

@ct:Conclusion

@st:The Legacy of the 1911 Revolution

@tol:For the Chinese constitutionalists, the ending of the 1911 Revolution was a particularly unfulfilling one. Was the revolution a success or a failure? Did the revolution have an impact beyond its short-lived mobilization? What was the legacy of the revolution? These troubled questions have haunted students of the 1911 Revolution for over a hundred years. The 1911 Revolution included all manner of actors, from high-level administrators in Beijing to local Gowned Brothers and militiamen in rural Sichuan, and from famous revolutionaries like Sun Yat-sen to cultural figures such as the vernacular opera performer Yang Sulan, who helped sing the revolution into existence. A revolution might fail in the most narrow, political sense, but despite its failure, it can still have profound and lasting effects and set in motion major political change.

@tx:The 1911 Revolution occurred within the context of the wider political transformations that were playing out at the end of the Qing dynasty. In 1900, Chinese elites were still dutifully serving their emperor in Beijing, providing him with resources and maintaining his monarchical legitimacy; in 1912,

these same elites became advocates of the political principles embodied by a newborn republic. By the end of the revolutionary decade, Chinese had learned a new political discourse: the concept of rights had gained currency, ideologies of equality and political participation had challenged the traditional cosmology of hierarchy and harmony, and mass propaganda had been deployed as a powerful tool for political change. The revolution had demonstrated the mobilizing potential of democratic republicanism and mass nationalism. Marking the rise of a new political consciousness, thousands of men and women gained firsthand experience in the public arena: they talked, read, and listened in new ways; they voted, protested, and joined political parties.

The 1911 Revolution was a fundamental political change spearheaded by new ideas about rights (quan, quanli, minquan and guoquan), equality (pingdeng), and popular sovereignty (minzhu), which furnished a powerful stimulus for the Chinese elite to abandon the old imperial order. The defining feature of the revolution was the creation of a rhetoric that centered on rights and a political repertoire that included mass media, speeches, demonstrations, and public meetings. The filtering of the revolutionary experience through the media created a new community, transforming how politics was conducted. Looking at

the 1911 Revolution through the lens of political culture reveals the crucial role played by the constitutionalists. Contrary to the dominant tendency in the historiography of the 1911 Revolution to focus on the Tongmenghui, this book instead foregrounds the popularity of constitutional reform among the Chinese gentry. In the two decades leading up to the collapse of the Qing, it was this group of men who mobilized political activism, fostered the learning, translation, and promulgation of the new, revolutionary ideas, and created schools, legal codes, and mechanisms to transform Chinese society in accordance with those ideas. Their potential as a political constituency capable of turning one way or another was contingent on the circumstances they faced. During the revolutionary turmoil in 1911, the movement leaders in Sichuan, who were counted among the constitutionalists, voiced an alternative legitimacy to that of the old regime, created a new, democratic political culture, and gave life to the revolution.

The revolution had a mixed legacy. That the Chinese constitutionalists failed to establish a constitutional order had much to do with the ways the revolution unfolded. To begin with, Chinese constitutionalists had their own understanding of constitutionalism. For them, constitutionalism was a means to achieve popular sovereignty. It was not necessarily aimed at

establishing a limited government, but at strengthening state power, on the condition that the state would be led by them, or that sovereignty would lie with them. Reflecting the assertion that "constitutional politics is the politics of public opinion," they sought to rely upon public opinion to achieve constitutionalism. During the revolution, claiming to represent the people, these leaders' exercise of power was often unlimited and oppressive, and the valorization of public opinion spawned further scrambles for public office, with all contenders maintaining that they embodied the people. After the revolution, movement leaders were neither able to reach a consensus about the setup of the new state, nor were they able to control the military or local powers once the Qing was deposed. The revolution failed to build a viable, constitutional state; however, the core of revolutionary experience, that is, the emergence of a new, democratic political culture, has survived.

Rather than attempting to determine long-term social and economic origins or outcomes, this book has concentrated on identifying the source of unity in the revolutionary process. From a consideration of the various types of power that arose in the revolution, it is clear that socioeconomic interests were an important part of the story but they were not the decisive factor. The lack of social and economic definition among the

participants made the experience of the revolution all the more dramatic and all the more democratic. Movement leaders held that every person was a "master of the nation," and that rhetoric effectively mobilized multitudes to join the revolution.

