# An Emperor Without Empire: A Study of the Qing Emperorship Through the Lens of the Last Qing Emperor Pu Yi

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## Introduction

Pu Yi, later known as Henry Puyi in Western media publications, was the last emperor of the Great Qing dynasty and the last emperor in Chinese history. Born in 1906, he ascended the throne at the age of two as Empress Dowager Cixi's handpicked successor after the passing of the Guangxu Emperor in 1908. Pu Yi took on the reign name of the Xuantong Emperor but his reign did not last for long. He was forced to abdicate in 1912 when he was just six years old because of the republican revolution that "overthrew" the Qing dynasty. The resulting "Articles Providing for the Favorable Treatment of the Great Qing Emperor after his Abdication" allowed Pu Yi to retain his imperial title and continue his residence in the Forbidden City while also granting him an annual subsidy from the newly established republican government.

Pu Yi remained and grew up in the Forbidden City under such provisions until 1924, when he was expelled from the palace by the forces of Christian warlord, Feng Yuxiang. The period from 1912 to 1924, when Pu Yi was still emperor despite being stripped of all his political power, was referred to as the "Twilight period" in the Forbidden City by Pu Yi's tutor, Reginald Johnston in his book, *Twilight in the Forbidden City*. It was in this period that we see the emergence of Pu Yi's life as the embodiment of the importance of the emperorship over the emperor's own personal self. We can also see Pu Yi's struggles and subsequent failures to retrieve and live up to the emperorship that had been taken away from him.

## The Qing Emperorship

What exactly was the emperorship, or more precisely, the Qing emperorship? Janet C. Moyer, in her Ph.D. dissertation *Hostage to Fortune, Footnote to History: Aisin-Gioro Pu Yi*, sums it up as thus:

> By becoming the emperor, a man 'became the symbolic center of the known world, the mediator between heaven and earth.' Much of the imperial life was consumed by ritual activity: court audiences, offering prayers for good crops, listening to court scholars lecture on the Confucian classics, and on performing sacrifices to the ancestors. Almost every detail of the emperor's life emphasized his uniqueness and superiority to lesser mortals: he alone faced the south, only he used vermilion ink, and the use of his personal name was taboo. Certain clothing and hat styles, the designs on them, and the colors used for him were only for the emperor. His subjects had to kowtow to him. He was more than human, he was the Son of Heaven, and viewed as a cosmic being but not divine…the Emperor sat at the apex of the hierarchical Confucian system in his roles as Son of Heaven and father to his people. The Chinese emperor was 'the supreme executive in history: he was the conqueror and patriarch, theocratic ritualist, ethical exemplar, lawgiver and judge, commander-in-chief and patron of arts and letters, and … the administrator of the empire. (p.1-2)

In addition to this multitude of what can be called "typical" functions and identities of the emperorship was the highly unique "cosmopolitan" aspect of the Qing emperorship.

Being one of the fringe or peripheral peoples themselves, the Manchus could relate and understand other peoples like themselves better than their Han Chinese predecessors. The "cosmopolitan" aspect of the Qing emperorship thus was displayed in the emperorship reaching out to all the diverse peoples of the Qing Empire and encompassing them by paying homage to their cultures. For example, the Mongolians and Tibetans, whom today have mediocre, if not hostile relations with the People's Republic of China, had very strong relationships with the Qing by virtue of marriage and religion. Mongolians, through said marriage to the imperial family, gained elite positions of power while Tibetans grew loyal to the Qing after the emperorship accepted and promulgated Tibetan Buddhism.

The "burden of the emperorship to impersonate its diverse peoples" (*Translucent Mirror* p.2) was high on the Qing agenda and it certainly paid off as Turks, Mongols, and Tibetan lamas filled the streets of Beijing and even the Dalai Lama came all the way from Tibet to pay his respects to Express Dowager Cixi after her passing in 1908. (McAleavy, p.70) This loyalty continued after 1911 when the proclamation of a republic disintegrated the old imperial unity: "Tibet and Outer Mongolia, which could glory in their subordination to a Tartar Son of Heaven, had no stomach for a purely Chinese overlordship and drove out the garrisons which maintained the rule of Peking." (McAleavy, p.156)

The Qing emperorship was also the head of religion but this was different from Western conceptions of religion. As the Son of Heaven, the intermediary between Heaven and Earth, and the successor of previous Qing emperors, the emperor was the head of ancestor worship, which was more so "a manifestation of family loyalty than an expression of religious sentiment (social ritual)." (McAleavy, p.88) This worship of ancestors had bearings on the emperor and his subjects because it served as a means of communication between the past and the present where ~~said~~ spirits of the ancestors expressed their approval or disapproval of the emperor's actions. The "divine response" (*Rulerships of China*, p.1477) then influenced the emperor's future actions and hence, the course of events in the empire.

