

From the Double-Ten Uprising (1911) to Sun Yat-Sen in Nanjing (1912)

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Time has arrived to mark the centennial of the 10 October 1911 Wuchang uprising which had led to the establishment of the Chinese Republic on 1 January 1912, with the provisional government sited in Nanjing and Dr. Sun Yat-sen as president.

The Wuchang Uprising and the Revolution of 1911

In several respects the Wuchang uprising on 10 October 1911 was different from the ten previous insurrections by followers of Sun Yat-sen to topple the Qing dynasty. It took place in Central China, along the Yangzi river and at the terminus of one of China's new railroad lines, therefore was of greater strategic importance than previous uprisings in remote South and Southwest China. Of even greater significance was the fact that the Wuchang insurgents succeeded in overthrowing the provincial authorities, enabling Hubei to secede from the Qing by declaring "independence" and by replacing the Beijing-appointed official with a military governor of the insurgents' own choosing. Within seven weeks, sixteen of the eighteen provinces seceded. Before Nanjing fell to the revolutionaries on 2 December, two calls had already been made for provincial governments to send delegates to a national assembly to end Qing rule and to organize the institutions of a republic. The provinces of Zhili and Henan, protected by the strong Beiyang Army commanded by 袁世凯 Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), remained on the side of the Qing court until he switched loyalty.¹

Another distinguishing feature of the Wuchang uprising was the composition of the men who staged it. They were New Army 新军 officers and soldiers, who were garrisoned in Hubei, but, as a number of these men had secretly joined the revolutionary movement – albeit not necessarily the Revolutionary Alliance (同盟会 Tongmen Hui), modern China's first political party – their effectiveness in preserving law and order would be negligible at best.

The Revolutionary Alliance was founded in 1905 by Sun Yat-sen who was the acknowledged leader with a mission to overthrow the Qing and to build a republic based on his three principles of "nationalism, democracy and people's livelihood". Sun had been an "international celebrity" ² since his 23 October 1896 kidnapping and rescue in London. While his activities were abroad seeking support from foreign states and overseas Chinese

¹ 廖大伟 Liao Da-wei and 高红霞 Gao Hong-xia, "辛亥议和地点个变动及其原因" (The change of location of negotiation meetings and the reasons for this change) in 《史林》 *History Review*, 2002.3, p. 99. Having Yuan on the revolutionary side seemed so attractive at that time even 黄兴 Huang Xing wrote to Yuan that he was anxiously waiting for Yuan to abandon the Qing and "to make your contributions to the cause like another Napoleon or Washington".

² C. Martin Wilbur, *Sun Yat-sen, Frustrated Patriot*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1976, p. 15.

communities,³ the Alliance leaders worked at organizing uprisings at home.⁴ Whereas the Alliance had relied on secret societies to provide manpower for the previous uprisings, the Wuchang insurrection was subversion of politically activist troops, although some of them happened to be also secret society members. In fact, the successful uprisings in six of the eighteen provinces were initiated by the New Army.⁵

Nevertheless, the Wuchang insurgents maintained “a tenuous link with revolutionary leadership elsewhere”.⁶ After the disaster of the 29 March uprising in Guangzhou, Alliance leaders had been pondering other means to overthrow the Qing, including moving the uprisings from South China. A Central China Bureau was established in July 1911 with 宋教仁 Song Jiaoren (1882-1913) as leader. The Wuchang revolutionaries were cognizant of these deliberations. Other circumstances, however, led to the Wuchang insurrection on 10 October. It was an important undertaking, as the historian Edmund Fung notes, that had the Hubei troops “not turned against the government at (this) time..., there probably would not have been a revolution in 1911.”⁷

The New Army came into being with the modernization movement adopted by the Qing during the 1870s-1880s. Administratively there was one division 镇 in each province, commanded by a general 统制 with the same rank (1B) as the Manchu general-in-chief 将军 of the traditional Banner forces.⁸ Besides military skills, the military academies offered a high-calibre modern curriculum, including western post-Enlightenment writings. So the academies attracted students from non-military and cultured families as well. Some of the cadets were revolutionaries who “infiltrated” the New Army, and more took up the cause at the academy. The Hubei division was headquartered at Wuchang; the arsenal was at Hanyang.

