Sun Yat-sen and the Revolution in China
Sun Yat-sen

OVERVIEW
Now called “the father of the Chinese Republic,” Sun Yat-sen had been forced to leave China after leading a failed coup against the 2,000-year-old Chinese monarchy in 1895. He continued his revolutionary activities from abroad, however, and when the 1911 revolution broke out in China, he returned, becoming the first president of the new Chinese republic in 1912. Here is his account of the events leading up to the overthrow of the Chinese monarchy, from his book *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary*.

GUIDED READING
As you read, consider the following questions:
• How did Sun Yat-sen help the revolution even though he was forced to leave China?
• How did global popular opinion contribute to the success of the Chinese Revolution?

From the very foundation of the "United League" we published newspapers which spread far and wide the ideas of the Chinese Revolution, democracy embodied in the three principles and the "Fivefold Constitution." A wave of revolutionary thought rolled all over China, but it reached its highest point when we began to publish journals. At that time we were joined by famous heroes like Hsu-Si-Lin, Sun-Yaen-Tsi, Tsu-Tsin and others.

The revolt at Pinli began in 1907, and was carried out independently by our "United League" with its own forces, the revolutionary army being organised out of its members. At the time that our revolutionary army was conducting a life-and-death struggle with the Imperial troops at Pinli, all our Tokyo members were yearning to go, and besieged our Committee with requests to send them to the front to take part in the fighting. I know of cases when some comrades who were not able to leave for the front cried like children.

Unfortunately, we were not informed in good time about the revolt at Pinli, which was begun by members of our League, and we learned of it so late that we were unable to make adequate preparation. We lost the battle at Pinli and Lu-Tao-Yi, Nin-Tiao-Yi, Yuan-Hun-Yin and other comrades were captured by the Imperial troops. Part were executed, and part sentenced to imprisonment. This was the first battle-christening of the members of our "United League." After this it could be said that the revolutionary movement seized on the whole country in unprecedented dimensions. The members of our League in Tokyo, of course, could also not remain passive spectators.
Then the Imperial Government proposed to the Japanese Government that we should be expelled from the borders of Japan.

I set out from Japan with Han-Min and Ching-Wei for Annam, in order to organise our office at Hanoi, with a view to a new insurrection. We raised a revolt at Chaochow: however, the troops of Huan-Kan were defeated there. This was our third defeat. Then followed the revolt of Min-Tan at Huchow, but this also suffered defeat. This was my fourth defeat. In the districts of Lian and Tsian a rising took place on account of unwillingness to pay taxes. The Imperial Government sent 4000 of its troops, under the leadership of Kuo-Jen-Chang and Chao-Po-Siang to restore order. I ordered Huang-Kai-Tsiang and Hu-Yi-Chen to visit their respective camps and persuade them to go over to the side of the revolution. Both generals declared that if a real revolutionary army actually revolted, they would join it.

After this we sent organisers to the Lian and Tsien districts to mobilise all the groups of intelligent citizens and co-ordinate their activity. We also sent Suan-E— and Chuan-Chi to buy arms in Japan. Moreover, we collected comrades in Annam, and invited many French officers from amongst those demobilised as instructors. We considered that, once we had arms, we would be able to seize the whole maritime area from Fanchen to Tungsin. Tungsin is extremely suitable for the organisation of a revolutionary army, as it borders on the French concession, and various kinds of military equipment can be transported with great convenience over the river which separates them.

With the arrival of arms we reckoned on equipping and arming 2000 odd men, then to collect an army of 6000 men in the Tsien district, and only then to convince Kuo-Jen-Chang to come over to our side. In this way we hoped to organise a strong army, which after a short period of training could easily occupy the provinces of Kwantung and Kwangsi, and then advance towards the Yangtse and join the lately mobilised troops of Nanking and Wuhan, which would give us at last sufficient forces for the successful completion of the revolution. However, quite unexpectedly for us, some troubles took place in our Tokyo committee, and the plan for the purchase of arms fell through. Fanchen at this time was attacked, but as the arms did not arrive, I lost confidence in the comrades who had set out to procure them, while those who had attacked Fanchen, seeing that the arms still did not arrive, withdrew to Kiangchow, hoping that the troops of Kuo-Jen-Chang would join them. The latter, however, seeing that our forces were too weak, could not make up his mind to help us, fearing that he himself would be crushed by the Imperial troops which had been despatched as reinforcements. Our troops then retreated to Linshan, expecting to be helped there by the troops of Chao-Po-Siang: but the latter, seeing that Kuo-Jen-Chang was not moving, also did not dare to move. Thereupon our army, in view of its weakness, decided to retreat to Shi-Wan-Dashan, which was done. This was our fifth defeat.

