

# Who or What's Behind It: The Internal and External Factors Leading to the Fall of the Qing Empire

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At the time when the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the 1911 Revolution (also known as the Chinese Xinhai Revolution, the Chinese Democratic Revolution, etc.) is being celebrated, one question should be raised in reviewing the studies on the Qing dynasty: Who or what was behind it? Apart from looking for clues from outside the Imperial power structure, we should also analyse the inside—that is, how did the empire itself come to its self-disintegration step by step? The main reason for the demise of the empire was not simply that it was being toppled; to a large extent, it collapsed of itself. The factors that determine the evolution of an event are often internal rather than external. Prior to the Revolution of 1911, the Qing rule had already fallen into a state of deep crisis. Its armies, gentry, officials and Manchu elites, all pillars of the Qing regime, were in a shaky condition; the accidental Wuchang Uprising that accelerated the collapse of the edifice of the Qing dynasty was a historical inevitability.

## DR. SUN YAT SEN'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY AND MASS REVOLTS

The year 2011 sees the centenary of the outbreak of the 1911 Revolution. It was on 10 October one hundred years ago that the Wuchang Uprising broke

out. Subsequent revolutions not only brought to an end the Qing dynasty that had ruled China for over 260 years but also proclaimed the complete collapse of the autocratic monarchy that had lasted for more than 2,000 years in feudal China. This is the greatest historical significance of the revolution. At present, after one hundred years of settling down, as the burning situation of the past has gradually cooled down and become clearer, the prevalent traditional views have been subjected to more and more deliberations. For a long time in the past there were two popular main-stream views: one of them holds that the Xinhai Revolution was mainly launched by the revolutionaries such as Dr. Sun Yat Sen 孙逸仙 (Sun Zhongshan 孙中山, 1866-1925) and his associates. The overthrow of the Qing court was the outcome of Sun Yat Sen's revolutionary ideology and practice. This is what is known in the historiographical circle as the 'orthodox view on Dr. Sun'. Another view maintains that the social foundation for the Revolution of 1911 was the extreme sharpening of class and ethnic conflicts. The revolution broke out simply because at that time there were swarms of victims of natural calamities and war refugees all over the country, and frequent revolts indicated that the ruled classes could not bear it any longer. However, when we make concrete examinations into history at that time, we find that the above views left many questions unanswered.

The fact is that before the outbreak of the Wuchang Uprising, Dr. Sun Yat Sen and his United Allegiance

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Society (also known as the Chinese United League, Chinese Revolutionary Alliance, United League, etc.), objectively speaking, were at their low ebb. In the early stage of his life, Sun Yat Sen's activities concerning human resources were focused on the overseas Chinese and the establishment of secret societies; and geographically speaking, he was mostly in Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macao and overseas. Sun Yat Sen had a special relationship with Macao. For instance, when he was still a child, he often travelled with his parents between Macao and Xiangshan, his hometown. When Sun Wen 孙文, that is, Sun Yat Sen, left his hometown for Honolulu in 1878 for the first time, he went abroad via Macao. His medical career started in Macao, too. In 1892 he practiced medicine for some time at Kiang Wu Hospital and other facilities. The germination of Sun's anti-Qing revolutionary ideas was also closely connected with Macao. Together with Yang Heling 杨鹤龄 (1868-1934), Chen Shaobai 陈少白 (1869-1934) and You Lie 尤烈, the four are known as the Four Bandits or Desperados, and Sun Yat Sen was a frequent visitor at the Hall of the Four Desperados, Yang's home in Macao. As he was well-connected in Macao, Sun Yat Sen, after his founding of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance, immediately dispatched Feng Ziyou 冯自由 (1882-1958) and Li Zizhong 李自重 (1882-?) to set up on Rua do Volong in the vicinity of Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida a book club called Lequn (*lequn shushe* 乐群书社), which served first as the branch apparatus and later as the official chapter headquarters of the Revolutionary Alliance in Macao.

It should be pointed out, however, that Sun Yat Sen was not as well connected in other places. As his



General Huang Xing.

contact with young students was limited, internal discord between Sun and students soon occurred after the establishment of the Revolutionary Alliance (whose members were mainly students). In the spring of 1907, Sun Yat Sen had a heated argument with Huang Xing 黄兴 (1874-1916) over the design of the Alliance flag. A little while later, over such matters as Japanese donations and the failure of the Huizhou Uprising, Sun Yat Sen split with Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869-1936), Tan Renfeng 谭人凤 (1860-1920), and Song Jiaoren 宋教仁 (1882-1913), who later launched an anti-Sun motion at a meeting and had Huang Xing replace Sun Yat Sen as the prime minister of

the Alliance. Although the agitation was later pacified by Huang Xing and others, Sun began to mistrust the Revolutionary Alliance's Tokyo headquarters and many of the key editors of the *Min Bao* 民报 (People's Journal). In the autumn of 1908 Sun Yat Sen, Wang Jingwei 汪精卫 (1883-1944) and Hu Hanmin 胡汉民 (1879-1936) formed in Singapore the Nanyang Branch of the United Allegiance Society. In addition to not mentioning its relationship of administrative subordination with the United Allegiance Society's Tokyo headquarters, the constitution of the Nanyang chapter is quite different from that drafted by the Tokyo headquarters, indicating Sun Yat Sen's intention to discard the Tokyo headquarters and set up a new centre of revolution in Southeast Asia instead. At the end of 1908 Zhang Taiyan, Tao Chengzhang 陶成章 (1878-1912) and Li Xiehe 李燮和 (1873-1927) brought up once more the request to expel Sun Yat Sen from the Alliance, and in March, 1910 started to reorganise the headquarters of the Revive the Light Society (also known as the Restoration Society) in Tokyo. (As a matter of fact, the Revive the Light Society

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Hu Hanmin (1879-1936).

existed openly or secretly even after the founding of the Revolutionary Alliance). The Alliance was crumbling.

Although Sun Yat Sen and his associates attempted to launch many uprisings in Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, they all ended in failure, probably due to the fact that the anti-revolutionary forces in the region were too strong. The Yellow Flower Mound (*huang hua gang* 黄花岗) revolt made the revolutionaries pay a much heavier price when the last attempt was launched on 27 April 1911. Sun Yat Sen said, 'The elite of the revolutionaries were all lost in the revolt.'<sup>1</sup> This was not just Sun's personal feeling. Huang Xing lamented in grief and indignation, 'There is nothing more that the Alliance can achieve. I'll never be involved with it anymore.'<sup>2</sup> After the failure of the uprising, Zhao Sheng 赵声 (1881-1911) deeply regretted that 'his ambition had not been accomplished and that the revolution had lost all its elites.... Looking around, he realised that the human and financial resources for the Revolutionary Alliance were now completely depleted and that it would be impossible for the Alliance to achieve anything in the future. His health deteriorated rapidly,<sup>3</sup> and he died of indignation before long. It can

thus be seen that a grave pessimistic mood hung over the revolutionary leaders. As a result, the split among the key members of the Alliance became increasingly serious. On July 31, Tan Renfeng and Song Jiaoren, who had long been dissatisfied with Sun Yat Sen's strategy to operate mainly in Guangdong, set up a 'Central Section of the Revolutionary Alliance' in Shanghai. By that time the Revolutionary Alliance existed only in name. Sun Yat Sen himself left for the United States. It can thus be said that Sun Yat Sen and his associates were not mentally prepared for the upcoming Wuchang Uprising.

On 10 October 1911, the Wuchang Uprising broke out when some soldiers rose in revolt. Two days later—that is, at noon on Oct. 12—Sun Yat Sen unexpectedly read the news from a local newspaper in Denver, tens of thousands of miles away from Wuchang. Although 'he could secretly return to Shanghai in some twenty days via the Pacific Ocean and take part personally in the revolutionary war so as to realise his life-long dream,' he believed that 'it was better and more effective for the revolutionary cause for him, at that particular time, to engage in diplomatic activities rather than fight on the battlefield. Therefore, he decided to dedicate himself to diplomatic activities before coming back to China.'<sup>4</sup> Because of his misjudgement, Sun Yat Sen gained very little on his American and European diplomatic tour. His efforts basically failed.