## The Articles of Favorable Treatment

Pu Yi's life as the embodiment of the emperorship's importance over the emperor's own personal self began with the republican revolution of 1911. Seeking to preserve the dynasty, Empress Dowager Lung-yu, after being convinced by Yuan Shikai (who is viewed by many as one of the great traitors in Chinese history), signed the previously mentioned "Articles of Favorable Treatment" with the republic and abdicated the throne on Pu Yi's behalf. Pu Yi was only six years old at the time and had been ruling as emperor for roughly three years since 1908. Consisting of eight articles (an auspicious number for the Chinese), the Articles most importantly provided for the retention of Pu Yi's imperial title as emperor, an annual subsidy of four million dollars for Pu Yi, permission for Pu Yi to continue his residence in the Forbidden City and later the Summer Palace, maintenance and construction of Qing ancestral tombs by the republic, and protection of the imperial family's personal property. (Johnston, p.96)

A second document was released shortly afterwards to clear up any possible misunderstandings regarding the Articles and it stated that the imperial house should recognize and not contradict republican authority, the republican calendar was to be used over the emperor's reign title calendar, the emperor could confer honors and rewards on his own staff and clan but not on citizens and servants of the republic, and the imperial house had to follow the laws of the republic. As said by Henry McAleavy in his book *The Origins and Misfortunes of Henry Pu Yi*, the dynasty was indeed saved, but only, paradoxically, by surrendering all its powers. (p.77) Furthermore, Johnston wrote that through the Articles,

> The Throne itself [was] converted into a bridge to facilitate the transition from the monarchical to the republican form of government. The emperor [remained] absolute to the last and the very republican constitution, which [involved] his own disappearance from political existence, [was] created by the fiat of the emperor in his last official utterance. Theoretically, the republic [was] established not by a people in arms acting in opposition to the imperial will but by the emperor acting with august benevolence for his people's good. (p.87)

The Articles hence can and was viewed by many as a way for the imperial family to save face. The imperial family, despite many years of corruption and misrule, abdicated not because it was being forced to by the newly established republic, but out of consideration for the people.

Serving as the architect behind the drafting and signing of the Articles, Yuan Shikai had great ambition and wanted to eventually become emperor himself. He manipulated the republican and imperial parties to his advantage. Yuan was like the bat in the Aesop's fable of the war between the birds and the beasts he constantly switched sides and the only person to whom he was loyal was himself. He gave the following already paraphrased argument to the republicans on why they should sign the Articles:

> This agreement provides for the abdication of the emperor and will give you what you want—a republic. In return, you are asked to let him keep a purely honorary and empty title, and to pay him an annual subsidy which though seemingly large will be only a trifle compared with the cost of a prolonged civil war. The permission granted him to remain in the Forbidden City is only temporary, and when you desire him to move to the Yi-Ho Park (the Summer Palace) he will be obliged to obey. The other privileges reserved to him and his family are of no practical importance and will be in no way detrimental to the prestige and dignity of the republic. All these privileges may be regarded as a kind of insurance against his taking part in any anti-republican or reactionary activities, and will simplify the task of keeping him under observation…*You secure the substance; he is left with the shadow*. Foreign countries will extol your magnanimity, and the new republic will start its career amid general applause and in a blaze of glory. For you, there will be a clear sky and brilliant sunshine: for the Ta Ch'ing emperor, only a slowly darkening twilight. (Johnston, p.102)

Concurrently, Yuan Shikai gave the imperial family (namely Express Dowager Lung-yu) the following argument for the Articles:

> This agreement saves the throne, and the emperor remains emperor. All he sacrifices is *cheng ch'uan*—the right of ruling. That is really no sacrifice at all; for his majesty is only a child, and could not personally assume the imperial

> responsibilities for many years to come. By giving up the right to rule, the imperial family will save themselves a great deal of trouble and anxiety. By the time he is grown up, the revolutionary madness will have spent itself, and the emperor will resume the powers he has temporarily delegated to a crazy organization that calls itself a republic. It will prove itself unable to govern or to keep order, and the people will grow weary of it. Then they will remember that their emperor still lives, that his throne has never been vacant, and that he is ready to respond to the call of his suffering people…*You secure the substance; the revolutionaries are left with the shadow*. Foreign countries will extol you for your magnanimity in having laid down your arms because you could not bear to see your people enduring the horrors of civil war. The Throne will regain its lost prestige, and in a few years time the whole world will rejoice to see the Son of Heaven step forth to rule once more over a happy and prosperous China. (Johnston, p.103)

To Yuan, none of the advantages of the Articles to either party really mattered to him because he planned on taking over and claiming power anyway. This was all temporary in the scheme of his hidden agenda and only furthered his plans. Yuan Shikai's plans did eventually come to fruition when he arose to the throne as the Hung-Hsien emperor of "Chung-Hua Ti Kuo" (Empire of China). (Johnston, p.128) He even performed the emperor-exclusive worship of heaven ceremony at the Temple of Heaven while dressed in the robes of a duke of the Chou dynasty. (*Bio of the Hsuan Tung Emperor*, p.71) It was only disapproval from the people and his peers and his untimely/timely death that Yuan's run at the emperorship was ended.

