

《祖宗革命》 Ancestor Revolution

李石曾 Li Shi-zeng

1907年6月29日 《新世纪》 *The New Century*

人类进化，脑关改良，科学以兴，公理乃著，此新世纪革命之本原。与科学乃公理为反对者，即迷信与强权也。与宗教中，用祸福毁誉之迷信，行思想之强权。于政治中，用伪道德之迷信，行长上之强权。于家庭中，兼用以上两种迷信，行两种之强权，故家庭遗毒至深，人类蒙害甚切。而家庭中之愚谬者，更莫甚于崇拜祖宗，故作祖宗革命。

The progress of mankind is achieved through social reforms, scientific developments, and the rule of Reason, which serve as the founding principles of revolution in this new century. Standing opposed to Science and Reason are the forces of superstition and tyranny. In religion, there are superstition and the belief in the wheel of fortune, which is a form of tyranny over the mind. In politics, there are superstition and hypocritical morality, which constitute a form of tyranny by the powerful. In family, both forms of abovementioned superstition are in place, and so are both forms of tyranny, poisoning the family life to the extent that the whole of human kind is greatly harmed as a result. What is most foolish and absurd about the family is ancestor worship, which is why we call for an ancestor revolution.

迷信中之祖宗与科学中之祖宗相比较

于迷信中，祖宗为神明，保佑子孙，永传血统。子孙感其恩德，族人畏其神灵，于是祭祀之，祷祝之，奉纸币纸锦，事死若生。故祖宗乃纯然一宗教上之迷信。于科学中，祖宗仅为传种之古生物耳，及其死则其功用已尽，复何神灵之有。考生物进化学，乃知吾人非突然生于世，实由他生物传演而来，故他生物中亦有吾之祖宗也。吾最近之祖宗为人，吾之远祖宗为猿，或为他种生物，故吾之祖宗非他，即已死着生物耳。博物学中有“祖宗学”一科Geneology即研究生物之传演者也。凡物愈古，其构造愈简单，其能力愈薄弱，此自然之公例。故于科学中，吾祖宗之程度，不及吾人，是正于迷信中之祖宗相反，于迷信中皆谓吾之祖宗胜于吾人也。由是而见科学中与迷信中祖宗价值之相异矣。

A comparison between ancestors in superstition and ancestors in science  
Superstition would have people believe that ancestors are gods and spirits safeguarding the wellbeing of their posterity that carry on forever the family bloodline. As children and

grandchildren, people feel grateful towards their ancestors, awed by the spirits of their clans or tribes, making sacrificial offerings, worshipping and remembering them on their birthdays, burning paper money and wreaths as if the ancestors were still alive. However, science would have people believe that our ancestors are but the objects of study and investigation in paleontology; once they are dead they are of no use, let alone to be treated as sacred spirits. In biological evolution, it is already known that we as human beings did not come into being suddenly but evolved from other life forms; we call our closest ancestors “human” and most distant ones “ape”. Therefore, our ancestors represent life forms already extinct. The science of genealogy studies the process of biological evolution. The more ancient and old life is, the simpler its structure and less developed its capability, which is the law of Nature. As proven in science, our ancestors were much inferior to us, which is contrary to the view of superstition. Here lie the differing values science and superstition attribute to our ancestors.

### 祖宗与上帝比较

古人生于天地间，而不知天地为何物，闻风雨而惊，见日蚀月蚀而惊，凡一切不能解者，皆归之于上帝，故上帝者乃凭人之妄想，而创造者也。后来之人，不识先人为何物，不知其死后何之，深夜闻风而惊，中宵梦思而惊，凡一切无可考证之谬想，皆归之于祖宗之神灵，故祖宗之神灵亦凭人之妄想而创造者也。盖信上帝，由于不知天地之学；信祖宗，由于不知生物之学。凡科学不明，皆脑髓之未改良；脑髓之未改良，由于人类之未进化。故崇拜祖宗，与崇拜上帝，同此原因。其不同处，则上帝为众人所共，祖宗为各家所专，总之此二者不外乎至愚与自私，故二者同为吾革命党所不容。

