

**The Martyrs of Zhejiang:  
Race and Revolution in Late Imperial China**

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On July 6 1907, Enming, the ethnically Manchu governor of Anhui province, presided over the commencement ceremony of the provincial police academy in Anqing.<sup>1</sup> He had recently received a telegram from the Governor-General of the Liangjiang region warning that members of the revolutionary, anti-dynastic Restoration Society (*Guangfuhui*) were gathering in Anhui.<sup>2</sup> Fearing violence, Enming had ordered Xu Xilin, the ethnically Han director of the police academy, to investigate the possibility of militant action.<sup>3</sup> Unknown to the governor, the Restoration Society already infiltrated the provincial bureaucracy and installed Xu and other revolutionaries as sleeper agents.<sup>4</sup> Knowing that his time was short, Xu acted independently of the Restoration Society and its parent organization, Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary League (*Tongmenghui*).<sup>5</sup>

Before the graduation ceremony began, custom demanded that Xu personally deliver the cadet roster to the governor. Enming arrived in a room directly behind the main hall, where the cadets awaited their induction into the provincial police force. When Xu approached the governor, he drew two pistols from his boots and opened fire, emptying both weapons at Enming at point-blank range. He then moved into the main hall and informed the panicked cadets that the

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<sup>1</sup> Li Chien-Nung and Jiannong Li, *The Political History of China, 1840-1928* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), 225; Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861-1928* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 104.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 224-5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>4</sup> Jerome B. Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China* (New York: The Free Press, 1981), 200; Rhoads, *Manchus and Han*, 104; Ta-ling Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution, 1905-1912* (New York: St. John's University Press, 1970), 152.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Shen Chao, "Chen Duxiu's Early Years: The Importance of Personal Connections in the Social and Intellectual Transformation of China 1895-1920," (PhD diss., Rice University, 2009), 229; Li and Jiannong, *Political History of China*, 225; Wu Yuzhang, *Recollections of the Revolution of 1911: A Great Democratic Revolution of China* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001), 88.

governor had been assassinated, and that they all were to follow him in search of the murderer. In truth, Xu attempted to bring the cadets to the nearby arsenal and arm them for the imminent firefight against Manchu forces. In the ensuing chaos, only forty to fifty cadets followed Xu and his coconspirators into the arsenal. After the Manchu forces arrived, the cadets had no choice but to fight for Xu in the brief siege.<sup>6</sup> They quickly succumbed to the overwhelming opposition; several cadets perished, but Xu was taken alive.<sup>7</sup>

Enming died from his wounds later that afternoon.<sup>8</sup> The Manchus interrogated Xu, where he openly admitted his purpose for the assassination:

The Manchus (*Manren*) have enslaved us Han (*Hanren*) for nearly three hundred years. On the surface, they seem to be implementing constitutionalism, but that's only to ensnare people's minds. In reality they are upholding the centralization of authority so as to enhance their own power. The Manchus' presumption is that once there is constitutionalism, then revolution will be impossible . . . If constitutionalism means centralization, then the more constitutionalism there is, the faster we Han people (*Hanren*) will die. . . . I have harbored anti-Manchu feelings for more than ten years. Only today have I achieved my goal. My intention was to murder Enming . . . so as to avenge the Han people. . . . You say that the governor was a good official, that he treated me very well. Granted. But since my aim is to oppose the Manchus, I cannot be concerned with whether a particular Manchu was a good or bad official. As for his treating me well, that was the private kindness of an individual person. My killing of the governor, on the other hand, expresses the universal principle of anti-Manchism (*pai-Man*).<sup>9</sup>

Xu suffered decapitation for his crimes, though it is unclear if he was beheaded the following day<sup>10</sup> or the day of the uprising.<sup>11</sup> After the execution, Enming's former bodyguards

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<sup>6</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 156.

