

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 262

### “The Long March”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

By 1929, Chiang Kai-shek had realized Sun Yat-sen’s dream of a China united under Nationalist Party rule.

But Chinese unity was a fragile thing. The warlords had submitted for now, but they were untrustworthy. Beyond the borders of the country lay the Soviet Union and Japan. Could either of these neighbors be trusted?

Then there was the most dangerous enemy of all, in Chiang’s estimation, the Communists.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 262. The Long March.

The last time we took a look at events in China was back in episode 234, which concluded with a Kuomintang government under President Chiang Kai-shek setting up shop in the city of Nanjing at the end of the year 1928. The Northern Expedition, originally conceived by Sun Yat-sen, succeeded in its goal of reasserting Kuomintang control over China and bringing the warlords to heel, although Sun himself did not live to see his ambition realized.

I left off at the end of that episode by noting the two biggest challenges facing Chiang’s government: the Communists and the Japanese. Today, we’ll look at the next few years in China and check in with each of these three forces: first, Chiang and the Nationalists, then the Communists, and finally the Japanese.

Chiang established Nanjing as the capital of the Republic of China. The city had the advantage of a central location, and although Beijing had been the capital of the Chinese Empire for centuries, Nanjing had played that role before. In fact, the names Beijing and Nanjing mean “northern capital” and “southern capital,” respectively, in Chinese. Nanjing was also close to Chiang’s power base, so that counted for something, and choosing a new capital made an

important symbolic statement. It demonstrated a break with the past and a declaration that Chiang's government represented something truly new.

Recall that Sun Yat-sen had laid out a three-step strategy for creating a united and democratic China. First, a military take-over, then a transitional period in which the Nationalists would rule while preparing the nation for democracy, and only then would an elected government take over. Sun conceived this plan after the failure of his first effort, when a democratically elected government collapsed almost as soon as it was established.

So Chiang could rule China both as President of the Republic and chief of the military and also claim the mantle of Sun Yat-sen. If there was no democracy just yet, well, be patient and remember that even Sun Yat-sen couldn't build democracy in a day.

Chiang would rule China from his capital in Nanjing until 1937, a period known in Chinese history as the Nanjing Decade. The Nanjing Decade was a welcome respite from the chaos and violence of the Warlord Era; the relative stability of this time allowed for greater economic growth. New schools opened and the number of Chinese children getting an education soared. In the realm of foreign relations, Western countries granted Chiang's government diplomatic recognition and negotiated the end of some of the special concessions that had been forced on China in Imperial times. Western governments recognized China's claim to the western region of Xinjiang, where the Soviet Union was trying to stir up revolution. Western governments also generally recognized China's claim to Tibet and refrained from extending recognition to the government of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa, although Tibet had been *de facto* independent, with the Dalai Lama ruling the country, since the end of the Empire in 1911.

The biggest problem facing Chiang and his government during this period was a chronic shortage of money. There were a couple of reasons for this. One was that China was still heavily in debt to foreign interests and paying indemnities from earlier wars with Japan and Western powers. Also, whatever the Republic of China's powers were on paper, in practice Nanjing only controlled a handful of provinces in the central coastal region. Warlords still governed the rest of the country. They had formally submitted to the rule of Chiang and his government, but that didn't mean Nanjing was getting all the tax revenue it was entitled to. The warlords still spent the money on themselves and their armies first, and sent to the central government only what was left over, which usually wasn't much.

As ruler, Chiang had to choose between building the economy and building the army. He went with the army, and you shouldn't be surprised. Chiang had always been a soldier first. He had strong support in the army, and the army was the base of his power. So the army was always first in line for government spending. And most of the country was still controlled by warlords, who supported Chiang mostly because they feared him. Every warlord who had opposed Chiang so far had come to grief; small wonder then that the rest were suddenly filled with a patriotic urge to

support a unified China. But if Chiang's army got smaller, those patriotic urges might disappear just as quickly as they arose.

Also, economic growth was the priority of Wang Jingwei, who was until recently Chiang's most serious rival for control of the Kuomintang and the Chinese government. Wang saw the value to China in economic development, which would increase government revenues and improve the lot of ordinary Chinese, thus reducing the appeal of Communism. But if Wang was for it, Chiang was against it, so that was that. Wang was by this time no longer a factor in Chinese politics.

