

PREPMUN 2020 ONLINE CRISIS



Study Guide

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# Letter of Welcome

**From the  
Crisis Team**

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the PREPMUN 2020 Crisis Committee!

What you are currently reading is the study guide for this crisis. It contains much of the information you would need to navigate your way through the complex society of China in the early 20th century — worlds apart from the modern day Singapore we live in. This guide is the condensed product of extensive reading and research about our topic at hand — the 1911 Revolution. Though this might be a slightly bulky read, we assure you that reading it in its entirety would well equip you with the essentials imperative for this crisis.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the PREPMUN 2020 Crisis has taken a rather different turn, to be executed online across screens rather than face-to-face in a physical conference. Despite the limitations of the format, we have taken into account its advantages to create unprecedented mechanics and bring you a unique Crisis experience. We encourage you to participate in our crisis with an open mind and heart, to maximise your learning and enjoyment.

So, grit your teeth and brace your mind as we dive into the thorny Revolution of 1911. Regardless of your portfolio, be you Rebel, Governor or Qing, you certainly have a role to play.

Good luck.

Regards,  
Crisis Team, 1911 Revolution  
PREPMUN 2020

# The 1911 Revolution

## Introduction to the Topic

If we still cling to the old traditions, do not take measures quickly to carry out reform and let things take their course, the country will go from bad to worse, the sovereignty will be weakened and the territory will be eroded day by day. In the end, the situation will be worse than that of Korea. I am extremely disturbed whenever I think of this.

Yuan Shikai

Historically, the 1911 Revolution was a watershed moment in Chinese history, marking the end of the Chinese imperial system. To better understand the long-term and short-term factors leading to the revolution, an examination of Chinese dynastic history is required.

Foremost, the guide features a brief overview of Chinese history, discussing (1) Chinese dynastic history, crucial in understanding Han and Manchu relations, (2) the history of the Qing Dynasty itself, along with its failed reforms and (3) the history of rebellions against the Qing (Taiping, Boxer) and the immediate events leading to the 1911 Revolution.

Subsequently, the guide explores the main stakeholders, including the Qing government and the rebels, followed by coverage of the main themes at play, such as decentralisation of the Qing government, corruption, attempts at modernisation and Han nationalism. Ultimately, we hope that the key factors revealing the weaknesses of the incumbent government, as well as the impetus for rebellion, will be evident in the course of this guide, enabling you to better utilize your portfolio powers and decide upon a relevant course of action.

Note: from here on out, this guide will deviate from all historical events after **1 September 1911**, the **start date** of the crisis. Delegates are advised that the crisis may and will likely take a different form from the historical 1911 Revolution, with different causes, actors and possibly a different outcome.

## Background Information

I am Emperor, my descendants will be numerous.

Emperor Qin Shi Huang

Beginning with the Shang King, the Shang dynasty is the first of 15 successive dynasties, and the formally recognised beginning of China's dynastic rule. China's dynasties were the political systems that governed China from the year 1600 BC onwards. Dynastic rule was often an issue of hereditary succession, if not forceful rebellion. Nonetheless, successful dynasties could last for hundreds of years, spanning almost 276 years and 16 emperors.

Yet, China's Dynasties are cyclical, and nearly all follow the same trend of growing economic and social success before elapsing into a decline, losing the Mandate of Heaven and into a new dynastic reign. Such is known as the Dynastic Cycle.

He who succeeds is a king or a marquis; he who fails is an outlaw.

Confucius

Central to the Chinese Imperial Political System is the Confucian "Mandate of Heaven" (Tianming). Founded on four governing principles, the mandate granted wide but temporary power to the emperor, subject to the virtuous actions they carried out during their rule. The length of an emperor's reign and continuous hold of the Mandate was wholly dependent on the judgment of his subjects, allowing them to keep their emperor accountable to them.

Therefore, immoral behaviors like greed and overall incompetency often resulted in the loss of public support, respect and the blessed Mandate. Though, the people in ancient China also took natural occurrences like floods and earthquakes as signs that Heaven had rescinded their mandate from the current emperor.

For any emperor, the consequences of losing a Mandate can be devastating. Upon the loss of the mandate, the people were justified in their attempts to overtake the throne, even through violent and aggressive means. More progressively however, the blessed Mandate of Heaven could be bestowed on any person who was successful in their attempt to force the current emperor to abdicate the throne. This is shown in attempts like those by rebel leader and peasant Liu Bang, who succeeded the Qin Dynasty and became the first emperor of the Han.

This is how the ruler imitates the ways of Heaven

Confucius

The expectations and roles of a dynasty's emperor depended greatly on the era of the rule, but an overarching theme was that the emperor served as the "Moral Pilot" for the nation. They

were to advocate for the principles of Confucianism, which much of their nation's policies and beliefs were rooted in. Additionally, they served as an almost paternal figure to the subjects and were expected to advocate and promote education and literacy among the population. Another important requirement of the emperor was attendance and participation at important ceremonial rituals like the New Year festival or Lichun Spring Festival at the Temple of Heaven.

Regarding the practical ruling of the nation, the emperor would actually have little to do with such decisions, even if they had the autonomy to create new laws and overturn existing ones. Though this kind of behavior was observed in some emperors more than others, each emperor was heavily reliant on a hierarchy of eunuchs and senior politicians to aid them in making executive decisions that influence the future of the nation. As such, court conferences were often held for the different politicians to debate over the military, economic and legal policies for the nation. Rather than taking an active role in these matters, most emperors simply presided over the debate and came to a decision on the advice of his counsel.