After our plan of insurrection was defeated in the districts of Tsian and Lian, I personally took the lead of Comrades Huang-Kai-Tsiang, Hu-Han-
Min, some French officers and 100 other comrades, and by a sudden attack seized three forts at Chen-Nan-Kwang, and took into our ranks the soldiers who surrendered. Here I hoped to collect also the comrades who had retreated to Shi-Wan-Dashan, and by our joint efforts to attack Huchow. But I did not then reckon with the fact that the comrades at Shi-Wan-Dashan were too far away. We, a group of about 100 men, with the three guns we had captured, fought for seven days against the thousands of men led by Lu-Tsi-Kwang and Lu-Yin-Tin, and then retreated to Annam. While I was passing through Lianshan, I was recognised by a spy of the Imperial authorities, who approached the French Government, with the result that I was expelled from Hanoi. This was our sixth defeat.

After my departure from Hanoi, I gave instructions for all preparations to be made for a new invasion of the Lian and Tsian districts. At the same time I ordered Huang-Min-Tang to seize Hokow, for the purpose of advancing further into the Province of Yunnan and establishing our base there. Shortly afterwards Huang-Kai-Tsiang moved out of Annam with his friends and marched into the districts mentioned, where he fought for several months, bringing panic on the Imperial troops and acquiring thereby great repute. However, after some time he also retreated, owing to lack of military equipment and lack of support. This I consider our seventh defeat.

After my arrival in Sinchow—in about a month—Huang-Min-Tang with his 100 comrades seized Hokow, shot the principal officers, won over 1000 soldiers who surrendered, and began to await instructions from our committee. At that time I was in Nanyang, and could not cross French territory to take command personally at the front, and therefore instructed Huang-Kai-Tsiang to assume the command himself. Huang-Kai-Tsiang was already half-way there, when he unexpectedly fell under the suspicion of the French authorities, and was taken to Hanoi, where, after communication with the Chinese Government, he was forbidden to enter China. The insurgents at Hokow were thus left without a leader, as a result of which we lost the moment suitable for an offensive. Huang-Min-Tang held out for over a month, fighting continuously all the time, but the enemy were ten times his numbers and we did not succeed in retaining Hokow. Finally the detachments of Huang-Min-Tang, numbering 600 men, withdrew to Annam, which was our eighth defeat.

In consequence of the insistence of the Pekin Government, our comrades were expelled from the French possessions and went to Singapore, but were stopped there by the British officials, who would not allow them to land. Then the French Consul in Singapore entered into negotiations with the Governor-General, stating that these were 600 Chinese revolutionaries, who had retreated after their defeat on to French territory, and in consequence of their own wishes had been sent to Singapore. The Governor-General of Singapore replied that he did not recognise Chinese who fought against their own Government as belligerents, and that he considered them to be not political
criminals but pure rebels, and therefore they would not be allowed to land. However, after two days’ delay in the port, the French succeeded in carrying their point, and our comrades were permitted to land. During the revolutionary fighting at Hokow the French Government had observed neutrality, but in effect it had even then recognised the revolutionaries as a belligerent side, and therefore it could not treat the comrades sent to Singapore as mutineers pure and simple.

After this last defeat, comrade Ching-Wei was very depressed, and decided to leave for Pekin to carry out terrorist acts: after consulting with me, he left for Pekin with a few comrades; but the attempt he made failed, and he was thrown into prison together with Huang-Fu-Chen. They were set free only after the Wuhan rising.

Up to the creation of our "United League," there were very few people who helped the revolutionary army in money, and those only from amongst my personal friends. No one else dared to help us. After the creation of our "United League" we began to be helped from outside. Of those who helped us most at that time, I can mention Chang-Tsin-Tsiang, who sold his factory in Paris and gave us a sum of 60 or 70 thousand dollars. Further, amongst the number of the most generous subscribers, I will mention Huang-Tsin-Nan of Annam, who gave us all his savings, amounting to several thousand dollars. I can also mention several rich merchants of Annam—Li-Cho-Fong, Tseng-Hsi-Chow and Ma-Pei-Chen—who subscribed some tens of thousands of dollars.