And don't underestimate the power of Chiang's in-laws. Through his wife, Soong Mei-ling, known in the West as Madame Chiang, he was the late Sun Yat-Sen's brother-in-law. Mei-ling was a daughter of the richest and most influential family in China, the Soongs. The Soongs had power and connections in Shanghai, just 200 miles down the Yangtze River from Nanjing, on the coast. Shanghai was a prosperous and bustling port city, the largest city in China and the fifth-largest in the world. The Nanjing Decade was a golden age for Shanghai. It was the trade center of East Asia, dominated by the foreign concessions in the heart of the city, but also home to wealthy Chinese merchants and businesses, its skyline defined by more skyscrapers than you'd see most places outside New York City. Twenty thousand anti-Communist Russians had fled here after the Civil War; Shanghai was one of the few places that would take them. In the 1930s, tens of thousands of European Jews would also flee here.

Shanghai was called the Paris of the Orient and the city attracted the rich and famous from Europe and North America, who flocked to sample its glitzy department stores, theatres, dance halls, and nightclubs, not to mention its equally well-known opium dens, gambling halls, and bordellos.

Shanghai was as famous for its vice and its criminal gangs as it was for its wealth and glitz. It was said back then that if God allowed Shanghai to exist, then he owed Sodom and Gomorrah an apology. There was a lot of money sloshing around Shanghai in those days, licit and illicit, and the Soongs were getting a taste of all of it. That meant Chiang was getting a taste of all of it, and so were his soldiers. If Chiang's government operated on nepotism, payoffs, bribes, family connections and underworld gangs, just like Shanghai did, well, that seems inevitable.

[music: "Nanjing Decade"]

Out there, in the remote rural regions of China, were the Communists, who in Chiang's view were a greater threat than the warlords and the Japanese put together. Chiang had worked with the Communists, accepted their support, then betrayed and slaughtered them. There was no turning back after that.

You'll recall that Stalin and the Communist International had declared the time had come for Communist revolution in China. The most committed Communists took them at their word and

launched the revolution, only to be smacked down hard by Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang.

Just as the Nationalists had been torn over questions of whether or not to ally with the Communists and whether to prioritize economic or military development, the Communists were having their own internal debates. The orthodox Communist leadership in the Soviet Union kept insisting that Communist revolution would emerge from the urban proletariat. So had taught Marx. And so Lenin had demonstrated. Many Chinese Communists tried, but the urban proletariat in China was but a tiny fraction of the population, and they tended to be nationalists, both in the small-n and large-N senses of the word. Also, much of the Communist effort to organize factory workers was based in Shanghai, because that was China's largest and most industrialized city, the Petrograd of China, you might say. But Shanghai was also Chiang Kai-shek's back yard and piggybank, and it was riddled with Kuomintang spies, who made it difficult to operate there.

In contrast, other Communist leaders, like Mao Zedong, found the rural peasants much more agreeable. The population of China was mostly rural peasants, and they were fed up with all the wars and revolutions and coups and political squabbling that had achieved nothing while making the life of the peasants even worse. China's farmers were quite sick of being the involuntary supply depots for warlord armies that were scarcely more than bandit gangs. All this talk about freedom and democracy and modernization seemed to them merely euphemisms for warlord rule. The fact that Chiang and his government had accepted the so-called submission of the warlords that left those bandits in control of most of the country was all the proof they needed that Chiang was not their savior.

Perhaps this Mao was. Mao had attempted an unsuccessful peasant revolt, been imprisoned, bribed his way out, and retreated to the rural Jinggang mountain region where he and a former Kuomintang military commander named Zhu De worked together to organize the local rural folk and build a Communist Party army. Zhu would be its military commander, Mao its political commissar, along the model of the Red Army. Soldiers would be trained not only in combat but in politics, taught that their goal was not merely to unite China, but to remake it.

Mao and Zhu had also learned from the rural peasants' hatred of the warlords. The Red Army of China would not and could not prey on the people as the warlord armies did and then move on. A People's Army needed to be disciplined and respectful. This Army would have to live in the country, among the rural people, for years. It would be reliant on the peasants to provide both support and intelligence on the movements of their enemies. So they strove to build an army of "sons and brothers," as they put it. The People's Army would respect civilians. It would not harass women. It would pay for the supplies it needed. The Army funded itself by confiscating the wealth of rural landlords and distributing their lands to the landless. It would oppose the rich and the criminal element and cultivate the support of the poor but honest farmers who were the backbone of the rural Chinese economy.

