

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 58

“The Republic of China”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Early twentieth century China was a nation burdened with a corrupt and incompetent Imperial government, a government accustomed to dealing with foreign challenges by excluding them, and domestic challenges by repressing them.

The result was a nation riddled with secret societies, which organized around a variety of different, and often conflicting, ideals. The Boxer Uprising of 1900 saw one such movement suddenly burst into prominence, and then be defeated. But there were others, still hiding in the shadows, biding their time.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 58. The Republic of China.

We are due to return to China, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*. We examined the Boxer Uprising all the way back in episodes 14 and 15, and China played a supporting role in the story of the Russo-Japanese War, episodes 31-36. And when I say “supporting role,” of course, what I mean is, the war was fought almost entirely on Chinese soil, but the Chinese state and people were only peripherally involved in it. And when the nation that includes more than a quarter of the human race within its borders is only peripherally involved in a major war being fought over its own territory, you know that something is very, very wrong.

When we looked at the Boxer Uprising, we saw some of the secret societies that were pervasive in China at the time. The Boxer Uprising was sparked by an anti-foreigner and pro-Qing collection of societies in the northeastern part of China, particularly Shandong province. It was in those secret societies that these anti-foreigner sentiments would fester, before they emerged as the Boxer Uprising.

But groups like the Boxers were not the only sort of secret societies in China. Today I want to look in particular to southern China, in and around the port city of Guangzhou, often called “Canton” in English. I said back in episode 14 that this region of China is where the earliest

European explorers and traders made contact with the Chinese. As a result, the Chinese living in this region tend to be more outward looking, more tolerant of foreigners, more cosmopolitan, and more curious about the outside world, than many people in other parts of the country. And Chinese who emigrate have traditionally been most likely to come from this region

Southern Chinese are also less loyal to the Qing dynasty, which, you may recall, is not Han Chinese, the 90% ethnic majority of China, but rather ethnic Manchus, a small minority. Beijing, the Emperor, and Manchuria itself are very far away from southern China. So whereas the Boxers wanted to “support the Qing, kill the foreigners,” as their slogan had it, secret societies in the south are more likely to be thinking about overthrowing the Qing, and restoring the Forbidden Palace to an ethnic Han dynasty.

At least, that’s what the rural, uneducated of southern China are thinking. Rural peasants are pretty much living lives of misery in China during this time, and it’s unsurprising that they dream of radical changes. But of course, merely overthrowing one Imperial dynasty and replacing it with another would have done nothing to address the fundamental systemic problems China was facing, and to us, it doesn’t look like much of a change. But in a Chinese context, considering the long history of the Chinese Empire, that was the way corrupt and incompetent rulers were usually dealt with.

But there were also wealthier and better educated Chinese in the south. Many of them were traders and merchants, this being the part of China most involved in foreign trade. Some of them sent their children to be educated in Western countries, and these children came home full of liberal ideas about constitutional monarchies, the rule of law, civil rights, and elected parliaments.

And here, too, we again come up upon the subject of tariffs. As you know, tariffs were the principal means by which national governments raised revenue at this time. And as we have seen, tariffs are an important tool governments to set economic policy, by determining what sorts of imports to encourage or discourage, to protect sectors of the domestic economy from foreign competition, and to reward friendly nations or punish unfriendly ones.

But this is China, and China is different. You probably remember all the pressure Western governments have been putting on China to open its markets to trade. That’s the way they usually say it in Western history books. Pressure China to open its markets. But understand that what we mean here by “China opening its markets” is “no tariffs on foreign imports.” And what we’re calling “pressure” is largely military in nature. “Pressuring China to open its markets” sounds a lot nicer than “Forcing China at gunpoint to forswear tariffs, a political and economic tool used by every other nation on the planet,” but the latter is more accurate.

So if China can’t use tariffs, how does it fund its government? Granted, the Chinese government at this time is largely ineffective, but it does have an army and navy to maintain—actually, several armies and navies, but we’ll get back to that later. It also has a bloated, corrupt and

incompetent central government which isn't accomplishing very much, but does cost quite a bit of money to maintain. So where does all that money come from?