Back in China, Sun's belated return made him lose his best opportunity for taking up the leadership of the revolution. On the day following the Wuchang Uprising, the revolutionaries in Wuhan sent telegrams nationwide, 'asking Sun Wen to come back to China as soon as possible and take up the leadership'.<sup>5</sup> On November 14, in his open telegram, Cheng Dequan 程德全 (1860-1930), Military Governor of Jiangsu Province, claimed, 'Mr. Sun Yat Sen, pioneer of the Chinese revolution, has won the admiration of both the Chinese and foreigners. Except for him, no one is entitled to organise the provisional government.'<sup>6</sup> Opinions from Guizhou indicated: 'We agree to elect Sun Yat Sen as our President.'<sup>7</sup> The attitude from Yunnan was: 'It is quite natural for Dr. Sun Yat Sen, who is highly respected by people all over China, to be elected President by all provinces.'<sup>8</sup> Thus, it can be seen that immediately after the outbreak of the Wuchang Uprising, opinions supporting Sun Yat Sen dominated the nation. But Sun did not make any timely response;

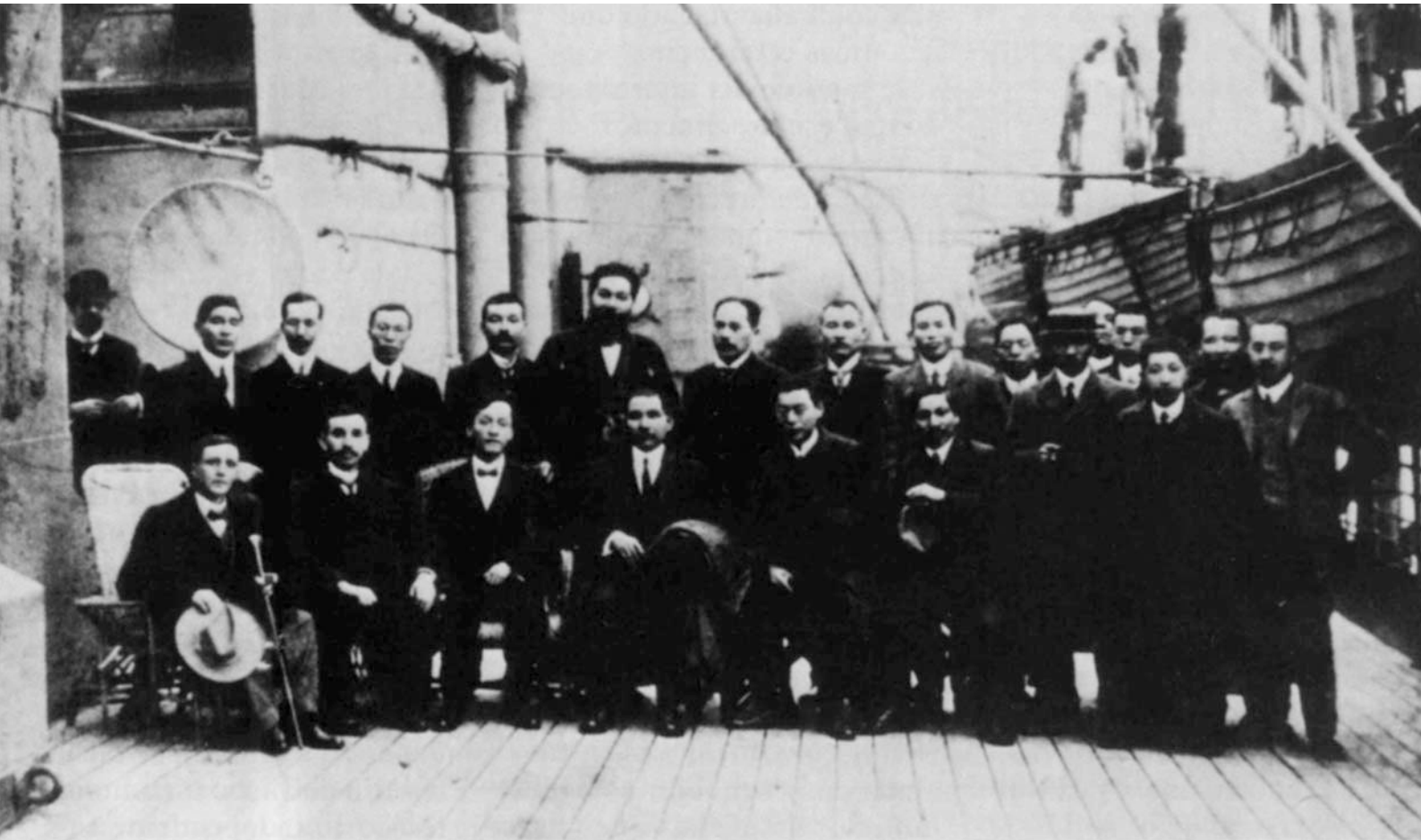
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neither did he return to China at once. It was not until 2 November before he set out from the United States, not directly for China, but for the United Kingdom and France. He reached Hong Kong on December 21 and arrived in Shanghai on the 25<sup>th</sup> to assume the responsibility of direct leadership of the revolution. By that time, however, 14 provinces in China had already declared restoration, and preparation was underway to form the new government. But the situation and public opinion had turned from ‘Sun as the sole candidate’ to ‘reserving the office of presidency for Yuan Shikai 袁世凯 (1859-1916)’. That is to say, at the most critical moment, Sun Yat Sen was not personally leading the revolution. Sun’s delayed return provided Yuan Shikai an immediate opportunity to replace him. As Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875-1907), a revolutionary and feminist, wrote in her poem: ‘We’re determined to reverse the tide of the situation, even though a hundred thousand brave men will be beheaded.’ On September 13 1912, a poem

was published as a response in *Min Li Bao* 民立报 (People’s Independence Journal), stating: ‘Numerous brave men have shed an immeasurable amount of blood for a fake republic. What a pity!’ Such an outcome was really disheartening.

The question is: How should we understand the intensity of social conflicts on the eve of the 1911 Revolution? Here we would like to use civil rebellions as parameters for our analysis not only because popular revolts from the lower classes in society represent the intensity of social conflicts, but also because they typically convey information on social unrest. What is the situation of civil commotions like those on the eve of the Xinhai Revolution, then? Three previous studies of statistics on internal revolts are available. The first study is C.K. Yung’s ‘Shijiu shiji zhongguo minzhong yundong de jizhong jiben tongji leixing’ 十九世纪

Sun Yat Sen on board a ship in Hong Kong on 21 December 1911 before returning to China.



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中国民众运动的几种基本统计类型 (Several Basic Categories of Statistics on the Popular Movements in 19<sup>th</sup> Century China).<sup>9</sup> This paper, based on information in the *Qingshilu* 清实录 (Veritable History of the Qing), has made a statistical analysis of the civil revolts from the first year of the Jiaqing 嘉庆 reign (1796) to the last year of the Xuantong 宣统 Emperor (1911). The second paper, Qiao Zhiqiang's 乔志强 'Xinhai gemin qian shinian jian nongmin douzheng de jige wenti' 辛亥革命前十年间农民斗争的几个问题 (Some Issues Regarding the Peasant Struggles during the Decade before the Xinhai Revolution), has analysed statistically the mass uprisings ranging from 1901 to 1911.<sup>10</sup> The third study is 'Qingmo minbian nianbiao' 清末民变年表 (A Chronological Table of Civil Rebellions at the End of the Qing Dynasty),<sup>11</sup> co-authored by Zhang Zhenhe 张振鹤 and Ding Yuanying 丁原英. Apart from the *Qingshilu*, the authors also consulted 22 different newspapers and journals in addition to collections of private works before compiling the civil rebellions in Chinese rural areas from 1902 to 1911 into a table. Comparing the three studies, we find that more rebellions are included in the last two studies. Qiao's counting, limited to rural China, numbers 326, while that of Zhang and Ding amounts to 1,300 as their statistics cover both urban and rural areas. However, from the statistical point of view, we could only use C.K. Yung's study as our main parameter of reference. This is not only because the sources he used are simpler, more complete and cohesive, but also because his statistics extend beyond the year 1901, which enables us to make a quantitative comparison between uprisings that took place before the revolution and those that occurred during the revolution so as to see roughly whether the number of revolts increased during the Xinhai Revolutionary period. Using periods of about ten years, C.K. Yung listed the number of uprisings as follows: There were 258 mass revolts from 1836 to 1845, 959 from 1846 to 1855, 2,483 from 1856 to 1865, 391 from 1876 to 1885, 315 from 1886 to 1895, and 566 from 1896 to 1911. From these statistics it is not difficult to see that the most civil revolts took place in the 1850s and 1860s. This phenomenon coincides with the period when the Taiping Rebellion was rolling on with full force. In the 15 years from 1896 to 1911, however, the number of revolts was less than one-fourth of those that occurred during the decade from 1856 to 1865.