### Ancestor and god compared

The ancients lived in between Heaven and Earth, yet they didn't know anything about the natural universe, frightened by winds and rain, startled by the eclipse of the sun and moon; whatever they couldn't explain, they attributed it to god, creating a god out of their imagination and fantasy. People who came later understood not what their ancestors were, or what would happen to them after they died. They became startled by their disturbing dreams or by the howling wind in the middle of the night; they then attributed all their unfounded ideas to the spirits of their ancestors, creating ancestral spirits out of their imagination and fantasy. Therefore, faith in god is an act of ignorance about Nature; reverence for ancestors is an act of ignorance about biology. What is not proven by science is where the mind has not been improved; the mind's improvement depends on the evolution of mankind as a whole. This is the cause of ancestor and god worship. What is different between the two kinds of worship is the fact that god is accepted by all people whereas the shrine for ancestors is put up by each clan; but in general both praxis lend expression to ignorance and selfishness and will not be tolerated by our revolutionary party.

不主祖宗革命者非自愚则自私

前人因科学未明，不识祖宗迷信之非，尚可恕，今则非其时矣，其至愚者固有之，然亦有知过不改者，是有故也。崇拜祖宗者曰：“使子孙不忘本，此乃论常之大义，若不敬祖宗，亦必致不敬父母。”盖父母之教子弟崇信祖宗。即如君长使百姓崇奉宗教，令其愚弱，乃易制服。故崇祖宗非他，即世世相传之狡计，之缚束其子孙，压制其子孙者也。其愚者不能辨是非而从之，其敏者与狡者，或知之而不敢言，或因之以求己利。如修祠也，立碑也，祭祀也，厚葬也，固有因迷信而为之者，亦有因沽名而为之者，此等事足令乡里称孝，于是为伪道学家之当权者所重。谚曰：“求忠臣于孝子之门。”故崇拜祖宗，与作官亦有关系。即使不以崇拜祖宗为运动之具，然亦不敢反抗祖宗，以伤舆论。总之利用祖宗，即内以为羁制之具，外以为沽名之资。

Those not for ancestor revolution are either ignorant or selfish

We can excuse the ancients who, without the benefits of Science, did not understand how wrong ancestor worship was. But time has changed; there may still be ignorant people, but there are also those with knowledge but unwilling to change their ways, because they have their concerns. Those worshipping ancestors say, “It is an axiom that children should be taught not to forget their roots, and if they do not revere their ancestors, they will not respect their parents.” Therefore, parents all teach children to worship their ancestors. The situation is akin to that wherein kings lord over their subjects by having them believe in religion, keeping them ignorant and weak. Ancestor worship is no different; it is a trick passed down from generation to generation to restrict and suppress the young. In this situation there are those who follow the rule because they are unable to see through things; and there are also the quick and clever who are either too afraid to speak up or driven by self-interests. Those that build ancestral shrines, put up memorial plates, offer sacrifice, or carry out elaborated burial ceremonies and rituals, may truly be motivated by superstition but may also be driven by fame and vanity. Their deeds are known in their villages as the deeds of filial piety, hailed by those in power that are hypocritical moralists. As the popular saying goes, “Find loyal ministers in the families of filial sons.” There is a relation between ancestor worship and official posts. And there are those who dare not oppose ancestors, not because they want to manipulate people by ancestor worship, but because they are too afraid of public opinion. In summary, ancestors are often used as a means to an end: it is a tool to control people from within, and it is a source of capital for those seeking fame from without.