It's simple. It comes from domestic taxation. Internal trade and excise taxes, that sort of thing. So, in other words, while every other country in the world is charging import tariffs as a way of shielding its domestic economy from foreign competition, Chinese tax policy is having the perverse effect of encouraging low-cost imports while raising prices of domestic consumption. China is shielding foreign imports from local competition.

This is making it awfully hard to be a merchant or trader in China, and it was tempting to many ambitious and entrepreneurial Chinese—and many oppressed and desperate Chinese, too—to leave the country and seek their fortunes elsewhere. Many traveled to other eastern Asian countries, like Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines, as we have already seen. In many of these places, ethnic Chinese came to dominate the merchant class. There was also Chinese emigration to Korea, Japan, Russia, Australia and New Zealand, and other Chinese emigrated to the New World, especially the United States, until Chinese immigration was banned in 1882. Also Canada, Peru, Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela. Significant numbers of Chinese also emigrated to Europe, particularly France, Britain, and Italy.

For most of the history of China, it was forbidden to leave the country without government permission, and this is still the case in the early twentieth century. Those who emigrated managed it either by getting official permission, perhaps legitimately, perhaps by bribery, or else by simply slipping out of the country while no one was looking.

Chinese who managed to leave their homeland and resettle elsewhere usually had to deal with hostility and discrimination in their new country, but often found that, in spite of these drawbacks, it was still an easier place to live and make money than it was back home, because of friendlier economic policies, and a commitment to the rule of law that was sadly lacking in China, but is very important to anyone trying to run a business.

Chinese who emigrated also sent money home. Much of it was for friends and relatives left behind, but some of it was to fund secret societies. But the sorts of secret society favored by business people weren't the kinds that wanted to overthrow the Qing dynasty; no, they favored the kinds that wanted constitutional reforms, like an elected legislature and legal rights.

To some extent, these movements were working at cross purposes from those who wanted to overthrow the Qing. And ironically, although overthrowing the Qing Dynasty sounds like a more dramatic change than reforming it, if you think about it for a minute, liberal constitutionalism really is the more radical idea.

[music: *The Moon Reflecting in the Second Spring*]

Okay, we'll turn our attention away from southern China for the moment, and turn back to what's going on up in Beijing. Back when we examined the Boxer Uprising, I talked a little bit about the aftermath. China had been forced to pay a large indemnity to the eight-nation alliance that had put down the uprising. The titular ruler of China at this time is the Guangxu Emperor, but he was effectively deposed and placed under house arrest following his attempt at reforms in 1898. He was 27 years old at that time. Afterward, his former regent, the 62-year old Empress Dowager, Cixi, is the de facto ruler of China, and will remain so for the next ten years, until her death. It was her decision to throw in with the unsuccessful Boxer Uprising. After foreign soldiers entered Beijing in 1900, she and her court, including the Emperor, fled deep into the interior of China to avoid the prospect of being taken prisoner.

In 1902, after the signing of the Boxer Protocol, which ended the conflict, Cixi and the court returned to Beijing. Chastened by this experience, the hardline conservative Cixi began to warm to the idea of reform along the lines that the Japanese had pursued under the Meiji Emperor. She even opened up the closed Forbidden Palace, at least a little bit, allowing herself to be photographed for the first time, and taking tea with the wives of foreign ambassadors.

I haven't given you any background on Cixi, by the way, so let me correct that oversight now. She was apparently the daughter of a minor Manchu official living in Beijing, and was born there in 1835. At the age of sixteen, in 1851, she was selected from among a large pool of candidates to become a concubine to the 20-year old Xiangfeng Emperor, who had only recently acceded to the throne.

The reign of the Xiangfeng Emperor lasted ten years, and was a turbulent time in the history of China. There were two internal revolts, plus the loss of outer Manchuria to Russia in 1858, plus the Second Opium War with Britain and France in 1860. The Emperor didn't help his position any during the Second Opium War when he arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and executed Western diplomats, either because they were rude, or in retaliation for Western atrocities, depending on who you believe. Either way, British and French troops marched into Beijing and looted and burned the Summer Palaces in retaliation. The Emperor fled to the Imperial vacation home, which lay in the mountains about 150 miles northeast of Beijing, and he died there at the age of thirty, supposedly from the stress, although it appears that rampant drug and alcohol abuse were also factors. Looking at it from a 21st century perspective, one might suspect that he had a mental illness.

