
UNIT 7 THE CHINESE REVOLUTION OF 1911*

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7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about:

- various factors that led to the outbreak of the revolution in China;
- various reforms set by the Manchus in order to consolidate their dynastic rule and establish a modern state;
- the social forces that emerged to save the country from Qing's rule;
- how Chinese nationalism geared up as a strong force against the Qing's and imperialist powers;
- various sections of Chinese society who became a major strength for the rise of nationalism; and
- the 1911 Revolution and its aftermath.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 6 we have seen how, during the second half of the 19th century the Qing state was more or less compelled to embark on a programme of limited reforms. Towards the end of the century, with the imperialist threat looming large, a brief attempt was made at more widespread reform. All these attempts at guided reform from above did not, however, call into question the viability of the imperial political structure. The reforms were in a sense introduced to strengthen and uphold the Confucian tradition and the polity. The 1898 Reform Movement, which had a brief life, set in motion trends which were to overwhelm the Qing and the political structures during the first decades of the twentieth century. The 1911 Revolution was a culmination of this process.

Several different factors went into the making of this revolution. There was growing discontent among the gentry and the peasants. New social groups, which gained strength with the economic changes, became vocal in their criticism of the system. Though the 1898 reforms were withdrawn, during the first decade of the 20th century the Qing re-introduced them in a bid to survive. The constitutional reforms introduced by the State however, boomeranged. The reorganized new armies turned on the Qing and from the end of the 19th century, the developing national consciousness found its strength in the secret societies, and in the growing discontent among the various sections of society. It is in this context that Sun Yatsen came to be perceived as the symbol of a new China. These are the various aspects related to the 1911 Revolution and have been dealt with in this Unit.

7.2 QING REFORMS

The Manchus tried to hold at bay the imminent collapse of their dynasty by introducing reforms which were more sweeping than those proposed by Kang Youwei. The reforms focused on three fields: education, army, and administrative and institutional organization. The reforms were introduced by the court and by senior officials like Chang Chi-dung and Yuan Shikai. These reforms were the last show of strength by the Qing state and marked an attempt to create a modern state structure which would then ensure its survival.

7.2.1 Education

One of the most important reform measures announced in January 1901 was the reform of the educational system. From the second half of the 19th century there had been suggestions that the traditional educational system needed to be changed. Chang Chi-dung was vociferous in his criticism arguing that the creation of a modern state administration required a new type of education and schooling. Between 1901 and 1906 a series of imperial edicts were passed to restructure the system as well as change the content of education. The traditional eight-legged essay was abolished in 1901. Students were now to study the history of China, World history, geography, mathematics and science.

A network of schools, arranged in a hierarchy, was planned: Elementary schools at the districts, secondary schools at the prefectures, and a college in each province. In September 1905, the examination system itself was abolished. This modernization of education received the active support of the provincial gentry and elite. By 1909 China had over 100,000 modern schools.

The effects of these changes were to be felt within a decade. The examination system had been an effective means for not only recruiting bureaucrats but also for binding the provincial gentry and elite culturally and ideologically to the fortunes of the dynasty. With the old style examination abolished, the gentry's ties with the monarchical state were now progressively weakened.

7.2.2 Military

Manchu military power rested at the turn of the century on the Manchu Banners and the regional armies that came into existence during the second half of the 19th century. The Manchu banners came into existence at the beginning of Qing rule. The regional armies had been recruited by Zheng Guofan, Li Hongzhang and Zuo Zongtang to suppress the Taipings. These were composed of professional soldiers closely linked and loyal to their regional leader.

The devastating military defeats during the Boxer Rebellion underscored the urgent need for military reform. By 1901 it was decided that the Banner system would be disbanded. Troops were to be trained at military academies in the provinces. The traditional military examinations were abolished. The army was to be organized along Western lines with active and reserve units. These measures, however, could not contain the growing regional and personalised loyalties of the troops.

Between 1901 and 1906, Yuan Shikai played a key role in military reform. In 1905 he treated the Northern Army (called the Beiyang Army) of six divisions. This army had modern equipment and officers trained abroad or at the new military academies. It had Japanese military instructors. The units were personally loyal to Yuan Shikai, a factor which Yuan was to effectively rely on when he threw in his lot with the anti-Manchu and anti-dynastic forces.