<sup>7</sup> Chao, "Chen Duxiu's Early Years," 229; Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State*, 200; Rhoads, *Manchus and Han*, 104.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 156.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Rhoads, *Manchus and Han*, 105.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Rhoads, *Manchus and Han*, 104-5.

ritualistically removed Xu's heart as an offering to their deceased governor.<sup>12</sup> They then fried and consumed the heart.<sup>13</sup>

This event, later labeled the Anqing Uprising, was one of many instances of racially motivated violence in the years preceding the Xinhai Revolution of 1911. The military annexation of China by foreign invaders from Manchuria in 1644 established the Qing dynasty. Ethnic tension between the Manchu rulers and their subjects, the Han Chinese, helped instigate revolutionary activity and the formation of revolutionary societies by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Though his movement failed, Xu's revolutionary activity with the Restoration Society embodies the calamitous confluence of internal and external factors that wrought the destruction of the Qing dynasty.

Xu Xilin was born in 1873 as the eldest son of a large family in Dongpu village, fifteen miles from Shaoxing prefecture in Zhejiang province.<sup>14</sup> As a wealthy merchant, Xu's father provided well for his family.<sup>15</sup> His eldest son, however, was fond of destroying things and constantly rebelled against his conservative, disciplinarian father.<sup>16</sup> When he was 12, Xu ran away from home, shaved his head, and attempted to join a monastery in a neighboring town; his father apprehended him before he succeeded. Despite receiving little formal education, Xu demonstrated militant tendencies when he endeavored to organize a local defense militia during

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<sup>12</sup> Mary Backus Rankin, "The Revolutionary Movement in Chekiang: A Study in the Tenacity of Tradition," in *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913*, ed. Mary Clabaugh Wright (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 354; Rhoads, *Manchus and Han*, 105.

<sup>13</sup> Lung-Ke Sun, "To Be or Not to Be 'Eaten': Lu Xun's Dilemma of Political Engagement," *Modern China* 12, no. 4 (1986): 481-2.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Backus Rankin, *Early Chinese Revolutionaries: Radical Intellectuals in Shanghai and Chekiang, 1902-1911* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 147.

<sup>15</sup> Rhoads, *Manchus and Han*, 104.

<sup>16</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 149; Rankin, "Revolutionary Movement in Chekiang," in *China in Revolution*, ed. Wright, 334.

the Boxer Rebellion. Later, his natural aptitude for mathematics allowed him to teach at the public school in Shaoxing. This brought him to the attention of the mayor, who appointed him deputy principal of the school, a position he held for four years.<sup>17</sup>

At this time, the Qing dynasty's responses to Western aggression demonstrated a self-realization of their insecure position in Chinese society. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, foreign military action never subjugated China's potential military capacity. Rather, the imperial government submitted to limited and localized Western intrusions because the mobilization of a widespread resistance would have jeopardized the ruling dynasty. The Qing court possessed legitimate reasons for this apprehension; armed masses of peasants posed a more immediate threat to the solvency of the state than unequal treaties.<sup>18</sup> The ubiquitous defensive masonry built around townships throughout the country reveals that the elite feared the constant threat of domestic upheaval, more so than foreign invasion.<sup>19</sup>

In this context, the upbringing of Xu Xilin in Zhejiang was marked by the recent suppression of the Taiping Rebellion and the Tongzhi Restoration. The three neighboring prefectures to the north and west of Shaoxing in Zhejiang province, Hangzhou, Huzhou, and Jiaxing, experienced the worst of the fighting. Contemporary observers estimated that roughly 10-20% of the pre-war population inhabited the land, the remainder having fled or perished during the rebellion.<sup>20</sup> Similar devastation in the adjacent province of Jiangsu was reported by Qing statesman Li Hongzhang in 1864: "I have surveyed an area of up to one hundred and

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<sup>17</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Chesneau, *Peasant Revolts in China, 1840-1949*, trans. C. A. Curwen (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 74.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Kathryn Bernhardt, *Rents, Taxes, and Peasant Resistance: The Lower Yangzi Region, 1840-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 119.

several tens of *li* [Chinese mile] . . . Villages and towns are destroyed and the cultivated land has all become waste. White skeletons lie on the thorns. There are definitely no residents.’<sup>21</sup> The imperial state faced the daunting task of rebuilding the ravaged lower Yangzi region, resulting in an unprecedented cooperation with the local elites in the process of reconstruction. It is likely that Xu’s rebellious tendencies reflected the political and economic insecurities of the region in wake what was then the deadliest war in human history.