As mentioned by Yuan Shikai in his argument to the imperial family, the Articles also hinted at the potential of the emperor claiming power again because "the word 'abdication' [was] not used in the Edict. Instead, it [used] the words 'retire into a life of leisure.' In the opinion of certain Chinese scholars, it implied the possibility of a return to the throne by the Manchu." (Chan, p.38) This kept alive the hopes of the restorationists as they strived over the post-revolution years to restore Pu Yi. They even succeeded in their efforts once in 1917 under the restorationist Chang Hsun, albeit lasting for only twelve days. The potential contained in the Articles for restoration endured until 1924, when Feng Yuxiang ousted Pu Yi from the Forbidden City.

There were many ways that scholars described the strange situation in the Forbidden City that resulted from the "Articles of Favorable Treatment." Moyer called it an "oddity where China had an emperor and a president: one without power and one without tradition…[living] side by side." (*Bio of the Hsuan Tung Emperor*, p.54) Johnston, a witness of the event and the times, called the situation "anomalous" and elaborated:

> In the heart of Peking were two adjacent palaces. In that which still retained the distinction of being the Forbidden City dwelt a titular monarch; in the other resided the chief executive of the republic. In the latter was a presidential chair occupied by one who exercised the powers of an emperor without the name; in the former was a throne on which sat one who was an emperor in name alone. He who ruled the vast realm of China was called a president; he whose rule did not extend an inch beyond his palace walls was called an emperor. (Johnston, p.178)

Pu Yi himself called it "absurd" in his autobiography because "at a time when China was called a republic and mankind had advanced into the twentieth century [he]

was still living the life of an emperor, breathing the dust of the nineteenth century." (Pu Yi, p.38)

## Pu Yi's Empty Title

The ineptitude of Pu Yi's title was "exposed" in a myriad of different ways by a number of groups, the first being the republicans. Johnston first asked "How can the republic [agree] to tolerate the existence, in its very capital, of a person calling himself emperor of China?" The answer was that "the republic did nothing so foolish" because while the emperor's title remained intact, "*that title, in its technical Chinese phraseology, was not, and never had been, 'emperor of China*.'" The title assumed by monarchs and described by foreigners as "emperor of China" was a dynastic title, not territorial. Each dynasty adopted an exclusive name for its use alone and it was custom for the character *Ta* meaning "Great" to be included before said name. According to Chinese custom, the *Ta* was only dropped when the dynasty passed out of existence and the succeeding dynasty adopted its own exclusive name. "The important point to notice is that in the name of the dynasty there is nothing to indicate the territorial limits of its dominions." So technically, a dynasty could continue existing elsewhere without a name change and rule over some area or people, as long as it could maintain itself. (Johnston, p.112)

It was by this logic and technicality that the republicans had nothing to fear about Pu Yi and felt not the slightest unease over his continued residence that was "right under their noses." "Each of the ten emperors of this dynasty was *Ta Ch'ing Ta Huang-Ti*—'emperor of the Great Ch'ing dynasty'—and it [was] this title, not any such title as 'emperor of China' which the last of the line was specifically allowed, by formal agreement (Articles) with the…republic, to retain." (Johnston, p.114) Pu Yi was at this point at least, still *Ta Ch'ing Ta Huang-Ti* but what good was that title when the *Ta Ch'ing* empire was merely the Forbidden City with a population consisting of eunuchs, clan members, servants, and possibly a harem? The situation, while quite misleading, "[didn't] matter and [didn't] affect the republic" (Johnston, p.115) and this was obviously so as the republic, without issue, took on the "dynastic name" of "Chung-Hua Min Kuo" (simply the Republic of China) and adopted a calendar beginning with "Republic Year 1."

Another occasion in which the ineptitude of Pu Yi's title was "exposed" was the Qing emperor's very own wedding. He was seventeen at the time and his bride and empress-to-be was a Manchurian woman by the name of Wan Jung (later given the Western name of Elizabeth by Pu Yi). For the wedding, the imperial family and court invited the foreign embassies in Beijing to attend the wedding festivities but in a twist of diplomatic embarrassment, "the ministers [of the foreign embassies] said they could not attend in their official capacity, as their governments did not recognize Hsuan Tung as the head of his government." (*Bio of the Hsuan Tung Emperor*, p.66) Other representatives from the embassies were sent to attend the wedding in their stead. Even on one of the supposedly happiest days of his life, Pu Yi was still slighted and shown disregard by others.

## The *Nei Wu Fu* and the Eunuchs

Pu Yi's wedding to Wan Jung came about at the urging of one of the few institutions that still operated in the Forbidden City under the emperor's rule. Two such institutions to which attention should be paid were the *Nei Wu Fu* (the imperial household department) and the over one thousand eunuchs still in service. First off, the *Nei Wu Fu* was the officially recognized organ through which the affairs and

finances of the imperial family were conducted. (Johnston p.99) However innocuous the *Nei Wu Fu* seemed, the department was actually knee-deep in incompetence and corruption. Johnston in particular seemed to harbor a rather hateful view of it and wrote that Pu Yi was left with the enormously expensive and barren task of maintaining an unnecessary and otiose mock court, solely for the purpose of continuing the *Nei Wu Fu*'s existence and interests. (p.109, 209)