7.2.3 Administrative and Institutional

Several changes were introduced in order to streamline and tighten the administration. The principle of maintaining a balance between Manchu and Chinese officials was abandoned. The elimination of a compulsory quota of posts for Chinese and Manchus worked in favour of the Manchus. This created great discontent among Chinese officials.

In an attempt to forge national unity, the Qing announced the reform of the political system along parliamentary lines. Stressing the need for closer ties between ruler and ruled, the state initiated a programme of constitutional reforms. The inspiration for this came from Japan, where it was believed that through the Meiji Reforms and the creation of a Diet, the Meiji Emperor was able to draw upon the resources of his people. In July 1905, the Empress Dowager instituted a commission to advise the government on the types of political reforms that could be fashioned. In August 1907 a Constitutional Government Commission was appointed. Officials throughout the country overwhelmingly responded in favour of a parliamentary form of government. The state promised the creation of a constitutional assembly and provincial assemblies. In August 1908, the constitutional principles which were to be the basis of change were announced. Under this elections to local self-government bureaus were to be held in 1909. The work of the parliament was, however, to start only in 1917. The Kuangxi Emperor and Ci Xi died in quick succession in 1908. The successor to the throne was her great nephew, PuYi who ruled as the Xuantong Emperor from 1909 to 1912. His father, Prince Chun became the Regent. The latter kept

at a distance Ci Xi's principal advisers like Yuan Shikai and returned to a more conservative policy which was not in favour of such reform.

There was a fundamental contradiction in the way the Qing state and the gentry saw the purpose of these political changes. To the Qing, these reforms did not in any ways mean the reduction in Imperial sovereignty or power. To the provincial gentry, however, they meant the transfer of power in real terms to local and provincial levels.

There were several other problems as well. The elections were essentially elitist. The property and educational qualifications ensured that the bulk of the population could not vote. To stand for election a candidate had to have an annual income of over 5,000 taels or a provincial degree or have graduated from one of the new middle schools. The membership of the provincial assemblies was naturally dominated by the upper gentry. In the province of Shandong, for instance, out of a population of 38 million only 119,000 people voted. In Hubei, 113,000 voted out of 34 million.

Despite the limited nature of suffrage, the assemblies became centres of opposition. In February 1910, at a meeting in Peking, the delegates demanded that a parliament be convened immediately. As a result, in October 1910 a national consultative assembly was convened, with half its members appointed by the government. As the pressure increased, the government under Prince Chun promised that a proper parliament would be convened by 1913. As an interim measure a cabinet was formed in 1911 composed mainly of princes and Manchu nobles. By this time armed rebellion had broken out in various provinces as a prelude to the final fall of the dynasty.

The failure of the reforms was in the long run the result of the economic and social upheavals that rocked China and generated discontent that could not to be satisfied by half-hearted measures.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Explain the educational reforms set up by Qing dynasty in 100 words.

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- 2) Discuss in about ten lines what were the aims and objectives of administrative and institutional reforms introduced by the Qing in early 20th century.

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7.3 STATE OF ECONOMY AND FOREIGN INTERESTS

The foreign presence expanded substantially by the beginning of the 20th century. Foreign investments grew from about 788 million in 1902 to 1,610 million in 1910. The bulk of this money went into the modern sector of the Chinese economy i.e. railway construction, mining and other industrial enterprises.

There were several developments as a result of this. The challenge provided by the foreign businessmen stimulated growth of Chinese enterprises. For instance the first modern banks were established, the Commercial Bank of China in 1897, the Hubu Bank, and the Bank of Communications in 1907. A corollary to all this was the development of private enterprises. In 1904 private incorporation of companies was allowed. By 1908, 227 companies registered with the Ministries of Industry, Agriculture and Commerce.

The growth of the national modern sector was uneven. There were several problems like lack of infrastructural facilities, mistrust between officials and merchant contractors. Further, the indigenous merchants were unable to withstand the competition from the foreigners. Since China had lost her autonomy in customs, the government could not protect the market. Western goods were exempt from inland dues. The government itself was in no position to invest since the treasury was badly strained because of the heavy war indemnities China had to pay. Under the terms of the Boxer Protocol, China had to pay as indemnity 224 million taels between 1902-1910.

It is estimated that the annual budget of the Qing was 90 million taels. The balance was made up by increased foreign loans which further worsened the economic situation. Unless China borrowed, there were no funds for any investments. Despite the economic crisis, the transformation of the state and economy had significant social and political implications.