## **The Qing Dynasty**

This is why you fail

Yoda

### **The Rise, The Stagnation, The Decline**

Under the Qing Dynasty, power was concentrated in the hands of a tiny proportion of the populace, who separated themselves from the majority. It began in 1644, when the Manchus led by Dorgon toppled the three-hundred year old Ming dynasty. From there, China entered into a long period of relative quiet, due to the Qing's policy of isolationism. Trade with the outside world was restricted through the Canton System, where foreign trade was centred in the port of Guangzhou.



When European merchants landed in Guangzhou, they would begin their business. However, they would not be looking to purchase machined goods, for China had none. While the West was on a path to rapid industrialization, when the opening salvoes of the First Opium War were fired in 1839, China's industrialization was still over a century away. Instead, Western traders would look to buy tea, silk, and ceramics. They would pay for these with scarce silver, the only currency acceptable by the Chinese. Soon, the traders were looking for a way to balance their books. Opium was the solution, and then the problem. More importantly, they found that the Chinese loved it. The British East India Company would grow the crop in Bengal, and sell it in Guangzhou to buy tea. While Marx may have said that religion is the opiate of the masses, the Chinese were taking masses of opiates religiously. By 1858, 4,500 tons of the drug would be imported annually, an amount that would make today's cartels sigh wistfully.

Naturally, the Qing wanted to regulate the influx of opium, with the Daoguang Emperor deciding to end the trade altogether. To this end, he appointed Lin Zexu to enforce this decision. When diplomatic channels failed, Lin confiscated over a thousand tons of opium. Taking a cue from the addicts across the nation, Lin decided to burn all the opium he had confiscated. This enraged the British, who did not take kindly to the uncompensated destruction of what was seen as a private commercial good. Thus began the First Opium War.

The First Opium War exposed the feebleness of China on the world stage. Although the Qing could bring to bear ten times as many troops as their enemies the British, the war proved that size does not always matter, as the junks of the Qing navy lived up to their name. The Qing were then forced to sign the first of many “unequal treaties” between themselves and Western powers, which granted various nations concessions on trade, territory, and territoriality.

### **The Attempts to Reform**

Following the First Opium War, and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Rebellion of 1865, the Qing realized how weak they were in comparison to the Western nations. They began a series of attempts to modernize. These were the Self-Strengthening Movement, which failed to strengthen China, the Hundred Days Reforms, which neither lasted a hundred days nor introduced significant reforms, and the Late Qing Reforms, which did introduce reforms, but were too late.

Admittedly, the Qing would always arrive at modern and effective solutions. Sadly, these were often about twenty years too late. They were also often preceded with flirtations with any and every other course of action possible.

Following the repeated military disaster of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, it occurred to the Qing that modern problems required modern solutions. Thus, plans were drawn to raise a new force, trained along European lines. The imaginatively-named New Army was relatively well-equipped, and many of its officers trained by German instructors or in Japanese academies. However, the training for its rank-and-file was somewhat lacking, and troops were concentrated in the North and East of China.

Along with a modern army came a modern Navy. The Qing began a large programme of purchasing modern ships from British and German shipyards. Many modern ships were also produced in China itself, based off of foreign designs. As with the army, however, the quality and competence of Chinese sailors was well below that of their European counterparts. They had still sailed into action during the First Sino-Japanese War and the Boxer Uprising, and by 1911 a good portion of China’s navy was little more than a series of well-ventilated hulks lining the seabed.

Another development of the Qing’s reforms was the abolition of the traditional imperial examinations in 1905. Previously, bureaucrats were selected based on their rote knowledge of the Confucian classics. Now, prospective civil servants had to have knowledge of concepts actually related to the running of a nation. However, most of the senior officials were holdovers from the traditional system. Another holdover of the traditional system was the rampant corruption within the civil service. This was said to have been at least partly-responsible for China’s continued budget deficits.

Supporting the Qing’s modernization was a burgeoning industrial base. Although Chinese industry was close to half a century behind that of the European powers, it was certainly a



formidable sector. The Hanyang and Great Xigu Arsenal would produce modern rifles, machine guns, and cannon every day. Meanwhile, the Jiangnan and Fuzhou shipyards could produce modern ships, patterned after those of Japan, Germany, and Britain. This could be attributed not least to China's massive population. At over 410 million, China's populace dwarfed that of Japan, Germany, and the United States combined, and gave it great potential for further expansion and industrialization.

In the field of communications and transport, the Qing oversaw a surprisingly well-developed system. China had over 30,000 miles of telegraph wires, enabling relatively-quick communication across the land. China's railway network was sadly under-developed in comparison. The 9,000 miles of railroad was mostly centred around Beijing, and could barely support such a large state. Similarly, China's roads were not particularly well-developed either. While there was an extensive road network, the most-well developed were either to-and-from Beijing, or in the largest cities. This meant that most transport was maritime-based, either port-to-port or along the extensive system of canals. This meant that the movement of goods and people could be done efficiently, but only as long as it was near Beijing or other large cities, or near a body of water.

## **Resistance Movements**

China's long and colorful history of resistance movements are spurred by a multitude of reasons, ranging from political ideology, to religious sentiments and overall discontent with governmental requirements and legislation.

### **Cheng Sheng and Wu Guang Uprising**

Are kings and nobles given their high status by birth?