Johnston continued to argue that besides Yuan Shikai, it was also the *Nei Wu Fu* that used the Articles of Favorable Treatment as a means to manipulate Pu Yi to its own advantage: "One of the most serious [problems] was that it (Articles) left intact the pernicious system (that the *Nei Wu Fu* was part of) which had been the principal cause of the Throne's decay…It was not the Nei Wu Fu that was to be maintained for the purpose of serving its imperial master" but the other way around. (p.109) Pu Yi was reduced to "being a parasite on his own former subjects" and "a completely functionless monarch" who was unable to serve his country in any way whatsoever since "the Articles deprived the emperor of all that was worth having—the privilege of being of service to his people—but left untouched the vampire (*Nei Wu Fu*) that had drained the life-blood of the dynasty." (Johnston, p.110)

The second institution that still operated in the Forbidden City were the eunuchs. Just like the *Nei Wu Fu*, there were "hordes" of eunuchs who were also corrupt. They constantly stole treasures from the palace and engaged in bribery and extortion. Of course, all of these corrupt activities were conducted in secret or at least veiled as proper protocol of palace behavior. For example, one eunuch, who missed out on his share of the loot, purposely spilled water on the loot coordinator's coat in order to the collect the "rental fee" for a replacement coat. The loot coordinator was in a rush to meet with high officials and had no choice but to pay the fee, effectively making up for the share of loot that the eunuch missed out on. The corrupt eunuchs may or may not have been agents of the *Nei Wu Fu*, but it seems highly possible that the two at least had some sort of "working" relations.

The only time when it seemed that the eunuchs "slipped up" was the event referred to as the burning of the Palace of Established Happiness. Pu Yi conducted random inventories of palace treasures and upon discovering that he could not locate certain ones, declared his own personal inspection of some of the rooms and palaces where the treasures were stored. A fire so happenly consumed *Chien Fu Kung* (the Palace of Established Happiness) overnight, which was supposed to be inspected the very next day. The losses were tremendous, as over 6,500 articles of value were totally destroyed, including countless gold Buddhas, golden Buddhist ornaments, porcelain, jade and bronze items, and books. (Johnston, p.336) Local newspapers quickly pinpointed palace eunuchs, desperate to cover up their trail of treasure theft, as the culprits. Investigations into the eunuchs were carried out by the *Nei Wu Fu*, but they amounted to basically nothing, furthering the idea that the two institutions may have had some connection.

As mentioned before, Pu Yi's life as the embodiment of the importance of the emperorship over the emperor's personal self began with the republican revolution in 1911. The revolution led to the signing of the Articles of Favorable Treatment and it was from this that the tragedy known as his life began to unfold. Johnston, most likely writing in 1922, stated that "the real welfare of the emperor was not taken into consideration at all and his true interests have never been consulted…The palace people are anxious…to preserve his life. So long as he is kept alive, however, they are fully satisfied, and they care little or nothing for his physical well-being." (Johnston, p.290)

Johnston based his statement off the three years since his appointment as Pu Yi's tutor, during which he witnessed and observed the events of the Forbidden City firsthand. He said that the most telling example of the palace people's (eunuchs, *Nei Wu Fu*, etc.) lack of care for Pu Yi's health was their constant denial of the emperor having any eyesight problems or needing spectacles. It was only at Johnston's relentless urging and even threat of resignation that Pu Yi was finally examined by a foreign oculist and discovered to have severe progressive myopia, a defect that most definitely required the use of spectacles. (Johnston, p.272) No one, except for a select few, really cared about Pu Yi the young boy because they only cared about Pu Yi the emperor. They were concerned with how the latter identity would maintain their existence and "rice bowls" and it was Pu Yi's existence, not well-being, health or happiness to which they ever paid attention. Johnston summed up this sentiment:

> There [was] nothing in the Articles to suggest that Yuan Shikai, or the revolutionaries, or the imperial household department took the smallest interest in his personal welfare or gave a moment's thought to it. They were concerned with the system which he represented…No one asked whether it would be beneficial to his character or conducive to his happiness that he should be surrounded by hundreds of idle and servile eunuchs and flatterers and taught to believe himself semi-divine, yet debarred from assuming the duties and responsibilities that [were] the only justification of kingship. (Johnston, p.104)

To be fair, it was not just the Articles of Favorable Treatment and the palace people's consequent treatment of Pu Yi that determined the young emperor's life as the embodiment of the emperorship over himself. As said by Dr. Samuel Wells Williams in his work *The Middle Kingdom*, "Nothing in Chinese politics [was] more worthy of notice than the unbounded reverence for the emperor. The reverence was rather for the throne than for the person of the emperor, of whose character and personality no ordinary subject knew anything." (Johnston, p.92) The phenomenon of the emperorship exceeding the person who held such title was an inherent part of the emperorship. The person behind the title was intentionally depersonalized so as to increase the nobility and importance of the emperorship to the point where it became essentially a symbol that was "larger than life."