凡有道之革命党必主张祖宗革命

祖宗迷信之反背科学，有伤公理，为知道者所最不能堪者也。革命无非为求伸公理而已。然支那人生平最早所遇不合公理之事，末有如崇拜祖宗者也。是故祖宗革命，为支那革命党之“初学试验品”无疑。

若生于新世纪，其智力不能知祖宗迷信之谬妄，吾敢断其无新世纪革命党之资格。若已知祖宗革命之正当而不肯实行者，是甘心服从专制，反对公理，吾亦敢断其非新世纪之革命党。

All those revolutionaries who believe in Reason must advocate ancestor revolution. Ancestor superstition is the one thing that a person cannot stand the most, knowing how it runs counter to Science and contradicts Reason. Revolution is nothing more than the pursuit of Reason. One of the first irrational things that all Chinese encounter early in life is ancestor worship. That is why there is no doubt that ancestor revolution has to be the “initial experimental stage” of Chinese revolution. I dare say that he who, born in this new century, has not enough intelligence to know ancestor superstition to be incorrect and irrational, is disqualified to be a member of any revolutionary party in this new century. I also dare say that he who knows ancestor revolution to be correct but is unwilling to put it into practice, whole-heartedly obeying a tyrannical rule, is no revolutionary of this new century.

#### 祖宗迷信之四大罪恶

《一》反背真理，颠倒是非。

阻数千百年知识之改良，阻数千百兆人之进化。

《二》肆行迷信之专制，侵犯子孙自有之人权。

《三》耗民力民财于无用之地。

富贵者丧祭之时，祭筵无数，腐臭弃置，值巨金之纸物，顷刻烧毁，于此无形之中伤害民生无算。

《四》攘夺生民养命之源。

攘可耕之田为墓地，忍听耕者之流离。

祖宗迷信之罪恶，皆由人力使然，以上诸端，皆当彰明其罪，勿再以迷信颠倒是非。

#### Four evils of ancestor worship

(1) It runs contrary to truth and flies in the face of morality. It impedes centuries of intellectual progress and retards the social evolution of billions in the world.

(2) It tyrannizes by superstition and infringes on the rights of posterity.

(3) It squanders away people's wealth and resources for nothing. The wealthy mourn the dead by offering them banquets in funerals only to throw away food gone bad and they burn up in an instance paper offerings that are very costly to buy. Such practice diminishes human and natural resources in ways incalculable.

(4) It takes away by coercion the land on which peasants depend for livelihood. When tillable land is seized and turned into burial grounds, farmers become displaced.

The evils of ancestor worship are man's doings; the facts mentioned above should be made clear and presented as crimes, and such superstition should not be allowed to continue to derail the progress of morality.

## 实行祖宗革命

今支那之青年，凡以科学公理为务者，想必赞助吾祖宗革命之意，且必实行之，其实行之法甚简易。

《一》于书报演说中发阐此种新理，破数千年之迷信。

《二》凡遇含有祖宗迷信性质之礼仪，皆指公理以拘之。

《三》平坟墓，火神牌，以为警世之钟，籍行传布之法，或将墓牌神位，送入博物馆，资后来考人智进化者之研求。

《四》凡主张祖宗革命者，当囑其子孙，于其死后，勿以昔日待祖宗之法相待；或笔之于书，俾子孙懦者，或受他种强权所阻者，亦得勉行祖宗之革命。

## Carry out the ancestor revolution

We take it for granted that the youth of China who believe in science and reason would support our call for an ancestor revolution and would carry it out, which is quite easy.

- (1) Promote our new point of view through newspapers, magazines and public speeches, breaking with thousands of years of superstition.
- (2) In the name of Reason, refuse to attend and participate in rituals and events that are by nature a form of ancestor worship.
- (3) Level the graves and torch the plates in shrines for ancestors to warn people and spread the word; or send to museums tombstones and plates of ancestral shrines as objects for study and investigation for future generations interested in intellectual progress.
- (4) Those who sign on to ancestor revolution need to tell their young to discontinue the way people have treated their ancestors in the past; they can also write books for the young, the weak and those living under tyranny, urging them to carry on ancestor revolution.