The Xiangfeng Emperor would, as it happens, turn out to be the last Emperor to rule in his own right. His concubine, the now 26-year old Cixi also happened to be the mother of the Emperor's only son. This son, who was five years old at the time, would become the next Emperor, the Tongzhi Emperor. A regency council was created, but his mother Cixi ended up wielding all the power, and as things turned out, she would continue to run China from behind the scenes until her death, 47 years later. As for the Tongzhi Emperor, he would grow into an obstinate and irresponsible teenager and die of smallpox at the age of 19, coincidentally shortly after taking

power in his own right and also shortly after quarrelling with his mother over the appointment of officials. Yeah, smallpox. That's the ticket.

The Tongzhi Emperor died childless, so the next Emperor would be his three-year old cousin, the Guangxu Emperor. His regent would be, you guessed it, Cixi. A few years after the Guangxu Emperor came of age, in 1898, he attempted to introduce constitutional government in what would come to be called the Hundred Days Reform, which would lead to Cixi retaking power, stashing the titular Emperor away into house arrest for the rest of his life, and executing a number of court officials who had supported the Emperor's reforms.

Which brings us back to 1902, and Cixi returning to Beijing with the Emperor in tow following resolution of the Boxer Uprising. By this time, even Cixi was ready to acknowledge the need for reform. And this went beyond taking tea with the wives of ambassadors. Inspired by the Japanese model, she sent Chinese officials around the world to study how things were done in other countries, in order to bring that insight back to Beijing and incorporate it into a new set of reforms and modernizing programs that came to be called the New Policies. A plan was laid out for a gradual transformation into a constitutional monarchy modeled on Japan's, with local elections to be held in 1908, and then provincial elections in 1910, and finally, elections to a national assembly in 1916.

But it was a case of too little, too late. On November 15, 1908, the Empress Dowager died just a few days shy of her 73rd birthday. The Guangxu Emperor died the day before at the age of 37. Tests performed on the Emperor's remains a hundred years later, in 2008, demonstrated that he had been poisoned, apparently to prevent him from reasserting Imperial authority after Cixi's death.

His likely poisoner was Yuan Shikai, a 49-year old high ranking military officer. Yuan's last-minute switch from supporting the Emperor to supporting the Empress Dowager had been pivotal in allowing Cixi to end the Hundred Days Reform and put the Emperor under wraps back in 1898, and the Emperor had never forgiven him for that. It was well-known that high on the Emperor's to-do list for when he got back into power was the execution of Yuan Shikai, and if that isn't a motive for murder, I don't know what is.

The Guangxu Emperor had also provided for the possibility that he might die before being restored to power by including instructions in his will that Yuan be executed. But these instructions were not carried out. The deceased Emperor had had no children, and so while she was on her own deathbed, Cixi designated the Emperor's two-year old nephew as his successor, and he would be crowned the Xuantong Emperor a couple of weeks later, crying and screaming in terror for the whole ceremony. The new Emperor's father, the younger brother of the late Emperor, would be the regent.

As for Yuan Shikai, in the aftermath of the Boxer Uprising and the foreign response, which had destroyed many military formations in and around Beijing, he became a powerful figure in the

rebuilt northern Chinese military, which was called the Beiyang Army, or the Northern Army. The Chinese military was organized into several regional armies, but this one, the Northern Army, the one whose territory includes the Imperial capital, was the largest and the best equipped.

Nevertheless, a few weeks after the coronation of the new Emperor, Yuan's retirement was announced, for health reasons, it was said, and he returned to his hometown, about 300 miles south of Beijing. But he would maintain his contacts within the crucial military formations in and around Beijing, so it's doubtful we've heard the last of *him*.

[music: *The Moon Reflecting in the Second Spring*]

And now, it is time to meet Sun Yat-Sen. Now, I have to tell you right up front: Sun Yat-Sen is known by a variety of names, which were given to him at different times in his storied life. And many of those names have different pronunciations, depending on whether you say them in Cantonese, which was his native dialect, or in Mandarin, the national dialect. But frankly, I'm pretty sure neither one of us wants me to delve too deeply into that question. He is usually called Sun Yat-Sen in the English-speaking world, so if that's good enough for you, that's good enough for me. I just want you to be aware that that's not the only name he's known by.