This was further supported by the previously mentioned fact that use of the emperor's personal name was considered taboo. Johnston wrote that an emperor's personal or private ("Christian") name was never used and instead, because he was "unnamed," he was referred to by *huang shang* or "his majesty the emperor." The emperor did take on a *nien-hao* or "reign name" and it was this name that was used like a personal name by foreigners. Even after death, the personal name was not used, and a *miao-hao* or "temple name" was assigned. The "temple name" was how the emperor was to be referred to in speech and writing and also how he was to be recorded in history. (Johnston, p.78)

The few select people that genuinely cared for Pu Yi as a person were his wet nurse Mrs. Wang, his younger brother Pu Jie, and last of all, his tutor Reginald Johnston. Johnston, while recognizing Pu Yi as the emperor, never lost sight of who Pu Yi really was. In a letter to an English-speaking Chinese friend, he wrote "Although he is an emperor (a titular one) he is also a boy…I quite understand that you and other loyal Chinese regard him primarily as emperor, whereas to me he is primarily a very human boy." (Pu Yi, p.243) It was this recognition and concern for Pu Yi that led to Johnston's realization of the dismal situation created in the Forbidden City by the Articles and the dire need for change. In the same letter to his

friend, Johnston wrote that "The highly artificial life that the emperor leads must be detrimental to his health, physical, intellectual and moral; and I sincerely hope for his sake that some means will be devised whereby he may be enabled to live more naturally and rationally." (Johnston, p.243)

## In Action in the Forbidden City

Under Johnston's tutelage and influence, Pu Yi himself began to realize and see the same reality that his tutor had come to see. Johnston used to tell Pu Yi many stories of his travels in Europe and it was inevitable that the young emperor began to question his confinement of being "cooped up in the palace since [he] was two without even having the chance of going outside on the street." He soon determined that he wanted to go to Europe or the United States to study and unsurprisingly, Johnston was the only one in favor of the idea while everyone else was against it. It was then that Pu Yi's discovered the truth: "I understand now what they (the palace people) were afraid of. They knew if the tree fell the monkeys would be scattered. In other words, once I went away, they would lose their rice bowls and their positions. They were all living off me!" (McAleavy, p.127)

Pu Yi's realization gave birth to what shall be called his "rebellions." The young emperor's first acts of rebellion, which served to break down some of the conventions and formalities that regulated his daily life, started in the latter part of 1920 before he was even sixteen: "He shocked the palace officials by the apathy or amused contempt with which he regarded many of the things that in their eyes were the be-all and end-all of his existence—court ceremonial, the etiquette of audiences and the observance of solemn anniversaries." (Johnston, p.266) Pu Yi knew that many of the people around him were merely insincere flatterers and in response, "he distressed his courtiers by refusing to take them as seriously as they took themselves." (Johnston, p.266) His ultimate act of rebellion came in 1922 when he cut off his own queue with a pair of scissors after voicing his desires to do so a few times before. Johnston was blamed for this act because of his "Westernizing" of Pu Yi and while "Westernization" did contribute, it was more so Pu Yi's way of saying he was fed up with all the artificialities that surrounded him.

Pu Yi's rebellions eventually gave way to honest efforts to change the system and to live up to his emperorship. Seventeen at the time, his first such efforts was a desire for the removal of the actual system. As he "became more and more…aware of the evils of the system of which he was the unwilling centre…[he] gradually awoke to his inglorious position [and] began to feel the ignominy of his position as an idle pensioner of the republic." (Johnston, p.281) Pu Yi wanted to renounce his emperorship, his annual subsidy and his right of living in the palaces on his own accord. He felt shame and humiliation because he was being supported financially by the republic for doing nothing and "at the expense of his suffering and almost bankrupt country." Making matters worse, a large part of the subsidy that he received went to supporting "a huge staff of unnecessary and more or less worthless parasites." (Johnston, p.289) This remained only a desire as Johnston convinced Pu Yi to not carry out the plan.

Unable to abolish the system, Pu Yi decided to do "the next best thing" by reforming the system instead. Reforms had been long desired; even before the republican revolution, "people were asking how the emperor could expect his people to look up to him for guidance in the affairs of life if he himself proved incapable of regulating the affairs of his own household and curbing the malpractices of his own servants." (Johnston, p.223) Thus, in retaliation for the

burning of the Palace of Established Happiness, Pu Yi started reforms by expelling all of the eunuchs from the Forbidden City. He gave them very short notice, so that the eunuchs would have no time to steal more before they left, or even worse, set fire to more buildings. The over one thousand eunuchs waited outside the Forbidden City for their turn to go back "in twos and threes to collect their personal property and to receive the grants of money which each one received according to his age and seniority." (Johnston, p.339) In the end, Pu Yi allowed about fifty eunuchs to return to service in the Forbidden City, but only at the tears of the three elderly *t'ai fei* over the loss of their favorite servants.

Pu Yi then appointed Cheng Hsiao-hsu as the first Chinese head of the *Nei Wu Fu*. He was a brilliant Confucian man of great loyalty to his emperor who, while not a politician, held both civil and military offices under the Qing. Cheng resigned said position at the birth of the republic and rejected multiple offers of working for the latter, where he undoubtedly would have enjoyed a successful career. Johnston's opinion of him was equally as positive: "In [his] twenty-five years of experience in China [he] had never met a Chinese for whom [he] had conceived a greater respect and admiration." (Johnston, p.342) This man of immense ability was charged with reorganizing and "cleaning up" the *Nei Wu Fu* and as expected, he soon delivered. To add another blow to the "corrupt fraternity," Pu Yi appointed Johnston as the imperial commissioner in charge of all affairs of the emperor's soon-to-be new residence, the Summer Palace. (Johnston, p.358) Not only did the *Nei Wu Fu* witness a possible change in location that would entirely remove its power and influence, but it even lost all hopes of gaining strength in the new location.