7.4 FORCES OF OPPOSITION

During this period China witnessed the emergence of new social forces. For example in the Treaty Ports, we see the beginning of a small bourgeoisie consisting of businessmen and brokers. Chinese compradors were in all foreign enterprises and intermediaries between Chinese and Western and Japanese businessmen. It was in Shanghai that the Chinese bourgeoisie came far more directly into contact as well as in conflict, with foreign business interests. Nationalistic feelings were expressed in the boycotts of 1905 and 1907. In 1907 for example, the protest against the British Chinese Corporation's contract for the Shanghai-Ningbo railway lines included leaders of the gentry, merchants and coolies. This anti-foreign sentiment of these early years was transformed into hostility against the imperial state because of its inability to protect China and Chinese business interests.

There were other social groups which also emerged as potential enemies of the Qing and the imperial system. During the first decade of the 20th century, young men were encouraged to take up a military career. Many students had "thrown away the pen to take up the sword" to serve the country better. The graduates of the new military academies and the new schools in general were increasingly alienated from traditional Confucian scholarship and all that it stood for. They were imbued with a sense of mission of not only saving China but also of creating a new, strong China capable of withstanding the challenges of imperialism both Western and Japanese.

The growing discontent among merchants, soldiers and students was matched by a growing agrarian discontent as well. Although, there were not large scale peasant uprisings like the Taipings and the Boxers, there was incessant disturbances in the rural countryside. The provinces of the lower and middle Yangzi region were in a constant of flux. Secret societies, which traditionally surfaced during a period of dynastic decline, were active once again.

The rural agrarian elite who were the principal beneficiaries of the regionalization of power, were now eager to defend their interests at all costs. With the all-encompassing economic imperialism of the foreign powers, they saw their economic interests threatened. They were angry with the helplessness of the Qing in being unable to protect their interests. By the end of the nineteenth century, the rural elite had developed strong business interests. The trend was now of a growing and stronger link between the merchants and the landed elite (the two were now clubbed together and called the shen-shang).

The agitation for the return of the mining and railway concessions illustrates the shen-shang's determination to contain foreign competition and intrusion and to promote their economic and political privileges against the state. In this attempt often they had the support of senior bureaucrats. For example, in the 1890's, Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), a senior Qing official bought back from an American company the rights to build the Hankou-Canton railway. He had the active support of the Hubei, Hunan and the Kwantung gentry. The provincial shen-shang were extremely hostile to the Qing proposal to nationalize all railways in 1911. This decree, coinciding with a large loan contract with a foreign banking syndicate, was seen as yet another betrayal by the Qing of the Chinese national interests. They saw this as a threat and insult to their patriotism, provincial autonomy and economic well-being. The protection of the railways in Sichuan province became in a sense a call to revolution. This will be discussed further below but before that we need to look at the way Chinese nationalism was developing.

7.5 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE NATIONALISM

At the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese nationalism took a more definite shape and centred primarily on two issues — anti-Manchuism and anti-imperialism.

The Manchus, who came to power in 1644, continued to remain a separate group and preserve a distinct identity but this separateness did not in any way threaten the survival of China. Manchuria, their homeland, was out of bounds for any immigration. In the civil and military administration separate Manchu posts were reserved. Manchu authority was reinforced by the social practice requiring Chinese to grow a long queue (longbraid which during the first decade of the twentieth century, came to be seen as a symbol of Chinese subordination and Manchu dominance). Despite all this the Manchus were quite Sinicized. They had adopted Chinese social and political practice, not to mention the prevailing and dominant Confucian ethic. They ruled with the support of the Chinese bureaucracy and the tacit support of the provincial gentry. It was this support which, due to a variety of reasons already mentioned, weakened.

Anti-Manchu feelings had survived and were maintained by the secret societies for a long time. The Boxer movement initially had a strong anti-Manchu component. Anti-Manchuism gradually spread to a wide cross section of the population. Among Chinese intellectuals, this was coupled with a condemnation of the absolute power of the Chinese Emperor.