It should be pointed out that the years 1899 and 1900 witnessed the high tide of the Boxer Rebellion. If revolts in this period were not counted, the number of civil commotions during those fifteen years would be far less. Popular commotions are violent actions waged by the lower classes against the existing institutions and serve as a gauge for the intensity of social conflicts. If we use this criterion, then the traditional theory that insists that social conflicts were unprecedentedly intense during the period of the Xinhai Revolution will not stand by any means. Therefore, it can be argued that the Democratic Revolution of 1911 was mainly a revolution fomented by middle- and upper-class people. It had little to do with the lower-class masses (The Railway Protection Movement in Sichuan and the uprisings of secret societies in Shaanxi are probably exceptions.) Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936) portrayed the lower classes' alienation from and misunderstanding of the Xinhai Revolution in his short story entitled 'A Q zhen zhuan' 阿Q正传 (The True Story of Ah Q). And Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893-1976), a political polemist, pointed out: 'The National Revolution requires a great transformation in rural China.' The Xinhai Revolution failed because it brought about no such transformations.<sup>12</sup> Although different methods of presentation were employed, the event they describe is the same.

## THE INTERNAL CRISIS OF THE QING POWER STRUCTURE

It seems that the traditional single-track (revolution) paradigm is far from enough to explain the colourful history of the late Qing dynasty. This brings us another question: What is the reason for the fall of the Qing court, an unprecedented historical transition in the Chinese political system? The answer might be that it was brought down by a combination of forces. Regarding the collapse of the Qing Empire, most of the previous research focuses on its opponents, putting the collapse of the Empire into the category of the history of the Xinhai Revolution. They study how the Empire was toppled by the revolution and the forces that overthrew it, such as Sun Yat Sen, the United Allegiance Society, revolutionary parties, constitutional monarchists, mass revolts and civil commotions. These studies are, without doubt, necessary and important. However, this single perspective model is now found

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to be unable to provide reasonable explanations for a series of major issues. We need to expand our point of view and use a more spacious multi-perspective model to examine the historical issues and history of issues. Since we are studying the collapse of the Qing dynasty, we should examine the inside of its power structure in addition to looking for reasons from the outside. We should also analyse how the Empire itself came step by step to its self-destruction in addition to seeking answers from the forces of opposition that brought it down. Maybe, the inside aspect is more important. Prior to the Wuchang Uprising, the Qing ruling clique was really beset with crises. The major pillars of the state apparatus had all crumbled, and administrative resources had been greatly depleted. The foundation of political power had become too narrow for it to continue. It can be argued that the very existence of such a political power itself had become superfluous. Let us analyse this view step by step.

The army is an important constituent part of the state machine. The crumbling process of the armed forces in the late Qing dynasty started at the latest during the reign of the Daoguang 道光 Emperor (some scholars even claim that it began to fall apart much earlier during the revolt of the White Lotus Society in the Jiaqing reign). The Eight-Banner Army and Green Standard Army were first devastatingly defeated by the foreign powers during the Opium War and later almost completely wiped out by the Taiping rebels. The rise of the Xiang 湘 and Huai 淮 armies eventually served, especially after the second defeat of the Jiangnan Army Group in 1860, both as a turning point for the Xiang Troops to completely replace the Green Standard Army and the beginning of the Huai Troops to become a standing Imperial army. From the 1860s to the 1890s, the Xiang and Huai armies were the main military units of the Qing dynasty. During that period, units of the Trained Army (*lianjun* 练军) and Garrison Army imitated those of the Xiang Army. However, the Xiang and Huai armies were not regular Imperial hereditary troops. Instead, they were called 'Braves Units' (*yongying* 勇营) with local and private characteristics.<sup>13</sup>

This brings to our attention a series of paradoxes in the process of the modernisation of Chinese military forces. Paradox one: generally speaking, in the modernisation process of a national army, two developments that run neck and neck are included—

that is, the modernisation of military equipment and formation and training go hand in hand with the nationalisation of the armed forces. But the emergence of the Xiang and Huai armies saw the above two developments go in opposite directions. During the process of modernisation of military equipment and training, the army not only was not nationalised, but actually went through a process of privatisation, becoming in the end a tool in the hands of some individuals or power groups. Paradox two: due to frequent wars in modern China, soldiers gradually occupied the centre of political power. 'As far as promotion is concerned, military exploits are far more useful than scores in the civil service examinations. It can thus be seen that the importance of soldiers is greatly stressed.'<sup>14</sup> However, while the army was getting nearer to the centre of political power from its formerly marginalised position in society, it was beginning to deviate increasingly from the orthodox institutions of the Empire. Paradox three: modern China then was developing civic awareness. Individuals were emerging from the bonds of Imperial power, patriarchal clans and regional systems to become legitimate citizens. But while the awareness of modern nationhood and citizenship was increasing in China, the localisation and privatisation of soldiers as a group was being strengthened as well. Such a situation eventually led to the soldiers' intervention in politics and incessant wars among the warlords.

Although the First Sino-Japanese War resulted in the decline of the Xiang and Huai forces, the rise of the Beiyang Army (also known as the North Sea Army) represented a stronger colour of privatisation. Although the Qing court planned to resume control of the army and established one after another such institutions as the Military Supervision Agency, Wuwei Troop, Military Training Agency, War Department, and Office of Military Consultancy, limited effects were achieved. The fourth paradox is that the nationalisation of the army was entangled with its royalisation. The attempt of a couple of young men from the royal family to assume control of the army greatly disgusted the officers and soldiers in the 'New Army,' rendering the modernisation process of the New Army into a revolutionary process. The army, instead of protecting the Qing court, turned out to be the most important force in the overthrow of it. By the time of the Xinhai Revolution, most of the new army units in the south

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had come under the influence of the revolutionaries. Dr. Sun was pleased to note that the campaign launched by the revolutionaries ‘to win over the New Army has spread to Yunnan, Guangxi, the three-Jiang (*san jiang* 三江, that is, Jiangsu, Jiangxi and Anhui) and two-Hu (*liang hu* 两湖, that is Hunan and Hubei) regions, and the opportunity for the revolution is ripening.’<sup>15</sup> In the north, the New Army was largely under the control of Yuan Shikai. The Xinhai Revolution, launched by the New Army in Wuchang, a strategically important

Yuan Shikai (1859-1916).



place in central China, touched off positive responses among the new armies both in the south and north. Of the 14 organised divisions and 18 mixed brigades of the New Army nationwide, seven divisions and ten mixed brigades came to the side of the revolutionaries, and of those units, seven divisions and eight brigades were from the New Army in the south. Under their influence, many provinces were restored. The Beiyang Army under the command of Yuan Shikai, however, played a different role in the overthrow of the Qing Empire. Upon receiving Sun Yat Sen's promise to ‘reserve the presidency for him’, Yuan Shikai instructed Duan Qirui 段祺瑞 (1865-1936) to send a joint telegram with a dozen Beiyang generals to the Qing court, demanding the ‘establishment of a republic’ in the name of 400,000 soldiers, or he would ‘march the army into the capital and discuss the matter with the princes’.<sup>16</sup> The Qing Emperor was forced to abdicate the throne. It is therefore quite understandable that some overseas scholars simply treat the Xinhai Revolution as a sort of ‘Soldiers’ Revolution’ or ‘Mutiny of the New Army’. After the Xinhai Revolution, many restored provincial governments were preceded with the adjective ‘military.’ This tells us vividly and profoundly that an administration must rely on the military, and a government must be led by the military before it can live and function in peace. If this was just a wartime exception, then after the Revolution of 1911, of the 22 provincial governors in the country, 15 were generals. This situation shows that soldiers, a relatively low-status group, had become the most powerful group that was able to sway society. However, such a shift deviated from the right track of the Qing dynasty.<sup>17</sup>