After my repeated defeats, I could not live freely either in Japan, Hong Kong, or Annam, or generally in the districts bordering on China. Thus work within the boundaries of my native country was almost impossible for me. Therefore, entrusting the leadership to comrades Huang-Kai-Tsiang and Hu-Han-Min, I myself once more set out on a journey round the world, with the special purpose of collecting resources for the Chinese Revolution.

Subsequently, comrades Huang-Tsiang and Hu-Han-Min organised at Hong Kong a "Chief Committee for Southern Affairs," and, together with comrades Chao-Po-Tsiang, Ni-Yang-Chen, Chu-Chi-Sin and Chen-Chiung-Min, raised a rebellion of the newly-mobilised troops in the province of Kwantung. This movement was well thought out, and the banner of insurrection was raised in 1910.

Comrade Ni-Yan-Tiang went to the camp of the insurgents and assumed leadership of the revolt. From Shaho they moved on the chief city of the province, and had already reached Han-Chi-Gan, but there met the Government troops, and by an accidental explosion Ni-Yang-Tiang was killed. Left without a leader, the rebels dispersed in various directions. This was our ninth defeat.

At this time I was leaving America for the East. When I arrived in San Francisco I learned of the revolt. I immediately set sail for the Philippine Islands and Japan with the object of returning to China. But in Yokohama I
was recognised by spies and could not remain there, and left for the South, where I decided to meet Huang-Kai-Tsiang and Hu-Han-Min to confer on the plan of our further activities. Amongst the comrades at this time there was great depression. After our defeat and the destruction of our strongest committee, we had lost advantageous positions. Most of our fighters were forced to flee and emigrate. We had not sufficient strength to organise all anew. Therefore the comrades were in an extremely pessimistic frame of mind, and when we began to talk of our future plans, they all sighed heavily and did not look one another in the eyes. I took the floor, and began to tell them that our defeats in the past were much heavier. Our detachments at the present time might be few, but the revolutionary wave was growing and broadening day by day, and the spirit of the Chinese was rising. "And if we now turn our attention to the plan I proposed and do not lose heart, I promise to find the resources for future work." They replied: "If we have not the resources necessary to satisfy our own needs as emigrants, how can we find resources for the Revolution?"

I replied again that I would find the resources. Then comrade Bo declared that if we were really to begin action again we must immediately send a comrade with several thousand dollars to the Province of Szechuan, to help the comrades there and prevent their dispersal. Only then will it be possible to think of setting up a new committee and again reopening the struggle. "We must," said comrade Bo, "return to Hong Kong for a full discussion, and also immediately send five thousand dollars to Szechuan. But if we intend further action, we require several tens of thousands of dollars."

I then summoned the Chinese emigrants who sympathised with us for a conference, the result of which was that they collected eight thousand dollars for us, and in addition decided to delegate comrades to collect the sum we required in the various regions and provinces. In the space of a few days we collected sixty or seventy thousand dollars.

We worked out a plan of action. I went to the Dutch possession, but was not admitted, and was also refused a passage through the British possessions; so that I had nothing else left but once again to leave for Europe or America. I went to America, where I travelled from corner to corner, agitating amongst the Chinese emigrants and urging them to help us and to subscribe money for the cause of the Revolution. On this occasion there were very many sympathisers amongst the emigrants in America.

At this time took place the Kwantung rising. All the most heroic revolutionaries took part, and although we once again suffered defeat, the glorious deeds of the seventy-two heroes resounded throughout the world. This was our tenth defeat.

Even before the rising, comrades Chen-Yin-Shin, Sun-Tun-Chu, Tan-Shi-Bin, Tsui-Tsiao-Shen and others, seeing that in the province of Kwantung we were suffering one defeat after another decided to transfer the centre of their attention to Hankow, Wuchang and Hanyang, i.e. to work amongst the
garrisons there, consisting as they did of newly-mobilised soldiers. After some agitation had gone on amongst them, their state of mind was so revolutionary that the Governor-General of the Hupeh and Kwantung provinces ordered the most revolutionary units to be transferred to the province of Szechuan. However, after the last Kwantung rising, the number of supporters of the Revolution began to increase daily. The Imperial authorities of the Tsing dynasty were in a state of panic terror, fearing most of all a blow from Wuchang, and therefore the Governor-General of the above-mentioned provinces, Jui-Chen, made an agreement with the Consul of a "certain" state that, when the revolutionaries rise in revolt, he must land his troops and bombard the city.