Sun Yat-Sen was born on November 12, 1866, in a small town in Guangdong province, sometimes called Canton province in English, because that's where the city of Canton lies. He had an older brother, Sun Mei, who had emigrated to Honolulu, in the Kingdom of Hawaii. At the age of 13, Yat-Sen went to Hawaii to live with his older brother, and to pursue an education. He lived there for four years, and he was an excellent student. He learned to speak English, and studied history and science. He also began to show an interest in Christianity, which concerned his older brother, and moved him to send Yat-Sen back home, out of fear that otherwise, his little brother might convert.

Back home in Guangdong province, and now 17 years old, Yat-Sen renewed a childhood friendship with Lu Haodong. Both of these young men were modernist in their outlooks and frustrated with Chinese traditionalism, and one day they took out their frustration with Chinese traditionalism by vandalizing the local temple in their hometown, which in turn led to a sudden need to flee their home town for the sanctuary of the nearby British-administered territory of Hong Kong. Yat-sen would convert to Christianity and spend the rest of the 1880s attending school in and around Hong Kong, including the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese. This school was founded by missionaries for the purpose of teaching Western medicine to China. China had its own traditions of medical practice, and the Qing government was opposed to the introduction of Western medicine into China.

Sun Yat-Sen's own study of Western medicine convinced him more than ever of the need for political change in China. At the medical school, he joined with three other anti-Qing students in a group that came to be known as the Four Bandits. He began to advocate for modernization of

China, but after petitioning the government and getting no response, he came to believe that the Qing government was beyond hope, and that only a revolution could bring modernity to China.

The humiliation of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 led to a split of opinion among those who wanted to see reform. Some felt that the lesson of the war was that to overthrow the Qing would lead to chaos and collapse and that therefore modernization had to be effected through the existing government. This group was encouraged by the Guangxu Emperor's Hundred Days Reform, but after those reforms were quashed and the Emperor placed under house arrest, that idea sort of went by the wayside. Sun Yat-Sen was part of the other group, the ones who continued to maintain that the Qing were hopelessly corrupt and incompetent, and what was needed was a wholesale revolution.

In 1894, Yat-sen was back in Honolulu, in what was now the Republic of Hawaii, and was working among Chinese expatriates to create the Revive China Society. Its oath and motto was, "Expel the Manchus, Revive China, Establish Unity." A year later, members of the Revive China society planned an uprising in Guangzhou, Canton. Sun's old childhood friend Lu Haodong was in Guangzhou as part of the plan, and even designed a flag for the occasion, a white sun with twelve rays of light on a blue background.

But the government learned of the planned uprising, and moved to arrest the ringleaders, including Lu Haodong, who was executed at the age of 27. The uprising was nipped in the bud. Sun Yat-sen would later call his friend the first martyr for democracy in the history of China. A second attempted uprising, in 1900, timed to coincide with the chaos of the Boxer Uprising, also failed.

Part of the problem here is that for many ordinary Chinese people, replacing the Qing with a new Imperial dynasty, an ethnic Han dynasty, was a simpler solution, one easier to understand than all this talk about parliaments and democracy and modernization. But Sun Yat-sen persisted.

After the United States annexed Hawaii, it became more difficult for Sun to travel there, owing to America's Chinese Exclusion Act, which banned Chinese immigration to the US. And it didn't help that Sun had supported the Filipino resistance, the one that fought against the US annexation of the Philippines.

And so, by 1905, Sun Yat-Sen was spending a good deal of his time in Japan. Japan began making it a policy to be open to Chinese political dissidents. Indeed, the Japanese government began supporting them. Japan, of course, following the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese war, was seeking regional hegemony in East Asia. To see the Chinese government overthrown and replaced by revolutionaries who had lived for many years in Japan, learned from Japan, and were indebted to Japan seemed like a pretty sweet arrangement.