Officials are both the representatives of ‘political rule’ and the executors of state power. The problem of officialdom in the late Qing dynasty lay in the disloyalty of many officials, the expansion of local forces, and corruption. For a government at any level, the key components of political power are the military, financial and administrative powers. Previous passages have discussed the loss of military power. As far as the erosion of financial power is concerned, the static and fixed financial institutions that had long worked for the Qing dynasty began to show signs of their inability to cope with the rapidly changing situation as early as the 1840s. The gap between the rigid revenue system and the dynamic expenditure system was getting increasingly larger. First of all, the spending for a series

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of wars against foreign powers, such as the Opium War, and their subsequent reparations became unprecedented extra expenditures in the history of Qing finance. The Taiping Rebellion that would break out later dealt another blow to the Qing financial system because the areas occupied by the Taiping Army happened to be the most important sources of revenue for the Qing court. As a result, the policies of revenue submission to the central court and inter-provincial transfer payments were completely upset. Rich provinces like Jiangsu and Zhejiang, originally big revenue providers to the Qing court, were then mostly controlled by the Taiping Army. Instead of submitting revenues to the central court, these provinces had to rely on the central court for financial support; and they had to seek financial aid from poorer provinces instead of providing financial transfer payments to them. Large-scale wars depleted the state coffer too. During the reign of the Yongzhen 雍正 Emperor, the central treasury normally had a surplus of about 60 million to 70 million silver taels in reserve; by July 17, 1853, however, the Ministry of Revenue had only about 2.27 million silver taels left for regular expenditures. The Qing court, which had 'never experienced such a strained financial situation before',<sup>18</sup> totally lost its ability to coordinate and balance the local finances. Under this situation, the local governments had no other alternative but to raise their own funds. At a time when the central government had to reduce or give zero financial support to the local governments, it had to reduce or give up its financial monopoly too. A plethora of new revenue sources (controlled or shared by the local governments) were established one after another, such as the *likin* tax of one-thousandth. From 1853 to 1864 the country collected an average annual *likin* tax of 10 million silver taels, making it the second largest source of revenue after the land and poll taxes. However, the authority to collect the tax and spend the income was vested in the local governments rather than in the central court.<sup>19</sup> Another source of revenue was the tariff. In 1849 the total tariff collected by customs nationwide was only a meager 2.21 million silver taels. By 1863, however, it had grown to 8.75 million and continued to grow in subsequent years, making it the third largest source of revenue.<sup>20</sup> The income was shared by the relevant foreign powers, the Qing court and local governments, which usually had the lion's share. For instance, a large portion of the military expenditures of the Xiang and Huai armies



Duan Qirui(1865-1936).

came from the import tariff collected by the Shanghai Customs House. 'In the past years, the war in Jiangsu was steadily financed by the import tariff.'<sup>21</sup> Mintage is the other source of revenue. In 1887 the Qing court approved a proposal submitted by Zhang Zhidong 张之洞 (1837-1909), viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, to institute a modern mint to manufacture dragon silver coins. The government's mintage of silver coins was controlled by local governments at its very beginning. By 1905 there were altogether fifteen mints established by 12 provincial governors, who made huge profits in the production of coins and distribution of banknotes 'without being censured' by the Ministry of Revenue.<sup>22</sup> Borrowing money from foreign countries is another way of fund raising. Local governments started to borrow money from foreign countries much earlier than the central court. From 1853 to 1864 China borrowed foreign money twelve times, totalling 2.07 million silver taels, which was mostly done by local governments. 'In the late Qing dynasty, Zuo Zongtang 左宗棠 (1812-1885) was the staunchest supporter for borrowing foreign debts. Debt-borrowing was an



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important turning point in the history of the Chinese economy.<sup>23</sup> Bonds issued by the four provinces of Hunan, Hubei, Zhili and Anhui from the 31<sup>st</sup> year of the reign of Guangxu 光緒 Emperor to the first year of Xuantong amounted to 9.6 million silver taels. Financial institutions such as the Provincial Bank, fiscal authorities such as the Commission of Grain Supply (*zong liang tai* 总粮台) and Security Garrison Bureau (*chou fang ju* 筹防局), and the Commercial Tax Bureau (*juan ju* 捐局) and Donation Bureau (*li jin ju* 厘金局) formed by the local provinces became increasingly well established. The rapid expansion of local finance in the provinces was accompanied by the rapid shrinkage of central financial power. 'The authority of the Ministry of Revenue was diminishing day by day while that of the provincial governors was increasing day by day.'<sup>24</sup> What is more, local governments also began to withhold more money that should have been handed over to the central court. 'Annual hand-over was no more than 60-70%.'<sup>25</sup> While the central government reduced or gave no financial support to the local governments, it had to reduce or give up its monopoly over the financial authority too. The Qing court, under the double pressure of the erosion of financial power and fiscal strain, made a meagre living. The repeated attempts made by the Qing government to rectify its finances and restore the lost financial authority all failed. It is estimated that in 1908, the total amount of revenue collected by the Qing government accounted for a mere 2.4% of the gross national product, whereas that of Japan reached over 12% as early as 1880.<sup>26</sup>

Now let us discuss the issue of the erosion of administrative power at the end of the Qing dynasty. Since the local forces were too strong to control, the 'Preparation for Constitutional Government' initiated in September 1906 was aimed at the reform of the bureaucratic system. At first, the court, 'eager to strive for the centralisation of power,'<sup>27</sup> hoped for the reform of local bureaucracy, but many of its proposals met strong opposition from local officials. The 'Local Bureaucracy Regulations' introduced after much difficulty on 7 July 1907 only brought about some trivial reforms.<sup>28</sup> The Qing court intended to use the reforms to curtail the power of provincial civil and military governors with the aim of centralising power, whereas the governors used the reforms to advocate local autonomy. In the end, both sides had to compromise. On 3 November 1908, as the health of both Emperor Guangxu and Empress

Dowager Cixi 慈禧太后 (1835-1908) deteriorated rapidly, the Empress Dowager appointed the 25-year-old Zaifeng 载沣 (1883-1951), the second Prince Chun, as regent and had his three-year-old son Pu Yi 溥仪 (1906-1967) brought to the Palace for education. When Emperor Guangxu passed away the following day, Cixi proclaimed Pu Yi emperor, that is, Xuantong, the last emperor of the Qing dynasty. Zaifeng, although made regent, had to seek instructions on all matters of state from Cixi. Another decree was issued on the following day to give Zaifeng authority over all military and state affairs in the nation, but he was required to ask the Empress Dowager Longyu 隆裕皇后 (1868-1913) for instructions on important issues. Shortly afterwards, Cixi also died of illness. The Emperor and Empress Dowager died in succession within two days. As Cixi was more than 70 years old, her death should be natural, but Guangxu was only 38. Why did he die so young? And why did he die just one day before Cixi's death? As there are many suspicions, there are as many explanations. What is worse, the deaths of Guangxu and Cixi and the assumption of Zaifeng as regent greatly weakened the capability of the supreme rulers to control the situation. Zaifeng, who became a member of the Grand Council in February 1908, was weak in character and indecisive. His political experience, leadership ability and manoeuvring skills were far behind those of Cixi. As he was made the chief executive of a big country all of a sudden, he was under a lot of pressure and unable to exercise his power. This resulted in the expansion of power in the provinces and the increasing tension between the central court and local governments.<sup>29</sup> After the outbreak of the Xinhai Revolution, most of the provincial governors opposed the central court or were reluctant to help when needed. By that time, the cohesive power of the central court had been totally lost.

The gentry, whose status was between 'semi-officials and non-officials,'<sup>30</sup> constituted an important foundation for feudal autocratic rule and an indispensable class in society. In the Chinese language, the character 士 (*shi*, gentry, literati) often goes with 大夫 (*dafu*, officials). This indicates that the gentry are not only the reserve force of officials, but also serve as a link between the government and the populace. If a 'gentleman' fails to start his career by entering officialdom through the civil service examinations, his social position will always be ignored; if an 'official' has

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not taken any civil service examination, he will always be regarded as someone who has not yet embarked on the right path. It is through the system of civil service examinations, the obligation to cultivate the populace, and power distribution at the roots of society that the autocratic Imperial authority found itself living in a state of symbiosis with the rights of these scholar-bureaucrats.