## Pu Yi's Expulsion and Turn to Japan

Pu Yi was praised by news agencies for his reforms and hailed as "one of the very few progressive Manchu princes of the present day" (Johnston, p.340). But, just like his restoration in 1917 by Chang Hsun, success and good times were short-lived. Pu Yi's aforementioned expulsion from the Forbidden City by the forces of Christian warlord Feng Yuxiang occurred in 1924 because "the new authorities…determined to put an end once and for all to the dynasty whose survival, in their eyes, provided a puppet likely to be used at any time by domestic reactionaries and foreign enemies." (McAleavy, p.148) They issued a "revision" of the Articles of Favorable Treatment that abolished Pu Yi's emperorship, reduced his annual subsidy to 500,000 dollars, removed his right to stay in the Forbidden City, provided for the maintenance of Qing ancestral tombs by the republic, and protected the imperial family's private property. (Pu Yi, p.146-47) Thus as an ordinary citizen of the republic, "Mr. Pu Yi" and his family were ordered to permanently leave the Forbidden City in three hours. (Johnston, p.390)

His expulsion marked the starting point in Pu Yi's life where he constantly struggled to regain his emperorship and failed many times. Despite Feng Yuxiang's efforts to remove Pu Yi's potency as a symbol, he was still so important that "he was a virtual or actual prisoner of one nation or another most of his life and, as such, peculiarly subject to the political shifts of fortune in East Asia." (*Hostage to Fortune*, p.vii) Pu Yi expressed pleasure at seeing the Articles of Favorable Treatment annulled or "revised" and he said to the soldiers of Feng Yuxiang's army at the time of his expulsion: "'I had no freedom as an emperor, and now I have found my freedom'…I was sick of the restrictions with which the princes and high officials surrounded me. I wanted 'freedom,' freedom to realize the ambition of regaining my lost throne." (Pu Yi, p.149)

Pu Yi was finally unfettered from the fake emperorship that he was allowed to hold for all those years and it was that title that also blocked him from seeing the "real" emperorship. He had the freedom to dictate his own terms and now, at the crossroads, was faced with three roads. The first road was to follow the suggestions of the "revised" Articles by "[abandoning] the imperial title and [his] old ambitions and [becoming] an enormously wealthy and landed 'common citizen.'" The second road was to appeal to his sympathizers (i.e. the restorationists) and have them help to "cancel the new Articles and restore the old Articles in their entirety, to regain [his] title and return to the palace to continue to live [his] old life." The last road was to enlist the help of a foreign power in planning a restoration. (Pu Yi, p.156) The ex-emperor went with the third option and opportunities did arise but, "Unfortunately for him, that opportunity came from the Japanese." (*Hostage to Fortune*, p.113)

Taking shelter at the Japanese legation in Beijing and later the Japanese concession in Tianjin, Pu Yi lived under the protection of this foreign power for about seven years from 1924-1931. During this time, he harbored and expressed hopes of the Japanese restoring him to the Qing throne, while the relationship between the two grew closer. However, instead of the Qing throne, a new prospect for a different throne had emerged—that of Manchuria. Johnston offered a description of the long-forgotten emperorship:

> The title "Manchoukuo Huang-Ti" or "Emperor of Manchuria" replaced the title "Chin-kuo Khan" formerly used by the founders of the Manchu power…if the Manchu emperor had returned to Mukden and declared himself *Ta Manchou Kuo Huang Ti*, he would not merely have been returning to the throne but also reassuming an ancient title, of his Manchu ancestors. (p.255)

Pursuit of this Manchurian emperorship could be viewed as an appropriate act of "returning home" and it was very tempting because more importantly, it could also be used as a stepping stone to regain the Qing throne. Japan at the time was extremely interested in expanding to Manchuria but Pu Yi hesitated at agreeing to explore this new prospect because of his attachments to the land in which he grew up. It was only after the discovery of grenades hidden in a fruit basket sent to him (suspected to be Japan fabricating an assassination attempt by the Chinese (McAleavy, p.201)) and the desecration of Qing ancestral tombs by plunderers, in particular those of Qianlong and Cixi, that pushed Pu Yi to proceed with Japan's plans. The ex-emperor left Tianjin for Japanese controlled-Manchuria in late 1931.