In 1903, Xu travelled to Japan to visit Tokyo and the Osaka Exhibition.<sup>22</sup> Earlier that year, the Russian Empire broke its promise to withdraw its military presence in Manchuria. This sparked a tide of nationalist fervor amongst Chinese students in Japan, leading to the formation of various paramilitary organizations intent on fighting Russian imperialism. Student delegations left Japan for China to petition the Qing court for military action against Russia. Rather than risk hostilities with Russia, the court attempted to arrest the delegates and suppress radical student activity. The Qing dynasty’s capitulation to Russian intransigence and repression of nationalist activity further angered the students, shifting their militancy toward the Manchu rulers of China.<sup>23</sup>

Xu’s own rebellious character fit well within the revolutionary atmosphere of Japan in 1903. Chinese students in Japan organized themselves in relation to their native province.<sup>24</sup> As such, Xu forged relations with student leaders like Gong Baoquan and Tao Chengzhang, fellow natives of Zhejiang. Xu returned to China and founded his own school and bookstore, from

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Bernhardt, *Peasant Resistance*, 119.

<sup>22</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 149; Rhoads, *Manchus and Han*, 104.

<sup>23</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 146; Rankin, “Revolutionary Movement in Chekiang,” in *China in Revolution*, ed. Wright, 331.

<sup>24</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 144.

which he began to promulgate anti-Manchu rhetoric and activities he was exposed to while in Japan.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, Gong returned to China in the summer of 1904 and formed a conspiratorial circle seeking to assassinate Manchu officials as part of a greater plot to overthrow the Qing dynasty. Tao joined him in Shanghai to help organize an elite circle of professional revolutionaries. That same year, famed educator Cai Yuanpei, who hailed from Shaoxing prefecture in Zhejiang, traveled to Shanghai and joined their organization. The secret group reorganized themselves into the Restoration Society with Cai as its first chairman.<sup>26</sup>

In 1912, Dr. Sun Yat-sen estimated that the Restoration Society had forty to fifty members upon its founding.<sup>27</sup> Tao's writings suggest that the group officially formed in either October or November of 1904. Cai Yuanpei's younger brother, who also joined the Restoration Society, returned home to Zhejiang at this time to gather support amongst local schools and businesses. Quietly revealing Cai Yuanpei's involvement inspired many intellectuals and elites to offer their support and involvement in the Restoration Society.<sup>28</sup> Xu, who already associated with Gong and Tao, travelled to Shanghai for a business trip and joined the Society that winter.<sup>29</sup>

The base of support for the Restoration Society largely consisted of educated elites. Historian Mary Rankin sources them as youths from gentry, scholar, and merchant families.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, historian Joseph Esherick calls them "classically educated upper-class revolutionaries." He later cites Rankin by stating that local officials sometimes conspired with

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 146-147.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>30</sup> Rankin, "Revolutionary Movement in Chekiang," in *China in Revolution*, ed. Wright, 320.

revolutionaries or responded favorably to bribes. Similarly, revolutionaries used connections with powerful gentry to fund their educational and militia enterprises.<sup>31</sup> Despite low membership numbers, organizations like the Restoration Society utilized their upper-class origins to effectively organize and carry out revolutionary activities; education and modernity afforded by elite class status granted the student revolutionaries significant opportunities to enact political change through violence.