In modern times the status and functions of the gentry have undergone a persistent and profound transformation. This change was first caused by foreign invasions. Generally speaking, when a country is under foreign invasion, its army should take up the responsibility of resistance. While protecting the country, the army protects the gentry of the country. However, as the defeats suffered in the Opium War indicated that the nation was incompetent in taking up this responsibility, the gentry took it upon themselves to bear arms. While protecting themselves, they protected the country. The most prominent case in this regard was the performance of community schools in rural Guangzhou. Both the Sanyuanli 三元里 Resistance and the protest against the British troops' entry into the city of Canton were led by the local gentry. Consequently the gentry, as a class, started to play an important leading role in China's foreign relations. They first pushed the local Guangdong government, then the Daoguang and Xianfeng 咸丰 emperors, into adopting a tougher foreign policy. This is, however, a special local case. Nationwide, there was not much change in the rights of the gentry. Fundamental changes in the gentry class took place only after the outbreak of the Taiping Rebellion. The defeat of the hereditary Imperial army and the formation and training of local militias resulted in some decisive changes in the relationship between the monarchy and the gentry. The Qing court's protection of the gentry was reversed, and the gentry's dependence on imperial institutions was eroded. The balance between the monarchy and the gentry began to tip towards the latter. In particular, the practice of having civil officials take command of the Hunan troops in the army opened a wide path for scholars. In addition to their dream of 'becoming a prime minister', they could also serve as military generals. In the late Qing dynasty, the gentry class saw its first split, resulting in a new sub-class—that is, the military gentry.

The self-strengthening movement that started in the 1860s brought about the second split in the

scholar-gentry class. As some of the gentry turned to the operation of modern enterprises and various kinds of modern cultural and educational institutions related to those enterprises, a new sub-class, that is, the merchant gentry emerged.<sup>31</sup> The rise of the gentry class was not a simple matter of ranking higher or lower than other classes such as peasants, workers and merchants. As the gentry became involved in heavy industry, they became a brand new class qualitatively different from the feudal system. The new merchant gentry were not only alienated from monarchical power but also took on the nature of checking other forces. The social status of merchants rose rapidly. 'The power of a nation and the prosperity of the Chinese race are really controlled by merchants.'<sup>32</sup> Under the system of mercantilism in the late Qing dynasty, it was quite a vogue for people to go into business. For example, Zhang Jian 张謇 (1853-1926) was rather unlucky at the civil service examinations. He failed five times before passing the provincial examinations and failed four times before passing the top level of the examinations. Shortly after he obtained the title of *zhuangyuan* 状元 in 1894, the highest achievement for a scholar, which opened up a bright path for his future, Zhang Jian unexpectedly gave up his hard-won official career and resolutely stepped into the realm of industry. Although this may be regarded as a special case, statistics on the categories of occupation taken by the residents in Hankou in the late Qing period indicate that of 99,833 residents investigated, 30,990 were merchants and 9,464 were peddlers. Nearly half of the residents were engaged in business.<sup>33</sup> Although these merchants may not necessarily have been from the gentry, we can be sure that some of them, especially those who had greater social influence, could be regarded as new merchant gentry.

In July 1898 Yan Fu 严复 (1854-1921), in a tone typical of a modernist, sternly questioned the legitimacy of the integration of politics and education: 'As a nation gets more civilised, the division of labour becomes more detailed. Why are education and politics, two great branches of labour, not separated?'<sup>34</sup> Zhang Taiyan was even more radical when he resisted resolutely any links between the 'government and education,' stating that 'government should not be involved in the administration of schools as the latter are aimed at teaching people to become wise and competent.'<sup>35</sup> These are some of the challenges levelled at the very foundation of survival for the scholar-gentry class. The abolition of the Imperial civil service examination

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Zhang Jian (1853-1926).

system in 1905 eventually severed the link between the scholar-gentry class and the government. As a result, the educational system in China gradually became a part of the Western educational system that had been expanding all over the globe. The ‘common knowledge’ that had remained unchanged since ancient times and the sacred and dignified ‘classics’ were re-examined by the new knowledge system based on Western learning, and knowledge was re-defined by alternative standards. The subsequent study-abroad program and the establishment of new Western-style schools, while blocking the old path of career through the Imperial examinations, opened up new routes for aspiring scholars. The separation of politics from education shows that the traditional system was weak in attracting the scholar-gentry group on the one hand, and the new system was strong in attracting and transforming the scholar gentry class on the other hand. According to the official Qing report, ‘Initially, students in the new schools set up in the provinces are mostly recruited from the former graduates of the Imperial civil service examinations.’<sup>36</sup> It is said that at least 100,000 old scholar-gentry entered the new Western-style schools for re-education. Studying abroad rapidly became a vogue among those scholars who had passed different levels of the civil service examinations. The crash

program offered by the Hosei University in Japan, catering to the special needs of the Chinese scholars, enrolled 1,868 Chinese scholars in a period of four to five years, of whom 10% had passed the metropolitan examinations and three had passed the palace exams.<sup>37</sup>

The new trend of the old scholar gentry trying to take on new identities resulted in the third split in the scholar-gentry class: that is, the rise of the new scholars. The statistical document mentioned earlier in this paper shows that at the end of the Qing period, there were in Hankou only 293 self-acknowledged gentry, although 2,025 residents were engaged in education.<sup>38</sup> This is a true reflection of the rapid approach of the old gentry toward their new identity as new-style intellectuals. Gentry mainly exist as a group of intellectuals. As this transformation was fundamentally a subjective shift, the class of gentry began to fall irretrievably. The group of modern intellectuals arose in its stead. If the old gentry was naturally, inseparably and inevitably connected with the dynastic institutions, the group of the new-style intellectuals then seemed to be absolutely incompatible with the dynastic system because the two, widely different from each other, could not live side by side. Chen Kuilong 陈夔龙 (1857-1948), Viceroy of Zhili Province in the late Qing period, once asked a penetrating question: ‘Who could predict the harm that modern schools should bring us today? Look at the revolutionary leaders. Aren’t they all trained in modern schools?’<sup>39</sup>

The establishment of the provincial assemblies and the National Assembly was an attempt on the part of the Qing court to re-establish its link with the scholar-gentry class. As a result, in order to ensure the victory of the scholar gentry, the “Ziyiju yiyuan xuanju zhangcheng” 諮议局议员选举章程 (Regulations on the Election of Members to the Provincial Assemblies), introduced on July 22, 1908, included inflexible stipulations unfavourable to young graduates of modern schools. The shared requirement requested that the voters must be 25 years or older, and those elected must be 30 years or older. Such an age requirement excluded those people who had freshly graduated from the new-style schools from taking part in the election because the Imperial civil service examination system had been scrapped only three years before, and the new-style schools had only a very short history. Other stipulations were more favourable to the candidates. For instance, they must have been engaged in education

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for no less than three years—a policy favouring the scholar gentry; and the candidates must have assets of no less than 5,000 silver coins—a policy favouring the merchant gentry. Stipulations on the accomplished scholars, senior licentiates and those who had served as civil officials (7<sup>th</sup> rank and above) or military officers (5<sup>th</sup> rank and above) appointed by the central government showered privileges directly on the scholar gentry and local gentry. On the other hand, the stipulations that current students were not entitled to vote or be voted for, and primary school teachers were not entitled to be voted for, excluded many new intellectuals from the election.<sup>40</sup>

The resulting situation greatly narrowed the path for the new-style intellectuals to go into politics. Many of the young students were forced to join the New Army, with the hope of winning promotion in the military. At that time, most of the educated who joined the New Army were primary and secondary school students. In 1905, of the 96 conscripts recruited in Huangpi, Hubei province, 24 were accomplished scholars and 12 were scholars who lived on government grants. In the 32<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the New Army in Hubei, primary and secondary school students accounted for more than 20% of the troops.<sup>41</sup> Such a high concentration of educated people in the army earned it the appellation: the 'Accomplished Scholar and Student New Army'. In contrast, most of the middle- and high-levelled old-style intellectuals ended up in provincial and national assemblies. Of the sixty-three speakers and deputy speakers in provincial assemblies nationwide at that time, apart from three people whose identities are unknown, only five had not passed the Imperial civil service examinations. Most of the members of the provincial assemblies come from the gentry class. For instance, of the 94 members in the Guangdong Provincial Assembly, all had passed the Imperial civil service examinations.<sup>42</sup> This resulted in the dominance of the moderate Constitutional monarchists in the assemblies. However, in the New Army, which was composed of younger people, radical revolutionaries held more sway. The establishment of the assemblies not only failed to strengthen the links between the gentry and the Qing court, but actually served as a turning point for the expansion of 'gentry power' in modern China. The inclusion of the gentry into the assemblies is a decisively significant example of tradition turning into modernity. It also made the assemblies into

another political centre in opposition to the Imperial and bureaucratic powers. Instead of getting closer to the Imperial court, the gentry in transition become more alienated. The gentry power in its modern sense could hardly exist together with the Imperial power, for they were frequently engaged in conflicts over such issues as the model of the constitutional government, the duration of the preparation for the constitutional government, the authority of the assemblies, the composition of the cabinet, and the taking back of rights. As a result, in the last few years of Qing rule, there appeared a situation in which, as political representatives of the new gentry, the Constitutional monarchists made demands that were turned down by the court. After the Constitutional monarchists made repeated complaints, however, some of their demands were met. Then they raised even higher demands and increased their stake until the court was no longer able to satisfy them. This also put the Constitutional monarchists on a path of no return because they had been repeatedly disappointed by the court. As the gentry could not solve their problems with the Imperial court, they were forced to go down to the grass roots