Between the years 1930 and 1934, the Nanjing government's army would conduct five campaigns against Communist forces in the mountains, forces that were inevitably referred to as "bandits" by Chiang and the Kuomintang. Mao and Zhu knew full well the Nationalist army was better trained and better equipped, so their army relied on guerilla tactics to stay ahead of their opponents. They would avoid direct combat and try to lure enemy units deep into remote places in the mountains, where they could be cut off and destroyed. A network of informants among the farmers kept them apprised of enemy movements.

The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, living and working underground in Shanghai, people like General Secretary Wang Ming and Zhou Enlai, criticized Mao and Zhu for their deviant ideology, right up until 1932, the year when the Kuomintang secret police closed in and the Communists had to flee the city. They went off to the mountains and joined up with Mao Zedong, where they took control of the Army and the rural enclave Mao and Zhu had built.

By that time, 1932, the Nationalists had made three attempts to clear the Communists out of the mountains. The first two had relied on warlord soldiers, who were poorly motivated and not up to the job. As we've seen before, warlord armies are very good at bullying civilians, but when they have to face actual combat against opponents armed with actual weapons, they tend to cut and run.

Chiang's third campaign against the Communists had to be cut short, owing to the crisis in Manchuria. We'll get into that a little later. By the fourth campaign, in 1933, Zhou Enlai was now in charge of the Communist forces and he directed an able defense that held the Nationalists at bay.

Then came the fifth campaign, which began in September 1933. The Nationalists had learned from their earlier failures. This time, the army moved slowly and deliberately, clearing Communists out of a region and securing it thoroughly before moving on. They would no longer be tempted into rash advances into the mountains. The Communists had no choice but to make a strategic withdrawal. This withdrawal would become the defining moment in the history of the Communist Party of China and the most storied event in modern Chinese history. It would cover 8,000 miles, from central China west into Yunnan and the foothills of the Himalayas, then turn north through Sichuan and on to Yan'an, in the province of Shanxi, the same province to which the Dowager Empress had fled to avoid the Eight Power coalition during the Boxer Uprising. It would take a year, cost the Communists 90% of their force to death and desertion, and be known forever after as the Long March.

The original force conducting the Long March numbered about 80,000. Within three months, it was down to 30,000. The Party leadership met along the way to discuss their situation and how it had gotten so dire. The urban, pro-Soviet Communists came under criticism, and here is when Mao and Zhu, now supported by Zhou Enlai, rose to become members of the Politburo and take leadership positions in the Party.

Nationalist forces pursued them every step of the way. Chiang took advantage of the movement of his troops through territory normally controlled by the warlords to show the flag and wrest more concessions from them. The warlord forces themselves were content to allow first the Communists then the government forces through their territory and just hoped they would both go away.

Mao and the Communist leadership spent their days being carried along the March in sedan chairs while they slept. They spent nights monitoring radio communications, receiving intelligence from sympathetic civilians and planning the next day's movements. Everyone suffered from hunger and privation. Mao and his wife had to leave their two-year-old son behind in the Jinggang Mountains when they fled the Nationalist attacks. Mrs. Mao gave birth to a daughter along the way, who was left behind with a local peasant family. The Maos lost contact with both of these two children and never saw either of them again. The Long March was the baptism of fire for Mao and the Party. By the time it was over, Mao was the Party's unquestioned leader, and for the rest of the twentieth century, Party leadership would be drawn almost exclusively from the comrades who had fought together, starved together, and stuck together during the Long March.

[music: "Wa Ha Ha"]

All the way back in episodes 31-36, we talked about the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, which was a struggle between Russia and Japan over control of Manchuria, which is actually, you know, part of China, not Russia or Japan. The Russians and the Japanese were fighting over "spheres of influence," as diplomats and historians like to say. When the war ended, the Japanese were in control of the tip of the Liaodong Peninsula, including Port Arthur, formerly the home of the Russian Navy's Pacific Squadron. The peninsula lies south of Manchuria and west of Korea, which was controlled by Japan at this time. Besides the tip of the peninsula, which is called Guandong, the Japanese controlled a strategic railroad, the South Manchurian Railway, that ran north from Port Arthur to Mukden and it was the coal and iron mines along this railroad that provided these valuable commodities to resource-starved Japan.