Meanwhile, popular anti-Qing sentiments were becoming increasingly violent. The 1910 rice riot in Changsha 长沙抢米 reflected how the government could no longer count on gentry support in handling emergencies such as famine relief.⁹ Natural disasters were (still are)

³ For Sun's fund-raising methods and activities in Hawaii, see Yansheng Ma Lum and Raymond Mun Kong Lum, *Sun Yat-sen in Hawaii: Activities and Supporters*, Honolulu, Hawaiian Chinese History Center, 1999. Excellent illustrations.

⁴ The Revolutionary Alliance leaders specifically mentioned in this essay are enumerated in chronological order of the dates of their births: 黄兴 Huang Xing (1874-1916), 居正 Ju Zheng (1876-1961), 陈其美 Chen Qimei (1878-1916) and 宋教仁 Song Jiaoren (1882-1913).

⁵ 王建华 Wang Jian-hua and 翟海涛 Zhai Hai-tao, “军事教育与清末新军民族：民主思潮的兴起及其影响” [The new education curriculum in military education and the rise of nationalist and democratic thinking in the New Army at the end of the Qing], 《史林》 *History Materials*, 2004. 1, p. 85.

⁶ Vidya Prakash Dutt, “The First Week of Revolution: The Wuchang Uprising”, in Mary C. Wright, *China in Revolution*, (1968), p. 383.

⁷ Edmund S. K. Fung, *The Military Dimension of the Chinese Revolution: The New Army and Its Role in the Revolution of 1911*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1980, p. 203.

⁸ The division comprised artillery, cavalry, engineers, troops, transportation, engineers, quartermasters, musicians and gendarmerie, a total of 12,512 men in peace time. In certain provinces, such as Jiangsu, there were two divisions. H. S. Brunnert and V. V. Hagelstrom, *President Day Political Organizations of China* (1911), Taipei edition: Ch'eng-wen Publishing, 1971, p. 279ff.

⁹ 李细珠 Li Xizhu, “清末民变与清政府社会控制机构的效能 – 以长沙抢米风潮中的官僚矛盾为视点” (Popular unrest at the end of the Qing and the effectiveness of the government system of control – using the rice riot in Changsha as an example) in 《历史研究》 *History Research* 2009. 4, pp. 68-84.

regular features in Chinese history, but there were conventional measures of handling relief.¹⁰ In April 1911, when drought in Hunan's grain producing region and flooding in the tri-county (Hankou, Hanyang, Wuchang) area of Hubei caused a rice shortage, the gentry engaged in speculations, resulting in high rice prices and looting of granaries in Hunan.

Then, a crisis in Sichuan arising from nationalization of the railroad precipitated the Wuchang uprising.

In 1896, the court started to construct railroad lines from Beijing to Hankou and to Nanjing and Shanghai; later extending the Beijing-Hankou line into Sichuan. The ownership of the projects was given to foreign companies, but local investors could participate in the sections in their provinces. In 1905 the government nationalized the railroad, using foreign borrowings to buy out the original investors. The Sichuan investors, feeling that the compensation system was to their disadvantage, stopped paying taxes. Their arrest led to rioting which destroyed the tax office and the police station, and the military intervened. More troops were sent from Hubei, leading to a sense of urgency among the revolutionaries in Wuchang to take advantage of the timing and revolt.

Revolutionaries in the Wuchang New Army had been planning an uprising with the guidance and support of the Alliance leaders. With the Sichuan crisis and the thinning of the ranks in Hubei, the conspirators advanced the date to 6 October, but it was too soon for the Alliance representatives to arrive. In the end, circumstances forced their hand. On the night of 9 October several conspirators were testing weapons in the office where they held their political meetings. One man was smoking and inadvertently detonated a bomb. The noise brought the police. The conspirators escaped, but left behind their membership list. Fearing imminent arrest, they started hostilities the next morning.