And this is not to mention that the Russo-Japanese War had demonstrated that in a conflict between Japan and a Western nation, the sympathy of the Chinese people, and many other Asian

peoples, was with Japan. Chinese nationalists saw in Japan an inspiring example of how even a smaller Asian nation could stand up to Western imperialism, and it evoked hope that China might someday follow Japan's example. As far as the Japanese and their dream of regional dominance go, the Japanese increasingly view Western nations, including the United States, maybe especially the United States, as the greatest threat to Japanese ambitions. So it was seen as in Japan's interest to encourage anti-Western as well as anti-Qing thinking in China.

Of course, Japan's main interest in freeing China from Western domination is so that it will be ripe for Japanese domination, but that's a story for a future episode.

In Tokyo in 1905, Sun merged his own Revive China Society with other antimonarchical organizations to form the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance. Sun would eventually emerge as the intellectual leader of this movement. He is best known for articulating his three principles, which were first publicized at about this time. They were, first, nationalism, that is, a multiethnic nationalism for all the peoples of China, as opposed to Manchu imperialism or Western imperialism, second, democracy, and third, public welfare. Sun wrote extensively about the social problems facing Western nations in the wake of industrialization, the sort of thing I've been talking about in past episodes on this podcast, and Sun noted that China had not yet modernized and come to face modern social problems, but after the revolution, they would come, and it was not too early for the Chinese to start thinking about ways to avoid the misery that faced working people in the West.

The reforms set in motion by Cixi were slowed by the new Emperor's regime, although local and provincial elections did go ahead as scheduled. Whether there would ever be a national assembly remained an open question. But Sun and the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance, they didn't care. Reforms or no reforms, the Qing had to go. In 1907, the Revolutionary Alliance launched no fewer than five uprisings in southern China, but every one of them was put down, including one led by Sun himself, who was forced to flee to Singapore. The revolutionaries in Tokyo began to challenge Sun's leadership of the movement, seeing as how these revolts he keeps trying to trigger never quite seemed to get anywhere.

The revolutionary movement split into pro- and anti-Sun factions. After a grand total of eleven failed uprisings, the antis were accusing Sun, falsely, of manipulating the movement for his personal financial gain. In Singapore, Sun worked to rebuild and raise more money to fund more uprisings. But the controversy followed him to Singapore's large Chinese community, and in 1910 Sun moved on again, to Penang, in Malaysia.

[music: *The Moon Reflecting in the Second Spring*]

And with your permission, I'd like to leave Sun in Malaysia for the time being, because it's 1910, and I'd like to switch gears for a moment and focus on Korea. Japan fought a war with China in 1894 to gain sway over Korea; basically, to convert a Chinese satellite into a Japanese satellite. A major cause of the Russo-Japanese war ten years later was Japan's need to defend its

influence in Korea against Russian encroachment. At the end of that war, there remained a large Japanese military presence in Korea. The Japanese government immediately opened negotiations with the Korean government. “Negotiations” might be the wrong word to describe a process that involves Japanese soldiers in the Korean Imperial Palace, locking up the prime minister and threatening the Emperor with physical injury if he doesn’t sign a treaty dictated to him by Tokyo, but whatever you want to call it, that’s what happened and that’s what he did.

Under the terms of this 1905 treaty, the Japanese government would take charge of all relations between Korea and other nations, which is pretty much your textbook definition of “protectorate.” Japan also claimed control over Korea’s foreign trade. After the soldiers left, the Korean Emperor sent appeals to several other great powers, including China, Germany, and Britain, asking for support against Japan, but none was forthcoming. The rest of the world seemed content to allow Japan to do what it wanted with Korea.

The inevitable result was that in 1910, Japan forced the Korean government to agree to an annexation treaty. Count Terauchi Masatake, who had been war minister during the war with Russia, became the first Japanese governor-general of Korea. The Japanese moved quickly to modernize Korea, with programs to improve education and literacy, and introduce land reform. Some of these changes were badly needed in Korea, but of course the Japanese introduced them with an eye to integrating Korea fully into the Japanese Empire and discouraging expressions of the Korean language and culture. Japan would maintain control over Korea until 1945.