Japan kept an army garrison at Guandong, called the Guandong Garrison. After the Great War, it was upgraded to the Guandong Army. You might also find it referred to in the history books as the Kwantung Army, and I guess that's what I'm going to call it for the next few episodes. About 100,000 strong, this force bore the heavy responsibility of protecting Japan's hard-won control of this region. After Japan was forced to cede the Shandong Peninsula back to China in 1922, Guandong became even more important for its resources, its port, and its strategic location, essentially Japan's western defense line.

The Kwantung Army became the most important element of the Japanese Army, and the most prestigious posting for a Japanese Army officer. We saw how the Japanese felt rebuffed by their Western allies at the Paris Peace Conference, episode 199. There were two schools of thought

among the elites of Japan regarding the future of the nation. One was that Japan should seek its place in the sun as a Great Power, alongside nations like France and Britain and the United States. The shabby treatment Japan received in Paris discredited that view, which was most frequently heard among liberal politicians.

The other view was that Japan needed to go it alone. In this view, the other Great Powers respected only strength; therefore, Japan needed more than anything else to be strong. Because Japan was a land lacking in natural resources, Japan would need to follow the lead of Western nations like Britain and France and develop a network of colonial holdings, which would provide Japan with the imports it needed to keep its economy growing and support a military that could go toe-to-toe with any of the other Great Powers and maintain Japan's position as the hegemon of East Asia and the western Pacific.

This second view was particularly popular among the right wing, and especially in the military. The Kwantung Army was particularly right wing and particularly drawn to this militarist interpretation of Japan's destiny. To them, the civilian government in Tokyo was foolish, ineffective, and corrupt. Japan was not secure, its future was uncertain, and all the politicians ever did about it was bicker.

The Japanese archipelago has a land area about 20% larger than the land area of the British Isles, though much of Japan's land is rugged and mountainous and therefore less productive. Its population at this time was almost double that of the British Isles, over 80 million and rising rapidly. Japan needed room to grow. It needed agricultural land to feed its people. It needed resources.

The officers of the Kwantung Army saw what they believed was the solution to Japan's woes, and it lay literally in their own back yard: the Chinese province of Manchuria. Manchuria had natural resources, it had agricultural land, and it was under populated. It was everything Japan could wish for.

But there were two problems with this potential solution. The Chinese and the Russians.

The Japanese had already made a bid to take control of eastern Siberia during the Russian Civil War, landing some 70,000 soldiers in Vladivostok. But the Russians hadn't liked it, the Allies hadn't liked it, and the move was controversial domestically. The Japanese public had wanted above all else an end to the war, and so the Japanese government was forced to back down, although bear in mind that the last Japanese soldier didn't leave Vladivostok until October 1922.

But the Russians had been busy fighting their own civil war, and afterward in picking up the pieces, so the Japanese felt confident that Russia would be no threat to their position in Manchuria or to the Home Islands for years to come.

In China, this was the warlord era, so China's national government, such as it was, had little or nothing to say about Japan's role in Manchuria. The one Chinese person who did matter was the 45-year-old Zhang Zuolin. Zhang had been a military officer in Manchuria during the 1911 Revolution, during which he and his soldiers opposed those in Manchuria who wanted to take advantage of the Revolution to declare Manchurian independence. For his support of Chinese unity, he was rewarded with a promotion. When Yuan Shikai seized control of the young Republic of China, Zhang backed him, which earned him another promotion.

He became both the civilian governor and the military commander in Manchuria, so after Yuan died and the Warlord Era began, Zhang was perfectly positioned to become the warlord of Manchuria, which he did. Manchuria was a large province and geographically remote from most of the other warlords, so Zhang's power went uncontested. He ruled the region wisely, and Manchuria prospered. So did Zhang, who became enormously wealthy and lived in a cozy chateau, with his five wives.

But that wasn't enough for Zhang, who had dreams of using his relatively large and well equipped military to take Beijing, the capital, which was not so far away. As we already saw, whichever warlord happened to control Beijing controlled what passed for the central government of China, which held little power but did hold the perk of being the internationally recognized government of the nation, allowing whichever warlord controlled it to cut favorable deals with the international community.