In the fall of 1905, Xu established new educational institution called the Datong School in Shaoxing, ostensibly to instruct youths in physical education.<sup>32</sup> In truth, the Datong School provided the Restoration Society with a recruiting center and training grounds for their master plan to topple the Qing Dynasty.<sup>33</sup> Utilizing their elite connections, Xu and Tao convinced local Manchu officials to officially sanction the school by arguing that China needed to develop an effective, Western-style militia system. Intrigued by their offer, the Datong School received official backing by the very institutions the school was designed to help destroy. In Shaoxing, Xu and Tao invited civic officials to preside over school functions in order to increase public legitimacy for the institution. These efforts also offered mutual protection for civil servants and Restoration Society members linked to the school in the event of public exposure to the institution's terrorist activities.<sup>34</sup>

Parallel to the creation of a web of support within elite strata, Xu and Tao sought support from the preexisting secret societies in counties neighboring Shaoxing.<sup>35</sup> Before the foundation

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<sup>31</sup> Joseph W. Esherick, "1911: A Review," *Modern China* 2, no. 2 (1976): 154.

<sup>32</sup> Li and Jiannong, *Political History of China*, 224.

<sup>33</sup> Rankin, "Revolutionary Movement in Chekiang," in *China in Revolution*, ed. Wright, 344.

<sup>34</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 149-51.

<sup>35</sup> Li and Jiannong, *Political History of China*, 224; Rankin, "Revolutionary Movement in Chekiang," in *China in Revolution*, ed. Wright, 346.



of the Restoration Society, Tao and other Zhejiang revolutionaries consistently toured the province and promoted anti-Manchism to those willing to listen. They published leaflets and journals promulgating their racial worldview, appealing to the sentiments of many local secret societies. Because of this, the leaders of local secret societies and their followers enrolled in the Datong school and received six months of physical and militant education training. Before he left in late 1905, Xu delivered guns and ammunition from Shanghai to the Datong School for these training purposes. Secret dictums inducted every graduate of the Datong School into the Restoration Society. Graduates returned to their homes, armed with ideological and physical training necessary for the Restoration Society's plot to violently overthrow the Manchu dynasty.<sup>36</sup>

The Restoration Society's association with local secret societies presented further logistical problems that foreshadowed Xu's failed uprising in Anqing. The lack of a central, organized hierarchy prevented uniform decision making and planning. Graduates of the Datong School received automatic membership into the Restoration Society,<sup>37</sup> yet those linked to affiliated secret societies usually returned home rather than remain part of a cohesive militant militia. Consequently, graduates took advantage of their physical training to involve themselves in conflicts unrelated to the goals of the Restoration Society. For example, floods throughout the winter and spring of 1906-07 caused famine in and around Zhejiang. Original members of the Restoration Society did not involve themselves in the rice riots or relief efforts. Graduates of the

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<sup>36</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 150-1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

Datong school affiliated with local secret societies, however, retained their historical obligations to the local population and their daily toils.<sup>38</sup>

In this instance, a shared militant nature and anti-Manchu nationalism brought secret societies and radical student groups together, but class origins highlighted their divergent primary objectives. While Xu spoke of the enslavement of the Han race by the Manchus during his interrogation, it is not clear that the daily toils of the people concerned the Restoration Society. The frequency of class antagonisms and peasant uprisings increased with worsening economic conditions. Poor weather and famine consistently produced disorganized revolts throughout the Qing and antecedent dynasties.<sup>39</sup> The Restoration Society's response to the famines of 1906-07 suggests that they did not trace their revolutionary lineage to these lower class antagonisms over food, but derived their purpose from something entirely different. It is true that merchants, gentry, and the literati occasionally acted in concert with peasant uprisings, sometimes acting as the provocateurs and leaders of such revolts. In most cases, especially in the final years of the Qing dynasty, the only mutuality was the common enemy found in the ruling dynasty.<sup>40</sup> The dual issue of logistical organization and ideological intent ultimately defeated the Restoration Society's attempt to instigate revolution.

In preparation for their revolution, Xu, Tao, and Gong used their connections in the Manchu government to return to Japan in late 1905, early 1906, to study military science. Because of his poor eyesight, the military academies denied Xu admission. He studied at a police academy instead.<sup>41</sup> Upon his return to China several months later, Xu secured his position as

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<sup>38</sup> Rankin, "Revolutionary Movement in Chekiang," in *China in Revolution*, ed. Wright, 351-2.

