

Coronation and Abdication

I WAS BORN ON THE 14TH DAY OF THE FIRST MOON OF THE 32nd year of Kuang Hsu's reign; on February 7, 1906, by the Western calendar.

On the evening of November 13, 1908, or the 20th day of the 10th moon, in the 34th year of Kuang Hsu's reign, the mansion of the Emperor's brother, in which I lived, was in turmoil. My grandmother had fainted and, while royal eunuchs and servants were trying to revive her, children and adults were weeping. All this because I, as Emperor apparent, of the Ch'ing Dynasty, had refused an imperial summons from the Forbidden City delivered by the Grand Councillor.

I would not let any of the eunuchs come near me to carry me to the palace. I cried so hard the eunuchs had to ask the Grand Councillor what to do. My father, meanwhile, rushed about from room to room—first entertaining the Grand Councillor and the eunuchs who had come with him from the palace, then ordering servants to get me dressed, then visiting my still-prostrate grandmother and forgetting that the Grand Councillor was waiting.

I have, of course, no impression or recollection of what my family thought of this situation, of the humiliation brought upon them by my refusal to obey the imperial edict. However, I was told several years later that in order to solve the impasse of my refusal to let the eunuchs come near me

it was finally agreed to waive all protocol and permit my wet nurse herself to carry me to the palace.

There was a great and unprecedented ceremony involved, within the palace, in my transfer from the arms of my wet nurse to those of the ranking eunuch who was to present me to the Empress Dowager, Tzu Hsi. All I remember of this first meeting with my great-aunt was my fright at finding myself suddenly plunged among so many strange people.

I stood in front of a dark heavy canopy. Sitting under it, I saw a very ugly, thin-faced and emaciated old woman. It was Tzu Hsi. According to what I have been told, my first sight of her brought on a tantrum. I screamed and cried and kicked and completely lost control of myself.

Tzu Hsi asked someone to give me a string of candy. Instead of eating it, I threw it on the floor and cried for my wet nurse. This displeased the Empress Dowager very much. She commented that I was stubborn and ordered my removal from her presence.

Two days after this, she died, and shortly thereafter her nephew the Emperor, Kiang Hsu, also died. On the 9th day of the 11th moon of the lunar calendar, or December 2, 1908, my ceremonial ascension to the Imperial Dragon Throne took place.

This ceremony was held in the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City which can accommodate several thousand courtiers. However, according to custom, before it began I had to receive the commanders of the palace guard and the ministers of the inner court in the Hall of Central Harmony where they performed their kowtows. It was only after this that I went to the throne in the Hall of Supreme Harmony to receive civil and military officials, viceroys and governors.

This pre-enthronement ceremony was very long and took up a good part of the day. Moreover, it was very cold and by the time I was finally placed on the high Imperial Throne my patience was exhausted. My father was privileged to kneel on one knee, with his face in profile, below me.

He had tried to help me ascend the throne by using his two hands to guide me and to protect me from making motions that were not part of the ceremonial tradition. But by this time I was so exhausted that all I could do was

scream that I wished to go home. I wanted no more ceremony. I could stand it no longer.

My father became so nervous that his face was covered with perspiration despite the cold. All the hundreds and thousands of civil and military officials did their nine bows and three kowtows and while they were still doing them, I cried louder and louder. My father tried to appease me.

"Hush," he said. "Don't cry. Be patient. Everything will soon be over. It will soon be finished."

Some of the courtiers who were near the throne heard him and, after the ceremony, they talked with one another in whispers. "How could a Royal Highness say such a thing as 'it will soon be over'?" they asked. "This is a bad omen."

They felt that my father's remarks indicated that my reign would be an unlucky one.

Later, some of the diaries and articles on my coronation added more to this tale. One article mentioned that the gongs and drums of the ceremonial music had caused me to cry. Another said that my father had given me a little toy tiger to distract me from my crying. These stories were not true, but the annoyance of the high officials with my father's use of the words "it will soon be over" and my own cry of "I want to go home" was true. It was generally felt that these were very bad omens indeed.

However, the real premonitions of impending difficulties did not come from these two phrases. The historical record of the first year of my reign clearly shows the origin of the real worries of the Ch'ing officials. Take the following items for example:

A revolutionary group in Canton revolted and occupied part of Kwantung Province but was later defeated.

Sun Yat-sen led an attack in Kwangsi Province but was defeated.

An imperial edict was issued forbidding students to participate in politics or to gather and make speeches.

Officials in Kwangtung Province intercepted arms on a Japanese steamer en route to revolutionaries.

Sun Yat-sen ordered an attack in Yunan Province which was first successful, but later defeated.

These items are from the official history of the Ch'ing Dynasty. The word "defeat" occurs with striking regularity, and the more often it appears the more it serves as an indication of the intensity of the approaching storm. It was this that was the real focal point of worry among the high officials.

As my reign continued, the difficulties became more obvious. For when Yuan Shih-kai was recalled to serve my government there were many who realized that the Ch'ing House now had two hostile forces to contend with—the republican revolutionaries outside the government and Yuan inside.