A corollary of this was a strong xenophobia. Anti-foreign sentiments were periodically expressed by officials and peasants during the nineteenth century. In the first decade of the twentieth century, there were direct attacks on foreign trade and commerce. In 1905, Chinese merchants and traders organized a

boycott of American goods in Shanghai to protest against American immigration laws which discriminated against the Chinese. Students and large numbers of people joined this boycott. An essential feature of this political boycott was that Chinese were now protesting not merely the loss of economic privileges but were expressing a self-conscious national loyalty and consciousness. In 1908 a similar boycott of Japanese goods was organized. The Japanese ship, Tatsu Maru, was seized by the Chinese for carrying contraband. The Japanese protested vehemently and claimed an apology and compensation. This outraged the Chinese and a boycott was organized. Merchants burnt their stocks of Japanese goods and dock workers refused to unload Japanese ships.

What these boycotts represent is a growing determination to oppose imperialism and any threat to Chinese sovereignty. But this opposition was not without contradictions, because of the growing anti-Manchu nationalism leaders of political movements, like Sun Yatsen sought the help of imperialist powers to overthrow the Qing. As result a clear anti-imperialist movement did not develop at this stage. However, the growing consciousness of Chinese nationalism became a binding force among various sections of the Chinese society.

7.5.1 Reformers and Revolutionaries

By the beginning of the twentieth century a wide cross-section of Chinese were convinced that something drastic needed to be done to save China. While all groups were inspired by notions of national fervor and commitment, two major divergent trends emerged regarding the type of government China should have:

- One group, called the reformers, advocated a more gradual pace of change and a constitutional monarchy.
- The other group, often referred to as the revolutionaries, propagated radical political change in which the Manchus and the imperial monarchical system itself had no role to play whatsoever.

It was this latter group that gained the upper hand in the 1911 Revolution which finally led to the collapse of the Qing and the imperial system.

7.5.2 The Reformists

The most prominent of the reformists was Liang Qichao a close associate and student of Kang Youwei. Born in 1873 in Canton, Liang Qichao had a classical education. After the debacle of the 1898 Reform Movement, Liang Qichao fled along with Kang to Japan. A prolific writer and essayist, Liang Qichao exercised a great influence on an entire generation of Chinese youth. Though Liang Qichao did not believe in immediate radical political change unlike his more celebrated contemporary, Sun Yatsen, he urged the Chinese to shake off their past and go forward like a “ship leaving the shore.”

Liang Qichao did not share with the radical political activists and Sun the feeling that immediate radical change was possible or that China was ready for it at this juncture. In 1907, he founded the Cheng Wen She (the political culture association). Through the platform of this association, Liang Qichao advocated the adoption, of a constitution, a parliament, a cabinet, an independent judiciary, and provincial autonomy. For Liang Qichao democracy was to take the form of a constitutional monarchy established voluntarily by the Qing. The latter were to function like an “enlightened monarchy” under whom the people would be politically educated to exercise their rights. His opposition to sweeping political change was based on his view that the Chinese people were totally unprepared

for and ignorant of their role as responsible and conscious citizens. Hence he advocated of a period of tutelage under a constitutional monarchy.

Though in the years before the 1911 Revolution, Chinese youth and radicals were to turn away from Liang Qichao for what they believed were conservative ideas, Liang Qichao wielded considerable influence. His ideas inspired the constitutionalist movement which mobilized the gentry against the Qing. But the gentry too, were not quite committed to Liang Qichao's ultimate objectives of a democratic China. They were to use his views effectively to realize their aim of greater political participation and power against the Qing.

7.5.3 The Revolutionaries

Sun Yatsen (1866-1925) has been identified with the more radical political current which demanded not only the overthrow of the Qing but also abolishing the Imperial institution. They advocated the creation of a new political structure in the form of a republic.

Sun, like Liang Qichao, was born in Kwantung province in a rich peasant family. Unlike Liang Qichao he had no classical education. With education in Honolulu and Hong Kong, he was trained to be a Western style doctor. He was a great admirer of the Taipings and the secret societies. As early as 1895 he had attempted to organize an insurrection against the Qing which failed. He had also organized the Hsing Chung Hui (Revive China society).

His Western ways and anti-dynastic view found enthusiastic support among Chinese youth, secret societies and the overseas Chinese communities who were to financially support his anti-Qing activities. The secret societies had maintained a tradition of anti-Manchuism from the days of the collapse of the Ming in the seventeenth century. The overseas Chinese in turn saw the Qing as hampering the development of a modern economy and thereby their commercial interests. Chinese youth from the end of the nineteenth century had been increasingly exposed to non-Chinese ideas. They saw in Sun's modern rhetoric a possible hope of China's survival.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Mention in about five lines the attitude of shen-shang towards the Qing rule.