<sup>39</sup> Chesneaux, *Peasant Revolts*, 66.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 71-72.

<sup>41</sup> Li and Jiannong, *Political History of China*, 224.

head of the police academy in Anqing under Enming by using his personal wealth to purchase the office.<sup>42</sup> He also utilized his connections with his elder cousin Yu Liansan, who had been Enming's superior, to convince the Manchu governor he was genuine.<sup>43</sup> During his tenure, Xu gained the confidence of Enming for his hard work and dedication at his post.<sup>44</sup> The governor never suspected that the director of his police academy was plotting to murder him.

Xu's testimony under interrogation demonstrated his overt anti-Manchu tendencies. He was not alone, for racism abounded in revolutionary rhetoric and activities in the final years of the Qing dynasty. Yuzhang Wu argues that the popularity of Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary League grew from their official anti-Manchu position. The republican and bourgeois nature of Sun's League would have isolated the revolutionary movement, yet Han supremacy appealed to broader strata of Chinese society. This deepening racial narrative, stressing the divergence between Qing and Han China, allowed the Revolutionary League to garner greater support for the overthrow of the ruling dynasty.<sup>45</sup> Michael Gasster concurs, adding that anti-Manchuism spread revolutionary thought without comprising the integrity of the principle of traditional governance, affording legitimacy to a potential revolutionary government.<sup>46</sup>

The shared bourgeois nature of the Restoration Society and the Revolutionary League helps explain Han nationalism. National identity persisted throughout Chinese history, exemplified by the persistent Han Chinese political unit juxtaposed to subservient foreign

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<sup>42</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 152; Li and Jiannong, *Political History of China*, 224.

<sup>43</sup> Rhoads, *Manchus and Han*, 104.

<sup>44</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 152.

<sup>45</sup> Wu, *Recollections of the Revolution*, 17-18

<sup>46</sup> Michael Gasster, "Reform and Revolution in China's Political Modernization," in *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913*, ed. Mary Clabaugh Wright (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 77.

nations, such as Korea, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Simple Han nationalism fails, however, to explain the sudden burst of revolutionary, racist violence that ended millennia of imperial rule. Henrietta Harrison provides insight into this question, noting that the fusion of imported Western nationalism significantly changed Chinese conceptions of ethnic identity.<sup>47</sup> The bourgeois origins of the many individuals associated with anti-Manchu organizations allowed for greater interaction and adoption of Western ideas. Thus, Western conceptions of nationalism provided the spark with which members of the Chinese bourgeoisie began their revolution.

It is well documented that the Manchu dynasty regularly equated the Qing and China as one. In official proclamations and informal communications, the ruling Manchu elite attempted to erase the differences between themselves and their majority Han subjects.<sup>48</sup> Opposition to Manchu rule, whether found in Xu Xilin's assassination of Enming or Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary program, did not entirely originate in the revolutionary era. The conscientious decision to use ethnically-homogenizing language in state documents demonstrates that the Manchu elite remained self-conscious of their precarious ethnic position throughout their 267-year rule. Significant racial instability, however, only followed the importation of Western ideas. The newly-conceived Chinese urban bourgeoisie, with members such as Xu, Tao, Gong, and Cai, received the greatest exposure to these Western ideologies and education. It is reasonable to suggest that this ideological exposure played a catalytic role in the racial violence in the years leading up to the Xinhai Revolution of 1911.

Ideology never exists in a vacuum. Imported Western ideas could not have exacerbated race relations in China without also impacting the Manchu elite's ability to govern. As such,

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<sup>47</sup> Henrietta Harrison, "Newspapers and Nationalism in Rural China 1890-1929," *Past and Present* 166, (Feb. 2000): 181-2.