The conspirators attacked the Governor-General's *yamen*; the Governor-General fled, so, by lunch time, the revolt was over. The conspirators declared the secession of Hubei and drafted 黎元洪 Li Yuanhong (1864-1928), "an army colonel with modern training who commanded a brigade" in Wuhan", who was not a part of the conspiracy but did not suppress it, into serving as military governor 都督 of the province.¹² The merchants supported the military government financially with cash advances and helping "with the maintenance of order".¹³ The consular corps in Hankou announced its non-interference on 18 October.

¹⁰ For managing "gruel kitchens" 粥厂 (China's soup kitchens), see Betty Wei, *Ruan Yuan 1764-1849*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2006, pp. 187-197; see also Pierre Etienne Will and R. Bin Wong, *Nourish the People*, Ann Arbor MI, University of Michigan, 1991.

¹¹ This translation is inaccurate. Li's rank was "general" and he commanded a "division" (translation by Brunnert and Hagelstrom) which comprised three brigades.

¹² See, for example, Michael Gassiter, "The Republican Revolutionary Movement", in CHOC 13 (1986), p. 525.

¹³ Marie-Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen* (1994), translated from the French by Janet Lloyd, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 205.

The success in Wuhan started a *tsunami* as the rest of the country followed suit.¹⁴

Being the first to succeed gave the Wuhan revolutionaries a sense of achievement and prestige of leadership – at least for the time being. It was Li who made the first call to the provinces to send delegates to assemble in Wuhan to structure a new government for China. It was also due to Li that Yuan Shikai sent his first overture to arrange peace.

October, November and December 1911

On 14 October, the Qing court reacted to the Wuhan situation by appointing Yuan Shikai Governor-General of Hunan and Hubei. Then, as the situation intensified, the court gave him command of the Beiyang Army as well and civil power as head of the cabinet. Yuan, therefore, was in a position to negotiate with the revolutionaries.

The Beiyang Army was gaining grounds in Hubei. Before the end of November, the imperial forces had attacked and occupied Hankou (outside the foreign settlements), and took Hangyang on the twenty-seventh. Huang Xing was advising Li Yuanhong to abandon Wuchang, but to bring along the seal of his office.¹⁵ The revolutionaries in the lower Yangzi, on the other hand, in a joint effort between the Revolutionary Alliance and the New Army, were gaining in Zhejiang and Jiangsu. Shanghai fell to the revolutionaries on 30 November as Chen Qimei led an attack of the Jiangnan Arsenal. Nanjing was taken by the revolutionaries under 徐绍桢 Xu Shaozhen (1861-1936). Xu, a metropolitan graduate of 1894, was appointed general commanding the Jiangsu garrisons. Xu, a scholar himself, had recruited cadets for the academy, inadvertently brought in underground revolutionary elements.¹⁶ In fact, immediately after the Wuchang uprising on 10 October, Jiangsu's divisions had responded to the revolutionary call. The governor-general and the Manchu general-in-chief at Nanjing never trusted Xu and his subordinates, so much so they had kept weapons and ammunition from the New Army. The taking of Nanjing on 2 December was successful and the accounts colourful, and Jiangsu secession of Jiangsu, and won Nanjing.

The taking of Nanjing and Shanghai not only provided a Nanjing as the seat of at least the provisional government, it also meant that Wuhan was no longer the only centre of the Revolution, and the Hubei leaders were no longer going to make all the important decisions.

