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ARTICLE

Reconsidering 1911: Lessons of a sudden revolution

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The year 1911 launched China on a century of revolution and ended one of the most successful dynasties in Chinese history, the Qing. The New Policy reforms of the late Qing were remarkably successful in transforming China into a modern state. They failed only at the end, because of the ill-advised power-centralizing policies of the regent Zaifeng. Zaifeng's policies focused opposition on the Manchu ruling family and created the conditions for a sudden revolution in 1911. Understanding the 1911 Revolution requires more focus on the revolutionary milieu of 1911 that brought China to its tipping point. As a sudden revolution, China in 1911 is more similar to France in 1789, Russia in 1917, or Egypt in 2011 than it is to the subsequent revolutions of the Nationalist and Communist parties. Our analysis requires more attention to all the political forces that allied to overturn Manchu rule but could not maintain that unity to establish effective republican institutions.

Keywords: 1911 Revolution; sudden revolution; tipping point; anti-Manchuism

In this centennial year, it is fitting to reconsider the meaning and significance of the 1911 Revolution. We can start by looking both forward and backward from the year 1911. Looking forward from 1911, we see the beginning of the long series of revolutions that dominated the history of twentieth century China.[1] Because the 1911 Revolution resulted in internal divisions, warlordism, and further imperialist encroachments (especially by Japan), by the May Fourth era many Chinese intellectuals concluded that the revolution had failed because it had not been thorough enough.[2] There ensued the successive revolutions that have punctuated modern Chinese history: the National Revolution of the Kuomintang, the Communist Revolution, and finally the Cultural Revolution. Each sought to overcome the disappointment of the previous revolution by making it more thoroughgoing, more comprehensive, and more penetrating into the lives of individual Chinese. It was only with the Cultural Revolution that the Chinese leadership and the Chinese people decided that this final revolution to touch people's souls was surely thorough enough, and China bid farewell to revolution and pursued a policy of reform.

Looking backward from 1911, most have stressed the revolution's accomplishment in ending 2000 years of imperial rule. Here I would like to concentrate on the significance of

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[1] Mary Wright's seminal volume on the 1911 Revolution was entitled *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900–1913* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

[2] Luo Zhitian, *Jindai dushuren de sixiang shijie yu zhixue quxiang* [The Mental World and Intellectual Choices of Modern Scholars] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2009), 9, 104–141.

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the end to the impressive 270-year rule of the Qing dynasty. In 1911, the Qing was condemned as weak, corrupt, and incompetent. Viewed from the present, however, the achievements of China's Manchu rulers look much more impressive. In China, the massive Qing History Project and abroad the scholarship of the New Qing History have given us a new appreciation of the achievements of the Qing. Especially under the three extraordinary early Qing emperors, Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong, China enjoyed unprecedented peace and prosperity. The population doubled in these years, and had almost tripled by the mid-nineteenth century, aided in part by an efficient system of granaries and national attention to crop yields and famine relief.[3] The imperial government ran a budget surplus through much of the eighteenth century, despite fixing taxes at an extraordinarily low rate (by international standards).[4] The provinces that have become such a fundamental feature of modern Chinese governance were essentially a Qing creation.[5] Finally, it was under the Manchus that China established its present borders, successfully incorporating Mongolia, Tibet, and the Muslim regions of Xinjiang into the empire.[6]

Much of the nineteenth century was, of course, marked by a series of humiliating defeats at the hands of Western and Japanese imperialism. But the New Policy (*xinzheng*) reforms following the Boxer fiasco and the occupation of the capital by the International Expeditionary Force showed that the Qing state was not without imagination, vitality, and the capacity to reform itself. As the much vaunted examination system proved incapable of fostering the sort of talent required by the new age of imperial conquest and commercial competition (*shangzhan*), it was abolished in favor of a new school system closely modeled on the successful educational reforms of Japan. The army that had proved so ineffective in protecting the country was retrained or replaced by the New Army with modern Western arms and drill; and police forces were organized to better preserve domestic order – all, once again, with significant advice from Japan. Industry was promoted, initially through the officially supervised and merchant managed (*guandu shangban*) enterprises and later with private enterprise encouraged by the new Chambers of Commerce; mineral rights were protected in the Rights Recovery Movement; railways were built with both Chinese and foreign capital; and, as a result of all this, China experienced in its coastal cities the first burst of a small-scale industrial revolution.[7]

Nor were these reforms restricted to growing the economy and increasing the power of the state. The Qing court also began tentative steps to open up the political system to broader participation by the educated elite. The old proscriptions on public discourse were eliminated, and in response a vibrant press arose with an almost uniformly progressive and

[3] Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959); Pierre-Etienne Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine in Eighteenth-Century China,* trans. Elborg Forster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Pierre-Etienne Will, R. Bin Wong, and James Lee, *Nourish the People: The State Civilian Granary System in China, 1650–1850* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1991).

[4] Li Huaiyin, ''Fiscal Cycles and the Low-Equilibrium Trap under the Qing,'' (paper presented at the Association for Asian Studies annual meeting, Honolulu, Hawaii, 31 March–3 April, 2011).