<sup>48</sup> Gang Zhao. "Reinventing China: Imperial Qing Ideology and the Rise of Modern Chinese National Identity in the Early Twentieth Century," *Modern China* 32, no 1. (2006): 5-10

anti-Manchuism expressed a deeper anti-Imperialism. Western intervention disrupted the solvency of the Qing dynasty, leading to Han Chinese fears of national partition. Revolutionaries promoted racial violence against the Manchu because they feared that the dynasty's weakness would continue to allow the West to upset the natural order of Han unity. Qing concessions to the West also convinced some revolutionaries that the dynasty became a mere puppet to foreign interests.<sup>49</sup> As Jean Chesneaux argues, the Manchus found themselves caught in a double bind where both military action<sup>50</sup> and inaction would result in further deterioration in race relations.

Understanding their precarious position, the Qing dynasty enacted policy reforms after Enming's assassination in order to assuage racial tensions. In the weeks following Xu Xilin's failed uprising, the Empress Dowager Cixi met with foreign minister Lu Haihuan and discussed racial reform. She protested that "The bandit Xu Xilin claimed there is prejudice between Manchus and Han, but really when we select provincial officials there is no prejudice whatsoever."<sup>51</sup> In truth, Cixi feared that Xu's martyrdom would ignite further violence against the Manchus because of long lasting prejudicial policies. Two days after the assassination, Cixi invited gentry and scholars throughout the country to transmit policy proposals to dissolve the differences between the two races. Some, such as Governor General Yuan Shikai, favored the use of force to dissuade anti-Manchu propaganda. Others, like Governor General Duanfang and Zhang Zhidong proposed counter-propaganda, stressing the unity between the Han and Manchus. They also supported reforming the Manchu-favored racial quota system in the bureaucracy and

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<sup>49</sup> Joshua A. Fogel, "Race and Class in Chinese Historiography: Divergent Interpretations of Zhang Bing-Lin and Anti-Manchuism in the 1911 Revolution," *Modern China* 3, no. 3 (1977): 352-3.

<sup>50</sup> Chesneaux, *Peasant Revolts*, 74.

<sup>51</sup> Rhoads, *Manchus and Han*, 106.

allowing subsidiary government agencies to enact their own policies aimed at removing structural differences between the two races.<sup>52</sup>

The torrent of reform proposals demonstrates that the Qing widely employed institutional racism against the Han and that these policies further aggravated race relations in confluence with the height of Western imperialism. Symbolically, the Manchus forced the Han to grow their hair into the braided queue as a sign of submission, a contentious issue in the final years of the dynasty.<sup>53</sup> It was only five years prior to Enming's assassination – in 1902 – that the Qing rescinded the ban on intermarriage between Manchus and the Han.<sup>54</sup> Racial divisions ran deep, however. In 1912, a year after revolution destroyed the Qing dynasty, President Yuan Shikai issued a reminder to the population that the ban on intermarriage between ethnic Manchus and Han was no longer in place.<sup>55</sup> A decade of revolution failed to establish normalized social relations between the two races.

During his interrogation, Xu denounced reform and the promises of constitutionalism as thinly veiled attempts to retain centralized Manchu authority over the *Hanren*. He constructed his racial narrative in order to indict the Manchus as foreign tyrants since their annexation of China in 1644. While it is true that the Manchus employed structural racism throughout their reign, the true source of Xu's discontent originated from complications brought on by Western imperialism. From his perspective, decades of humiliation by the Western powers delegitimized Manchu authority. Thus, Xu's racial narrative constituted a fictionalized explanation of systemic, ill-fated inequalities between Chinese and European civilization.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 106-7.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 262.

