A Railway Dispute and a Massacre: Who Forced the Shot at Wuchang

《神州大地》第 13 集 · 語言：English · 時長：27:59

出處：sylogs.com — 歡迎轉載分享，請注明出處

.

In the summer of 1911, in the
city of Wuchang, not a single person
had received any order to rise up.
Yet by October, this provincial capital had
set itself ablaze. No commander-in-chief, no battle
plan, not even a single coordinated signal
gun. What loosened the foundations of a
dynasty that had ruled China for more
than two hundred and sixty years was
not a carefully plotted revolt, but a
railway, and an accident.
In this episode, we will not yet
say who finally won.
We will only show how this fuse
was lit. Because once you understand this
fuse, you will see why the upheavals
that followed came so fast, and why
they cost so much.
The fall of a dynasty is never
a matter of a single night.
It begins by loosening, one by one,
the nails in the everyday lives of

countless ordinary people. In the teahouses of
Wuchang, on the heated brick beds of
the barracks, throughout those years there were
always people talking in hushed voices:
what can be done about the way
things are? The court could not hear such
talk, yet it carried more force than
any imperial edict. Which railway, which piece
of paper, finally lit this fuse?
In the next section, we begin with
a road.

.

The story begins with a railway.
The late-Qing government wanted to build two
trunk lines: the Sichuan-Hankou, from Chengdu to
Hankou, and the Canton-Hankou, from Guangzhou to
Wuchang. The government had no money of
its own, so it let the people
along the route buy shares.
In Sichuan this was called the land-rent
shares, apportioned by acreage; Hunan, Hubei and
Guangdong each had their own methods.
The Sichuan-Hankou railway's popular subscriptions amounted,
according to fiscal records of the late
Qing, to roughly fourteen million taels of
silver — saved coin by coin by countless
farming households. In May 1911, the Minister of

Posts and Communications, Sheng Xuanhuai, announced that
both lines would be nationalized; only a
small portion of the people's shares would
be repaid, and a shortfall of about
three million taels would simply not be
acknowledged. At the same time, the ministry
borrowed six million pounds from the four-nation
banking consortium of Britain, France, Germany and
the United States, to redeem the railways.
On one side they took the people's
hard-earned money; on the other they borrowed
from foreigners. Any literate villager could work
out that arithmetic. More galling still:
once the railway rights were taken back,
the work of building the line was
handed to foreigners. From the day the
railway rights were seized, a deeper thought
spread among the people: does this court
still act for the Chinese at all?
Beyond Sichuan, Hunan, Hubei and Guangdong were
drawn in as well, only with differing
degrees of fury; along the Canton-Hankou line,
Guangdong's merchants and gentry reacted just as
sharply. Sheng Xuanhuai was the architect of
this scheme. He thought official management plus
foreign loans would get the line built
faster, but he failed to foresee that

what was taken was not only railway
rights, but the last shred of millions
of people's faith in the court.
This was not the anger of any
one man. It was an entire society's
collapse of trust in a regime.
As for the land-rent shares, nominally apportioned
by acreage, what they actually collected was
the food money of the lowest farming
households. In the Sichuan-Hankou share register,
the overwhelming majority were small holders who
could not produce more than a few
taels; they had never in their lives
seen a train, yet paid into this
line year after year.
When Sheng Xuanhuai ran this scheme,
he reckoned in terms of the national
treasury: official management for unified dispatch,
foreign loans delivered in one go,
the line built faster.
What he did not reckon was another
ledger — that the court reached into its
own people's pockets and then turned to
borrow from outsiders; once that news reached
the villages, it did more than any
revolutionary pamphlet. When the May 1911 edict came
down, Sichuan, Hunan, Hubei and Guangdong nearly

