and harness his memory to various political agendas in China after his death.

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