Cheng Sheng

Pioneering the "trend" of uprisings against the emperor in ancient China were two peasants named Chen Sheng and Wu Guang. This first ever armed rebellion against the Qin dynasty was spurred by an intense dissatisfaction at the Qin official's harsh laws. In the midst of carrying out a task, they were setback by heavy rains, this would have proven to be problematic as Qin officials treated incompetency and lateness with the threat of execution.

Unwilling to accept the unreasonable outcome, the two men gathered a rebel army to carry out their uprising against the Qin. Even with almost a thousand cavalry and ten thousand troops, they were unsuccessful in their pursuit. However, their actions paved the way for future peasant leader Liu Bang, who successfully overthrew the Qin rule and started the Han Dynasty. For centuries to come, dynasties would rise and fall by the blade of the sword.

## Taiping Rebellion

The domineering air will be joyous for ten thousand years

Hong Xiuquan

Led by Hong Xiuquan, who was introduced to Christian ideologies in his younger years and believed that he was the brother of Jesus Christ, the Taiping revolution was a revolt against the Qing Dynasty. Hong Xiuquan, who had an intense series of visions, believed that he had been sent to reform the nation. He, along with his followers, would spread their beliefs around Guangdong, where he would eventually form the God Worshipping Society. From there, the group expanded into strategic territories, which Hong himself planned for his eventual battle against the Qing court.

Between 1850 and 1851, Hong and his society clashed with the Qing forces and emerged victorious. This was followed by an announcement on January 1st 1851, that a new dynasty, the Taiping Tianguo, or “The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom” had arisen. Following, in 1853, the Taiping army captured Nanjing, which they maintained control over for almost 11 years. It is to be noted that during this time, there was a Northern expedition set out for troops in the Taiping army to seize control over Beijing, though the attempt was unsuccessful.

The Taiping Rebellion ended with the mysterious death of Hong in 1864, and Nanjing was reclaimed by Qing forces shortly after.

## Boxer Rebellion/Uprising

The earth is parched and dry.

And all because the churches

Have bottled up the sky.

An anti-Christian song popular among the Boxers

Nearing the dawn of the 20th century, the resentment of Western influence and imperialism among local Chinese reached a new high. China had been seeing increasing infiltration by foreign influences, with the setting up of Christian establishments, such as schools and churches. Many local Chinese had also converted to Christianity. With growing discontent, some rebels who called themselves the Boxers made it their mission to ensure that China retained its Confucian values. They were called the “Boxers” as members of the rebel group were known to practice martial arts. The Boxers were initially against the government, as they did not like the power that the Manchus wielded. However, with the increase in foreign influence in 1898, the Qing government urged the rebels to join them in expelling the foreign influence in China.

This discontent was exacerbated by the floods and droughts which worsened living conditions

from 1899 to 1900. Many local Chinese attributed the worsening conditions to the Christians and the Europeans and joined the Boxers.

In the middle of 1900, the Boxers blockaded foreigners in Peking's diplomatic corner and destroyed churches and the Peking-Tientsin railway line. This rebellion had also killed foreigners and Christians, prompting foreign intervention to fight against the rebellion. The foreign coalition, named the Eight-Nation Alliance and mainly consisting of Russians and Japanese, eventually claimed victory. The Boxer Rebellion, which intended to eradicate foreign influence, increased the influence that foreigners had in China.

In 1901, the foreigners compelled the Manchu government to sign a treaty, called the Boxer Protocol, that would boost the influence they had in China. The treaty, among other things, mandated that the government execute leaders who advocated for supporting the Boxers, most of them anti-Western conservatives.

### **Important Developments Immediately Prior to the Crisis**

China's situation in the early 20th century can be adequately summed up by the first line of Andy Weir's 2011 novel *The Martian*. The first problem was the rise of Han nationalism. While bubbling under the surface almost as soon as a Manchu sat on the Dragon Throne, anti-Qing sentiments had been stoked by the writings of intellectuals such as Hu Hanmin. The foundation for these resentments were understandable. The Han made up the vast majority of the populace, yet they were ruled by a foreign minority, who separated themselves from the majority through policies such as a ban on miscegenation. Yet, this same group had wildly mismanaged the inexorable march of Western imperialism.

Following the Boxer Rebellion, the Eight-Nation Alliance imposed the Boxer Protocol upon China. It was in no way an easy peace. China was ordered to pay 450,000,000 taels of silver to the members of the Alliance over forty years. China's economy was already strained to say the least, and the addition of such a debt was another millstone round the neck. The Qing were also forced to crack down on pro-Boxer officials. This led to the execution of over a hundred officials, and the exile of Prince Duan. Replacing them were younger officials, though calling them "pro-reform" would be a stretch. The Imperial examinations were also suspended. Much of China's armaments industry was held in abeyance, with the import of necessary materials banned, and the Taku Forts, which protected the way to Beijing, were destroyed. Finally, the members of the Eight-Nation Alliance were allowed to be garrisoned in the Legation Quarter. While ostensibly to provide protection, the presence of so many heavily-armed and highly-trained foreign soldiers within the Forbidden City was a tacit threat to the government.