[5] R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644–1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

[6] Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

[7] Recent Chinese scholarship on the New Policies period has so far exceeded past efforts abroad that I would only mention one general work in English, stressing the Japanese connection: Douglas R. Reynolds, *China: 1898–1912—The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, 1993).

reformist tint.[8] Most importantly, after Japan's victory in the Russo–Japanese War – a contest that was interpreted as a victory of constitutionalism over autocracy – the Qing embarked on an ambitious program of constitutional reforms that began with missions to study models of constitutional monarchy abroad, and ended with the election of provincial assemblies (Ziyiju) and the organization of the National Assembly (Zizhengyuan) in Beijing. Though it was long fashionable to follow the revolutionary rhetoric that characterized these reforms as phony constitutionalism or the last gasp of a dying dynasty, most scholars now recognize that the New Policy reforms were real, they truly did transform China, and in many ways they laid the foundations for the modern Chinese state.[9] We should not take for granted that they were destined to fail.

The most fundamental question that the serious historian faces is why? If, as I have suggested, 1911 started China on its tumultuous path of revolution, we must ask why this revolution occurred. If, furthermore, the Qing was as successful and the New Policy reforms as effective as I have argued, how did the 1911 Revolution succeed in overthrowing Manchu rule and establishing the Republic of China? I first addressed these questions 35 years ago in *Reform and Revolution in China*, and in many respects my views are unchanged. I continue to believe that Sun Yat-sen and the Tongmenghui were minor factors in causing the revolution. Sun Yat-sen was of course abroad at the time, and feuding with the other revolutionary leaders.[10] There is no question that revolutionaries within the Hubei army sparked the Wuchang Uprising, but those revolutionaries had minimal connections to the Tongmenghui leadership.[11] More importantly, the spark provided by their mutiny would not have developed into the full-scale prairie fire of revolution if the relatively weak and isolated revolutionary parties had not quickly attracted support from other important actors – in this case New Army officers like Li Yuanhong and constitutionalist provincial assembly leaders like Tang Hualong. It was New Army and constitutionalist support that caused the revolution to spread beyond Hubei, so that within two months, 10 provinces had declared their independence of the Qing and the Manchu dynasty's fate was sealed.

To understand why this happened, it is important to distinguish between two fundamentally different types of revolution. Some revolutionary struggles are long and protracted, as was the case with the Chinese Communist revolution (and also the Nationalist Revolution) or the Vietnamese revolution. In these cases a well-organized and disciplined revolutionary party with its own army fought for years against a number of foes, domestic and foreign,

[8] Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: "Shibao" and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China?: Power, Identity and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872–1912* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); Tang Haijiang, *Qingmo zhenglun baokan yu minzhong dongyuan: yizhong zhengzhi wenhua de shijiao* [Late Qing Political Journals and Popular Mobilization: A Political Culture Perspective] (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2007).

[9] Xu Shuang, *Jiu wangchao yu xin zhidu: Qingmo lixian gaige jishi (1901–1911)* [Old Dynasty and New System: A History of Constitutional Reform in Late Ch'ing (1901–1911)] (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 2009).

[10] Kit Siong Liew, *Struggle for Democracy: Sung Chiao-jen and the 1911 Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971); Hsueh Chün-tu, *Huang Xing and the Chinese Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961). Recently I was struck by a letter of Liang Qichao, written shortly after the Wuchang Uprising on 29 October 1911, in which he says: ''Sun [Yat-sen] and Huang [Xing] have long been at odds. Huang is courageous and committed to action, while Sun is crafty and a dreamer. Huang's group despises him. Last year they at one point decided to remove Sun.'' See Ding Wenjiang and Zhao Fengtian, *Liang Rengong xiansheng nianpu changbian (chugao)* [Chronological Biography of Liang Qichao (draft)] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 287.

[11] The best recent Chinese scholarship seems to support this view. See Feng Tianyu and Zhang Duqin, *Xinhai shouyi shi* [A History of the 1911 Uprising] (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 2011), 198–212.

before it achieved victory. There was no clear revolutionary moment when the old regime collapsed. It was, instead, conquered by sustained military conflict. Compare this to the French Revolution of 1789, or to Russia in 1917, or indeed to Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 – where the fall of the old regime was quite sudden and the revolutionary coalition was composed of a variety of different elements rather than a single-party army. In this latter type of sudden revolution, the revolutionary moment (or revolutionary milieu) is critical. At some point, confidence in the old regime becomes so fragile and the confluence of opposition forces so powerful that the country reaches a tipping point[12] and the old structures of state power crumble and fall. In China, this happened in the autumn of 1911.