The atmosphere in Wuchang was electrical. Comrades Sun-Wu, Liu, and others decided to act and raise a rebellion of the troops. However, quite unexpectedly, our committee was discovered, and thirty people were imprisoned; but Hi-Yin-Shan, while in the prison at Wuchang, succeeded in notifying Chen-Yin-Shin and giving him warning, so that he should not too fall into the trap. At this time, there fell into the hands of the Imperial authorities a list of our artillerymen and other soldiers who were taking part in the work of the Revolution. With the object of saving these comrades from inevitable destruction, it was necessary to act immediately with great urgency. Therefore, Sun-Bi-Chen first went into action, followed by Tsao-Tsi-Min and others. At the head of their detachments they attacked the Governor-General’s office and began bombardning it.

Governor Jui-Chen, hearing the noise of the cannonade, immediately fled to Hankow, and appealed to the Consul of a "certain" country to bombard the city. But according to the Treaty of 1900, no country had the right of independent action in China, and therefore a meeting of the Consular body was summoned to discuss the question of whether the city should be bombarded to restore order. It turned out that the Consuls had no definite opinion. They were then addressed by my old acquaintance, the French Consul, who informed the meeting that this rising had taken place on my instructions, and declared that the revolutionaries of the Sun-Yat-Sen Party were by no means making a senseless mutiny, but were fighting for the reconstruction of political authority. Therefore, they cannot be classed with the Boxers, and they should not be interfered with. The senior member of the Consular body at that time was the Russian, and he took up the same position as the French Consul. The other Consuls joined with them, and passed a resolution of non-intervention and maintenance of neutrality.

Seeing that the Consul was not acting according to the Agreement, and that he could not be relied upon, Jui-Chen fled to Shanghai. But as soon as the Governor-General fled, Chang-Hu followed him. In this way the Imperial authorities eliminated themselves.

Amongst the revolutionaries, during this time, Sun-Wu was wounded, while the Shanghai comrades had not arrived. Tsa-Tsi-Min, Chang-Chen and
other members of the "United League" then forced Colonel Li-Yuan-Hung to assume the Governor-Generalship of the Hupeh province, and only then was order gradually restored.

The first revolutionary outbreak thus took place in the provinces of Hunan and Hupeh, but unity of action was not established between them. Our success at Wuchang was due in great measure to the flight of Jui-Chen, since, if he had not fled, Chang-Hu would not have fled also, and then the troops subordinated to him undoubtedly would not have mutinied. The majority of the mobilised soldiers at Wuchang were on the side of the Revolution: but most of them were transferred earlier to the province of Szechuan. Of the troops who remained in Wuchang there were only the artillerists and the engineering troops, but they would have sold their lives dearly if their officers had not fled. And so, "Heaven itself helped China."

The object of our Revolution, of course, was not limited to the capture of Wuchang alone. The comrades began to display activity throughout the country. Very rapidly we seized fifteen provinces. Earliest of all Shanghai went over to us, immediately after the fall of Hankow. Chen-Yin-Shin was acting there, and immediately after Shanghai he seized Nanking. Thus the seizure of Wuchang, Hankow and Hanyang gave us the keys to the whole of Central China, while Chen-Yin-Shin at Shanghai was also growing in strength.

While the rising was taking place at Wuchang, I arrived in Columbia. Ten days before my arrival there, I received a telegram from Huan-Kai-Tsiang from Hong Kong, but as the cipher was in my baggage, I could not read the telegram, and only deciphered it when I arrived in one of the towns of the State of Columbia. The telegram stated that Tsui-Chen had arrived at Hong Kong and reported that money was necessary to assist the rising of the recently mobilised soldiers. Being in Columbia, I had not any money, of course, and could not procure it, and intended to send a telegram postponing the rising. But night fell, and, being tired by my journey, I postponed it till the morning, in order to think over the question again with a clear head. I woke up the next morning at 11 o’clock and, being hungry, went out to a restaurant. On my way I bought a newspaper and, arriving at the restaurant, unfolded it; immediately my eyes were met by a telegram about the capture of Wuchang by the revolutionary troops. I thereupon sent a detailed telegram to Huan-Kai-Tsiang, in which I explained the reason for my silence.

In twenty days I could come to Shanghai and take a personal part in the revolutionary struggle, but for us our diplomatic front was more important even than the military front for the moment. Therefore, I decided to concentrate my efforts on diplomatic affairs, and only after settling this business to return home.