Meanwhile, back in China, at about the same time, the New Policies of the late Empress Dowager were trundling along. Local and provincial assemblies had been elected, and a first stab at a National Assembly was convened in Beijing in October 1910. It was a 200-member body—one hundred representatives sent from the provincial assemblies and one hundred appointed by the Qing Court. And as soon as the National Assembly opened, it found itself at loggerheads with the Palace. The Emperor’s regent saw the assembly as a purely advisory body—kind of like Russian Emperor Nikolai’s attitude toward the Duma. But the assembly didn’t see itself that way. It demanded the power to legislate. It demanded that the Regent appoint an actual cabinet, and demanded that a fully elected national legislature be organized ASAP. The Regent and the Court, however, would only agree to the last of these demands, and that only insofar as to advance the national election date up to 1913. But no sooner.

And so, after so many failed uprisings, the final one, the one that actually brought down the Empire, was a huge anticlimax. It happened a year later, and it started with a terrible accident. On October 9, 1911, in the city of Wuchang, members of a revolutionary underground movement were working on a stockpile of bombs and ammunition. One of them took a cigarette break, and accidentally set off a small explosion that wounded one of his comrades. They all ran off before the authorities could arrive, but of course the police discovered the weapons cache. They also discovered documentation that an anti-government uprising was being planned in Wuchang, and, conveniently, a list of names of the conspirators.

When I say convenient, I mean for the government, of course. For the conspirators, this was about as terrible as could be. All that was left was to sit around and wait to be arrested, tortured, and executed. Or launch the uprising immediately, on the theory that they now have nothing left to lose.

Yeah, they went with the second thing. The next day, October 10, they began their uprising, and, probably surprising no one more than themselves, managed to capture key positions in the city, which was then the capital of Hubei province. They also captured the provincial military commander, a man named Li Yuanhong, whom they had found hiding under his bed. Although he was commander of the government forces arrayed *against* them, the rebels forced him to become *their* commander, as he was educated, and was well-known and respected, unlike, you know, any of the rebels.

At first, the rebels were just forcing him to sign decrees they had written, like the one declaring Hubei province's independence from the Empire. But as the news spread, rebellions broke out in sympathy in neighboring provinces, led by coalitions of the newly elected provincial assemblies, who were as fed up with not being listened to as was the National Assembly, disgruntled merchants, and all those secret underground anti-Imperial societies that have been forming for the past few decades. By the end of October, five neighboring provinces had joined in the uprising. By the end of November, Mongolia, which was then part of the Empire, and which had already been putting out feelers to the Russian government in St. Petersburg about supporting Mongolian independence against the Qing, also took advantage of the Imperial government's collapsing position, and went ahead and declared independence. They would be able to keep it, and this is the beginning of the modern Mongolian nation.

Meanwhile, back in China proper, Li Yuanhong was by this time named military commander of the combined rebel forces. By the end of the year, a total of fourteen provinces were in revolt, comprising most of central and southern China.

All of this had happened spontaneously, and the rebels scrambled to build an organization for their movement. In December, representatives of the rebel provinces met in Nanjing. They quickly decided to end Imperial rule and declare a Chinese republic, but who would be their leader? Several of the anti-Sun leaders vied against each other and against Li Yuanhong, who was now thoroughly imbued with the proper revolutionary spirit.

But where was Sun Yat-Sen while all this was going on? The Wuchang uprising had caught him completely by surprise, as the original conspirators were from the anti-Sun faction, so of course they weren't consulting with him or anything. So when the uprising began, Sun himself was in Denver in the United States. He was on a speaking and fundraising tour. He spent the next two months shuttling around Western capitals, trying to get their governments to recognize the fledgling Chinese republic, recognize Sun Yat-Sen as its leader, and send money and assistance.

He wasn't able to convince anyone, and so he returned to China, arriving in Shanghai in December.

Although he had returned to China empty-handed, the deadlocked rebel leadership turned to him as a compromise candidate. Sun had been fighting for a Chinese republic for two decades, was well-known in the movement, and was the only one of them with an international reputation. So they swallowed their pride and, on January 1, 1912, the Provisional Republic of China was proclaimed, with its capital at Nanjing.

I should mention that the city of Nanjing has served as the capital in the past. Indeed, the very name "Nanjing" means "southern capital," just as "Beijing" means "northern capital." And since Nanjing lay within the rebel-controlled territory and Beijing didn't, Nanjing became the obvious choice for the new capital, one with historical resonance.