In response to China's failure to stand against foreign nations and the imposition of Boxer Protocol, the Qing Court embarked on a period of significant reforms. A quick scan of the nations

responsible for their humiliation after the Boxer Uprising revealed that all had a constitution. The Qing thus believed that a constitution was the cure for all of China's ills and woes, and set about to implement one. Reluctant to move too far away from unrestricted authoritarianism, Qing officials recommended following the Japanese constitution, which maintained the rule of the Emperor, while giving very limited rights to the people. It also gave lip service to the idea of democracy, eventually providing for provincial assemblies in 1909. However, the role and powers of these assemblies was never clearly defined, nor was suffrage universal by any stretch of the imagination. In 1908, a document titled the "Principles of the Constitution", was released, a roadmap of China's planned implementation of constitutionalism. Notably, it laid out a plan to implement a constitution by 1912 and a parliament the following year. As of 1 September 1911, however, no progress has been made on drafting such a constitution.

Another product of the reforms was the abolition of the Six Boards, a relic of the Ming administration from centuries past, replaced by modern Ministries. Previously, applicants to the civil service were judged by their performance in the Imperial examinations, an arcane and byzantine series of assessments that required detailed knowledge of Confucian texts and philosophy. The Qing realized that such esoteric knowledge might not be particularly useful for running a country, and abolished the examinations. Instead, they focused on improving the standard of education across China, and expanding the use of modern teaching and methodology. However, the infrastructure to support such a system, such as schoolhouses and qualified teachers, is incomplete, and more effort is needed before China's education system can be regarded as "modern".

The Chinese military also saw a period of development after the Boxer Rebellion. Although the importation of materiel was banned, China still had several munitions factories, which continued production of modern arms and ammunition. Using these modern arms are the New Army. Before the Boxer Rebellion, China had been toying with forming modern military units, with Yuan Shikai, a veteran Qing official and general, spearheading these efforts. The Boxer Rebellion had shown the effectiveness of modern units such as the Peking Field Force, and efforts to build a modern force were redoubled. The quality of soldiers was increased, with many receiving training from German instructors. The officer corps was also vastly improved, with selection based on competence rather than clan. Multiple military academies sprung up around China, to equip cadets with the skills needed for the modern battlefield. Many young officers were also sent to Japan to receive further training. At present, the New Army is a large and well-trained force. However, it is far from fully-formed. Furthermore, the senior leadership is dominated by Manchus and many junior officers and soldiers are sympathetic to Han nationalism.

The results of the Boxer Protocol and the Qing's attempts to reform does not bode well for China. The Boxers might be seen as proto-nationalists, a pathlight for a movement that has not yet hit its stride. But instead of strangling Chinese nationalism in its cradle, the Boxer Protocol may well

have added fuel to the fire. Many are unhappy with the way that China was treated by foreign nations, and are eager to cast off this humiliation. The abolition of the Imperial exams has also created a generation of disgruntled intellectuals. The end of the Imperial exams spelled the end of their ambitions, as their focus on the exams meant that they had few other employable skills. It also ended any remaining support that the Qing received from the intellectual class, a sign of the growing disgruntlement within China.

Compounding the above issue was the death of Empress Dowager Cixi. She had been the de facto, if not de jure ruler of China for almost fifty years till her death in 1908. The near-simultaneous death of the Guangxu Emperor placed the Xuantong Emperor, the child Puyi, on the Dragon Throne at the age of 6. In his stead, his father Zaifeng governed as Prince-Regent. While this did not leave too much of a power vacuum in the Qing court, the Dowager Empress' death, and resultant loss of an undisputed leader in the court, made decision-making more bureaucratic and fractured.

Further complicating the above, are the numerous uprisings launched around China. The most recent of these would be the Second Guangzhou Uprising in March 1911. While these uprisings are generally small-scale and thus doomed to fail, the Qing have had to spend considerable resources quelling these rebellions around China. Worryingly for the Qing, these uprisings were often well-funded by the Overseas Chinese, allowing the anti-Qing movement to survive. For example, the initial planning of the Second Guangzhou Uprising took place in Penang, with a significant portion of funds donated on the spot by local Chinese émigrés.

### **Railway Protection Movement**

The Sichuan-Hankou railway has long been a point of contention between the gentry and the Qing Government. Issues of ownership and autonomy have caused railway development to halt to a standstill, and for tensions to flare between the peasants, merchants and bureaucrats.

In 1905, the Sichuan-Hankou Railway Company was a government operation, one that was judged by a large majority of the population to be ineffective and largely undermined by fund misappropriation. Proposals were thus drafted to the Qing court to pass the demands of the people to the emperors. In 1907, the provincial railway was privatised and headed by a group of trustees. This group consisted of merchants and retired scholar-officials. However, disagreements about the routes of the railway lead to another bout of ineffective management, resulting in only 10 miles of railroad being built by 1911.

In 1911, after officials were sent out by the Ministry of Posts and Communications to investigate and evaluate the feasibility of continuing the development of these railways, the central government announced their controversial decree. The emperor was critical of the private-owned projects due to their wasteful and impotent nature, and thus made the decision to nationalize the

railway and accept foreign investors starting 9th May the same year. While ostensibly to bring the management of the railway into more competent hands, it is well known that the sale of the railway rights to foreigners will result in a large influx of funds to Qing coffers — funds that are urgently needed to pay for the massive indemnity imposed by the Boxer Protocol.

However, as the sale of the railways resulted in the land surrounding the railway coming under foreign control, many Chinese felt that their government officials were incompetent and unable to maintain a stronghold of their own land and resources. As such, public opinion of the Qing court decreased greatly. Additionally, the compensation given to shareholders by the central government after the nationalisation of the railway was deemed insufficient by many.