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- 2) Discuss in about ten lines the views of Liang Qichao.

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- 3) Explain in about ten lines the role of Sun Yatsen.

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7.6 THE TONGMENGHUI AND ITS IDEOLOGY

After the failure of the 1895 insurrection Sun Yatsen fled to Japan. There he met other like-minded intellectuals and members of the secret societies. During the first decade of the twentieth there were several societies which sprang up with the purpose of overthrowing the Qing. For example, the Aigouhsueh she (Society for Patriotic Studies) was started to involve people in direct fighting. In various places, in Shanghai and Hunan province, revolts were attempted. In 1903 in Hunan the Xingzhonghui (China Revival society) organized a revolt led by Huang Xing. Most of these attempts ended in failure and their leaders fled to Japan, a country considered safe for all these political “dissidents”.

In July 1905 most of these dissidents met in Japan and from this meeting was born the Tongmenghui. The Tongmenghui was formed by merging the Hsing Chung hui (Revive China society), the Xingzhonghui (the China Revival Society) and the Guangfuhui (Restoration Society). The establishment of the Tongmenghui represented a definite step in the direction of different small groups, with shared goals and objectives, coming together to work immediately. Members of the Tongmenghui were bound by oaths of brotherhood which were in the tradition of the secret societies. An example of such an oath of brotherhood is:

I swear under heaven, that I will do my utmost for the expulsion of the Manchus, the restoration of Chinese sovereignty, the establishment of the Republic and the equalization of land rights. I swear to be faithful to these principles....

The oath included deposing the Manchus, regaining the sovereign rights that had been lost by China to the foreign powers and creation of a republic. Anti-Manchuism from all these goals was to take a centre stage. The best example of anti-Manchu propaganda was a popular booklet, *The Revolutionary Army*, written by an ardent nationalist and revolutionary Tso Jung. He exhorted the Chinese to “annihilate the five million and more of furry and horned Manchu race... if China is to be independent, if China is to survive in the new world of the twentieth century”

Following were the basic goals of this united party:

- 1) It was committed to the creation and the establishment of a republic.
- 2) The ideas which it enunciated as the basis of its actions were enshrined in the SanminZhuyi (The three people’s principles) as expounded by Sun Yatsen. The three principles were nationalism, democracy and thirdly, the people’s livelihood or what has often been referred to as socialism.

The first among the SanminZhuyi was nationalism. Its chief characteristic was an open and unabashed anti-Manchu stand. Though implicitly it suggested an anti-imperialist stand as well, however, hatred of the Manchus took precedence over a strong and outright anti-imperialist stand.

Democracy implied the establishment of a republican constitution and government with equal rights for all citizens. It stood for the separation of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary which was radical departure from the traditional imperial system.

The third principle aimed at improving the general condition of the people. Here it must be noted that Sun was influenced by the ideas of Henry George, who

advocated a single tax to appropriate increases in land values and thus to check the enrichment of speculators and monopolists in a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing society. The objective was a commitment to a prevailing principle of the common good as well as to contain the speculation in land values produced by industrialization and urbanization.

However, there were several problems with these stated principles of the Tongmenghui. The emphasis on Chinese nationalism was unduly concentrated on the ouster of the Manchus, who had in any case been quite over three centuries. Scant attention was paid to the more serious problem facing China, that of the presence of the Western and Japanese imperialist powers.

The second principle of establishing a republic took little note of the need to prepare strong ground on which it would be erected. Further, even though the goal was a republic, Sun too was to advocate, like Liang Qichao, a period of tutelage. This latter was to be used during the 1920's to perpetuate army rule.

The most astonishing and disappointing was the principle of the people's livelihood. It ignored the basic problem of China, the agrarian crisis and the wretched condition of the Chinese peasantry which constituted the bulk of the Chinese population. Despite major drawbacks in the stated goals, Sun and the Tongmenghui gained wide support. Agitated young students were drawn to Sun's grand vision and his conviction that the establishment of a modern republic could be achieved easily and that henceforth China's problems of subordination would miraculously disappear. Liang Qichao's ideas of more gradual change seemed outdated and not in step with the demands of the time.