¹⁴ 徐师慎 Xu Shishen and 罗家伦 Luo Jialun (1897-1969) 《国父当选临时大总统实录》[Veritable records of the election of the Father of Our Country as provisional president] 台北, 国史丛书编社, 1967, hereafter referred as *Veritable Records*. The provinces (and locations of a second division where applicable) rebelled in this order: 1911/10/10 Hubei (Wuchang), 1911/10/22 Hunan (Changsha), 1911/10/22 Shaanxi (Xi'an), 1911/10/23 Jiangxi (Nanchang 1911/10/31), 1911/10/29 Shanxi (Taiyuan), 1911/10/30 Yunnan (Kunming), 1911/11/3 Jiangsu (Shanghai), 1911/11/4 Guizhou (Guiyang), 1911/11/5 Jiangsu (Suzhou), 1911/11/5 Zhejiang (Hangzhou), 1911/11/7 Guangxi (Guilin), 1911/11/8 Anhui (Anqing), 1911/11/9 Guangdong (Guangzhou), 1911/11/9 Fujian (Fuzhou), 1911/11/13 Shandong (Ji'nan), 1911/11/22 Sichuan (Chongqing), 1911/11/27 Sichuan (Chengdu), 1911/12/2 Jiangsu (Nanjing).

¹⁵ Liao and Gao, op. cit. p. 100.

¹⁶ 沈晓敏 Shen Xiaomin, “孙中山，徐绍桢关系述论” [A study on the relationship between Sun Yat-sen and Xu Shao-shen], 《近代史研究》 *Modern History Studies* (Beijing), 2010. 1, p. 68.

Sun Yat-sen during this time

In the meantime, Sun Yat-sen was travelling overseas. On the day of the Wuchang uprising he was arriving at Denver, Colorado, the mile-high city in the Rockies and a terminus of the trans-continental railroad. His luggage had been sent ahead with a copy of his telegraphic code in it, so, he could not decipher until that evening a (by then out-of-date) telegram sent from Hong Kong, telling him that Ju Zheng had arrived at the British colony from Wuhan with a message that funding was urgently needed to start an uprising.¹⁷ Sun did not answer immediately. It was eleven o'clock the next morning when he spotted a newspaper headline that read: "Revolutionaries take Wuchang" that he realized the reason for the request.

Sun's immediate reaction was to take a fast boat to China and be in Shanghai in twenty days, but his cooler head prevailed. He headed for New York, then London and Paris, where he accomplished several tasks. He extracted from the International Banking Consortium an agreement not to allow the Qing government access to any more funding. He also persuaded governments which did not support the revolution to maintain neutrality. The British government removed restrictions on his travel to its colonies. In Malaya, he met businessmen on 11 November and persuaded them to give to the revolutionary coffers.¹⁸ When he landed in Hong Kong on 21 December, he was met by an entourage, including 胡漢民 Hu Hanmin (1879-1936), who brought him current with events in China.¹⁹ He spent four days in Hong Kong, where he conferred with the Merchant Guild of Guangzhou.

Therefore, during the two and half months since the Wuchang uprising, Sun was not present in person when important decisions, including his presidency albeit with conditions, were made. The major principles were his originally, the overthrow of the Qing and the founding of a republic. He did not attend any of the sessions of the assembly, but evidently made some of his views known. He reminded the revolutionaries of his existence and availability on the day after Li Yuanhong's invitation to the provincial governments, by sending a telegram to the newspaper 民力报 *Minli Bao* [People's Strength], to be forwarded to "military governments all over the country" that "I am delighted and comforted."²⁰

Assembly of Representatives of Provincial Governments

¹⁷ Information is from Sun Yat-sen's own account cited in 萧一山 Xiao Yishan (1902-1978), 《清代通史》 (A general history of the Qing dynasty), 1935. Taipei edition, Commercial Press, 1962, IV, pp. 2667-2669.

¹⁸ 谢举贤 Xie Juxian, a renowned painter in Hong Kong, recalls how his grandfather gave his entire fortune to "free his mother land from the Qing".

¹⁹ Bergère (1994), p. 210.

²⁰ 廖大伟 Liao Da-wei, "辛亥革命爆发后中国民主政治的创试：以孙中山与各省都督府代表联合会的关系为线索" [An experiment in democratic politics after the revolution of 1911: using Sun Yat-sen and delegates in the national assembly as a clue], 中国近代史 *Modern History of China* (Beijing), 2007, p. 5, p. 12 n. 2.