The state of affairs at that time was as follows. America had proclaimed in respect of China the principle of the open door and the maintenance of its sovereignty, but in relation to the Revolution America had no definite opinion. However, American public opinion took our side. So far as the
French Government and French people were concerned, our Revolution met with sympathy. In England public opinion expressed its sympathy with the Revolution, but the Government was opposed to it. Germany and Russia, at that time, were obviously in favour of support for the Tai-Tsing dynasty, and furthermore, the relations between our revolutionaries and their peoples were insignificant, and consequently we had no possibility of influencing their policy. Therefore, there remained only Japan, which was very close to us, and whose best sons not only expressed their sympathy with us, but had sacrificed their lives in the cause of the Revolution. The policy of the Japanese Government was, however, not quite clear in this question, and judging from previous experience one could suppose that it put up a negative attitude to our Revolution. Thus, on one occasion it expelled me from the country, and on another did not allow me to land in Japan.

Beginning with 1900, the Powers had not the right to act independently in China. There were six Powers who at that time took a very intimate part in the affairs of China. Of these, France and America took the side of the Revolution, Germany and Russia were opposed to the Revolution. England had not yet defined her policy, though her people also expressed its sympathy with the Revolution, and, while the Japanese Government was against the Revolution, the Japanese people sympathised with it.

Thus, the international situation was a question of life or death for the Chinese Revolution. The most important of all for us, at the moment, was the attitude of England, for we considered that if England took our side Japan would not delay in following her example. Therefore, I decided to leave for England.

When going through St. Louis, I read a newspaper statement to the effect that a revolution had broken out at Wuchang on the orders of Sun-Yat-Sen, and that in the proposed Republic Sun-Yat-Sen would be the President. After this I had to hide from the Press correspondents, as it turned out that rumour was in advance of fact.

Accompanied by comrade Chu-Cho-Wen, I continued my long journey to England. On arrival in New York, I received information that the comrades were making an attack on Canton, and I sent a telegram to Governor Chang-Ni-Isi proposing that he should surrender the city, in order to avoid bloodshed, and ordered the comrades to grant him his life, which was later on carried out.

On my arrival in England, I entered through my English friend into negotiations with the Banking Consortium of the Four Powers, with a view to stopping all loans for the Imperial Manchu House. The position was that the Consortium had already granted one loan of a hundred millions on the security of the Chuan-Hang Railway, and then a further loan of a hundred millions. On one of these loans the money had already been partly paid, but on the other, although the signature was appended, the bonds had not yet been issued. My intention was to secure the stoppage of payment on the loan
which had been carried through, and to prevent the issue of bonds for the other loan. I knew that the settlement of this depended on the Foreign Secretary, and therefore I instructed the Director of the Wei-Hai-Wei Arsenal to enter into negotiations with the British Government on three questions, on the settlement of which I insisted. The first was the annulment of all loans to the Tai-Tsing dynasty. The second was to prevent Japan from helping the dynasty, and the third was to withdraw all orders prohibiting me from entering British territory, so that I could return to China more conveniently.

Having received a favourable settlement of these questions from the British Government, I then turned to the Banking Consortium to secure a loan for the revolutionary Government. I received the following reply from the manager of the Consortium: "Since the Government has stopped the loans for the dynasty, our Consortium will grant these loans only to a firmly established and officially recognised Government. The Consortium proposes for the present to send a representative with you on your return, and when the official recognition of your Government takes place, it will be possible to open negotiations." This was all I could do during my stay in England. I then returned home through France, and during my passage through Paris met representatives of the French Opposition parties. I received expressions of sympathy from all, particularly from Premier Clemenceau. Thirty days after my departure from France I arrived at Shanghai. The Peace Conference of South and North was taking place at this time, but the Constitution of the future Republic was not yet determined.

Even before my arrival at Shanghai, all the foreign and Chinese newspapers were spreading widely the story that I was returning home with a large sum of money to help the Revolution. When I arrived at Shanghai, both my comrades and the reporters of the Foreign and Chinese newspapers expected this, but I replied that I had not brought with me a farthing; but had brought with me a revolutionary spirit, and that, until the aim of the Revolution had been achieved, there could be no question of peace conferences.

Soon after this the deputies from all the provinces of China, assembled in the city of Nanking, elected me Provisional President of China. In 1912 I assumed office, and ordered the proclamation of the Chinese Republic, the alteration of the lunar calendar, and the declaration of that year as the First Year of the Chinese Republic.

Thus thirty years passed as one day, and only after their completion did I achieve my principal aim, the aim of my life—the creation of the Chinese Republic.