In the decade of the 1920s, Zhang made three attempts to take control of Beijing, in 1922, 1924, and 1926. The first two failed. After the 1924 attempt, the warlord Feng Yuxiang defeated Zhang and his other rivals and *he* took control of the city. We met Feng before. He was the warlord who became a Methodist, was known as the Christian General, and he would soon ally with fellow Methodist Chiang Kai-Shek. When Feng took control of Beijing, he chose to nullify the agreement that had been in place since 1911, the one which allowed the former Emperor to remain in the Forbidden City and enjoy the title and privileges of Emperor, only without any, you know, power.

I guess we should get caught up on the story of the boy-Emperor, usually known as Pu Yi. Recall that he had been crowned Emperor in 1908 at the age of two—he cried at his coronation—and abdicated in 1911, at the age of five. Actually his father, the Prince Regent, abdicated in his name. But he continued to enjoy the life of an Emperor, if “enjoy” is the right word. He was surrounded by eunuch slaves who took care of everything for him. They fed him, dressed him, opened doors for him, blew on his hot soup for him. He never wore the same clothes twice; that was considered beneath an Emperor's dignity. He never learned how to do such simple tasks as brush his own teeth or tie his own shoelaces.

The result of his upbringing was what you would expect. He became a spoiled brat and a monster, who regularly ordered his slaves flogged just for his own entertainment. In 1917, when



he was eleven and the Warlord Era was just beginning, the warlord then controlling the capital declared the Emperor restored, which proved to be such a hugely unpopular move that the declaration was rescinded in about a week and a half.

In 1919, after the Great War ended, the Emperor was just becoming a teenager, and it occurred to some in the Beijing government that the titular Emperor was a potentially useful figurehead who might come in handy for some ambitious warlord. But it also occurred to them that the Emperor would be of even greater use if he were something more than a spoiled child, so a tutor was brought in to help educate him in his Imperial responsibilities. The tutor selected was a Scotsman named Reginald Johnston.

Johnston became the Emperor's first real human relationship. He was much more than a tutor to the boy; he was a father figure, a role model, and his only friend and companion. It was Johnston who figured out that Pu Yi couldn't see properly, and insisted that he be given glasses, over the objections of the Imperial Court, who believed glasses would be undignified for an Emperor. He introduced the boy to such modern wonders as bicycles, telephones, and moving pictures. He taught the Emperor English and world history and attempted to give him a picture of what was going on beyond the walls of the Forbidden City. When the May Fourth protests broke out that year, following the decision of the Paris Peace Conference to award the German concessions in China to Japan, episode 200, it was Johnston who explained to the Emperor what the commotion was about, astonishing the boy, who had difficulty understanding that the common people of his realm had concerns that went beyond their Emperor and his welfare.

Johnston was the only person who could tell the Emperor what to do and make it stick, so the slaves prevailed upon him to persuade the Emperor to be kinder to them. Johnston did so, although he was appalled by the corruption in the Imperial Household. The eunuch slaves were busily enriching themselves by selling off priceless Imperial treasures.

The Emperor liked Johnston, and through him, came to like and admire the Western world generally and the British in particular. As he grew older, he began to speak of leaving the Forbidden City and studying at Oxford University, where Johnston had studied. It was a worthy goal, but alas, an unrealistic one.

In 1922, the Imperial family decided the now-16-year-old Emperor should be married. They showed him pictures of potential brides. He picked one, and the wedding was set. Only, the boy got cold feet and decided to run away to England. This plan failed when Johnston refused to call him a taxi and the boy was too afraid to venture outside the Forbidden City alone. So the Emperor went ahead with the wedding. He met his wife for the first time in their bedroom on the wedding night; there he also met for the first time his second wife, whom he had also married in the same ceremony. He looked both of them over and fled the room.

It seems no one had ever instructed the Emperor in the art of love. Moreover, from our 21<sup>st</sup>-century perspective, it also seems quite likely the Emperor was gay. He married five women in

his life, but he sired no children and there is no convincing evidence he consummated any of these relationships, though there is plenty of evidence he took young men as lovers. (This is a facet of his life that didn't make the movie.)