In *Reform and Revolution in China*, I noted that prior to 1911, the membership of the revolutionary organizations in Hubei was very small. Despite years of organizing, the largest Hubei revolutionary organizations in 1910 listed only some 240 members; but by the fall of 1911, numerous reports put the number of revolutionaries (many in the army) between 3000 and 5000.[13] Clearly something fundamental had happened during the course of 1911 to create a revolutionary situation in Hubei. I pointed to a number of factors that seemed important to me. There was a general economic recession, set off by bank failures in Shanghai in 1910 and exacerbated by flooding along the Yangtze in 1911. The stalled economy affected government revenues, and soldiers in Hubei were often unpaid, with predictable effects on their morale. The New Policy reforms required new taxes, always unpopular, and reforms were slow to produce visible results, leading to widespread discontent and such violent outbreaks as the Changsha rice riot of 1910. Inflation in copper cash prices was pronounced and unpopular. Then in the spring of 1911 came railway nationalization and financing from foreign loans, and the notorious Princes' Cabinet (Huangzu neige) along with the flood of negative reaction that ensued. My earlier research focused on Hunan and Hubei, but the rapid, successive provincial declarations of independence following the Wuchang Uprising indicate that the crisis of confidence in the Qing affected most of the country. To understand why, research on the 1911 Revolution needs a different model. Past research has focused too much on Sun Yat-sen and the series of small uprisings that his revolutionary parties sparked, trying to make the 1911 Revolution fit the model of protracted revolution that the Nationalist and Communist parties would later follow to victory. But the 1911 Revolution was of a different type; it was a sudden revolution, and it requires a different explanatory framework.

One factor that I surely underestimated in *Reform and Revolution* was anti-Manchu sentiment, which I called "a new panacea. . . the only issue [that] could unite all the different strains of discontent."[14] While I would not dispute that conclusion, it still pays insufficient attention to the sources, functions, and significance of anti-Manchuism. Edward Rhoads' prize-winning book *Manchus and Han* has called important attention to the role of Manchu rule and ethnic privilege in the period leading up to the revolution.[15] Together with scholarship by the New Qing History school, Rhoads' work forces us to reconsider the nature of Manchu rule. The books of Pamela Crossley, Mark Elliott, Evelyn Rawski, and Michael Chang stress the efforts of Qing rulers to maintain a distinct Manchu identity and distinguish themselves from the Han majority through membership in the banner system and the legal

[12] Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002).
[13] Joseph W. Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China: The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 171.
[14] Ibid., 168.
[15] Edward J.M. Rhoads, *Manchus & Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861–1928* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

privileges and financial stipends that came with it, separate residence in Manchu garrisons (sometimes called Manchu apartheid), the promotion of Manchu language and the preservation of the martial skills of horseback riding and archery, seasonal hunting, summer residence beyond the Great Wall, imperial touring with its impressive martial displays, distinct styles of dress, the prohibition of foot binding among Manchu women, and of intermarriage between Manchus and Han.[16]

All of this fine scholarship has added much to our understanding of Qing rule, but most of it focuses on the seventeenth and eighteenth century. As is well known, by the end of the Qing, Manchus were overwhelmingly speaking Chinese; their military skills had decayed, and they no longer rode and shot arrows from horseback; the emperors no longer hunted at the summer retreat in Chengde or went on imperial tours; and in this respect most of the markers of ethnic identity had disappeared. Indeed, progressive Manchus in the overseas journal *Great Unity* (Datongbao) argued that with the same language, customs, and religion, Manchus and Han were already one people (*minzu*).[17] It is therefore something of a puzzle to explain the rise of racist anti-Manchu sentiment, and in the end what would be called racial revolution (*zhongzu geming*), at precisely the point when ethnic differences were slowly disappearing.

This is the problem that Rhoads addresses in his book, and much of his answer consists of arguing that at the end of the Qing, the Manchus were not so much a distinct ethnicity as an occupational caste.[18] It was the political privilege represented by Manchu posts (*Manque*), the balancing of Manchu and Han officials at the top of the metropolitan bureaucracy, and the continued Manchu domination of the Grand Council that most rankled Han elites at the end of the dynasty. The entire issue of anti-Manchu sentiment is difficult for historians to assess. On the one hand, until the last years of the dynasty, ethnicity was a forbidden topic in the official documents that form the most important records upon which historians rely.[19] One of the functions of Qianlong's vast *Four Treasuries* (Siku quanshu) project was to purge the Chinese literary tradition of disparaging ethnic references to the Manchus.[20] On the other hand, revolutionaries were so active in promoting anti-Manchu sentiment in the last decade of the dynasty that it is difficult to determine how much they were gaining support from pre-existing resentment of the Manchus and how much they were, through their propaganda, giving an ethnic focus to a general disenchantment with the ruling dynasty. That is, to what degree were the revolutionaries *creating* anti-Manchu sentiment as much as *appealing to* it?

Both the example of the Taiping Rebellion and the widespread influence of such secret societies as the Triads (Sandian hui or Tiandi hui) in south China suggest that anti-Manchu sentiment was more common there than in the North – and this is of course consistent with

[16] The most important and representative books of the New Qing History are Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1999); and Michael G. Chang, *A Court on Horseback: Imperial Touring and the Construction of Ethno–Dynastic Hegemony in Qing China, 1680–1785* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[17] One of the clearest statements of this position is in Wu Zesheng, "*Man-Han wenti"* [The Manchu–Han Problem], *Datong bao*, no. 1 (June 25, 1907), Taipei reprint edition, 1985, 57–106.

[18] Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 290–91.

[19] Elliott, *Manchu Way*, xv. Much of Elliott's argument is that ethnic discourse *does* exist in the Manchu documents, which makes them so essential to the New Qing History (pp. xv, 169).