Li Yuanhong, Military Governor of Hubei, was the first, but not the only person, to invite the provincial governments to send delegates to a general meeting in Wuhan. The revolutionaries in Shanghai also called for such a body to meet in Shanghai. Partly due to the adverse military situation in Wuhan during the second half of November, delegates met first in Shanghai on 15 November; then some of them moved to Wuhan on 11 November while others remained in Shanghai. After the revolutionaries took Nanjing on 2 December, the assembly moved to Nanjing.²¹

The delegates, selected by the provincial authorities, toiled hard. They created a set of policies, regulations and procedures that established the Republic of China.²² Qing rule was to end and a republic was to be established. The imperial family was to be treated with generosity and the Manchu people in a humane manner. Almost overnight, this unicameral body drafted a “plan of organization of the provisional government of the Republic of China”, following Sun Yat-sen’s wishes in establishing a presidential rather than a parliamentary form of government.²³ It decided to seat the provisional government in Nanjing; and the election of the provisional president also to take place in Nanjing. There was a proviso, “in case Yuan Shikai turned against the Qing, he would be elected provisional president”.

At the election, Sun Yat-sen received all but one of the seventeen votes and was elected president. Huang Xing received the one remaining vote, cast by the delegate from Zhejiang.

Sun Yat-sen, Provisional President

Sun Yat-sen arrived at Shanghai on Christmas Day and left to assume the provisional presidency in Nanjing by special train. He arrived at the Lower Customs 下关 rail terminus in the late afternoon on 1 January 1912. It was a glorious welcome. When the train door opened and the provisional president appeared, he was greeted by a cheering crowd and a double-line of uniformed soldier escort. Wearing a woollen coat with a velvet collar, Sun shook hands with each person and said a few words. He was then escorted by Huang Xing and Xu Shaozhen to a local train which took him to his new home, the former *yamen* of the Governor-General of Jiangsu and Anhui and now the site of the provisional government. There, he changed into a dark blue scholar’s gown, donned a black formal jacket, and checked the itinerary of the day.

It was ten o’clock in the evening when he took his oath of office, pronounced the end of the Qing dynasty, proclaimed the establishment of the Republic of China and announced the change to the solar calendar, before ending this glorious day. During the next five weeks

²¹ Liao (2007), pp. 3-4; and “各省都督代表会联合会述论” [A discourse on the national assembly of provincial government delegates] in 《史林》 *History Review* (Shanghai), 1998. 3, pp. 62-71.

²² Liao (2007), p. 4.

²³ Sun had argued that the parliamentary system was “not suitable to China’s present circumstances, for it would restrict too much the power of the leader, ... We cannot impose such a restrictive system on the man we single out to elect because we trust him, ...! Michael Gassiter, “The Republican Revolutionary Movement”, in CHOC 13 (1986), p. 533.

he was provisional president, in fact until 28 January, before he yielded the job as well as the title to Yuan Shikai, he set the foundation of the central government, including the five *yuan* 院 system, still used in Taiwan a century later.

Sun Yat-sen was forty-six years old when he was president. Whether he was a “reluctant revolutionary”²⁴ and/or a “frustrated patriot”²⁵, he had thirteen more years on earth to devote to his revolution but never came even close to realizing his utopia. For me, born and reared in China, it is impossible to fathom a negative thought on Sun Yat-sen, Father of Our Nation.

The following is extracted and paraphrased from a will to his children written on a fine June morning in 1992 by another Chinese revolutionary a century later, Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997): “It is history’s responsibility to make China a first rate country by building it into a true democracy of and by the people 建一个权力来源于人民, based on a fair and equitable legal system 法制公平的宪政国家. This was Sun Yat-sen’s dream 这也是孙中山的梦想. After it is achieved, we can then talk about long governance and eternal peace 长治久安.”

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²⁴ Harold Z. Schiffrin, *Sun Yat-sen: Reluctant Revolutionary* (1980).

²⁵ C. Martin Wilbur, *Sun Yat-sen: Frustrated Patriot* (1976).