Yan Fu (1854-1921)



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level, bringing their problems to the populace. As E. Young, a noted Sinologist, wrote of Chinese history, 'the politicisation of the gentry is probably the most prominent feature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.'<sup>43</sup> If the politicisation of the gentry could not be controlled, then the politicisation of the populace could hardly be put under control. The degree of social upheaval was in proportion to the politicisation of the populace. The higher the politicisation of the populace, the lower the politics descended to the grass-roots people, and the more irrational and disordered factors there could be. The Railway Protection Movement in Sichuan and other places 'initiated by the gentry and responded to by the labourers' was just such an act in which the gentry and the populace interacted and instigated each other until the Imperial government finally lost control.<sup>44</sup>

The Manchu people are the origin of the rise of the Qing dynasty and the foundation of racial dominance. As China at that time was a nation in which the ethnic minority ruled over the majority, conflicts always existed between the Manchus and the Han Chinese. Since the reign of Emperor Xianfeng, although the place of the Han officials in the power structure became increasingly important, the superiority of Manchu political privileges remained unchanged. That is why when Dr. Sun Yat Sen raised the flag against the Manchu rulers, 'Overthrowing the Manchu empire' became the most popular slogan in Chinese society. To counter the anti-Manchu propaganda, to rectify the collapsing privileged Eight Banner system, and to reconcile relations between the Manchu, the Han and other ethnic groups, the late Qing court overhauled its policies toward the Manchu and Han Chinese. Distinction was no longer made between the Manchu and Han Chinese. Official positions formerly reserved for Manchus were open to Han Chinese officials, promotions of Manchu and Han officials were unified, the Banner system was abolished, and the Banner men and common people were reorganised into the New Army. The legal privileges of the Manchus were discarded so as to ensure that the Manchu and Han Chinese were governed by the same law. Inter-marriage between the Manchu and Han Chinese was permitted, the Manchu and Han Chinese students could attend the same schools, rituals and customs were made uniform, stipends for the Banner men were scrapped, Banner soldiers were returned to the farmland, the parasitic privileges of the Banner people were abandoned, the

practice of separate governance over the Banner men and Han Chinese was abolished, and Manchuria was put under the framework of provinces in the hinterland.

It should be acknowledged that in the last years of the late Qing period, the Qing court adopted some active adjustment policies to eliminate the dividing line between the Manchu and Han Chinese, and the extent of such adjustments was unprecedented in history. The purpose of this policy overhaul was to 'wipe out the boundary between the Manchu and Han Chinese so as to make them all into citizens.'<sup>45</sup> However, the adoption of these measures failed to reconcile the conflicts between the Manchu and Han Chinese people. It is exactly during the last years of the late Qing period that the ethnic suspicions and conflicts grew more intense instead of becoming reconciled. Why did these measures bring exactly the opposite of the desired effect? One of the important reasons is that these social policies were offset on the political level by the precautionary anti-Han Chinese policy continued by the Qing government. During period of social upheaval and transition, political measures are, more often than not, of the utmost importance, and this is focused on the distribution of political power. In the bureaucratic reform carried out by the central government at the end of 1906, although it was said that no distinction would be made between the Manchu and Han Chinese, the actual line-up of officials was like this: of the thirteen ministers and secretaries of the eleven boards or ministries, seven were Manchus, one Mongolian, and five Han Chinese, breaking the long-standing policy of appointing equal numbers of both ethnicity. No wonder people at the time challenged, 'Isn't the preparation for Constitutional government a preparation for a second big conflict between the new and old, between the Manchu and Han Chinese?'<sup>46</sup>

The political disturbance in 1907 dealt another heavy blow to the political force of the Han Chinese. The most powerful Han Chinese officials, such as Qu Hongji 瞿鴻禨 (1850-1918), Cen Chunxuan 岑春煊 (1861-1933), Lin Shaonian 林紹年 (1845-1916), Yuan Shikai, and Zhang Zhidong were all suppressed during the disturbance.<sup>47</sup> Qu, Cen and Lin were dismissed from their posts. The other two most powerful Han local officials, Yuan and Zhang, were kicked upstairs to the Grand Council. Shortly afterwards, Zhang Zhidong died of illness, and Yuan Shikai was removed from his posts and sent back to his ancestral village. The removal

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of Yuan by the Qing court was aimed at suppressing the rising Beiyang Clique. This act was similar to the control of powerful and imperious senior officials in previous courts by any new successor to the throne in any dynastic change. Similar cases include Emperor Jiaqing's order of Heshen's 和珅 (1750-1799) suicide, Emperor Daoguang's dismissal of Cao Zhenyong 曹振鏞 (1755-1835), Emperor Xianfeng's removal of Mujangga 穆彰阿 (1782-1856) and Emperor Tongzhi's 同治 (1856-1875) execution of Sushun 肃顺 (1816-1861).

However, in the eyes of the populace the Qing court was again implementing its anti-Han Chinese policy.<sup>48</sup> At that time, as the conflicts between the Manchu and Han Chinese were so intense and commonplace, people would consciously or unconsciously associate everything that took place in the court with the issue of Manchu-Han relations. The more blatant the racial segregation practiced by the Qing court, the more strongly disgusted the Han and other ethnic groups felt with the racist regime. This led to a vicious cycle: the more suspicious the Manchu aristocrats became of the Han Chinese, the higher the anti-Manchu sentiments of the Han Chinese people were; the stronger the anti-Manchu consciousness on the part of the Han Chinese, the more suspicious and fearful the Qing court was of the Han Chinese. This chain of interactions disqualified the Qing court from ruling over the other ethnic groups in the end. 'The northern barbarians are not our own people. Those who refuse to carry out reforms should be removed and those who agree to carry out reform should be removed too; those who are unable to save humanity should be dismissed and those who are able to save humanity should be dismissed too.'<sup>49</sup>

The different policies toward the Manchu and Han Chinese adopted by the Qing government also brought about another conflict. As the Qing social policy to restrict Manchu privileges made the Manchu people unhappy and even antagonistic because it affected their traditional vested interests, they became more alienated from the court. Although the Qing court aimed to win over more Han Chinese with this policy, its anti-Han Chinese political policy prevented it from achieving this purpose. The outcome was that the Qing court pleased neither side, and both the Manchu and the Han Chinese became alienated at the same time.