[20] R. Kent Guy, *The Emperor's Four Treasuries: Scholars and the State in the Late Ch'ien-lung Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, 1987), 157–200.

the southern concentration of the revolutionary provinces of 1911.[21] More importantly, I am convinced that the disaster brought about by the court's support for the Boxer Uprising provoked a fundamental shift in elite opinion. The most prominent supporters of the Boxers at court were Manchus – Gangyi and Prince Duan in particular – and Gangyi was particularly hated for his alleged statement that he would rather yield power to foreigners than to Han household slaves.[22] In 1900, the provincial officials in Zhili, Shanxi (where Yuxian was sent after protecting the Boxers in Shandong), Inner Mongolia and the Northeast – the areas where the Boxers were most active and Christian and foreign casualties greatest – were all Manchus. In contrast, Han officials dominated in the South where they negotiated with the foreign powers to preserve order in the Southeast. Following the occupation of the capital by the International Expeditionary Force, the flight of the court, and the harsh terms of the Boxer Protocol, many Chinese officials felt that this disaster had been brought on by the pernicious influence of Manchu rule. Zhang Zhidong had no hesitation in revealing these thoughts to the British consul in Hankow who reported that "He hates the Manchus as do all the Chinese officials I have met because of their hanging on to and eating up China and the absurd way in which they are promoted irrespective of their ability or fitness."[23]

The rise of the revolutionary movement and its publications abroad, in Hong Kong, and in the treaty ports brought anti-Manchu sentiment into the open. The famous accounts of Manchu atrocities during the conquest of China – "Ten Days in Yangzhou" (Yangzhou shiriji), "Account of the Jiading Massacre" (Jiading tucheng jilüe) – long banned in China, were recovered from Japanese libraries and widely reprinted. Such anti-Manchu pamphlets as Zou Rong's *Revolutionary Army* (Gemingjun) became some of the most widely read tracts among radical young students. And of course the Tongmenghui made the crimes of the Manchus the heart of its revolutionary appeal. Edward Rhoads has ably summarized the revolutionary indictment of the Manchus: their barbarian origins, the atrocities of the conquest, their imposition of the queue and barbarian clothes, their privileged yet cloistered life in the Manchu garrisons, their domination of the central government and privileged access to office, and the hostility toward the Han expressed by such notorious reactionaries as Gangyi.[24]

The New Policy moves toward constitutional government were in part an effort to respond to this challenge to Manchu legitimacy, and to involve Han elites more effectively in the governance of the empire. Manchu officials such as Duanfang focused particular attention on this problem, proposing in one unusually comprehensive memorial the end of Manchu legal privilege, the reform of marriage rituals to promote intermarriage of Manchus and Han, the abolition of Manchu posts in the bureaucracy, the reform of Manchu naming practices to adopt surnames comparable to Han, the abolition of foot-binding among Han, the elimination of separate ethnic banners in the capital guards, and the abolition of banner garrisons in the provinces with a termination package to assist bannermen to enter civilian life.[25] Progressive Manchus studying in Japan and supported

[21] The best new work on the Triads is Barend J. ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). See esp. 23–25, 324–64, 400–402.
[22] Liang Qichao is the source of this alleged statement by Gangyi, cited in Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 18.
[23] Everard Fraser, December 1900, cited in Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 75.
[24] Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 12–18.
[25] Gugong bowuyuan Ming-Qing dang'anbu, ed., Duanfang memorial (31 July 1907), in *Qingmo choubei lixian dang'an shiliao* [Historical Materials on Late Qing Constitutional Preparations], vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 915–18.

by such reformers as Yang Du published a journal, *Great Unity*, devoted to eliminating all distinctions between Manchus and Han.[26]

The hope of the late Qing constitutionalist reformers was that the election of provincial and national assemblies, their gradual transformation from advisory bodies to legislative assemblies, and finally the selection of a responsible cabinet of officials selected by and from the Parliament could gradually transfer power to the people under principles of electoral democracy and majority rule in which the Han would inevitably dominate by virtue of their numbers. To be sure, in order to make this transition palatable to the Empress Dowager and the Qing court, the reforms were modeled on the German and Japanese versions of constitutional monarchy in which the emperor retained ultimate power, especially over military and security affairs. There was, in this model, the important notion that by passing administrative power to officials responsible to an elected parliament, the court could be protected from political controversy – and of course from responsibility for political failures.[27] In this way, constitutionalism was always proposed as a way to protect Manchu rule. Of course, the only way that the court could be fully protected was if it became a fully symbolic monarchy on the English model, what Liang Qichao would later call a republic with a nominal monarch (*xujun gonghe*), but this was not openly broached during the constitutional debates.

From 1906 through 1910 there was a good deal of optimism about the pace of constitutional reforms. The preparations for local self-government and the elections to provincial assemblies went smoothly enough, and despite some complaints about lack of enthusiasm for electoral politics, the results of the provincial assembly elections were particularly pleasing. Although the electorate was basically limited to members of the gentry (holders of examination degrees), the membership of the provincial assemblies and especially their leadership was impressive, with half of the presidents and vice-presidents of the assemblies holding the *jinshi* degree. Many had training in Japan, and they were of an age (average: 46) that was old enough to have some experience in the world but still young enough to be vigorous leaders of reform. The quality of the provincial assembly leadership, especially when compared to the relatively mediocre provincial officials of the last years of the Qing, led Liang Qichao to revise his views on the time needed to prepare for constitutional government. While Liang had initially agreed with the court's judgment (and Japanese experience) that 15–20 years would be necessary to prepare the Chinese electorate for constitutional rule, he later decided that this calculation held China up to inappropriate international standards for electoral politics. If, he now declared, one judged the quality of the provincial assemblies by Chinese standards, then it was clear that the assemblymen were more qualified than the imperial officials, and it made sense to move immediately to summon a Parliament and organize a responsible cabinet.[28]