Sun Yatsen's radical utopia and optimism obscured some major problems in pursuing the goal of establishing a republic. Armed rebellion as a strategy was adopted in an effort to establish revolutionary bases in the various provinces against the Qing. Between 1908-1911 eight such insurrections were attempted in the southern provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi. These two provinces had active secret societies and further, it was possible to smuggle in arms and funds because of this region's proximity to Hong Kong and Indo-China. All such efforts failed due to a variety of reasons, like faulty organization, lack of co-ordination and a total underestimation of the ability of the state to effectively deal with such challenges. The state ruthlessly suppressed them. There were other problems as well. Within the Tongmenghui divergent views emerged. Certain members of the party were attracted by ideas of anarchism and questioned the leadership of Sun.

The day though was not far off when these radical activists were joined by disgruntled gentry and demoralized army officers against the Qing.

7.7 THE 1911 REVOLUTION

The work of Sun and his party had been concentrated in the southern provinces. Rebellions broke out in the Yangzi basin in the summer of 1911 which accelerated the forces of revolution.

Two major developments, the agitation to protect and recover railway rights in Sichuan province and the revolt of the Wuchang army provided the immediate situation in which the Qing collapsed.

7.7.1 Protection of the Sichuan Railways

In May 1911 the movement which began in Sichuan to protect railways proved to be the prelude to the revolution. On May 9th 1911, the Qing announced the nationalization of all railways. This announcement was accompanied by news of a large foreign loan of 60,000 pounds sterling being taken by the Qing. This decree and the loan were seen by the provincial gentry as yet another evidence of the Qing disinterest in assisting Chinese entrepreneurship.

Further as already mentioned, the provincial gentry had developed large interests in modernizing economy and had invested heavily in developmental activities like the building of railways. In 1904 the Sichuan Hankou Provincial Company had been formed. The work of building the railway line had begun. The Company had raised funds of about 16 million taels from a surcharge on land and voluntary contributions. Many interests were involved and the compensation that the state offered was considered insufficient.

Several different groups responded for a variety of reasons. Patriots were outraged by the financial dependence on the foreigner. The financiers and the gentry whose interests were directly hurt were in the forefront of the movement. The provincial assembly that had come into existence as a result of the constitutional changes introduced by the Qing saw the nationalization of railways as a threat not only to provincial economic independence but also as a threat to their provincial political autonomy.

A Railway Protection League was formed with the backing of the provincial assembly and the gentry. Petitions were circulated and demonstrations organized. When these had no effect, the shareholders of the Company met in the capital Chengdu on August 24, 1911 and decided to escalate the scale of protest by closing shops and schools, refusing to pay taxes and forming local self-defense militia to meet any eventuality.

When the Governor-general of the province had the leaders arrested on September 7, several thousand people protested. In the ensuing turmoil 40-people were killed.

What had started off as a move to protect the rights of the gentry now took a new turn. The Railway Protection League was composed of constitutionalists defending their privileges. Now new social forces entered the fray. The secret society, Society of Brothers and Elders supported rebellious peasant bands. They were joined by revolutionary students who had returned from Japan.

The government worried by the events in Sichuan ordered the Hubei New Army to move to Sichuan. This further intensified the strife. Meanwhile the events of Sichuan were overshadowed by the outbreak of rebellion in the garrison stationed in Wuchang.

7.7.2 The Wuchang Rebellion

This rebellion which began on 10th October 1911 is traditionally celebrated as the “double ten” rising and as marking the beginning of the 1911 Revolution. Though the roots of the latter revolution go back in time to a complex set of developments, nevertheless the rising of the Wuchang garrison proved to be the last straw.

This rebellion was the work of members of the New army. They belonged to the Literary Study Society which had contacts with the revolutionary intellectuals of Hunan, Hubei and Sichuan, and had formed the Common Advancement Association. Though the latter had links with the Tongmenghui it worked closely with the Literary Study Society. The two societies together had begun secret preparations for a revolt in October of 1911.

A bomb accidentally exploded at the offices of the Common Advancement Association. To forestall reprisals from the police, the revolutionaries decided to act. On the evening of October 10, 1911 four battalions of the New Army mutinied. They took the arsenal and attacked the government buildings. In panic the Governor, Ruicheng and the commander of the army left down. By the morning of the 11th, Wuchang was in the hands of the rebels. Since they did not have any well-known leader, they turned to Li Yuanhong, a brigade commander and pressurized him to accept the post as head of the military government of the Chinese republic and Tang Hualong, the chairman of the provincial assembly was made responsible for civil matters. Both the leaders chosen held moderate to conservative views and to them fell the task of expanding the revolution.