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@to: The interaction of structure and ideas is an underlying theme of the story told in this book. To be concrete, up until 1900, although the effectiveness of the old regime had been challenged, neither elites nor commoners had called into question the political principle of imperial China. For example, in 1875, when Yuan Tingjiao rebelled against the gentry and landowners (shenliang) in Dongxiang, he talked about "clearing the emperor's name" and "restoring the emperor's rule." In 1897, the flamboyant Dayi Gowned Brother Yu Dongchen rose up to "repel the foreigners and restore the Qing." While Yu and his cohorts began questioning the Manchus' otherness, they did not question the sacredness of the emperorship or the legitimacy of the old regime. As influential as Yu was, he collaborated with the local officials and elites without questioning the justice of the local power structure. The old pattern of legitimacy survived, and fate was in the hands of Heaven, not his own.

@tx:Endorsement of the old regime was also natural for the elite. Chinese elites gained their status and prestige from the state. They were neither agents of self-governance nor representatives of the people. Up until the early 1890s, they had been willing to partner with the state in return for access to the limited number of official positions, and confirmation of local elite status through degrees, honorifics, and privileges of all kinds. This partnership with the state was also evident in their all-important role in negotiating and collecting the taxes that the dynasty relied on for its sustenance. In Sichuan, shenliang and local officials determined administration and shared control of local society. Tension and conflict arising between them did sometimes function as stimuli for change, but the maximal returns secured by the shenliang under the existing system blunted their desire to alter the status quo. They had no respect for insurgents like Yuan Tingjiao, who rose up to correct the evils of the old regime; that is, the shenliang, with the acquiescence of local officials, cheated and imposed extra taxes on peasants, asserting that Yuan deserved to "die more than ten thousand times" for he had shown the "greatest defiance and had no basic morality."

Missionary cases seriously challenged and stressed the old regime in the 1890s. In Sichuan, local officials shared with

elites and commoners repugnance for Christians and animosity against foreign missionaries. Despite the solidarity Sichuan officials achieved with the shenliang and the Gowned Brothers, imperial orders from Beijing threw them into a quandary. They had to obey Beijing to maintain their posts, but as they did so, their alliance with the shenliang was collapsing. It was in moments like these that the local Sichuanese lost their trust in the state, and over time their support of the Qing eroded. The missionary cases left the alliance between local officials and the elite shaken, while a new alliance--between the shenliang and the Gowned Brothers, as demonstrated by the Yu Dongchen Rebellion--grew stronger.

While local power structures were being renegotiated, new ideas also came to Sichuan. In the 1900s, the passionate writings of "Mr. New People," Liang Qichao, spread across the province. In essence, Liang's writings offered a new discourse on "rights." Through them, ideas such as "naturally given rights" (tianfu renquan), "equality" (pingdeng), "the people's rights" (minquan), and "popular sovereignty" (minzhu) became known among a new generation of Sichuanese. The sense of ownership in public affairs, the belief that the people were stakeholders in the polity, and the notion of political participation also became prevalent and gained popularity.

Before long, statements that "all were masters of the nation" were chanted in classrooms in over ten thousand new schools across Sichuan, propelling students to see politics in new and different ways.<sup>2</sup> Among them, a democratic impulse and a desire for social leveling were rising.

In one of the most influential constitutionalist essays of this period, Liang Qichao compared the state to a shop, and citizens to owners, not employees. Chinese seem to have read Liang's analogy of citizenship as ownership as the literal truth. Before this, Chinese subjects, especially the Confucian gentry, would have conceded that although the emperor had no "right" to rule, everything under Heaven belonged to him. Landowners held land and other forms of wealth at the emperor's sufferance. This, together with a shared set of hierarchical values keyed to obligation and obedience, protected the money in one's own pocket and the flow of taxes to the capital. But now the state wanted more than was customary in terms of wealth, and citizens wanted more power from the state than it was accustomed to giving. This new circumstance made what had been an obligation a right, and what had been informal formal.

