

# OVERTHROWING THE MONARCHY, ESTABLISHING A REPUBLIC

Apart from bringing an end to imperial rule in China, the 1911 Revolution also paved the way for the establishment of Asia's first republic, and this modernisation of China's political system had an impact on the Chinese community in Singapore and Malaya. However, the short-lived Chinese Republic was soon overtaken by a period of internal turmoil as Yuan Shih Kai (1859 - 1916) attempted to restore the monarchy with himself as Emperor, after becoming the President. In response, Dr. Sun Yat Sen launched a second revolution against him in 1913 which ended in failure. After Yuan's death, China entered a period of warlordism and civil strife. Many of these issues remained unresolved when Dr. Sun passed away in 1925.

Former members of the Tong Meng Hui such as Teo Eng Hock, Tan Chor Lam, Lim Nee Soon, Dr. Lim Boon Keng and Tan Kah Kee continued to render their support to Dr. Sun during the early days of the Chinese Republic, and were actively involved in China's politics and education. The Chinese communities in Singapore and Malaya were affected by the reforms happening in China during this period of time. After the establishment of the Nanjing Provisional Government, a series of social reform laws were promulgated which was widely adopted by the local Chinese communities. Commemorative activities were also organised on a regular basis by the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya to commemorate Dr. Sun and the 1911 Revolution. These commemorative events served to foster their sense of belonging to their motherland.



### **Artillery shells fired during the Wuchang Uprising (1911)**

These two artillery shells, fired during the Wuchang Uprising in 1911, were a gift from Shen Mao Zhao (1868 - 1915), a Shanghai banker, to Lim Peng Siang (1872 - 1944), the founder of Ho Hong Bank Limited. The Chinese characters inscribed on the exterior of the shells were meant to commemorate the founding of the Chinese Republic.

Courtesy of Ms. Lin Chuen

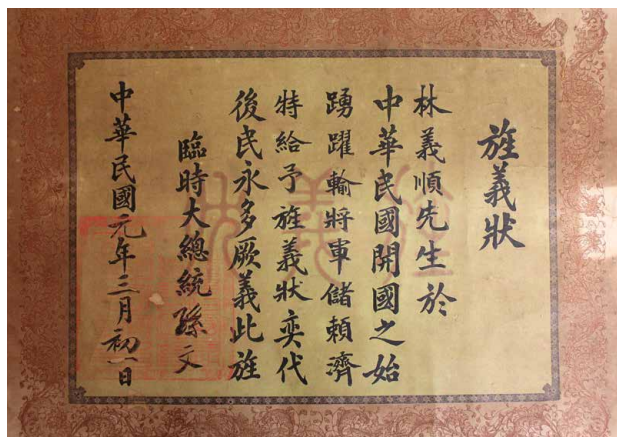
# THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A REPUBLIC: SUPPORT FROM NANYANG

After the Chinese Republic's establishment, the Nanyang Chinese continued to maintain close ties with China. Harboring hopes for a strong and prosperous China, they devoted themselves to China's development in areas such as politics and education. Many former members of the Tong Meng Hui, such as Teo Eng Hock, Lim Nee Soon, Tan Chor Lam, Tan Kah Kee and Dr. Lim Boon Keng continued to support Dr. Sun Yat Sen's nation-building efforts in various ways.

## Certificate of Commendation from Dr. Sun Yat Sen to Lim Nee Soon (1912)

Following his appointment as Provisional President of the Chinese Republic in 1912, Dr. Sun Yat Sen presented certificates of commendation to those who had contributed to its establishment.

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## SOCIAL REFORMS FOLLOWING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE REPUBLIC

On 1 January 1912, following the success of the 1911 Revolution, Dr. Sun Yat Sen was appointed Provisional President of the Chinese Republic. In March the same year, he legislated laws to rid the society of undesirable practices, such as opium smoking and foot binding. Other social reforms included the cutting of the queue (Chinese pigtail), which was a symbol of subjugation to Manchu rule. These reforms also had a profound effect on the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya. Meanwhile, the "National Products Movement" began in China where citizens were encouraged to purchase domestically-produced goods to spur the country's industrial development. The effects of this movement spread far and wide, and garnered extensive support from the overseas Chinese. The local Chinese community expressed its support for the movement, encouraging consumers to buy products that were "made by the Chinese", thereby fostering the growth of overseas Chinese nationalism.