7.7.3 Declaration of Independence by the Provinces

The example of Wuchang was quickly followed by other provinces which declared themselves independent. In October the provinces of Hubei, Hunan, Yunnan, Shenxi and Shanxi declared themselves independent. During November, Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Sichuan followed in declaring independence. By November 27, 1911, the Qing was left with control over only Manchuria, Henan, Zhili and Shandong.

The social forces that brought about these provincial independence declarations varied from region to region. Secret societies and the New Armies actively participated in this. For the most part the leadership was in the hands of the provisional assemblies and the chambers of commerce. The state officials fled or in some cases joined hands with the revolutionaries. For example, in Jiangxi and Guangdong the governors themselves announced secession. Generally, it was altogether a peaceful transition.

7.7.4 The Qing Response

The Qing government responded by sending 12 units of the Beiyang army. The problem, however, was that the troops were loyal to the commander Yuan Shikai, who was called out of retirement to deal with the “rebels”. The regent Prince Chun had to accept all the conditions laid down by Yuan. Yuan used the opportunity to consolidate his position and gain the sympathy of the rebels as well. He demanded that the Qing pardon the rebels and create a parliament. The members of the National Assembly had on October 27th demanded that a constitution be prepared forthwith, a parliament convened and a general amnesty declared. Fearing a revolt from the Beiyang army itself, the Qing declared a constitution with nineteen articles and Yuan Shikai, the commander of the imperial forces was now made prime minister.

Yuan Shikai moved quickly in a counter-offensive and took Hankou and Hanyang. This offensive was stopped at this stage. It has been suggested that this was because Yuan wanted to further his own ambitions. There was also the considerable strength of the rebels. A truce was signed on December 1st.

The foreign powers preferred neutrality. This was because the theme of anti-imperialism remained muted and the new leaders were willing to accommodate their interests and sought their tacit support.

7.7.5 The Chinese Republic

Curiously enough, when the revolution did break out, Sun Yatsen was in the United States. There were differences between the revolutionary intellectuals on the one hand and the gentry and militarists on the other. After a series of provincial meetings it was decided that China would have a presidential government with Sun Yatsen unanimously selected as the first president. The Chinese Republic was inaugurated on January 1, 1912 at Nanking.

The new Republic faced a great threat from Yuan Shikai and his army. At this juncture, to avert a crisis and to protect the fledgling republic, Sun Yatsen offered to resign in favour of Yuan if the latter promised to support the new republic.

Yuan negotiated with the Nanking government and engineered the abdication of the last of the Manchu emperors. On February 12, 1912, the Xuantong Emperor (later known as Henry Pu-yi) bowed “to the Mandate of Heaven....manifested in the wishes of the people”, and abdicated thereby ending the Qing dynasty and the ancient Chinese monarchy. A final imperial proclamation guaranteed Yuan’s position: “Let Yuan Shikai organize with full powers a provisional republican government and confer with the republican army as to the methods of union, thus assuring peace to the people and tranquility to the people.” On March 10, 1912, Yuan was established as provisional president until a parliament was elected and a full constitutional government established.

7.8 AFTERMATH

The end of Manchu rule was achieved with relative ease but soon the fundamental weaknesses of the Revolution surfaced. Yuan, as president, was not committed to the principle of representative government and sought every opportunity to subvert the parliamentary process. He would not tolerate any challenge to his power from anyone.

Soon after the revolution, political groups had organized themselves into something like political parties and were gearing themselves for the parliamentary elections. Liang Qichao had organized the former reformers into the Democratic Party (Minjudang) which later was amalgamated into the Progressive Party (Jinbudang). The greatest challenge to Yuan came from the Guomindang (the National People’s Party) organized by former members of the Tongmenghui. This party had been formed by Song Jiaoren, an associate of Sun Yatsen.

In 1913, the first parliamentary elections in Republican China were held. The Guomindang was easily the most successful of the three parties. This euphoria, however, did not last very long. Yuan moved quickly and cracked down on the revolutionaries and had Song Jiaoren assassinated in Shanghai in March 1913 in a bid to check any threat to his own position.

This assassination outraged the Chinese. At this time Yuan also came into attack for having taken a foreign loan on onerous terms. Yuan borrowed money to the tune of 25 million pounds sterling from a six power consortium of British, French, German, Russian, American and Japanese banks. In return the consortium demanded and received a monopoly of loans and reserved the salt taxes as security.