Most merchants were already unwilling to lose the money and efforts already invested into the construction of the railway, much less experience a loss from being unable to profit off the railway. This intense disapproval of the central government's policies resulted in a massive development in Chengdu, Sichuan's capital city: the formation of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association (SRPA).

The SPRA was spearheaded primarily by Sichuan Provincial Assemblymen, many of whom controlled the Chengdu branch of the Chuan-Han Railway Company. Their motivations in starting the association stemmed largely from the desire to protect their own interests from the policies of the Qing Government. However, even so the population of the SPRA included many simple peasants as well, culminating in the formation of Worker, Children and Women branches within the organisation.

With such a high level of manpower, the association relied on funds donated by each member and used them to effectively pedal their central message of “recovering the railway and breaking the treaty” around the province. The use of widely-distributed newspapers facilitated the spread of this propaganda.

As the message spread, more people within the city felt indignation at the choices made by the Central government and wished to rebel against their leaders. At one point, nearly 62 Sichuan counties had a SPRA branch. The strength found in the number of Sichuan people encouraged both city and rural commoners to act out, with the former engaging in strikes and protests, while the latter resistant complying to tax demands. Worse still for the Qing, the SPRA acted as a model for gentry and commoners to organise themselves across China against the Qing, should they find the impetus to do so. As of the 1st of September, the protests in Chengdu were still rising in their intensity.

# Key Stakeholders

## Background, History and Lifestyle of Qing Governors

In 1911, China was divided into several provinces, each ruled by a Governor. In some regions, several provinces were grouped together under the authority of a Viceroy, or Governor-General. Being influential members of a formal administrative hierarchy, the provincial governors enjoyed support from the central government, as well as access to resources. They played crucial roles in the management of the complex Chinese empire, managing both political and economic matters. Up till 1905, Qing governors were recruited via the imperial examination system. They mostly consisted of academics who were well-versed in Confucian theory, which contributed to a traditional way of governance socially, economically and militarily. Additionally, the Qing government also appointed governors on the basis of favouritism rather than capability alone, and was not fully meritocratic.

A significant phenomenon that occurred throughout the late 19th Century was that of “provincialisation”, where provincial governors increasingly enjoyed greater autonomy from the central Qing government in Beijing. This will be explored in greater depth below, and occurred due to a variety of reasons, such as the central government’s relative weakness, locally-led reform efforts, and technological improvements. In any case, China was increasingly acting less like a single organism with Beijing as its brain, and individual provincial governors were finding themselves with both the will and the means to make their own decisions.

## Background, History and Lifestyle of Rebels

The rebels were members of underground resistance movements which were required to carry out their operations in secret, or risk persecution from the Chinese government. Most rebels were liberals who felt that the Chinese government’s values were overly traditional, which resulted in China being unable to keep up with the West, which was much more advanced in fields like technology, military and economy. More so, the ineffectiveness of many government reforms led them to believe that the traditional system of governance and the people behind the rulings, were impediments to Chinese modernisation as well as its fight against the foreigners. As such, many of them wanted radical reforms to China’s governing systems and processes. Those willing to expend their efforts joined the many developing underground resistance movements. The goals of the many resistance movements differed greatly, from some seeking violent revolution to the establishment of a Chinese republic. The earliest revolutionary groups were founded outside of mainland China, examples being Furen Literary Society founded by Yeung Ku-Wan in Hong Kong in 1890, as well as the Revive China Society in Honolulu. In 1911, the largest revolutionary group remains to be the Tongmenghui, which was started by Sun Yat-sen and has since absorbed many other smaller organisations under its wing. Nevertheless, the rebel camp remains split by both geography and ideology, with different camps across the world and different ideas of what



China's future should be.

## **Background, History and Lifestyle of the Central Qing Government**

Having gone through repeated humiliations at the hands of Westerners and Japanese on the battlefield in addition to a failing economy, the Central government was under massive pressure to carry out reforms to China's political, economic, and social systems. Increasing Western influence also led to louder calls for change. However, the "Outline of Imperial Constitution" promulgated by the Qing Court in 1908 promised a constitutional monarchy that would supposedly last forever, and provide those in power with supreme authority and privileges. The reluctance of the Qing government to cede their power was demonstrated in their refusal to heed multiple public petitions calling for the implementation of a National Assembly, a demand only met in 1910. Racial issues exacerbated political and social tensions, given that only 4 out of 13 of those in the ruling cabinet were of Han Chinese ethnicity, despite making up the biggest ethnic group in China. These factors resulted in a fractured government and displeased population in that time, with some politicians even going so far as to harbour revolutionary sentiments due to the government's lack of sincerity to introduce change and carry out reforms.

## **Background, History and Lifestyle of Gentry**

Gentry were a class of traditionally wealthy, well educated people who played a significant role on a provincial level. For centuries, the gentry made up a large part of the Chinese government, qualifying for the imperial examinations due to their high education level. However, the abolition of the imperial exam in 1905 removed this route of employment from them, leaving many gentry feeling marginalised. By 1911, two distinct groups of gentry had emerged; being the scholar and merchant gentry.

The scholar-gentry consisted of well-educated gentry who served China despite the lowered accessibility to their previous source of employment in the government. They made up a large part of each province's provincial assemblies, which had been formed in 1909 as the Qing was starting to democratise. This allowed their interests to be heard by provincial governors, who were legally bound to abide by the provincial assembly's rulings. They were typically stronger in the northern, inland provinces.