Much can be gleaned from Xu's interrogation to explain his thought process:

I have decided that once the opportune moment presents itself, I would kill off all the Manchus . . . I had intended to proceed slowly with my plan. But lately the governor has been enforcing strict orders to arrest all revolutionists and he has, in fact, ordered me in person to do the job. Fearing that any delay would only hurt my plan, I decided to take his life first and then force all officials in [Anqing] to surrender. Thereupon, I would lead my force to proceed to [Nanjing] and fulfill my greatest ambition.<sup>56</sup>

His last words reveal what Arif Dirlik calls a “moralistic dedication to self-sacrifice in the cause of revolution.”<sup>57</sup> Likewise, Xu's willingness to murder a man he held no personal enmity against verifies his self-proclaimed dedication to the “universal principle of anti-Manchuism.”<sup>58</sup>

Revolutionaries appreciated and promoted commitment to “universal principle,” or *gongli*.<sup>59</sup> Anarchists, strongly influenced by Western political thought, believed that the pursuit of truth took priority over the practical possibility of a successful revolution. While Xu did not ascribe to anarchism, he shared the “ethical impulse” and the primacy of “personal validation” in revolutionary activity.<sup>60</sup> One anarchist, Chu Minyi, declared that assassination was ethically justified because it purified the assassin.<sup>61</sup>

Not only did anarchists praise Xu, but their overlapping worldview explains the failure of the Anqing uprising. Xu sought validation in his martyrdom. His plan to march on Nanjing in order to achieve his “greatest ambition”<sup>62</sup> reveals that the revolution became *his* revolution. As

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<sup>56</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 157.

<sup>57</sup> Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 74.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Rhoads, *Manchus and Han*, 105.

<sup>59</sup> Arif Dirlik, “Vision and Revolution: Anarchism in Chinese Revolutionary Thought on the Eve of the 1911 Revolution,” *Modern China* 12, no. 2 (1986): 134.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 134-5.

<sup>61</sup> Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*, 74.

<sup>62</sup> Lee, *Foundations of the Chinese Revolution*, 157.

he emptied his pistols into Enming, Xu no longer concerned himself with the practical possibility of political change. Enming no longer existed. In the room there was only Xu, a Manchu oppressor, and the climactic moment of personal validation. Moving the date of the planned uprising forward helped Xu quicken his validation, yet others paid the price. Qiu Jin, Xu's cousin who succeeded him as head of the Datong School in 1907, intended to lead an revolt in Shaoxing in tandem with the Anqing uprising.<sup>63</sup> Neither coordinated effectively, and the revolutionaries at the Datong School were caught off guard when Xu instigated his revolt sooner than expected on July 6. By July 24, government troops moved on the Datong school and arrested Qiu. They executed her two days later.<sup>64</sup>

Internally, several confluent factors helped Xu arrive at his moment of martyrdom. His class origins allowed him access to nationalist ideas imported from the West, giving his rebellious temperament, in turn, a new avenue of expression. His education and time spent abroad connected him with ideas and individuals linked with the militant student movements. Seizing the opportunity to satisfy his inner convictions, he helped organize the Restoration Society and quickly moved to strike against his imagined enemies. His testimony under interrogation highlighted the romanticized worldview that led him to martyrdom.

Externally, the convergence of subsidiary aspects of Western imperialism helped drive history through the barrels of Xu's pistols. The importation of Western nationalism and revolutionary paradigms informed and inspired disaffected youth of the privileged ruling classes. Imperialism weakened the Qing dynasty's tenuous rule over the Han. Racial tension broke through the surface as the legitimacy of Manchu rule eroded away. Worsening economic conditions brought disparate social classes together in revolutionary movements. The Restoration

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 154-5.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 160-1.



Society, however, remained aloof from the plight of the lower classes. The failed Anqing uprising demonstrated the ineffectual nature of an insular revolution guided by personal conviction rather than logistical substance.

Thus, the martyrs of Zhejiang provide a microcosm of internal race relations and economic insecurity brought to a calamitous end by foreign intervention. The ruling Manchus found themselves caught in a double bind from Western imperialism; intervention instigated revolution by damaging the bonds between the rulers and the ruled and fed the disaffected youth ideological means to idealize alternatives to Qing rule. Xu and many of his comrades perished, but their example vividly demonstrates the inevitably disastrous position of the Qing dynasty in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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