Though the success of the constitutional reforms was by no means assured in 1909, a critical change came with the death of the Empress Dowager and the Guangxu emperor (the latter now presumed to have died at the hands of Cixi's agents) and the ensuing Regency of the young (26 years old in 1909) and inexperienced Zaifeng. Edward Rhoads' fine research

[26] See note 17.
[27] Xu, Chapters 3–6, in *Jiu wangchao yu xin zhidu*, 77–81.
[28] Zhang Pengyuan, *Lixianpai yu xinhai geming* [The Constitutionalists and the 1911 Revolution], 3rd. ed. (Changchun: Jilin chubanshe, 2007), 16–39. Zhang's path-breaking study of the constitutionalist movement and the 1911 Revolution, first published in 1969, remains an indispensable study of the topic. See also Xu, *Jiu wangchao yu xin zhidu*, 140–41.

has called attention to the centralizing and pro-Manchu policies of Zaifeng and their critical role in alienating key Han power-holders.[29] What does seem clear is that by 1911, Zaifeng had succeeded in antagonizing virtually every important constituency except for a small group of relatives and Manchu princes.

The consistent thread in Zaifeng's policy was his effort to centralize power in the court and restore Manchu control over the military. To this end Zhang Zhidong's long tenure in Huguang was brought to an end when he was summoned to the Grand Council in Beijing. Yuan Shikai was dismissed, removing the late empire's most capable reformer. This opened the way for Manchu control over the military and was welcomed by Kang–Liang supporters who still resented Yuan's role in the 1898 coup against Guangxu (Liang Qichao in his letters of this period refers to Yuan as graveyard bones (*zhonggu*)[30]). Yuan himself played a role in facilitating the ouster of Cen Chunxuan.[31] Duanfang was overly aggressive in pressing the regent to end Manchu privilege, and he too was dismissed.[32] As a result of all this clique struggle and bureaucratic turmoil, Zaifeng succeeded in centralizing power at court – but at the expense of removing the most able officials and replacing them with relatively mediocre and often Manchu (or Han bannermen) governors-general.

While Zaifeng was relatively decisive in removing powerful Han officials, he was hopelessly timid in carrying out reforms to end Manchu privilege. He backtracked on Cixi's edict to disband the Manchu garrisons, and vacillated in reforming the Manchu dress code and abolishing the queue. Most disastrously, when the time finally came in the spring of 1911 to replace the Grand Council with a cabinet of ministers, Zaifeng appointed nine Manchus and four Han – with the notoriously corrupt and much despised Prince Qing as chief minister. The unprecedented concentration of power in this infamous Princes' Cabinet becomes particularly clear when we realize that with one brief exception in the Jiaqing period, Prince Gong's elevation to the Grand Council in 1853 was the first appointment of an imperial prince (*qinwang*) to the Grand Council.[33] The Prince's Cabinet, with seven members of the imperial family (including two of the regent's brothers) was a remarkable and disastrous step backward toward concentration of power in the imperial family and the final blow to all hopes that constitutionalism could produce a gradual transfer of power to the Han majority.[34]

By the spring of 1911, Zaifeng had isolated himself from any possible source of support in the late Qing political system. Zhang Zhidong was dead. Yuan Shikai, Cen Chunxuan, and Duanfang had been dismissed. The nationalization of the railroads and the agreement to

[29] Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 121–72. The complexity of court politics in this period, the paucity of reliable documentation, and the problematic quality of various *yeshi* accounts make it difficult to discern exactly how political decision-making went so terribly wrong in 1910–1911. Having done no research on this myself, I find it difficult to understand the intersecting and competing networks of Manchu princes, Yuan Shikai's supporters, conservatives around Qu Hongji, corruption-fighting Cen Chunxuan with his links to Liang Qichao and the constitutionalists abroad, Manchu reformers like Duanfang with their own complex networks, and senior established figures like Prince Qing and Zhang Zhidong. There seem to me important issues to be understood here, and new Chinese research that I have not read may be exploring these important questions.

[30] Ding and Zhao, *Liang Rengong nianpu*, 290.

[31] Sang Bing, *Gengzi qinwang yu wan Qing zhengju* [The 1900 Loyalist Movement and Late Qing Politics] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004), 272–73.

[32] Zhang Hailin, *Duanfang yu Qingmo xinzheng* [Duangfang and the Late Qing New Policy Reforms] (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2007), 484–504.

[33] Jin Chengyi, *Qingchao diwei zhizheng shishi kao* [Studies of the Evidence on Qing Imperial Succession Struggles] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 229–30.