In an attempt at regaining some measure of autonomy against Yuan's highhandedness, during July and August of 1913, seven provincial governments, though ill prepared, declared their independence of Yuan's government in a short lived "second revolution". This revolution was quickly suppressed. Sun Yatsen, Huang Xing and others once again fled to Japan to work out their future strategy. Generals of the Beiyang army extended their control as governors of the provinces. The last vestiges of any resistance vanished. By the end of 1913, Yuan tried to abrogate to himself all powers thereby making the parliamentary assembly meaningless.

The revolution thus had an all too brief existence. It had achieved the destruction of a monarchical system and replaced it with a republic. The foundations of this republic were weak. The social forces that brought about this revolution, the gentry and the army had little to offer in the long run. The revolutionary intellectuals were ineffectual without a strong social base or military power. Most significantly it was a revolution that had ignored the bulk of the Chinese people, the peasantry. It was essentially a struggle among the dominant social groups, a struggle in which centrifugal forces were to undermine the basic goal of the 1911 Revolution of a strong unified republic.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Analyze in about ten lines the aims and objectives of Tongmenghui.

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- 2) Discuss in about ten lines the results of the 1911 Revolution.

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7.9 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have seen how the Qing government attempted reforms in certain areas to get a fresh lease of life. However the reforms failed to satisfy the people. The presence of foreign powers and continued exploitation of Chinese economy and resources further weakened the Qing position. There emerged new social forces. For example the rising bourgeoisie accused the Qing for not protecting Chinese business interests. A host of factors contributed in the development of nationalist feelings. Both the Reformers as well as the Revolutionaries played a major role in this awakening. While the former were led by Liang Qichao the leader of the latter was Sun Yatsen. The formation of the Tongmenghui gave a definite shape to revolutionary ideas and organization.

You have also become familiar with the course of events during the revolution (like the movement to protect Sichuan railways, the Wuchang Rebellion and the declaration of Independence by the provinces, etc); the establishment of the Republic and what happened after that.

The Chinese scholar Wang Hui writing on the influence of the 1911 revolution on Lenin and the Russian revolution, while noting that it is not possible to ascertain any direct influence, raises overlooked facts. Lenin followed developments in China closely. He had read and critiqued Sun Yatsen's writing and published "Democracy and Narodism in China in 1912, and "Backward Europe and Advanced Asia in 1913 where he said China

was the scene of a vigorous and democratic upsurge. In the imperialist phase, Lenin argued, struggles of the oppressed around the world would be integrated into the world proletarian revolution. He regarded Russia as an 'Asian country'.

It is often ignored, Wang Hui writes that the October Revolution took place after China's republican revolution of 1911. This he argues shows that the Russian revolution was a response to the revolution in Asia. Lenin's theory of national self-determination, and his ideas about revolutions in backward countries were introduced after the 1911 revolution. Karl Radek, who became principal of Sun Yatsen university in Moscow, wrote on Sun Yatsen's death an article recalling a conversation in 1916 at the height of WWI where Lenin proposed that the Bolsheviks unite with the Chinese revolution. The idea seemed farfetched at that time but Radek says Lenin had already seen the importance of the Chinese revolution. Lenin saw the Chinese revolution as the most progressive force in world history, a rupture in the world imperialist system. He develops a new logic of a 'progressive Asia' and a 'backward Europe', and by shedding imperialist Europe and joining Asia finds a new path which combines national liberation and socialism. It was this unique path, argues Wang Hui, that "provided the premise for a new kind of revolutionary subject: the alliance between workers and peasants with the Chinese peasant as the principal component.

Wang Hui, "The Politics of Imagining Asia" in *The Politics of Imagining Asia* Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2011, pp.10-62.

7.10 KEY WORDS

Tutelage : Guardianship

Xenophobia : Dislike of foreigners

Onerous : Troublesome

Vestige : Evidence, sign

7.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Base your answer on Sub-section 7.2.1.
- 2) Base your answer on Sub-section 7.2.3.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The link between the merchants and landed elite is referred to as shen-shang. They were opposed to the Qing for surrendering to imperialist powers and wanted to protect their own economic interests. Base your answer on Section 7.4.
- 2) Base your answer on Sub-section 7.5.2.
- 3) Mention the efforts of Sun Yatsen discussed in Sub-section 7.5.3.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The basic aims and objectives are discussed in Section 7.6.
- 2) Read Section 7.8 for your answer.