It is important to note that the concept of rights was inclusive of political as well as economic rights. Economic considerations were of particular importance in understanding

how the commitment of the state to modernizing China--for example, dominating railway development in Sichuan and elsewhere--and its attempts to accommodate foreign interests in the meantime to gain breathing space for its own development--for example, yielding to Western demands in railway investment--led such large numbers of gentry in a relatively isolated province like Sichuan to become constitutionalists and then revolutionaries, who could deploy ideas like the people's rights and equality with confidence and abandon.

The political terms were new, but they well described the mounting challenges the Sichuan elite faced. In the Sichuan political vernacular, the cry was not "no taxation without representation" but rather "no taxation without supervision." The expense of developing railways, police forces, and schools had led statist reformers to centralize and formalize taxation, thus running roughshod over gentry-landlord interests and the past practice of negotiating taxes in ways that balanced elite interests with those of the dynasty. The elite wanted back into the political process and constitutional reform--which relied on formal institutions rather than informal connections--appeared to be a means of ensuring that. For the elite, constitutionalism was a new path between old-style protests escalating to open rebellions on the one hand, and long-standing expressions of

loyalty to a dynasty now at the end of its run on the other. In the case of railways, if Sichuan was to have railways and was to pay for them via taxes or investment capital, then Sichuanese--that is, the elite--should control and supervise them. Private ownership, as long as the people--or some subset of the people--of Sichuan were the owners, was seen as more trustworthy than national ownership that lacked local supervision.

Establishing the Provincial Assembly was an important formative event in the emergence of the revolution in Sichuan. In their clashes with the new tax bureaus, the Sichuan elite found a way to address the principle of popular sovereignty as they refined their ideas and rhetoric. "No taxation without supervision" and "We, the people, are the masters of the state" became key notions that helped pave the way for the railway movement that was to come. In the course of their economic and political struggles against the state, the Sichuan elite also became increasingly influential, consolidating their political power in the Provincial Assembly and in the Chuan-Han Railway Company, where the reins of the economy were in their hands. After the assembly meeting, a strong constituency was formed through this convergence of social, political, and economic powers. The free-floating political ideas that had been in

circulation for years among the disaffected Sichuan elite finally coalesced into a formidable political movement.

When the revolution came to Sichuan in the summer of 1911, the leaders of the movement in Chengdu wielded the rhetoric of rights as a weapon and quickly deployed the political repertoire that had already been practiced in the Provincial Assembly--meetings, speech making, newspaper propagandizing--to mobilize supporters, encouraging them to fight for their rights even as they faced powerful enemies. On occasion, revolutionary leaders employed familiar cultural symbols from the past to stimulate people's emotions and at times appropriated traditional values such as loyalty (zhong) and righteousness (yi) to give people a sense of moral purpose. But more importantly, new concepts such as the rights of the nation, constitutionalism, and the rights of the people circulated in Sichuan. Sichuanese learned to organize, propagandize, apply peaceful yet firm tactics to achieve their goals, and articulate their opinions on national and public affairs. These experiences gave them a taste of what it was like to participate in politics, an understanding of political egalitarianism, and a growing confidence in their ability to give voice to a new political authority.

Springing from the political elite's desire to establish a constitutional government, the 1911 Sichuan Revolution was more

than an old-style protest. During the revolution, the pressing need to mobilize commoners was the impetus for the creation of a new, democratic political culture. As the revolution continued, radicalization was engendered by the constitutionalists, and their actions diverged from their originally proposed goals. The initial discourse about rights was augmented with concepts of equality, freedom, republicanism, and self-governance, which more effectively spoke to the hearts of the people. The people in Sichuan were encouraged to learn about these new ideas, identities, and modes of collective action. As a result, they began to take root, leaving a long-lasting impact on the working of modern Chinese politics.