[34] Rhoads, *Machus & Han* 131–72; Xu, *Jiu wangchao yu xin zhidu*, 167–70.

build them with foreign loans outraged patriotic partisans in Guangdong, Hunan, and Hubei and propelled Sichuan into the arms of the Railway Protection Movement and its leaders in the provincial assembly. The rejection of the provincial assemblies' petition movement for a national parliament had already led many constitutionalists to accept the necessity of revolution, in a process that has been well described by Zhang Pengyuan.[35] I would like here to emphasize the notable change of tone in National Assembly debates over impeachment of the Grand Council in December 1910, all of which were fully reported in the press. After the Assembly passed a motion to impeach the Grand Council, it memorialized the court, taking care to respect and protect imperial authority:

> A monarchy is founded on the inviolability of its sacred ruler. When officials offer proposals, the ruler gets credit for successes and officials are blamed for failures. Recently countries in the East and West have ministers who assume responsibility and this is clearly specified in a constitution. In this way citizens (*guomin*) can direct the course of the government but cannot blame the court for its intent.[36]

The wording was very much in the spirit of previous appeals for constitutional government: a constitution would protect the court from responsibility for unpopular political decisions. When, however, Zaifeng rejected this appeal in an edict issued directly from the court and not through the Grand Council, the tone of the Assembly shifted abruptly, and now for the first time came direct attacks on the regent. In the words of one assembly member: "The recent vermillion edict was issued directly by the Regent himself. It leaves us no room to maneuver. . . Now the legislature and the court stand in direct opposition. How is this any different from autocracy?"[37] For all these reasons, it seems to me that by the spring of 1911, revolution had become inevitable. China had reached its tipping point.[38]

But what form would the revolution take? What would its consequences be? Revolution is always facilitated by a clear enemy, with an identifiable villain as the focus of attack. For the American Revolution it was King George III; for the French Revolution, Louis XVI; in Russia, Czar Nicholas II; in Egypt, Hosni Mubarak. In China, the frustration of public aspirations was now clearly attributed to Zaifeng's court and its pro-Manchu policies. Now the anti-Manchu appeals of the revolutionary parties achieved wide support, and as noted above, the revolutionary parties in Hubei mushroomed in size. In the words of Zhang Jian, "In an instant, the ideas of political revolution were transformed into a mania for racial revolution."[39] When the Wuchang Uprising broke out, its appeal was unmistakably anti-Manchu Han nationalism. The song of the revolutionary army rang out: "Restore the Han (*xing-Han*), Restore the great Han! Eliminate the Manchus (*mie-Man*)! Eliminate the bandit Manchus!"[40]

[35] Zhang, *Lixianpai yu xinhai geming*, 84–95.
[36] *Guofeng bao*, 1: 32, 89–92, cited in Zhang, *Lixianpai yu xinhai geming*, 77.
[37] Yi Zongkui speech, cited in Zhang, *Lixianpai yu xinhai geming*, 79.
[38] Gladwell, *Tipping Point.* There are specific parts of Gladwell's insightful analysis that may be particularly appropriate to the Chinese situation in 1911, especially his stress on the importance of three types of people – connectors, mavens (information specialists), and salesmen (charismatic persuaders) – and on the importance of context.
[39] Zhang Jian, "Dai Lufu Sun Baoqi Sufu Cheng Dequan zouqing gaizu neige xuanbu lixian shu" [Memorial Written on Behalf of Shandong Governor Sun Baoqi and Jiangsu Governor Cheng Dequan Requesting a Reorganization of the Cabinet and Proclamation of Constitutional Government], October 1911, in *Zhang Jian quanji* [Complete works of Zhang Jian], vol. 1 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1994), 176.
[40] *Minli bao*, October 25, 1911.

The flag of the new revolutionary government featured 18 stars for the 18 Han-majority provinces of China proper. Perhaps most importantly of all, when the president of the provincial assembly, Tang Hualong, joined the revolutionary government and issued an appeal to other provinces to join – an appeal that was quickly answered and guaranteed the success of the revolution – he focused on the court's narrow protection of Manchu interests and expressed the aspirations of the revolution in the language of Han nationalism:

> The Qing court is without principle and has brought its own demise... Puyi is a mere child; the Regent is ignorant and incompetent. Our survival depends on financial and military power, but in these areas [the court] has excluded all Han and granted all power to imperial princes. Pulun and Zaitao, mere children playing games, now control the army and navy ministries; the rapacious Zaize controls the Treasury, intent on constraining the Han and forcibly imposing autocratic rule. Our hopes for reform have been dashed. Our great land is nearing disaster. How can we allow ourselves, the descendants of the Yellow Emperor, to perish along with this land?[41]

Anti-Manchuism was unquestionably a banner around which all could rally. It could encompass the young revolutionaries, disillusioned constitutionalists like Tang Hualong, and probably a substantial portion of the south Chinese population for whom the anti-Qing Ming Restoration ideals of secret societies had always had a certain forbidden appeal. At the very least, the Manchus had done little in recent memory to attract dedicated supporters. On the contrary, Zaifeng and his close relatives had done everything possible to alienate such support as his ancestors had earned. But revolution is not only about toppling an old regime, and 1911 would soon demonstrate that destruction is much easier than reconstruction. It is a truism in the comparative study of revolutions since the French Revolution of 1789 that no sooner do the diverse forces that have rallied against the old order succeed in bringing it down than they start quarreling among themselves. China after 1911 would quickly revert to that pattern.