The emergence of the 'Imperial Family Cabinet' on 8 May 1911 accelerated an alienation that was

unprecedented in history. Although people of all walks of life had looked forward to the emergence of the new cabinet, they did not anticipate that of the thirteen cabinet members, nine would be Manchus, and of the nine Manchu members, seven would be relatives of the Emperor! This result made the people feel that they had been cheated, while the Han officials complained to the Emperor, saying, 'It is not proper to make Imperial family members cabinet ministers.'<sup>50</sup> The Constitutional monarchists resented it bitterly, claiming, 'As the creation of the Imperial Family Cabinet failed to meet the requirements of the Constitutional government, it has dashed the hopes of the people promoting the Constitutional system. We demand that it be reorganised so as to pay more respect to the Constitutional government and consolidate the foundation of the nation.'<sup>51</sup> They also issued a warning against a possible breakup: 'We are afraid that people might be motivated to overthrow the cabinet upon its establishment.'<sup>52</sup> The international responses were not favourable either. Despite the fact that the Constitutionalism favoured by the Qing court was based mostly on the Japanese model, Okuma Shigenobu 大隈重信 (1838-1922), former Japanese Prime Minister, commented: 'Considering that Royal members are not entitled to any position of responsibility in a Constitutional monarchy, the cabinet created by the Qing court fails to conform to this rule.'<sup>53</sup> *The Times* in London published an even harsher commentary on the Manchu-Han Chinese conflict, which was carried in the *Shanghai News*: 'The new cabinet is nothing but a sobriquet for the old Grand Council. As all those who are assisting the Emperor are watching the Manchu-Han Chinese ratio, it is just a foolish idea to have the Manchus dominate the political stage.'<sup>54</sup> To say 'to have the Manchus dominate the political stage' was only half correct; the other half was to maintain Imperial dominance. Hu Sijing 胡思敬 (1869-1922), a censor, saw that

The most important thing of a nation is government administration, then comes the authorities over the military and finance. If everything is put in the hands of the relatives of the Emperor..., then the outsiders might probably think that the country is a piece of private property of the Imperial family. Trust no Han Chinese, and trust no Manchu either, for they both pursue their own private interests,...

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Okuma Shigenobu (1838-1922).

That is why the country becomes more and more isolated from its people.<sup>55</sup>

This is the impression left by the Imperial Family Cabinet on the people: Trust no Han Chinese, and trust no Manchu either—only Imperial family members are trusted! Unfortunately, the abilities of the Imperial family members and noblemen were going downhill. Since the implementation of bureaucratic reform in 1906, the Qing court had been trying to concentrate power into the hands of the Manchus before placing it under the control of Imperial family members. The Prime Minister of the 'Imperial Family Cabinet' was Yikuang 奕劻 (1838-1917), the Prince Qing of the Imperial family; the Minister of Finance was Zaize 載澤 (1876-1929) of the Imperial family; and the military was completely under the control of the Imperial family. Prince Zaifeng himself, as the Grand Marshal of the Army and Navy, commanded all the armed forces in the nation. Prince Zaixun 載洵 (1886-1949), one of his brothers, served as the Minister of the Navy. Prince Zaitao 載濤 (1887-1971), another brother, headed the General Staff. The Minister of the Army was Yinchang

荫昌 (1859-1934), a Manchu. Thus the cabinet was dominated by the Aisin Gioro clan.

On the surface, although the most important posts were placed in the hands of the most reliable relatives of the Emperor, the foundation of political power was actually in the process of disintegration and erosion. The Imperial Family Cabinet narrowed to the extreme the power foundation, which turned from the original practice of appointing equal numbers of both Manchu and Han ethnicity to the practice of concentrating power in the hands of the Manchus, and then of a few Imperial relatives. All others were excluded from the power structure. The ultimate goals of constitutionalism were the decentralisation of power and the simultaneous expansion of the base of political rule with the expansion of political participation. The Constitutional monarchy practiced by the Qing court, however, resulted in the centralisation of power, the exclusion of both the Manchu and Han Chinese, and vigilance against both civilians and officials. The self-isolation of the ruling clique of the Empire could be no worse.

The 'hierarchical service of the Eight Banners,' relied upon heavily by the ethnic rulers of the Qing dynasty for its rise and existence, was now shaking. After the start of the anti-Manchu movement, strange things happened: the Manchu students began to change their family names into Han Chinese ones, aristocratic families that hung plaques of honour above their front gates saying they had sons in the military were in a hurry to take them down, women started to wear men's outfits and men changed their names, to name only a few.<sup>56</sup> What was a strong and united Manchu society in the early Qing period was no longer in existence; the Qing regime was rapidly disintegrating. The outbreak of the Wuchang Uprising does not see much resistance in the whole Manchu society except from the Imperial family. Let us take a look at the banner garrisons throughout the nation: the Chengdu garrison was peacefully disarmed, Zhenjiang garrison surrendered on its own initiative, most of the garrison troops in the three provinces of Northeast China went to the Republican camp, and the Guangzhou garrison was even reorganised into the 'Canton City Army' under the command of the Republican government. Only the banner troops in Fuzhou, Jingzhou and Xi'an made some resistance before they soon fell apart.

The army, gentry, bureaucrats and Manchus, the most important pillars of the Qing rule, were the

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key to the survival of the Qing court. On the eve of the Xinhai Revolution, however, they were all in a shaky condition. It would be hard to explain if the tower of the Qing dynasty, having lost its support, would not soon crumble. It was historically inevitable that a little push by such an accidental incident as the Wuchang Uprising would make the Empire of Qing collapse.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE XINHAIR REVOLUTION AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE EMPIRE

Based on the information above, some basic historical concepts and political ideas should be distinguished:

Firstly, the history of the fall of the late Qing regime is not equivalent to the rise of the Chinese Democratic Revolution. This is an indisputable historical and logical thesis. However, many studies in the past have fallen victim to some kind of misconception. For a long time, we have focused our study on Dr. Sun Yat Sen from the perspective of revolutionary history, concentrating our attention on the opposition to the court instead of the court itself. Who or what was behind the fall of the Qing dynasty? It should be the coordinated efforts of both internal and external forces, but the evolution of the internal structure of the Empire is undoubtedly the main factor because it is the internal factor rather than the external one that determines the change of matters. Therefore, apart from looking for causes from outside the power structure of the Empire, we should also search for reasons from the evolution of the internal power structure. We should look at the issues from the perspective of internal causes that determine the evolution of issues. The main cause of the fall of the Empire is not simply that it was being overthrown; to a large extent, it fell apart itself. The Qing dynasty had come to the end of its historical 'life' because its power infrastructure had completely fallen apart. Instead of being toppled by alienated forces, the Manchu Qing dynasty was killed by itself. It is important here for us to expand and change our point of view. If we examine the history of the last few years of the late Qing Empire only by including it in the discussion of the Chinese Democratic Revolution, our research vision will be greatly limited. Similarly, the history of the Xinhai Revolution does not incorporate the whole

history of the late Qing dynasty either. The history of the Revolution of 1911 is only part of, rather than the whole of, late Qing history, and for a considerable period of time it is not even the principal component of this history. If we looked at the issue only from the perspective of the overthrow of the Empire, then it would be likely for us to reach a false conclusion, which is 'farewell to revolution.' That is to say, if the opposing forces had not toppled the Qing Empire, if they had given the Qing court plenty of time to carry out its 'reforms' in an unhurried manner, it would be more favourable for the growth of modernisation in Chinese society. However, it was not Dr. Sun Yat Sen who did not give time to the Qing court—the Qing dynasty had already pronounced a death sentence on itself. They set a timetable for their own death.

Secondly, examination into the alienated forces against the Empire should be carried out, to a large extent, from the perspective of the Empire itself because they were the rulers. The adoption of the 'New Deal' was very important. Scholars from both China and abroad have conducted many discussions on the causes of the failure of the New Deal instituted by the late Qing government. One of them should be that the aged body of the late Qing Empire simply could not take in the elements of the New Deal and reforms. The aim of the Qing government in implementing the New Deal was to keep the old production relation and superstructure. However, the institution of the New Deal led to the evolution of new productive forces and an economic structure that excluded each other. The result was that the addition of new factors, instead of maintaining the aged body, helped disintegrate it. The objective effect was entirely the opposite of the subjective desire of the Qing government. The Qing court aimed to overcome its financial crisis through economic reforms, but the reforms led to the growth of both capitalist industry and commerce and the bourgeoisie class. The bourgeois political factions that developed on this economic and class foundation included the revolutionaries headed by Sun Yat Sen, overseas Constitutional monarchists led by Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927) and Constitutional monarchists in China headed by Zhang Jian. These three active parties converged in the end and raised huge anti-Qing tides.

Military reform was aimed at building military forces to defend the Qing court and suppress the revolutionaries, but unexpectedly it provided the



按月發  
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# 鏡海叢報

CHING-HAI TS'UNG-PAO.