The merchant gentry consisted of wealthy gentry who were highly influential and owned land and businesses. By 1911, they had formed Chambers of Commerce that enabled them to become more politically prominent, allowing them to influence provincial governors. They were typically stronger in the southern, coastal provinces.

As China developed, it became more urbanised, and the ubiquity of the gentry in all major cities made them the most significant social class in Chinese life. Whether on a local, provincial or a



national level, the gentry were exerting a vast amount of influence on the government, making them a significant force to be reckoned with, and a voice that had to be listened to.

### **Background, History, and Lifestyle of Peasantry**

The peasantry comprised the largest portion of the population, and were often seen to be honest and respectable workers as they were seen to provide food for the nation. Despite this, the peasants lived in dire conditions, such as land shortage, famines, and were increasingly impoverished. Heavy taxation, inflation and corrupt local officials worsened the economic situation for farmers, while bureaucratic efficiency started to decline and the government neglected public services. Nevertheless, even though the peasantry made up a significant part of the population, their participation in and impact on politics was disproportionately small due to their residence in rural areas, and their lack of education.

# Central Concepts

## Lack of Reforms and Modernisation

In understanding China in 1911, there were several prevalent issues during that period of time - both short-term and long-term - which gave rise to the problems faced by the incumbent Qing government.

## Decentralisation of China

Foremost, there were demographic pressures on the Qing government, because of the state's inability to sustain an enormous and sudden increase in population. Due to a century of peace and relative prosperity, China's population doubled under the Manchus, reaching about 300 million at the end of the 18th Century. However, the growth of agricultural production levels was unable to match this increase in population. By 1800, for example, the amount of arable land had increased by less than 5 percent, in contrast to the population, which had increased by 100%. Meanwhile, land productivity scarcely improved as agricultural technology did not see significant progress under the Qing government.

Unfortunately, this population increase resulted in many Chinese peasants becoming unemployed due to the less than proportional increase of jobs. The government, which imposed heavy taxes on the people, only worsened the situation, placing increasingly heavy financial burdens on farmers. As such, farmers had less money to buy and cultivate land, and buy seeds, leading to less agricultural output, forcing them to raise the prices of their goods, resulting in food shortages. In order to ease their misery, many of these Chinese peasants turned to banditry or joined rebel movements. This culminated in the White Lotus Rebellion of 1796 to 1804, a large scale peasant rebellion which was considered a watershed moment marking the gradual decline of Qing, featuring its famous battle cry *"The officials have forced the locals to rebel"*.

This decentralisation and dissatisfaction was evident not only among the peasantry, but among the provincial governors and within the military as well. One crucial example of decentralisation arose during the Boxer Uprising, wherein provincial governors refused to obey the emperor. Despite the Qing issuing a decree to support the Boxers against the foreign powers, some governors such as Li Hongzhang deemed this as a mistake - after being given diplomatic powers, Li made a statement that the call to action from the central government was a "false edict", giving officials a justification not to follow Qing orders. Along with several other provincial governors, Li formed the "Mutual Protection of Southeast China", an agreement among the governors to remain neutral during the Boxer Uprising.



As such, in this early stage, the central bureaucracy lost a tremendous amount of its warfighting capabilities. Despite its efforts to combat the Eight-Nation Alliance, their efforts were curtailed by independent action of their governors and officials. Similarly, this trend is still evident at the point of this crisis - raising the vital question of whether (and through what means) the Qing Court would be able to garner sufficient support.

In the military domain, this was also evident during the Sino-Japanese War in 1895. The Qing navy had been divided into several regional fleets, with the largest in the north (Beiyang Fleet) and the south (Nanyang Fleet) of China. During the war, the Chinese suffered a naval disaster at the hands of the numerically inferior Japanese fleet, because the Nanyang Fleet had not been deployed to assist the Beiyang Fleet in battle, allowing the Japanese a local numerical advantage that achieved a decisive victory. Collectively, even preceding the discontentment in the 1910s, there was large-scale resentment against the Qing government. Greater decentralisation meant disunity even within the bureaucracy and state organs, diminishing the credibility of the Qing Empire.

### Corruption in the Qing Empire

The aforementioned pressures were exacerbated by the rampant corruption within the Qing

government. For example, tax collection during the late 1800s had been becoming increasingly corrupt and the central government's inability to handle the local corruption greatly impacted China. During that period of time, local tax collectors acted in their own interests and consistently increased their demands on peasants in order to line their own pockets. This not only placed great burdens on the local populace, but also resulted in less and less revenue for the maintenance of public works that was sent to the imperial court. The system that the Manchus had established included a complex series of bureaucratic checks and balances that prevented the gentry (e.g. people of an esteemed social standing) from building up bases of local power, hence allowing the Manchus to maintain its rule.

Although this system was good at maintaining the status quo, it was not sufficiently responsive when quick and forceful action needed to be taken. This resulted in the government being unable to check local corruption, with one example being the multiple floods of the Yellow River. During the 25-year period (1796-1820), the Yellow River flooded 17 times as a result of officials pilfering money that was designated for dike control. The result of the government's poor leadership resulted in the suffering of the local populace and caused great dissatisfaction among them, which eventually culminated in opposition sentiments against the Qing government. The system put in place was moderately successful in achieving what it set out to do - maintaining Manchu rule - however, this often came at the expense of the local populace. This archaic system led to further ossification, stymieing economic and industrial progress despite attempts towards modernisation.