With the elimination of the common enemy, the Manchus, divisions quickly arose within the revolutionary camp. Key constitutionalist allies like Tang Hualong, who as a *jinshi* and provincial assembly president did so much to lend credibility to the initial revolutionary coup, was quickly sidelined by the Hubei revolutionary camp and forced out of the province. In Wuchang the revolutionaries soon turned to squabbling among themselves, with power struggles degenerating into political assassinations from which Li Yuanhong and former New Army officers emerged as the main beneficiaries.[42] After its liberation, Shanghai became a major center of revolutionary activity, but also of endless factional struggle of which the most famous incident was probably Chen Qimei dispatching Chiang Kai-shek to arrange the assassination of the Guangfuhui leader Tao Chengzhang. The Constitutionalists were certainly the most politically legitimate and socially acceptable adherents of the revolution, but they were viewed with suspicion by the revolutionaries, and divided among themselves between more radical and moderate factions (with the powerful Zhang Jian the most famous of the moderates). Zhang Jian had visited and made his peace with Yuan Shikai in the spring of 1911, but the Kang–Liang ideological leadership of the reformist camp could never forgive Yuan for his role in 1898.

In many important ways that deserve further study, Zhang Jian emerged as the arbiter of the revolution. He had met with Yuan Shikai in the spring, was in Wuchang conferring with Ruicheng on an industrial project when the revolution broke out, then hurried back to

[41] Cited in Zhang, *Lixianpai yu xinhai geming*, 115.
[42] Zhang, *Lixianpai yu xinhai geming*, 114–20; Esherick, *Reform and Revolution*, 221–33.

Shanghai to announce his opposition to it. As had always been the case in the constitutionalist camp, his concern was that revolutionary violence would provoke foreign intervention on the model of the Boxer incident, bringing about the break-up of China. But the Wuchang revolutionaries' solicitousness toward foreign interests and the Great Powers' declaration of neutrality in China's civil war soon removed that threat. Once it became clear that one could have a revolution without foreign intervention, Zhang Jian began to tilt toward support of a republic.[43]

Another consistent concern of Zhang Jian's was the fate of China's borderlands. The rhetoric of Han restoration and racial revolution that prevailed in Wuhan had alarmed the Manchus' Mongol allies in particular.[44] The constitutional group felt that "Some in the revolutionary camp favor abandoning the borderlands and seeking the independence of China Proper."[45] In Beijing, Mongol princes were resisting abdication by the Qing emperor over just this issue.[46] It seems likely that the influence of Zhang Jian and his allies in Jiangsu and Zhejiang was critical in turning the rhetoric of revolution away from racial revolution and toward a republic of five peoples (*wuzu gonghe*) and once this was accomplished, Zhang Jian came to support the revolutionary government and even assisted in arranging crucial support for Sun Yat-sen's provisional government in Nanjing[47] – despite his negative impression of Sun Yat-sen, of whom he had written in his diary after their first meeting: "he has no sense of practical limits."[48]

By way of conclusion, let me offer a few thoughts on how this reconsideration differs from my interpretation of the 1911 Revolution in *Reform and Revolution*. In that book, the central argument was that the revolution was "politically progressive … [but] socially regressive."[49] The socially regressive part of this formula was more original (and more controversial) and it pointed to the role of the urban reformist elite in the revolution and their enhanced local power in its wake. My reconsideration today still focuses on this group of constitutionalist gentry, though today I have used Zhang Jian as a key example rather than Tan Yankai or Tang Hualong. I would also give more credit today to the politically progressive side of their contribution in leading the transition to a republican form of government which, however flawed, had provisions through the press, the courts, and legislative bodies for public participation in the political process. I would further note that by focusing on the unity of the five races the constitutionalists were instrumental in keeping the border regions of the Qing Empire together, supplanting the focus on the Han provinces of China Proper that prevailed among the revolutionaries in Wuchang with their 18-star flag.

My emphasis here, following Edward Rhoads, on the disastrous policy failures of Zaifeng and my argument that China reached its revolutionary tipping point only after the

[43] Zhang, *Lixianpai yu xinhai geming*, 169–86; *Zhang Jian quanji*, vol. 1, 163–216.
[44] Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911–1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16–22. For an interesting recent Chinese web posting on the impact of revolutionary ideology on the frontiers, see Caoyuan de erlang [Son of the Grasslands] Quexuejun, "Xinhai geming shiqi de shibasheng jianguo sixiang ji qi houguo" [The Idea of Establishing a Nation of Eighteen Provinces at the Time of the 1911 Revolution and its Consequences], http://bbs.tiexue.net/post2_4225367_1.html (accessed 6 January 2012). I have also explored this issue in "How the Qing became China," in Joseph W. Esherick, Hasan Kayali, and Eric Van Young, *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 229–59.
[45] Letter from Sheng Xianjue to Liang Qichao, in Ding and Zhao, *Liang Rengong nianpu*, 297.
[46] Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 217.
[47] Zhang Pengyuan, *Lixianpai yu xinhai geming*, 182–83.
[48] "Zhang Jian riji" [Zhang Jian Diary], February 2, 1912, in *Zhang Jian quanji*, vol. 6, 662.
[49] Esherick, *Reform and Revolution*, 8.