I was Emperor for three years in such an atmosphere, without any real awareness of the political situation. I abdicated with a similar lack of comprehension of the true situation. An incident of my last days on the throne, however, stands out clearly in my mind.

One day, in one of the rooms of the Mind Nurture Palace, the Empress Dowager Lung Yu¹ was sitting on a *kang*² near the southern window and using a handkerchief to wipe the tears from her eyes. In front of her, kneeling on a red carpet, was a stout old man with tears streaming down his face. I sat to the right of the Empress Dowager feeling bewildered because I did not understand why these two adults were crying. There was no one else in the palace besides the three of us and it was very quiet. The fat man was sniffing so loudly when he talked I could not understand him. Later on I found out that it was Yuan Shih-kai. This was the only time I ever met him and it was the last time he paid his respects to the Empress Dowager. If what I have been told is correct, this was the occasion when Yuan directly raised the question of my abdication with Lung Yu. After this audience, Yuan used the pretext of an attempt that had been made on his life at one of the palace gates not to come to court again.

¹ Just prior to her death, Tzu Hsi had ordered that Pu Yi's father, as Prince Regent, should consult and ask for instructions from her niece and successor as Empress Dowager, Lung Yu, on all important matters.

² A sofa-like bed, commonly used in North China, which could be heated in winter.

The Wuchang uprising of October, 1911, had sparked off responses from revolutionaries all over the country, and when the Manchu commander in chief of the imperial forces proved incapable of directing the modernized Peiyang Army to resist the Republican forces, my father as Prince Regent had no choice but to recall Yuan Shih-kai from retirement. Yuan, who had been waiting to strike a political bargain, had been kept informed of developments in Peking by his friends in the Imperial Grand Council. Thus, he fully understood the situation and repeatedly refused Peking's offers of reinstatement until he was promised the premiership and supreme military command. Only then did he accept the imperial edict and order the Peiyang Army to attack the Republican revolutionary army. After recapturing Hanyang, he halted his troops and paid a visit to Peking where he was received by the Empress Dowager Lung Yu and the Prince Regent.

Yuan Shih-kai was no longer the Yuan Shih-kai of before. Not only did he enjoy supreme military and political power, but he also enjoyed something else even more valuable: foreigners, including the British Minister in Peking, acting under instructions from London, were interested in him and he also had friends on the Republican side who kept him well informed on developments in the revolutionary camp. In addition, some of the constitutional monarchists were beginning to feel well disposed toward him.

With all his new and old friends both inside and outside the Ch'ing Dynasty,³ as well as his supporters and friends abroad, Yuan's position as the political favorite of all parties was stronger than ever. Within a month of his return to Peking he was able to force my father, the Prince Regent, into retirement. Immediately afterward, on the pretext of the need for money to meet military expenses, he took over the palace treasury from the Empress Dowager Lung Yu and, at the same time, he compelled the high officials and princes to contribute money for the support of the Army. Thus, political, military and financial power were concentrated in his hands alone. Once this was accomplished, Yuan suggested to the Chinese minister to Russia as well as to other Chinese

³ Descriptive term for the Manchu ruling family.

diplomats abroad that they cable the Ch'ing court requesting my abdication. Meanwhile, he submitted a secret memorial in the name of the entire cabinet to the Empress Dowager saying that a republic was the only solution. He must have presented this memorial on the day I saw him and this would explain why Lung Yu wept so copiously. What frightened her the most were the following phrases in this memorial:

The Navy has revolted entirely. . . . National protection is thus gone. . . . If the civil war reaches a stalemate, there might be intervention by some of the foreign powers. . . . In this case hostility toward the government on the part of the Republican armies will be heightened. . . . Delay in abdication might lead to a fate similar to that suffered by Louis XVI and his family during the French Revolution.

The terror-stricken Dowager immediately called a meeting of the Imperial Council to permit the members of the royal family an opportunity to reach a decision. When they learned of the contents of the secret memorial they were not so much shaken by the allusion to the fate of Louis XVI as they were by the sudden reversal of Yuan Shih-kai's loyalties. Heretofore Yuan had ostensibly been strongly anti-Republican and had favored a constitutional monarchy. "I will never betray the orphan son [Pu Yi] and widow [Empress Dowager Lung Yu]," he had written. Also, shortly after Yuan's return to Peking a decree was issued allowing officials to cut off their queues. On this day, after a court audience, a high palace official, while strolling down one of the streets of Peking, had asked Yuan, as he pointed to his queue, "What do you propose regarding this?"

"You can rest assured," Yuan had replied, "that I propose to keep it."

Because of remarks like these, even those who did not have complete faith in him were put at ease. Furthermore, the Ch'ing and Republican sides had reached agreement that the future structure of the state should be decided by a provisional national assembly. The suggestion of Yuan, therefore, that the dynasty should abdicate at a time when

the structure of the state was still undecided, came as a shock to the royal family.

