

## Sun Yixian and the 1911 Revolution

### Topic:

- The 1911 Revolution in China was a political turning point for China in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as characterized by the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of a republican government
- Had its beginnings in 1894 when Sun Yixian, often referred to as the “Father of the Chinese Revolution”, launched his Revive China Society (Xingzhonghui)
- Sun was instrumental in stirring up revolutionary sentiments, garnering support for his ideology, and stirring foreign support
- Set up revolutionary societies; Revive China Society and the Tongmenhui

### Thesis:

- However, this essay asserts that he was not the main cause for the 1911 Revolution
- It was rather the provincial gentry elites and the decisive role of Yuan Shikai

<p><b>SYS: Stirring up revolutionary ideals and foreign support</b></p>	<p><b>Topic Sentence</b> Sun stirred up revolutionary ideals and was one of the first to do so, with the setting up of the Xingzhonghui in 1894 and the Canton uprising in 1895</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sun travelled to Europe, Japan, and Asia to spread his revolutionary ideals, through drama troupes and other mediums</li> <li>• However, he was unable to garner much support due to the relatively greater influence of the monarchical reformers under the leadership of Kang and Liang</li> <li>• Sought reforms and power through the Emperor-Protection Society</li> <li>• In addition, the Canton uprising failed and was quickly suppressed by the Qing, with many of the members captured and some killed</li> <li>• Thus, Sun lacked political clout to support his revolutionary efforts</li> <li>• Secondly, Sun was instrumental in stirring foreign support, but this was relatively limited in causing the 1911 Revolution</li> <li>• Sun was relatively popular among the foreigners, particularly in the West due to his Western education and Christian beliefs</li> <li>• However, in the USA, he made no headway in gaining support from the overseas Chinese, but his efforts did alarm the Chinese government</li> <li>• Resulted in his kidnapping in London by the Qing in 1896 and his rise to fame</li> <li>• However, foreign support was weak as Sun was only able to get them to stop providing loans to the Qing</li> <li>• Japan proved a huge disappointment since the Chinese population there were conservative or apathetic and he attracted only around a hundred supporters</li> </ul>
<p><b>SYS: Ideology</b></p>	<p><b>Topic Sentence</b> Sun developed an ideological framework for his revolutionary movement, aiding in its growth and development, particularly against the Qing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sun created the Three People's Principles of Nationalism, Democracy and People's Livelihood</li> <li>• He also formulated the Three Stage Revolution, intending for China to become a republic first via military rule, secondly a period of political tutelage and then constitutional rule</li> <li>• However, the Three People's Principles were too vague and it was unlikely that the</li> </ul>