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@to:To be sure, the immediate outcome of the 1911 Revolution was not a triumph. The revolution achieved its goal of overthrowing the monarchy, but deposing the Qing did not give birth to a functioning constitutional republic. The secret to making a republic work is not the promulgation of a radical political discourse but the channeling of the energy of the citizens into stable institutions. In recent years, legal scholars in China have returned to this important topic and reflected upon the

failure of Chinese constitutionalism. Zhang Yongle, for example, emphasizes above all the prerequisite of a viable state as the foundation for a working constitutional order. He notes the conditions militating against China establishing a viable state following the collapse of the Qing: the uncontrollable military, the encroaching imperialist powers, and the breakdown of the relationship between the central and the local governments. In addition to these material reasons, he attributes the miscarriage of constitutionalism to the political elite's failure to achieve a consensus when drafting constitutions.<sup>1</sup>

@tx:Indeed, the inability of the political elite to reach agreement on the basic structure of the state had been a long-running theme in China's constitutional history. Between 1906 and 1911, Qing central officials and the provincial elite disagreed, causing the constitutional reform to turn into a revolution. The Qing's resistance to the idea of constitutional monarchy gave rise to the elite's demand for republicanism. In 1913, the failure of the Progressives and the Nationalists to reach an accord in effect led to the failure of the parliament. In 1917, as another chance for China to achieve parliamentary politics briefly emerged, the former Progressives and Nationalists were still unable to work together, and the new military strongman Duan Qirui manipulated the senate election to

advance his Anfu clique. After 1918, as parliamentary politics was losing popularity among politically minded Chinese, a new political ideal, that is, the politics of the masses, became the more appealing alternative. Mass movement and socialism, as Li Dazhao articulated in his 1918 seminal article "The Victory of the Masses," became the future for China.<sup>2</sup>

While scholars like Zhang Yongle correctly point out the material and structural reasons for the failure of constitutionalism in China, this book stresses instead the democratic impulse and the fixation on popular sovereignty--which again led to the obsession with expanding the power of the legislative branch--of the Chinese constitutionalists. The greatest number of Chinese constitutionalists studied at Hosei University in Japan, where they were educated in the French political tradition infused with concepts such as equality, rights, and popular sovereignty. It was these radical, egalitarian values rather than the mediated, hierarchical ones in mainstream Japanese constitutionalism that shaped their imagining of a Chinese constitutionalism. Contrary to the tenets in the Meiji Constitution (1889), which emphasized the authority of the emperor and claimed that "sovereignty lies with the emperor," constitutional law professor Minobe Tatsukichi taught Hosei's Chinese students that constitutionalism was first of

all to realize "freedom" and "equality."<sup>3</sup> Sovereignty, he insisted, must reside with the people. Being a liberalist, he viewed constitutionalism as "the politics of public opinion," and as a corollary, emphasized the importance of a parliament in the polity and at times equated "constitutionalism" with "a political system that has a parliament."<sup>4</sup>

Tang Hualong, Song Jiaoren, Pu Dianjun, Wang Jingwei, Shen Junru, Yang Du, and Ju Zheng, to name but a few leading Chinese constitutionalists and legal talents in the revolutionary camp, were all trained at H<sup>o</sup>sei. Forty-eight chairs, vice-chairs, and resident representatives of the provincial assemblies and twenty-one national assemblymen among the core group of the late Qing constitutionalists had studied at H<sup>o</sup>sei.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the most important of the early Republican lawmakers, who created the Provincial Constitution, had also been trained there.<sup>6</sup> The training at H<sup>o</sup>sei coincided with Liang Qichao's widespread idea that "people are the masters of a nation" and reinforced Liang's argument that constitutionalism is a means for realizing popular sovereignty. These students came back to their home provinces and disseminated knowledge about constitutionalism to the rest of the educated elite.<sup>7</sup> They brought back with them the principles of democracy and popular sovereignty, but far less of the administrative know-how for

running a constitutional state, or the values of separation of powers or limited government.

The experience of studying in Japan, in addition to a tradition of elite activism, created a Chinese constitutionalism that was full of contradictions. While claiming to represent the people, Chinese constitutionalists were the most aggressive agents in imposing state-building projects on local communities. Deploying the rhetoric of rights, Sichuan constitutionalists took over the railway company, but ended up demanding more taxes from the people. Legitimized by the late Qing constitutional reform, these constitutionalists strove to be power holders in the newly enhanced state. As the movement became ever more radical, the demand for constitutionalism shrank. After 1911, the same, persistent focus on popular sovereignty and the role of the legislature also helped explain the troubled process of building constitutionalism in early Republican China. Historian Zhang Yong, for example, demonstrates that both the Provisional Constitution and the Temple Draft embodied the spirit of parliamentarism of the French Third Republic; both placed the parliament in a supreme position and considerably limited the power of the executive branch.<sup>8</sup> The French emphasis on the power of the legislature, though better able to speak to the hearts of

the people, also included aspects that were not conducive to the making of a viable, working constitutional republic.