## **Ban on Opium Smoking**

In 1773, the British East India Company obtained the exclusive right to sell opium, a drug made from poppy, produced in India. The Company exported large quantities of opium to China, which caused opium addiction to permeate all levels of society. Opium was not only prevalent in China, but also in Singapore and Malaya. Driven by profit, the British colonial government turned opium into a social ill among the Chinese. By the end of the 19th century, local periodicals such as *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, *Lat Pau* and *Thien Nam Sin Pao* published articles urging the people to give up opium smoking. Chinese community leaders from Singapore and Malaya, including Dr. Lim Boon Keng, Tan Boo Liat and Dr. Wu Lien Teh, also moved to establish anti-opium associations.

## **Abolishment of Foot Binding and Advocating of Female Education**

Foot binding was an ancient Chinese custom prevalent during the Ming (1368 – 1644) and Qing (1644 - 1912) dynasties. When girls reached the age of 5 or 6, their feet would be bound using cotton cloth to keep them from growing, and this caused their feet to be deformed. Since the 1880s, anti-foot binding associations had been set up successively in many Chinese provinces and cities, influencing the local Chinese community to do the same. This custom was abolished after the founding of the Chinese Republic and community leaders in Singapore established girls' schools, such as Chung Hwa Girls' School (1911), Chong Hock Girls' School (1915), Nan Hwa Girls' School (1917) and Nanyang Girls' School (1917), to provide equal education opportunities to females.

## **Cutting of Queues**

The Qing government made it mandatory for the Han Chinese to adopt the Manchurian hairstyle (i.e. to keep a queue). Keeping a queue symbolised the Han Chinese's submission to Manchurian rule. Towards the end of the Qing Dynasty, many students who were educated overseas began to cut off their queues. In the early 20th century, revolutionaries led by Dr. Sun Yat Sen cut off their queues as a sign of rebellion against the Qing government. The queue-cutting movement rapidly gained momentum after the success of the 1911 Revolution. The Chinese in Singapore and the Malaya also supported the movement by cutting their queues and abandoning the Manchurian style of dressing. This became a new social trend which symbolised the beginning of a new era.

## National Products Movement

After the founding of the Chinese Republic, there was intense competition between China-made and foreign-made goods. In order to boost the Chinese economy, the “National Products Movement” was started in China. It was met with enthusiastic response from the local Chinese community and businesses which supported the purchase of products made by the Chinese. In particular, Chinese businesses emphasised the slogan “Support China-made Goods” in their newspaper advertisements, which was an expression and manifestation of the rise of overseas Chinese nationalism that was centred on China.

## COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS FOLLOWING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE REPUBLIC

The establishment of the Chinese Republic held great significance for the Chinese communities in pre-war Singapore and Malaya. Hence, the community regularly organised events that paid tribute to Dr. Sun Yat Sen and the 1911 Revolution, such as those that commemorated Dr. Sun’s birth and death anniversaries, Double Tenth Day, the Huanghuagang Uprising and the inauguration of Dr. Sun as the Extraordinary President. Clan associations, reading clubs, schools and even individuals showed fervent support for these events. The celebration of these commemorative occasions formed part of the collective memories of the local Chinese community, which shaped their sense of national

### Calendar printed with the portrait and will of Dr. Sun Yat Sen (1935)

Dr. Sun Yat Sen’s portrait and will were printed on this calendar, as a mark of respect for him. The flags of the Kuomintang and the Chinese Republic, as well as the message “We have yet to succeed in our revolution. Soldier on, comrades!” were also printed on both sides of the calendar.

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