Two years into his marriages, in 1924, Feng Yuxiang, the Christian General, seized control of Beijing. Feng was no monarchist and he had noted how unpopular the Emperor was, so he declared the arrangement under which the Emperor kept his title and the Forbidden Palace cancelled. Pu Yi could keep his wealth, but not his title, his palace, or his slaves. The eunuch slaves were left destitute, although some of them had been making a good living on the side over the past decade selling off palace treasures. The now former Emperor was given just three hours to vacate the palace where he had lived his entire life.

The Anglophile Emperor wanted to flee to the British Embassy, but Reginald Johnston urged him to go instead to the Japanese Embassy. Johnston reasoned that Britain was merely a constitutional monarchy, while Japan still revered its divine emperor as *tenshi*, or "son of Heaven," just like the Chinese do, or did, and he felt only the Japanese government would treat the Emperor properly.

The Emperor lived four months in the Japanese Embassy in Beijing. This strained relations with China, and the Japanese suggested he move to Tianjin, the port city just a hundred kilometers to the southeast. Like Shanghai, Tianjin hosted numerous foreign communities in their foreign concessions. Pu Yi settled in there, with his family and a large collection of dogs, and became a regular in the foreign social scene in Tianjin, partying with rich British and French and Japanese.

Four years later, in 1928, came Chiang Kai-shek and the Northern Expedition, which I told you about in episode 234. If you recall, I ended that story by saying that the remaining warlords submitted to the Kuomintang, putting the Nationalists in control of the whole country. And I told you that the last warlord to submit was the one who controlled Manchuria.

That would not be Zhang Zuolin, the quite wealthy and successful ruler of Manchuria, and the warlord who had seized Beijing in 1926, which meant for the past two years he was effectively the national government, such as it was. After a few defeats at the hands of Chiang's Nationalist Army, Zhang decided discretion was the better part of valor and withdrew back to his home base in Manchuria.

Zhang's failure to prevent Chiang from taking Beijing infuriated the Japanese military commanders of the Kwangtung Army. Zhang and the Japanese had managed to maintain a respectful, if not exactly cordial, relationship for these past ten years, but the Japanese well remembered that Chiang had been trained in the Soviet Union and until recently had had Communist support and they saw Chiang as a Russian puppet. And Russia was their strategic rival in the region.

Someone decided that Zhang had to go. This decision was not made in Tokyo. It was not even made at Army headquarters in Port Arthur, but among some lower ranking, right wing, officers in the Kwangtung Army. As the train bringing General Zhang home from Beijing passed over a bridge near Huanggutun, just outside Mukden, a Japanese officer set off a bomb on the bridge, mortally wounding the general, who died a few hours later. He was 53 years old.

The Japanese had a couple of close allies among Zhang's senior commanders and expected one of them to take control over Manchuria, but were caught off guard when control over the region fell instead to the late general's eldest son, 27-year-old Zhang Xueliang. At first this didn't seem to be a serious problem. The younger Zhang was known primarily as a skirt-chaser and a heavy opium user, so the Japanese military commanders expected he would be easy enough to manipulate.

They were wrong. Within days of his father's death, Zhang the younger reached an armistice agreement with Chiang Kai-shek and proclaimed his loyalty to the Nationalist government in Nanjing. The Japanese lobbied Zhang to declare Manchurian independence instead, but he refused. In the last days of 1928, the old government's flags were lowered for the last time, and Manchuria began flying the new flag of the Republic of China. This is the moment I was referring to back in episode 234, when I said the last warlord, in Manchuria, submitted to the Nationalist government.

Zhang cemented his control over Manchuria and his patriotic bona fides a few days later when he had two of his father's generals executed. These were the pair who were close allies of the Japanese.

So Zhang became a patriotic hero and an ardent supporter of Chiang's government, even to the point of going to war with other warlords in defense of the government in Nanjing. In gratitude, Chiang's government allowed Zhang to rule Manchuria as he pleased. But just a few months later, Zhang pushed his authority too far when he tried to take on the Russians.

I'll remind you at this point that in addition to that Japanese-controlled South Manchurian Railway, Manchuria also hosted a Russian-controlled Chinese Eastern Railway that ran east-west across Manchuria. It was useful to the Russians as an alternative route to Vladivostok, cutting hundreds of miles off the route around Manchuria taken by the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

In the heady days following the October Revolution, the new Russian government promised the Chinese it would voluntarily surrender all the unjust concessions the old imperialists had foisted upon China. Over the decade that followed though, the Soviets began to hedge on the Chinese Eastern Railway, which was too valuable to just give away. Perhaps it should be run jointly by China and Russia, they suggested, with management positions to be given to those who were most competent to operate the railroad.