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@to:As messy and unfulfilling as the immediate outcome of the 1911 Revolution was, the people of China subsequently lived under a republican government. From 1912 onward, notwithstanding political turmoil, assassinations, factionalism, civil wars, invasions, and revolutions, the polity of China has remained, at least in name, republican. Whether it was the Beiyang warlords, the Nationalists, or the Communists in power, selections of the head of state have invariably been "by the people," and the popular will of the nation has steadfastly remained the declared basis of state sovereignty. The mantra of "liberation of the people from the yoke of the Qing," combined with the newly embraced concepts of political rights and self-determination, led to the emergence of an unprecedented political and moral force--the people as a recognizable political constituency. This was, in effect, the birth of modern politics in China: an ideal that the state should be built for the people and that the people should have sovereignty over the state.

[figC.1]

@tx:The 1911 Revolution changed Chinese political culture in ways that were irrevocable. The revolution shows that the value of "rights" was often protean, fungible, and translatable, but while being translatable it was still accruing momentum, and while subsiding, it still had the potential to erupt like a volcano at the right moment. After the revolution, a new polity emerged in China, and in that new polity, the principle of popular sovereignty and the ideas, lexicon, symbols, and rituals of republicanism became widespread in Chinese society. Even though politicians oftentimes manipulated republican rhetoric to pursue interests of their own that were far from the noble principles they espoused, rather than simply labeling Chinese republicanism as "fake," and proffering as evidence a handful of short-lived examples, it is more illuminating to analyze the impact of republican values in the *longue durée*.<sup>9</sup> Political change is often preceded by an ideological paradigm shift. The establishment of democracy is often a process spearheaded by a new conceptual framework, and its content remains to be gradually filled.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, if we view the political transformation in 1911 in the longer time frame of twentieth-century Chinese

revolutions, we see that the concept of rights rather than obligations is a paradigm shift that began among the elite but continued to gradually take root in the broader population. That shift laid the foundation for the subsequent popular revolutions in twentieth-century China. It is precisely the emphasis on equality and popular sovereignty that deepened the revolution's hold further down in Chinese society, leading to the ultimate success of mass movement in China. A consistent theme running through constitutional reform, the 1911 Revolution, the Campaign to Defend the Republic, the Nationalist Revolution, the Communist Revolution, and finally, the Cultural Revolution, was a fundamental belief that "the people are the masters of the nation." For many political leaders and activists, ideas about equality and rights were central to the values and expectations that shaped their intentions and actions.

Thus, when we look at what the 1911 Revolution brought to the people of China, we see a sea change resulting from new ideas and practices that transformed perceptions about government and the role of the state. The revolution established the mobilizing potential of democratic republicanism. During the revolution, Chinese people learned about their rights and their power and learned to deploy a new repertoire of protest. The language of preserving the nation, the gestures of equality and

fraternity, and the emotion-filled songs and public parades were not soon forgotten. The repertoire of movement politics and the values of promoting national and popular sovereignty, rights, and the rule of law would not easily disappear. A revolution attracts people's enthusiasm in an exhilarating way. It connects the elite with commoners, shakes people's prior beliefs, and destabilizes old lifestyles. It creates powerful stories and puts on a good show on open streets, and in doing so touches people's hearts and exerts a profound impact. Through movements like this, key notions fundamental to modern Chinese politics were spread among a large group of Chinese people for the first time. After 1911, political institutions had to be based on a new form of legitimacy, and new political values continued informing Chinese politics and setting discursive rules for it. Even though the new political language has been appropriated, subverted, and distorted by various powers, the legacy of the 1911 Revolution remains. After the revolution, China has never again been the same.