Shortly after his arrival to Manchuria, Pu Yi became the *chih-cheng* or "Chief Executive" of an independent "Manchukuo" republic in 1932, which the Japanese said was only a temporary and transitory position before emperor. (Johnston, p.450) Sadly, he was too naïve to realize that it was essentially a trap and "did not understand that once he cooperated with the Japanese he would become their hostage." (*Hostage to Fortune*, p.112) The Japanese never had any intention of helping Pu Yi regain his Qing emperorship and to them, it was simply another instance of the importance of the emperorship over the personal self. Pu Yi was the ideal pawn to install as the head of the new independent state that Japan wanted to forge out of Manchuria, because his "presence and past title of Qing emperor lent authenticity and legitimacy to those actually wielding power." (*Hostage to Fortune*, p.15) Pu Yi seemed to also be aware of such sentiment. After being told about becoming Chief Executive, he said in protest: "The people of Manchuria are longing not for me as an individual but for the great Ching emperor." (Pu Yi, p.245)

Despite his disappointment, Pu Yi still did all he could to retrieve and live up to his lost Qing emperorship. He asked his advisor Chen Tseng-shou to help him prepare for presentation to Itagaki Seishiro of the Kwantung Army (the Imperial Japanese Army presence in Manchuria), a list of twelve reasons why "the 'right system' (the restoration of the Ching monarchy) was necessary." (Pu Yi, p.241) The list invoked principles of Chinese history, morality, and even the relationship between China and Japan. However, Cheng Hsiao-hsu, his ex-head of the *Nei Wu Fu*, refused to deliver the list to Itagaki because he thought it was unwise and tried to convince Pu Yi to think likewise. Pu Yi could not be calmed and, during his meeting later with Itagaki, strongly and resolutely remonstrated against the decision to make him Chief Executive, but to no avail. Itagaki said smilingly that "The demands of the Army cannot be altered in the least," to which Pu Yi countered that he would resign his Chief Executive position if the imperial system was not restored after one year. (Pu Yi, p.247)

## Emperor of Manchukuo

In spite of this, Pu Yi did not resign after one year because he lacked the courage to do so and "even if the Kwantung Army had allowed it [he] would have had nowhere to go." (Pu Yi, p.273) He was also advised that it was better to wait because that kept alive the hopes of restoration. Pu Yi's waiting "paid off" because he was upgraded to Emperor of Manchukuo in 1934 as the Manchukuo republic was transformed into an empire, per the decision of the Japanese. The latter reassured that China did not need to worry because Pu Yi's ascension to the Manchurian throne was not an indication of a restoration of the Qing and "they stressed he (Pu Yi) would not be known as the Ch'ing emperor." (*Bio of the Hsuan Tung Emperor*, p.131-33) The new Manchurian emperor took on the reign name of the Kangde Emperor, which was of particular significance because the characters *kang* and *de* meant tranquility and virtue respectively and "represented the virtues Confucius prescribed for a sovereign." (*Hostage to Fortune*, p.137)

While it was not the Qing emperorship, Pu Yi still continued doing what he could to make the best of it. He wanted to uphold his lost emperorship by wearing to the ascension ceremony the same dragon robes that his predecessor, the Guangxu Emperor, wore. However, the Japanese did not allow it. After some negotiations, the two parties came to a compromise and Pu Yi was allowed to wear the dragon robes to the memorial ceremony but had to don a Western military uniform when he was actually ascending the throne. (*Hostage to Fortune*, p.135) In other words, Pu Yi's allowance to wear official Qing robes (authentic since Pu Yi had personally sent for them) merely *pro forma* seemed to echo a familiar theme from his earlier years. It was like the Forbidden City all over again but instead of the 1910's, it was the 1930's.

At the time of Pu Yi's crowning, the Japanese authorities in Tokyo announced that Pu Yi was to be known as "ko-tei" while the Japanese emperor was called "tenno." As explained by Moyer, "Although both terms [meant] an emperor, the word 'tenno' [had] a connotation of heavenly or sacred emperor. A foreign ruler [was] not called 'tenno.' The difference in status was quite clear to the Japanese." (*Bio of the Hsuan Tung Emperor*, p.133) The Japanese had pulled a move very similar to that of the republicans and Yuan Shikai at the drafting and signing of the Articles of Favorable Treatment. As recalled by Pu Yi in 1956, "When the Kwantung Army made a decision, they would write it down and tell me to sign it. Edicts, laws, treaties, everything was managed in the same way." (McAleavy, p.216) From this, it was apparent that once again, he was left with an empty emperorship, placed in a

fake environment and surrounded by people who only wished to use him. They "*secured the substance*" and Pu Yi was "*left with the shadow*."

When Pu Yi became Emperor of Manchukuo, he also became a traitor to both the Chinese people and his own family. He betrayed the Chinese people because he became "the cover for a sanguinary regime which turned a large part of [his] country into a colony and inflicted great sufferings on thirty million of [his] compatriots." (Pu Yi, p.247) He was forced to betray his family when the Japanese ordered him to implement Japan's state religion (Shintoism) in Manchukuo since he was the head of state and hence, religion. Pu Yi explained his internal torment at the time:

> I had previously been prevented…from sacrificing publicly at the graves of my imperial ancestors, and now I was being called upon to acknowledge myself as the descendant of a foreign line. This was very hard to bear. Although my every action since the time I yielded [to the Japanese]…had been an open betrayal of my nation and my ancestors, I had managed to justify my doings to myself. I had represented them as filial deeds done for the sake of reviving the ancestral cause, and pretended that the concessions I made were only for the sake of future gains. I had hoped that the spirits of my ancestors would understand this and protect me. But now the Japanese were forcing me to exchange my ancestors for a new set. Surely my forebears would never forgive me for this. (Pu Yi, p.299)