	<p>peasants, which composed 85% of the population, could understand them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The provincial gentry elites who played a major role in the revolution were not in favour of democracy as it would undermine their positions of power</li> <li>• As for People's Livelihood or Socialism, the influence was not particularly significant</li> <li>• <b>Martin Bernal:</b> Even for the revolutionaries, interest in socialism was subordinate to their concern over national issues</li> <li>• Thus, the only message that the revolutionary groups used was anti-Manchu nationalism</li> <li>• Furthermore, Sun's Three Stage Revolution idea was extremely idealistic and was not implemented in 1911 and even under Jiang's government from 1928-37</li> <li>• There was only a military dictatorship without the implementation of a constitution during the warlord period and no centralized control</li> <li>• Thus, although it did manage to incite the masses into anti-Manchu nationalism, Sun's ideology was not instrumental in garnering support for the 1911 Revolution</li> </ul>
<b>SYS: Revolutionary societies</b>	<p><b>Topic Sentence</b> Sun is largely credited for the formation of revolutionary societies responsible for the 1911 Revolution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sun was one of the earliest to form a revolutionary party in 1894, the Revive China Society</li> <li>• However, it suffered from poor organization and Sun was only effective in recruiting members from the periphery of society</li> <li>• Although it staged an uprising in Canton in 1895, it failed due to lack of organization, weapons and funds</li> <li>• In 1905, Sun set up the Tongmenhui and engaged military genius Huang Xing and organizational expert Song Jiaoren</li> <li>• However, the majority of members were from central China and Huang Xing's supporters were educated elites, while Sun's supporters were from Southern China and were uneducated</li> <li>• Sun's peasant background was also looked down by Huang and Song</li> <li>• Both of them thus asked Sun to be a figurehead and symbol of the society</li> <li>• Sun's leadership of the Tongmenhui was thus clearly challenged and by 1908, the society was politically inactive</li> <li>• In 1910, Sun formed the Revolutionary Party while Huang and Song formed the China Office of the Tongmenhui, adjunct of the former organization</li> <li>• Thus, while Sun did organize revolutionary groups, there were in effective by 1911</li> <li>• Only Huang and Song's China Office played an instrumental role in the 1911 Revolution, of which Sun had no part in</li> </ul>
<b>SYS: Strategy</b>	<p><b>Topic Sentence</b> Sun's strategy was a failure and it was Huang's strategy that prevailed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sun called for armed uprisings and the rise of secret societies</li> <li>• However, this was unsuccessful as seen by the 10 failed uprisings since 1906</li> <li>• Furthermore, Sun had little involvement in the preparation for the uprisings and participated only in one of them, while Huang had a critical role in all</li> <li>• Sun also sought to stage uprisings in Southern China, which was a strategic failure as it was far from the political and economic base of Beijing</li> <li>• In contrast, Huang and Song focused on revolution in Central China, seeking to infiltrate the New Armies instead of relying on secret societies, which were poorly armed and disorganized</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The New Armies were a modern force, and had politically-active officers who were easily affected by anti-Manchu nationalism espoused by Huang and Song</li> <li>• They were especially crucial during the Wuchang uprising in 1911, where they staged a coup in response to the accidental bomb explosion, a trigger for the 1911 Revolution</li> <li>• Hence, it can be argued that Huang's strategy was more consequential to the 1911 Revolution than Sun's</li> </ul>
<b>Role of provincial elites</b>	<p><b>Topic Sentence</b> The provincial elites, who were the gentry elites in league with the businessmen, played a much bigger role in the 1911 Revolution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Qing Court was immensely unpopular amongst the provincial elites due to the failure of the Late Qing Reforms</li> <li>• Resulted in the abolishment of imperial examinations in 1905 and Manchu dominance of the new cabinet, diminishing their prestige</li> <li>• Alienated the provincial elites and made the anti-Qing message espoused by the revolutionaries more appealing</li> <li>• Most significantly, the railway recovery movement was the trigger for the provincial revolt</li> <li>• The Qing government intended to nationalize the railway network set up by the Western imperialists in order to promote China's economic development</li> <li>• It did so by borrowing even more loans from the West in 1911</li> <li>• The Qing's decision to nationalize the railways gave the impression that the Manchus were buying out the Chinese and selling national interests to foreign powers</li> <li>• Outraged many Chinese who believed that foreign powers should not be allowed in the process of railway development</li> <li>• The provincial elites played an important role in uniting the opposition to the Qing under "Railway protection societies" and contacting the various provincial assemblies through the telegram system</li> <li>• By late November 1911, all but 3 provincial assemblies had declared independence</li> <li>• Thus, the gentry elites played an important role in the 1911 Revolution and setting up a Republican state by declaring independence from the Qing</li> <li>• Sun in fact was not in China when the Wuchang uprising broke out.</li> </ul>
<b>Role of Yuan Shikai</b>	<p><b>Topic Sentence</b> Arguably, the most important factor in the 1911 Revolution was the role of Yuan Shikai, who engineered the downfall of the Qing through his betrayal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yuan had the loyalty of the New Armies, including the Beiyang Army, which was the most powerful army in China</li> <li>• This gave him immense political and military power as he was the only figure who had the forces and might to suppress the revolutionary forces in defence of the Qing court</li> <li>• Left the fate of the revolution in his hands</li> <li>• Thus, in order for Sun to overthrow the Qing, he needed to secure an alliance with Yuan</li> <li>• Despite his allegiance to the Qing, Yuan secretly negotiated with the revolutionaries</li> <li>• With the promise of presidency, Yuan encouraged the Qing under regent Prince Chun to abdicate in February 1912, thus paving the way for the revolutionaries to organize a provisional republican government</li> <li>• Thus, the role of Yuan was critical in forcing the Qing out of existence and legitimizing the Republic</li> </ul>

### Conclusion

- In conclusion, while Sun played a role in revolutionary sentiments in 1895, he was largely unsuccessful