### **Effect of Past Attempts at Modernisation**

Another source of problems faced by the Qing government came in its spectacular failure of reforms, undertaken by the Qing Court as a desperate countervailing measure against the waning of its dynastic fortune. It can be argued that The Manchu-led Qing government were remarkably conservative in their unwillingness to implement even the slightest form of any socio-political change, even despite the numerous wars and uprisings, such as the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion. Due to the complex political structure in the Qing Court, the lethargy in carrying out systematic reforms persisted, and true change was contingent on a case-by-case basis depending on the initiative of local governors in their respective provinces.

The Self-Strengthening Movement from 1861 to 1895, was an industrialisation effort which built the first modern dockyards and the construction of steamships for the modern, Western-emulating Beiyang Army/Fleet. Unfortunately for China, such military reinvigoration backfired, as their annihilation at the hands of Japanese military might merely meant that the Self-Strengthening Movement was condemned by many to be an abysmal failure, stemming from weak central government coordination, a shortage of resources, technical backwardness and corruption, just to name a few. Scholars such as Li Chien-Nung, Samuel Chu, and Benjamin Elman are representative of those advocating historiographical theories that instead argue the reforms

themselves were not flawed. Rather, they posit that a sound concept had been compromised by conservative opposition, incoherent reform policies, and institutional corruption, causing both the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement and the demise of the Qing.

On top of prevalent conservative attitudes, the reasons behind the failure of industrialisation efforts are typically attributed to poor mismanagement. For instance, while it would have been the most scientific and cost-efficient to build the factory closer to mines, the head of companies along with governmental directives, chose to have the factory located closer to the city so that it was more convenient for “supervision.” Ultimately, the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement can be summarised as a product of “poor annaments, insufficient training, lack of leadership, vested interests, lack of funding, and low morale.”

Meanwhile, the Qing government unveiled the Tongzhi Restoration, a set of reforms in response to the Self-Strengthening Movement and introduced the Zongli Yamen, the official ministry to deal exclusively with foreign affairs. Unfortunately, despite this, their attempts at reviving agriculture as well as the implementation of a Maritime Customs Service to wrest back tariff autonomy from Western powers, they were unsuccessful and were lacking in substantial value to make a lasting impact.

The Guangxu Emperor was embittered by the defeat in the Sino-Japanese War, and understood the need to reform China. In June 1898, he issued an imperial edict to call for a new course for China, and over the course of the next 103 days issued bevy after bevy of edicts with Kang’s advice. Such changes included the abolition of the traditional examination system based on the arcane eight-legged essay in favour of a modern civil exam system and the rapid industrialisation of China. They hoped that such reforms would pave the way to the creation of a constitutional monarchy. As such, reforms were put in place not only to alter China’s industrial state, but its cultural one as well. The reforms failed due to the conservative nature of the Qing government and the Emperor Dowager Cixi who saw the need to stop the reforms once they gained pace. A coup was launched on 21 September 1898, resulting in the end of the reform movement after the edicts for reform were rescinded and Cixi assumed regency.

Ultimately, the failure of reform movements gave greater impetus to revolutionary forces. Top down changes within the establishment were seen to be hopeless, and the growing narrative of the revolutionaries was that revolution was the only way to save China. In addition to these political factors, long-standing cultural and social factors will be further touched upon in the subsequent sections.

## Han Nationalism

There sleeps China! God pity us if she awakes. Let her sleep!

Napoleon Bonaparte

Considering that China as a nation had existed as early as the Bronze Age (Xia Dynasty, 2700-1600 BC), the concept of Chinese nationalism is a relatively recent one. It arose out of a common unifying desire to eliminate the Qing dynasty and reassert Chinese superiority after a series of humiliating defeats at the hands of foreign countries.

Under the leadership of the Manchus, China brutally lost to multiple foreign countries, resulting in exploitation and unfair treatment of the Chinese. Shortly after China's devastating defeats in both Opium Wars, she was brutally destroyed by the smaller Japanese in the First Sino-Japanese War. This required them to pay financial reparations and grant special privileges to foreigners, both of which crippled the Chinese economy. To exacerbate China's woes, the Eight-Nation Alliance responded to the Boxer Rebellion by invading and occupying Beijing, looting and ransacking cities for priceless cultural treasures. Consequently, the image of China as the Celestial Empire was shattered, leaving Chinese citizens deeply dissatisfied with the Manchus' governance and agitating for democratic change.

As mentioned above, the failed Hundred Days' reform sought to implement broad socio-political changes, only to antagonize the conservative ruling elite who believed that the proposed changes were too radical and sudden. Led by Empress Dowager Cixi, they staged a coup d'état, forcing the reformists into exile.

The first figure to conceptualize Chinese nationalism was Liang Qichao, who was an integral part of the Hundred Days' Reform. He believed that a strong Chinese identity could only be borne out of a unified Chinese state, arguing that "the Nation comes into being with the creation of the State". Hence, he put forth the idea of a Chinese identity (中国民族 — zhongguo minzu), modeled after Western nationalism. Western influences are evident in the early beginnings of Chinese nationalism, such as "National Soul" being derived from the German Romantics' Volksseele and "National Spirit" from Volkgeist.