It was apparent, however, that Yuan Shih-kai by this time had foreign support and that his friends on the side of the Republican Army were sufficient to control its actions. Those revolutionaries who had originally been constitutional monarchists felt that Yuan was their only hope and this thinking had affected some of the Republicans as well. Thus the Republican side decided that if Yuan consented to a republic it could be achieved rapidly and, in this case, Yuan should be invited to become the first president. This was really exactly what Yuan had hoped for, especially since he knew that my father, the former Prince Regent, headed a group that was implacably hostile to him. He had decided to accept the Republican offer and was debating how to deal with the Ch'ing royal family when he learned that Sun Yat-sen had taken office as Provisional President in Nanking. An early solution of the problem of the dynasty was therefore all the more urgent for Yuan. If the Republicans in the South went on to set up a national assembly it would be difficult for him to get rid of it. He decided to frighten the royal family and the Empress Dowager Lung Yu so that she would consent voluntarily to my abdication and grant him full power to organize a provisional government. This was the real explanation for Yuan Shih-kai's sudden change in policy.

Those princes and nobles who had always been anti-Yuan and had felt he was a traitor were in favor of putting up a desperate last-ditch fight against both the Republicans and Yuan. Thus, when the Empress Dowager Lung Yu called the first meeting of the Imperial Council the atmosphere was charged with anger.

From various accounts of these meetings one can tell that they went approximately as follows. Having established that all present were in favor of a monarchy and opposed to a republic, the Dowager went on to say that she had been told by allies of Yuan that the imperial forces were incapable of defending the government and defeating the Republicans.

A leader of the anti-Yuan group among the nobility then stated that the rebels were nothing to be afraid of and reported that one of the generals of the new Peiyang Army

insisted that three months' military funds would be enough to defeat them. But as the Dowager pointed out, Yuan Shih-kai had taken over all the funds of the palace treasury so that she had no money. "Besides," she added, "what if we lose? Surely in that case we will not be able to fall back on the Articles of Favorable Treatment."

One of the nobles then claimed that the Articles were only a trick, but when Lung Yu asked about the real state of the Army and its loyalty to the Ch'ing House there were only noncommittal replies.

As one inconclusive meeting of the Imperial Council followed another, the advocates of fighting it out became fewer and fewer. Telegrams began to arrive from Peiyang Army generals, heretofore considered loyal to the Ch'ing House, requesting abdication. Meanwhile two leaders of the war party in the royal family left Peking for German-occupied Tsingtao and Japanese-held Port Arthur where they sought to go abroad in order to plead the imperial cause. Local officials, however, blocked their departure.

On February 12, 1912, the Empress Dowager Lung Yu proclaimed my abdication. My father, who had not said a word during all the Imperial Council meetings, returned to his house to "hug his children." Yuan Shih-kai, meanwhile, was organizing a provisional republican government as he had been ordered to do by the Empress Dowager. At the same time, in accordance with an agreement with the revolutionaries, he changed his own position from premier of the cabinet of the Great Ch'ing Empire to Provisional President of the Republic of China. While all this was going on, I became the President's neighbor as I started my life in the "Little Court" according to the Articles providing for "The Favorable Treatment of the Great Ch'ing Emperor after his Abdication."

These Articles consisted of eight separate provisions. They provided for my retention of the title of Emperor and stated that the Republic of China was to pay me an annual allowance of \$4,000,000. I was to be allowed to retain my usual bodyguard and to continue to live in the Imperial Palace. Also the Republic was to provide guards to insure the protection of my ancestral temples, and the imperial tombs; and the sacrifices at these places were to be contin-

ued forever. All persons employed in the Imperial Palace were to be continued to be employed as before, but no new eunuchs were to be engaged. All my existing private property was to receive the special protection of the Republic and the existing Palace Guard was to be incorporated into the Army of the Republic, its numbers and salary to be continued as before my abdication. The Republic of China was to permit the completion of the tomb of the Emperor Kuang Hsu according to the original plan and the funeral expenses were to be borne by the Republic.

THE LAST MANCHU

"IMPORTANT AND FASCINATING"
—The New York Times

In 1908, at the age of two, Pu Yi ascended the Imperial Dragon Throne: the last Emperor of centuries-old Manchu dynasty. Here, in his palace, is Pu Yi's extraordinary life: a saga of emperors, warlords, concubines and empresses, intrigues and high adventure.

After revolutionaries forced him to abdicate in 1911, Pu Yi retained his title, living for 13 years in Peking's Forbidden City with all the pomp and ritual of ancient tradition. Forced into exile by Chinese warlords, he was at the mercy of a succession of invaders and regimes: the Japanese, the Soviets, the Chinese Communists. After 15 years in prison, Pu Yi became a palace gardener.

With amazing candor and a wealth of exotic detail, Pu Yi wrote his story in captivity. Smuggled out of Peking, The Last Manchu is a unique, enthralling record of China's most turbulent, dramatic years—and of the one man who was witness to it all.

"REMARKABLE... FANTASTIC..."

—The Sunday Times (London)

NO 6721651880 9931797 POC
0-6721-65188-9 1245 \$10.01
\$ 4.95 B10 PU YI
LAST MANCHU



ISBN 0-6721-65188-9

The true, extraordinary story—
now a major motion picture!

THE LAST MANCHU

The Autobiography of
Henry Pu Yi,
Last Emperor of China



preface
Kramer

POCKET
183188-9
\$4.95