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## THE REVOLUTION OF 1911

### Sun Yatsen

Many of the enemies of the Manchu dynasty in 1900 had a handsome thirty-four-year-old doctor named Sun Yatsen as their leader.

Doctor Sun was a Christian. He had been educated in American schools in Hawaii and in a British college in Hong Kong. He had spent many years travelling the world, and what he saw in advanced industrial countries like Britain and Japan made him think that China was backward and weak. Sun Yatsen came to believe that the only hope for China lay in making it a republic organised on modern, Western lines. That would mean getting rid of the Manchu dynasty which was so opposed to change.

Sun Yatsen founded several secret societies with the aim of overthrowing the Manchus by force. From 1894 to 1905 he led a 'Revive China Society' and, in 1905, he founded the 'Tongmenghui', meaning 'Sworn Chinese Brotherhood'. Doctor Sun's three aims, which he announced in 1898, were to 'Eliminate the Manchus, eliminate the monarchy: open the road to socialism'. All his attempts at revolution failed, however. By 1911 he had attempted to overthrow the government on ten separate occasions, but none had succeeded.

### The last years of the Manchus

In 1908 the seventy-three-year-old Empress Dowager Cixi died. Her successor as ruler of China was her

nephew, a two-year-old boy named Puyi, who was given the title of Emperor. The Manchu dynasty was clearly in trouble.

The power to rule was given to a Regent, Prince Chun, the boy's uncle. Prince Chun sided with the conservatives in the court – the politicians and princes and courtiers who disliked change. He gave important positions to his brothers and appointed the most conservative of the Imperial Princes to the post of Prime Minister. At the same time he dismissed many powerful and able officials, including the chief military commander in north China, Yuan Shikai.

In 1911 China entered a period of economic difficulty and discontent. The harvest failed in all the central areas of the country. It was the worst crop failure for forty years and caused great distress among the peasants. The wealthier classes were also discontented because the government had increased their taxes to pay for the New Army. They also disliked a government plan for building railways, using foreign loans and technical assistance.

### The Wuchang rebellion

In September 1911 a rebellion against the government began in Sichuan province after police fired on a crowd of demonstrators, killing many of them. Agents of Sun Yatsen's 'Sworn Chinese Brotherhood' immediately went to Sichuan to help spread the rebellion. On 10 October – the Double Tenth, as the

*A street in Beijing in October 1911 after the execution of supporters of the Manchus*



rebels called the tenth day of the tenth month – soldiers of the New Army in their base at Wuchang joined the rising. With the help of the New Army the rebels quickly took control of Wuchang. From there the rebellion spread throughout central and southern China, and became a full-scale revolution. By the end of November fifteen of the country's eighteen provinces had joined the revolution. In the city of Nanjing the rebels formed a provisional government in opposition to the Manchu government in Beijing.

The Manchus tried to deal with the revolution by recalling Yuan Shikai from retirement. Yuan Shikai was made Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the armies, and was ordered to crush the rebels by all possible means.

Yuan Shikai was the most able general in China, and he quickly defeated the rebels and recaptured Wuchang. But instead of punishing the rebels, he made a deal with their leaders. In return for their support, he promised to help them achieve their aims; he would use his great power and influence to persuade Prince Chun, the Regent, and Puyi, the six-year-old Emperor, to give up the throne and make China into a republic. Yuan Shikai himself would take office as President of the Republic.

## The contest for leadership

While these events were taking place, Sun Yatsen was in America on a fund-raising tour. On 24 December Sun returned to China and a week later was elected President of 'The United Provinces of China' by an assembly of the rebels at Nanjing.

A contest for the leadership of China now took place between Yuan Shikai and Sun Yatsen. Sun was the democratic choice of the rebels, but Yuan had the support of the army. With this military superiority, Yuan was able to persuade the assembly in Nanjing that he, not Sun, should be President. The assembly duly elected him President in February 1912. Sun resigned without protest in order to avoid a civil war between Yuan's army and his own supporters.

Finally, on 12 February 1912, Prince Chun and Emperor Puyi stepped down from the 'Dragon

Throne' of the Manchus. The Edict of Abdication which they issued said:

'Today the people of the whole Empire have their minds bent on a Republic, the southern provinces having begun the movement, and the northern generals having subsequently supported it. The will of Providence is clear and the people's wishes are plain. How could I, for the sake of the glory and honour of one family, oppose the wishes of teeming millions? Wherefore I, with the Emperor, decide that the form of government in China shall be a constitutional Republic. . .'

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PU YI, CHINA'S FIVE-YEAR-OLD EMPEROR, WHOM THE REVOLUTIONARIES ARE SEEKING TO DEPOSE.



Dr. Sun Yat Sen. The Regent and his second son. The Empress. China is in the throes of a revolution, the aim of which is nothing less than the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty and the establishment of a Republic. Pu Yi, the present Emperor, who is now five and a half, came to the throne when only three years old. Under over 20,000,000 souls, he lives a life secluded from the world, even his mother only being allowed to pay him occasional visits. In the palace he is addressed as 'His Majesty' (K'ang of Pao, P'ian-shan, Yuen). Prince Chun, the Regent, is the little Emperor's father. Dr. Sun Yat Sen is named as the President of the first Republic—if it is established.

## Work section

- A. Study the Edict of Abdication above. Then, using the information you have read in this chapter, answer the following questions:
1. Who were 'I' (line 7), 'one family' (line 7-8) and 'the Emperor' (line 9)?
  2. In which of the 'southern provinces' did the movement for a Republic start? In which city was a Republican government set up?
  3. Name the leading 'northern general' who later supported the Republican movement.
  4. Explain in your own words the meaning of the term 'constitutional Republic'. In what ways does a constitutional republic differ from a monarchy?
- B. Study the front page of the Daily Mirror above, then answer these questions:
1. Why do you think the Daily Mirror gave the whole of its front page to this story?
  2. Who was 'Dr Sun Yat-sen' in the bottom left? Why do you think the last sentence of the newspaper report expresses doubt that he would become President of the first Chinese Republic?