Later on, revolutionaries Yang Du and Zhang Taiyan expanded on the defining characteristics of Chinese Nationalism. Yang Du wrote in his article *Theory of Gold and Iron Doctrine*:

The noun, China (中华), is neither the name of a state of a certain region, nor the name of a bloodline. It is the name of a cultural family. Therefore, according to the Spring and Autumn Annals, whoever they were, Lu and Wei with the same surnames, Qi and Song with different surnames, Chu and Yue with people from other ethnic groups, people of China could become Yidi (夷狄, 'barbarian' tribes in the east and north of China) and Yidi

could become people of China.

Contrarily, Zhang Taiyan challenged Yang's discussion in his article, *Interpretation of the Republic of China*:

Just think if you go downtown and ask people who gather from all directions to the large city, what their surnames are. Are there more old Han surnames? Or are there more abnormal and special surnames? [...] In the surname books of Tang and Song Dynasties (唐宋), the number of Han surnames was the smallest. Is the Chinese nation only a hollow model which is filled with people of other ethnic groups?

There are significant areas in which these thinkers diverge in their aspirations for the growth of Chinese Nationalism. Whereas Yang Du believed that it was possible to integrate the Han and the Manchus under a unified Chinese state through the fusion of both ethnic groups, Zhang argued that the ostensible mistrust between the Hans and the Manchus meant that they could never coexist harmoniously together. This ideological difference manifests in their opinions on the future path of Chinese nation-building. The revolutionaries fought for the exclusion of the Manchus, whereas the constitutional monarchists believed that sufficient cultural assimilation had taken place.

As tensions grew in 1911, the revolutionaries put their ideology into action, creating slogans such as "Slay the Manchu officials" and "Revive the Han, exterminate the Manchus". Some also planned to assassinate Manchus by engaging in citizen vigilantism and seizing the military arsenals of the Qing, while spreading their ideology to provinces across China. This had the unintended effect of alienating potential political allies along the Qing frontier, where the leaders of non-Han communities attempted to distance themselves from the new homogenous Han state that the revolutionaries aspired to create.

However, not all revolutionaries believed in such drastic ideology. The mainline Tongmenghui leadership, such as Sun Yat-sen, viewed these overzealous revolutionaries as "radical" and did not share the same desire to eliminate Manchus from China. They hoped to take a more diplomatic approach of uniting the Hans and the Manchus, stressing the importance of uniting all people living in China to fight against the Qing empire. This can be attributed to their desire to prioritize the success of the Revolution above less significant racial conflicts.

## Foreign Imperialism

If astronomy and mathematics have to be taught, an extensive search should find someone who has mastered them. Why is it limited to barbarians? Why is it necessary to learn from the barbarians? The barbarians are our enemies... There has never been such insults [as from foreign powers] during the last 200 years of our dynasty

Wo Ren, advisor to Ci Xi

The Qing Dynasty appeared weak to the populace in the face of foreign imperialism. Anti-foreigner sentiment began to take root within China due to the events in the late 19th century. Stronger foreign powers constructed spheres of influence within China that emanated from their “concessions”, cities ceded through their numerous victories over China. Key ports like Guangzhouwan and Hong Kong fell under imperial control while foreigners attained “quarters” — effectively small enclaves in major cities like Beijing and Shanghai that hosted foreigners and fell under foreign law, not Chinese law. This exposed many Chinese living in the surrounding area to firsthand experience of foreign domination of their lands. The Qing empire seemed unable to resist the growing influence of foreign powers.





To make things worse, following the loss of land in 1895 from China to Japan during the Sino-Japanese War, China was forced to make more concessions to foreign powers, ceding Korea, Taiwan and Liaodong to Japan. At this juncture, the Qing regime had proven themselves unable to stand up to foreign powers - both Western powers as well as the Japanese.

More Chinese saw how the foreigners were coming in and exploiting Chinese resources and people for themselves — the Qing appeared too weak to solve this, exacerbated by the sales of railway shares to foreign firms to repay debts incurred to the western powers made the Qing appear incapable of defending against foreign imperialism. Therefore many people, especially the gentry, wanted independence from foreign influence as far as possible. As such, the inability to react to foreign intervention not only gave impetus to rebel against the Qing government, but also showed that the government was weak and unable to lead. The Boxer Uprising, an anti-Western incident, proved that tensions were well past tipping point. Cumulatively, it was not only the inability to react to the foreign agents, but the increasing decentralisation, corruption and the resistance to reforms that greatly curtailed action from the Qing government. Despite being the rulers of China, their power was gradually being eroded due to structural long-term factors as well as the inability to respond to the aforementioned short-term factors.

# Conclusion

At this juncture, China is at a crossroads. The tensions between the people and the Qing are clear. The burden of the Boxer Protocol is heavy. Neither side believes the other to be able to steer China in the right direction, nor do they believe that the other deserves to rule. The Unequal Treaties weigh on the minds of the people, as foreigners still occupy large sections of China, including in Beijing itself.

While the conflict between the Qing court and any would-be revolutionaries is clear, the presence of the provincial Governors and Viceroys may prove to be a proverbial spanner in the works. Each wields power and influence within his area of control, and each is faced with unique circumstances and problems. How they will respond to the actions and overtures of each side remains to be seen.

All delegates in this Crisis will have to sway the populace, be they peasants or privileged. The fate of China is in your hands.

# Annex

## MAP OF CHINA



# MAP OF CHINA

■ Provincial Capitals



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