spring of 1911 also leads me to ask whether different policies might have saved the Qing. This is a potentially useful thought experiment. I noted at the outset that 1911 launched China on a revolutionary course that lasted until the disasters of the Cultural Revolution convinced China's leaders that reform and opening was a more promising road to prosperity and national revival. This was, in a sense, the same position held by people like Liang Qichao in the last years of the Qing. Revolution, Liang warned, would lead only to domestic turmoil and likely foreign intervention, and to some degree he was right. But was continued rule by a Manchu dynasty a viable alternative to revolution? Late in 1911, Liang Qichao tried to rescue constitutional monarchy with his vision of a republic with a nominal emperor, in which all Manchu privilege and the banner system would be abolished, and Manchus would adopt Chinese customs and surnames. Liang pointed out that in Europe, the constitutional monarchs of Greece and Norway were foreigners in those lands.[50] The example that occurs to me is Queen Victoria in Great Britain – as great a symbol of British civilization as any, and yet she was of the House of Hanover, with both mother and father from German noble families.[51] Since the Manchus had already largely Sinified, they could just as easily have become Chinese as Victoria had become British. But as we have seen, Zaifeng and his Manchu allies at court were unwilling, in the final years of the Qing, to abandon the trappings and privileges associated with a distinct Manchu identity. This suggests that the point that Edward Rhoads and the New Qing History scholars have been making is correct: Manchu ethnicity mattered, and we need to take greater account of it in our scholarship.

There is one final point to be made. At the very last moment, when everything else was lost following the Wuchang Uprising, the Qing court did agree in its Nineteen Fundamental Principles (Zhongda xintiao shijiu tiao) to a symbolic emperor basically on the English model.[52] But it was too late. The revolutionaries were already empowered in the South and they would never accept continued Manchu rule. The lesson here is clear. The relationship between reform and revolution is complex and not easily predicted. Reform is often advanced as an alternative to revolution, as a weak or unpopular regime attempts to revive its fortunes. But as Alexis de Tocqueville taught us long ago, reform is just as likely to lead to revolution as to prevent it.[53] That was surely the case in China in 1911, when the products of the reforms – the students in the new schools and those returning from Japan, the members of the New Army, and the constitutionalists in the provincial assemblies – all turned against the dynasty and brought it down. Much of the difference between success and failure in political reform lies in the degree of commitment and leadership at the top. From 1901 through 1909, the court and key provincial leaders like Yuan Shikai and Zhang Zhidong led an aggressive program of reform. But under Zaifeng the court pulled back and its moves became reactive rather than preemptive – responding only to pressures from the press and the provincial assemblies and making only partial concessions. Their dithering on such issues as the queue and disbanding the banners were hopelessly incompetent, and their final retreat into the protection of Manchu supremacy in the Princes' Cabinet sealed their fate. At that point, the dynasty was lost and the 1911 Revolution became inevitable. Reform, if it is to succeed, must be proactive. The Qing court in the end lost the courage for decisive action.

[50] Liang Qichao, "Xin zhongguo jianshe wenti" [The Problem of Constructing a New China], cited in Ding and Zhao, *Liang Rengong nianpu*, 294.
[51] For a simple introduction, see Antonia Fraser, ed., *The House of Hanover and Saxe-Coburg-Gotha*, part of the series *A Royal History of England* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).
[52] Xu, *Jiu wangchao yu xin zhidu*, 170–72.
[53] Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Regime and the French Revolution*, trans. Gerald Bevan (1865; repr., New York: Penguin, 2008).

Glossary

Cen Chunxuan 岑春煊
Chen Qimei 陈其美
Chengde 承德
Cixi 慈禧
Datongbao《大同报》
Duanfang 端方
Gangyi 刚毅
Gemingjun《革命军》
guandu shangban 官督商办
Guangfuhui 光复会
Guangxu 光绪
guomin 国民
Huangzu neige 皇族内阁
Huguang 湖广
Jiading tucheng jilüe《嘉定屠城纪略》
Jiaqing 进末
jinshi 进士
Li Yuanhong 黎元洪
Manque 满缺
mie-Man 灭满
minzu 民族
Prince Duan 端王
Prince Gong 恭亲王
Prince Qing 庆亲王
Pulun 浦伦
Puyi 浦仪
qinwang 亲王
Qu Hongji 瞿鸿禨
Ruicheng 瑞澂
Sandian hui 三点会
shangzhan 商战
Siku quanshu《四库全书》
Tan Yankai 谭延闿
Tang Hualong汤化龙
Tao Chengzhang 陶成章
Tiandi hui 天地会
Tongmenghui 同盟会
wuzu gonghe 五族共和
xing-Han 兴汉
xinzheng 新政
xujun gonghe 虚君共和
Yang Du 杨度
Yangzhou shiriji《扬州十日记》
yeshi 野史
Yi Zongkui 易宗夔
Yuxian 毓贤
Zaifeng 载沣

Zaitao 载涛
Zaize 载泽
Zhang Jian 张謇
Zhang Zhidong 张之洞
Zhili 直隶
Zhongda xintiao shijiu tiao 重大信条十九条
zhonggu 冢骨
zhongzu geming 种族革命
Ziyiju 咨议局
Zizhengyuan 资政院
Zou Rong 邹容

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