The unsurprising corollary to this argument was that most of the time, the person best suited to a management position on the railway was a Russian. By 1929, Zhang had had quite enough of this. His troops forcibly removed and arrested Russian officials and took control over the railway.

The Soviet government in Moscow responded by mobilizing the Red Army. Stalin was reluctant at first to order troops into Manchuria, out of fear of the Japanese response. But the Japanese government, not at all happy with Zhang themselves, signaled to the Soviet government that they would accept Soviet military intervention in Manchuria, so long as it was limited to securing the railroad corridor. The Red Army moved in, smoothly and professionally, in stark contrast to Zhang's army who, being warlord soldiers, had to stop at every town and village along their way to pillage it before moving on. The Russians won a quick and decisive victory; by the end of 1929, the Chinese government was forced to accept Russian control over the railway.

The efficiency and success of the Red Army made the rest of the world sit up and take note. This was the first Soviet military action since the Civil War. Many foreigners had harbored serious doubts about the competence of the Soviet military. Those doubts were now gone; the Red Army was clearly a world-class military.

The Japanese also took notice of this, just as they took notice that the Russians were clearly not ready to let go of their interest in Manchuria. They also took note of how badly the Chinese military in Manchuria had performed in actual combat. They put out feelers to the deposed Chinese Emperor in Tianjin. Would the Manchu Emperor be interested in returning to his native land and reigning there? That was where his distinguished ancestors had originated, and from there their armies had moved southward and conquered all of China. Perhaps Pu Yi could begin in Manchuria and duplicate the feats of his ancestors. The Japanese military stood ready to assist.

Well, who could say no to an offer like that? Certainly not Pu Yi. He said yes.

But that is a story for another episode. We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Karlis and Tomislav for their kind donations, and thank you to Jimmy for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Karlis and Tomislav and Jimmy help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And it's that time of year again. The holidays are upon us, so allow me to remind you that donations and patronages to *The History of the Twentieth Century* make the perfect holiday gift—for me. No need to spend your valuable time shopping, no worries over whether it's the right size or the right color, and you can feel absolutely confident that it will never be returned. Another giving option is a rating—that's where you click on the stars—or a review—when you write actual words—at the iTunes store, which is still where your rating and review carry the most weight, or wherever podcasts are available for download. And thanks again to everyone who has already supported the podcast, by any or all of these means. You help keep me going, and help other listeners find the podcast.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century* as we shift focus to Japan. From the period of 1922, when Japan pulled out of Siberia, to 1929, when it began meddling in a big way in Manchuria, the Japanese were relatively disengaged from affairs in China, because they had troubles enough at home. We'll look into those troubles, and the revived Japanese interest in Manchuria next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Pu Yi's first wife, Wanrong, the titular Empress of China, was bored and miserable during their stay in Tianjin. She wanted to go out partying every night, like her husband, but he and his courtiers imposed traditional Imperial standards on her. It was deemed unseemly for an Empress to go dancing or wear Western clothes or play tennis or listen to jazz records or do any of the things she longed to do.

A regular visitor to the Emperor in Tianjin was his cousin, a Qing princess who had been given up for adoption to a Japanese family after the Revolution of 1911. She is usually known by her Japanese name, Kawashima Yoshiko. She was sexually abused by her adopted father in childhood, and grew up to adopt a wild lifestyle that involved moving regularly between Tokyo, Shanghai, and Tianjin. She had many lovers, both men and women, and preferred to wear men's clothes and had a fondness for leather. She was perhaps what we today would call a trans man.

The Emperor regarded her as part of the Imperial family and she was always welcome to his home in Tianjin. She was also working for Japanese intelligence and served as their go-between in negotiations with the Emperor. Later in her career, she would command a counterinsurgency force that would engage anti-Japanese guerillas in Manchuria.

She has been called “an urbane leather-clad cross-dressing spy princess.” She has also been called “the Eastern Mata Hari.” She also shared Mata Hari's fate when she was tried for treason by the Republic of China in 1947 and executed in 1948, at the age of 40.

[music: Closing Theme]