每月收  
銀半元

大清光緒十九年己巳六月初六日 西曆一千八百九十三年七月十八日

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## 本局告白

本報局創辦之始轉擬每禮拜派報一次每次由禮拜二開派一兩月後加增一次由禮拜六日派送報價每張每月收銀五毛按月清收外埠不增信資按期派到一誤并接印書稿單張等件諸色花邊精緻各士商欲刊告白印件者煩到本局面議取價甚廉不致有誤閱有惠到詩古文詞不收印費惟刊與不刊原稿概不發還

## 創辦鏡海叢報條列利益佈啟

澳門自通商開埠以來三百有餘歲矣商賈不繁戶宇不闢其故何哉始緣於不設日報貨物漲跌無由先知禁令更張無由通曉商賈足而不前耳當今日報風行凡屬通商之埠必有華文日報以通中外之情以達官民之隱法之安南英之港叻美之金山中國之天津上海武昌廣州連年報局繁興後先爭趨澳門何獨無焉溯夫日報規模原有兩等一為都會快捷報遍設採訪通電信門捷速於晷刻越巔而陳腐矣此等報章雖曰快捷而未盡確實也又非具大資本未易流通一為偏僻確實報泰西各國細至一鄉一鎮必有報以報之眾情不致遺要機得以流通此等報章雖遲快捷而實多真確也澳門一埠非第一鄉一鎮之繁而已有西洋官下多關粵人下多僑抑多不能達于上上有誤猷亦無由佈于下積而不通或成痼重前車未遠本報主人思所以振革之擇得澳門下環正街第三號門牌開設日報館一周名曰鏡海叢報前用西洋字後用中華字每月收銀五毛每禮拜開派一次每次準于禮拜二日派送定于西七月十八號即華五月初六日印派先做偏隅確實報款式本地風光實事求是逐漸推廣再照都會快捷報款式爭新競捷焉本報之創辦非為營牟財利起見實為振興商務旅旅擴充智識起見中間具有兩要義其一專為有益澳門凡有官紳議論交涉事務行情市價雜劇聞與或商家所欲陳而不敷廣陳可代陳於報以助官之酌奪庶府有欲宣而不能通宣亦可詳宜於報以令民之曉暢稍有涉於本澳者每次登諸首幅藉寓樹林春秋之微旨此創辦之本意也 粵為有益外埠日報之益亦得聞焉自開辦以來自理於學問

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revolutionaries with armed forces. The educational reform, intended to train talents for the Qing court, forced the old-style intellectuals to change directions and form a group of new-style intellectuals unlike the traditional scholars. The bourgeoisie and their political representatives, the New Army and the new-style intellectuals—the three products made by the New Deal—turned out to be the major gravediggers for the diseased Qing court. The old saying ‘Lift the stone only to drop it onto one’s own foot’ is vested with some irrefutable truth of historical dialectics. The superstructure must be in line with the theory of changing economic structures. The question is not whether the Qing court was carrying out the New Deal reforms or not, or whether the pace of reform was fast or slow. The problem was that the ‘internal change’ caused by the reforms was incompatible with the old ‘outer shell’ of the Qing court. What is worse, the Qing government was bent on maintaining this old outer shell instead of carrying out a comprehensive reformation. Another problem was that during the New Deal period, although various concrete institutions in China had already been oriented to capitalism and modernisation, the institutions at the top level, stuck in feudal autocracy or the Middle Ages, still remained unchanged. It was really hard for the Qing government to give up the Imperial autocratic system. Then the end was inevitable. The outer shell was destined to be blown up by the fusion of internal forces.

Finally, making an alternative comment on Dr. Sun Yat Sen and the Revolution of 1911 is not intended to negate the lofty position occupied by Sun Yat Sen and the great achievements made by the 1911 Revolution. Instead, it is aimed at a repositioning of Dr. Sun and the Xinhai Revolution based on historical facts. To put it simply, the study of Sun Yat Sen and his role in the history of the Chinese Democratic Revolution is going through a shift from the original political orientation toward academic research, or what is called a reversion to the truth. This is especially true of scholarly research. It should be admitted frankly that the political era of the studies on Dr. Sun Yat Sen and the history of the Xinhai Revolution is vanishing (but it is impossible to make it go completely), and a comparatively independent age of academic research is approaching. The hustle and bustle of the study of Dr. Sun and the history of the 1911 revolution as a hot topic cannot go on forever. Studies in these realms worldwide are returning from

an abnormal state to a normal state.<sup>57</sup> Needless to say, Sun Yat Sen is mainly a political figure, and the Xinhai Revolution is mainly a political event, but academic studies are based on the academic principle of seeking truth from the facts. As far as the relationship between Sun Yat Sen and the 1911 Revolution is concerned, Dr. Sun’s contribution to the great revolution is irreplaceable, and he will always be the flying standard of the Xinhai Revolution. However, we should also see that Dr. Sun’s contributions to the Revolution of 1911 were mainly embodied in his ideological guidance, his democratic enlightenment and his encouragement of the pioneering spirit.

In his early years, Sun Wen displayed his outstanding propaganda skills. ‘Zhi zheng zaoru shu’ 致郑藻汝书 (A Letter to Cheng Tsao Ju) published by Sun Yat Sen in a Macao newspaper in 1892 is the earliest political essay written by Sun discovered so far. His ‘Nong gong’ 农功 (Agricultural Work), ‘Shang zhan’ 商战 (Commercial War) and ‘Shang li hongzhang shu’ 上李鸿章书 (Letter to Li Hung-chang) had some social influence too. His treatises such as ‘Agricultural Work’ were even included in *Sheng Shi Wei Yan* 盛世危言 (*Words of Warning in Times of Prosperity*), a book compiled and edited by Zheng Guanying 郑观应 (1842–1921), whose family had lived in Macao for generations. The more than 180 issues of *Echo Macaense* (*Jinghai Congbao* 镜海丛报) created and run by Sun Yat Sen and his friends from 1893 to 1895 in Macao had seventeen distributing offices ranging from Qianshan, Waizhai, Shiqi, Canton, and Hong Kong near Macao, to far away Shanghai, Beijing, Singapore, San Francisco, Portugal, and Yokohama. Their views and opinions spread from Macao to China and the rest of the world. The most significant contribution made by Sun Yat Sen was his enlightenment of the Chinese nation and promotion of the Republic. When Dr. Sun passed away on March 12, 1925, Macao people were deeply mournful. Businesses were closed and flags flown at half-staff. Of a population of 100,000 in Macao then, 20,000 went in the rain to the Kiang Wu Hospital to express their condolences. It was the largest memorial activity witnessed by Macao in history. As the sayings go, ‘A mustard seed can contain a huge mountain of Sumeru,’ and ‘One can visualise the whole leopard by looking at one spot on it.’ From Macao, a small territory that has a close connection with Dr. Sun Yat Sen, we can see the great respect cherished by the local populace

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to the founder of the Republic! At the concrete level of academic research, at the level of speaking with the historical facts, we can also see that Dr. Sun Yat Sen's actions were mainly reflected in his initiation of the principle of anti-Qing revolution and the establishment of a Republic, in his creation of anti-Qing revolutionary societies such as the Revive China Society and the Chinese Revolutionary League or Alliance, in his formation of the platform and theoretical system for the Chinese revolutionary democrats, in his persistent and inspiring spirit in his fight against the Manchu Qing dynasty, in his extensive publicity of the view that the feudal Imperial system was no longer suitable for China, and in his drawing and public declaration of the blueprint for the Republic. As to the questions of the relationship between the Revolution of 1911 and the fall of the Manchu Qing Empire, the main reasons for the fall of the Qing court, and how to examine the history of the Chinese Democratic Revolution, etc., more deep studies are needed before we can get the answers.

The Xinhai Revolution, a great revolution that changed the political system in China, broke out in October, 1911. On 1 January 1912, the Republic of

China was founded. In his inaugural speech as the first provisional president of the Republic of China, Dr. Sun Yat Sen proclaimed, 'The root of a nation lies in its people.'<sup>58</sup> For the first time in history, products of modern institutional civilisation such as the constitution, national assembly and republic appeared in China. Before long, the republic became an established political institution acknowledged by all Chinese people. After the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the Leal Senado of Macao raised flags as a token of congratulations—that is, congratulations on the decisive progress made by the Chinese political system toward the modern system of civilisation. The Xinhai Revolution played a landmark role in the evolution of Chinese civilisation from its barbaric state, its classic state to its modern state. The establishment of modern institutional civilisation indicates that the greater Chinese civilisation in modern times, protected by its institutional and legal systems, has become sacrosanct and the new 'orthodoxy.' **RC**

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## NOTES

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