Although on the outside he accepted Japanese orders, on the inside, he tried to uphold the honor of his family and the lost Qing emperorship by continuing to worship his ancestors at home and saying to himself that he was worshipping at *Kun Ning Kung* (the Palace of Earthly Peace) whenever he had to go bow at the altar of Shintoism's deity. (Pu Yi, p.300)

## Pu Yi's Fate

After Japan's defeat in World War II, the Manchukuo empire was abolished and its lands returned to Chinese sovereignty. Pu Yi consequently lost his emperorship again and was arrested by the Soviets who wanted to use him to testify negatively against the Japanese at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in 1946. They also wanted to keep Pu Yi "as a bargaining chip" since he could be "traded to the Chinese in exchange for any number of things the Soviets wanted." (*Hostage to Fortune*, p.174) The Soviets got what they were waiting for and released Pu Yi to the jurisdiction of the newly formed People's Republic of China in 1949. The PRC wanted to reform him to show that even a former emperor could be changed by the Communist thought and therefore "prove the superiority of their system over other political systems." (*Bio of the Hsuan Tung Emperor*, p.239)

Pu Yi thus spent ten years in reform camp in Fushun and Harbin, during which he grew to blame his current state and the failures throughout his life on the deceased Express Dowager Cixi and others from the Forbidden City: "Her (Cixi's) dim memory had only seemed frightening to me in the past, but now I hated her. Why had she picked on me to be emperor? ...Was not my present state the fault of Tzu Hsi, the princes and the Ching ministers?" (Pu Yi, p.376) Finally on September 24, 1959, Pu Yi was declared genuinely reformed, pardoned by the Communist government, and granted citizenship to the People's Republic of China. (Chan, p.158) He spent the last eight years of his life in relative peace, marrying his fifth wife in 1962 and succumbing to kidney cancer in 1967 at the age of 61.

In his formative years, Pu Yi was groomed to be the Qing emperor but never got a chance to fulfill what he saw as his destiny. In the spirit of importance of emperorship over the personal self, he was taught only to assume and uphold the emperorship and, as a consequence, he was not equipped "to live in the modern world or to pursue another career." (*Hostage to Fortune*, p.3) His later life was marked by self-hated incompetence (as he had trouble simply taking care of himself) and a lack of many meaningful relationships. Pu Yi had few friends and the limited list included the aforementioned Mrs. Wang, Reginald Johnston and Pu Jie, of whom only the last was still alive to be with him.

Pu Yi also seemed very selfish in all his years. The most compelling examples of this was the "exclusive concern for his own safety" that he displayed when he abandoned the two elderly dowagers as he was leaving the Forbidden City in 1924 (McAleavy, p.149) and when he abandoned his wives as he was fleeing Manchuria by plane in 1945. His selfish actions can be viewed as another form of Pu Yi's efforts to live up to his lost emperorship because he once said during his time in Tianjin: "As long as I am alive the Great Ching shall not perish." (p.196) The preservation of his life as a means of continuing hopes for his emperorship and dynasty was always on Pu Yi's mind and it was not surprising to learn that no matter which regime he was under, he was in constant fear of getting killed.

## Conclusion

Many scholars and authors who studied and wrote about Pu Yi's life characterized it as a tragedy. In his life, Pu Yi ascended the throne three times but never truly held power. He was a hostage of three nations and had to survive through a republican revolution, Chinese warlordism, Japanese imperialism, Soviet imprisonment, and Chinese Communist reformation. His own life was rarely, if ever, in his control and having lived as "a gilded bird in a cage," he died a pauper in the People's Republic of China. (*Hostage to Fortune*, p.155,vii) Pu Yi's life was tragic because, as researcher Nathaniel Peffer notes, "he had the misfortune to be born a prince" (*Bio of the Hsuan Tung Emperor*, p.208). What's more, he had become emperor during such a tumultuous era of Chinese history: "In happier days he would have officiated as Son of Heaven and Father of his people." (Johnston, p.434)

Like the Guangxu emperor before him, Pu Yi was emperor in name only. But unlike his earlier imperial predecessors, he was unable to enjoy the compensations and real powers of his emperorship while being bound in freedom by the same, or perhaps even greater conventions. (Johnston, p.291) With the Articles of Favorable Treatment beginning the nightmare, he spent the majority of his life chasing after the "true" Qing emperorship. Pu Yi did so during his time in the Forbidden City and after having lost whatever semblance of the "true" title in 1924, worked endlessly to regain it. He even went to the Japanese for help but only received treatment similar to what he experienced in the Forbidden City—in both instances, people only saw him as an emperor/ex-emperor, not as a person.

Pu Yi's life embodied this concept of the importance of the emperorship over the emperor's personal self and the saddest fact of it all was that not many people ever really cared about him. He struggled and experienced numerous setbacks in the pursuit of his emperorship. Due to this and also his attempts to uphold and live up to what his emperorship was supposed to entail, Pu Yi was robbed of a normal life. In the dedication of his book *Twilight in the Forbidden City*, Reginald Johnston hoped for "the dawn of a new and happier day" for Pu Yi and it seemed that the last Qing emperor may have found it in the last few years of his life as an ordinary citizen.

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