And speaking of Beijing, by this time the Regent and the Qing Court were getting pretty desperate. More than half the nation had risen up in revolt. The National Assembly, the one body that might legitimize the retention of Imperial power, was asking for a constitutional monarchy, an elected parliament, and a cabinet government as the price for its support. Unwilling to pay that price, even now, the Regent turned to Yuan Shikai, asking him to return from his forced retirement to save the Empire. Yuan demanded that he be named prime minister in exchange for his help. The Regent agreed.

Besides the premiership, Yuan continued to hold the support and respect of the Northern Army, the best army in China, and now the only army that still answers to Beijing. Yuan ordered the army into action against the rebellion, but that was just a negotiating tactic. He knew full well that neither President Sun nor the Regent had the stomach for a full-scale civil war across a country of 500 million people. He also knew that what Sun and his rebels wanted most of all was to see the Qing deposed and a Republic established. And so, negotiating on behalf of the Emperor and his Regent, Yuan dangled in front of Sun the thing he wanted most: the abdication of the Emperor.

But it would come at a price. The Emperor and the Qing Court would continue to occupy the Forbidden City, and the Imperial Palace and the Court would be funded by the new Republic, and continue to receive the same honors. It's just that the Emperor wouldn't be the Emperor anymore.

Oh, and by the way, Yuan Shikai had one last demand: that he replace Sun Yat-Sen as the President of the Republic.

The leaders of the provisional Republic and the Regent had grave doubts about this arrangement, but they reluctantly agreed it was better than a civil war. And so, on February 12, 1912, the Regent, acting in the name of the Emperor, abdicated. And that's how the Xuantong Emperor

became the Last Emperor and became Pu Yi. I'm allowed to say his name now, because in Republican China, it is no longer a capital crime.

Three days later, Sun Yat-Sen resigned his Presidency, and Yuan Shikai was chosen as his successor.

This news was greeted with a sigh of relief in the international community. As I mentioned earlier, the major foreign powers had refused to recognize the provisional Republic and continued to maintain diplomatic relations with the Imperial Court in Beijing. Most Westerners, however, agreed that the Imperial government was archaic, ruthless, and hopelessly corrupt, so there was a lot of sympathy with the Republic, even as foreign governments steered clear of China's internal conflicts. But developments in China were unfolding rapidly during those five months, and where things were headed remained unclear. There was no more enthusiasm for a Chinese civil war in the West than there was in China.

So the compromise agreement brokered by Yuan was hailed in the West. China had, to all appearances, transitioned peacefully and smoothly from an archaic, ramshackle empire to a modern republic. And Western leaders regarded Yuan as a tough, no-nonsense military man who might have autocratic tendencies, but knew how to maintain order and was someone that foreign governments and private interests could do business with. And so, the other nations of the world quickly recognized the new Republic of China.

This is another one of those stories where I wish I could just stop right here...oh, wait...I guess I'm out of time, so I *will* be stopping right here. Let's take a moment to bask in the glow of China's remarkable accomplishment: a relatively peaceful and almost bloodless transition from a quasi-feudal Empire to a modern Republican government that befits a great power in just a few months. And I'll wait for a future episode before I tell you the story of how the whole thing crashes and burns the following year.

We'll have to stop there for today. We're coming up on the holiday season. Christmas is just a week away, in Western Christianity, and New Year's Day comes just a week after that, so *The History of the Twentieth Century* is going on a holiday schedule. The next episode will come out a little earlier than usual, so it will be available for download on December 23. I tried to think of a topic appropriate to the season, and what I came up with was the North Pole. After that episode is released, I plan to take a week off for the holidays, so the next episode following will be released on January 8, 2017. So I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we take up the exploration of the North Pole. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the far north was unexplored. Who was the first human being to reach the North Pole? That turns out to be more complicated than you might think. That's next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. All the way back in episode one, I named the ten great powers at the beginning of the century, and pointed out that they were seven empires, two republics, and one

kingdom. The revolution in China means it's time to update the score. As of 1912, we now have six empires, three republics, and one kingdom. So, good on you, China.

[music: *The Moon Reflecting in the Second Spring*]

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