exploded at once. Provincial assemblies, chambers of
commerce and schools held meeting after meeting;
even the usually steady gentry-merchants could not
sit still, because what was taken was
not some distant state affair but the
banknotes in their own cabinets.
In those years the Chinese still dressed
by an old code: men in long
gowns and magua jackets, a queue trailing
down the back; officials in rank badges
and coronets, the embroidered square on the
chest depicting birds or beasts that betrayed
their rank at a glance; villagers in
short tunics and straw sandals, a cloth
wrapped around the head; women in jacket
and skirt, their feet bound small,
needing support to walk far.
The money in circulation was also a
jumble: large sums in silver ingots,
graded by fineness and weighed on differing
scales, often discounted; daily trade in copper
cash, strung coin by coin on a
cord, a thousand cash making a string;
and at the treaty ports the silver
dollar grew popular. Silver ingots, copper cash
and silver dollars running side by side
itself a portrait of that era.

When the court reaches into its own
people's pockets and then turns to borrow
from outsiders, the avalanche begins here
but what truly carried the spark to
Wuchang still lies ahead.

.

The fiercest reaction came from Sichuan.
In the summer of 1911, Chengdu formed
the Railway Protection Society; gentry like Luo
Lun and Pu Dianjun stepped forward,
hundreds of thousands signed, and they knelt
before the governor's yamen to petition.
What they wanted at first was simple:
give back the share money we pooled
ourselves. The society also published a newspaper,
reading the court's proclamations aloud to the
villagers line by line; the more they
read, the hotter the anger.
What the petition brought was a massacre.
On the seventh day of the ninth
month, Sichuan governor Zhao Erfeng, under the
pretext of coming to the yamen to
discuss affairs, lured and arrested Pu Dianjun,
Luo Lun, Deng Xiaoke, Yan Kai,
Zhang Lan and others.
As the news spread, one man from
each Chengdu household poured out, tens of

thousands surging toward the yamen demanding the
prisoners' release. In their hands they held
tablets of the Guangxu Emperor; in their
raised hands a stick of incense
the clearest signal of that era:
these were petitioning civilians, not rebels in
revolt. The crowd pressed to the gate,
and Zhao Erfeng ordered his troops to
open fire and charged the lines on
horseback — this was a massacre of unarmed
civilians who had come holding tablets to
petition. According to Xinhai accounts from Sichuan
and Hubei, thirty-two dead were registered on
the spot, the wounded beyond count;
among the dead was a thirteen-year-old child
who fell still clutching a tablet.
After the massacre, Zhao Erfeng ordered that
no bodies be collected for three days.
It was summer, and the rains came
without cease. This was the Chengdu Blood
Case — a massacre of peaceful petitioners.
People of the time gave Zhao Erfeng
a nickname: Zhao the Butcher.
He gave the order to fire;
his troops pulled the triggers; the three-day
ban on collecting the dead was also
his command. To whose account this is

charged, the historical records state plainly.
Before the firing, these were petitioners holding
tablets and incense; after the firing,
no one in Sichuan went to petition
again. Men like Pu Dianjun and Luo
Lun who stepped forward were gentry the
court itself had tolerated; that even they
were arrested showed that discontent had already
outgrown the bounds of petition.
After the Blood Case, volunteer armies rose
in every county; Qin Zaigeng and Hou
Baozhai led men to besiege Chengdu,
and within seven or eight days a
hundred thousand or two gathered beneath the
walls. Long Mingjian, Zhu Guochen and Cao
Du wrote on wooden slips, Zhao Erfeng
first arrested Pu and Luo, then pacifies
Sichuan — comrades everywhere rise quickly to save
yourselves, coated them in tung oil,
wrapped them in oiled paper and cast
them into the Jin River — these were
the water telegraphs, by which the lower
counties learned the provincial capital had erupted.
On the twenty-fifth day of the ninth
month, Tongmenghui members Wu Yuzhang and Wang
Tianjie declared Rong County independent — the first
county regime established by the Tongmenghui.

The Qing court urgently transferred the Hubei New Army
into Sichuan. This move would later be
raised again and again: the best fighters
in Wuchang had been drawn away,
and those left in the city were
mostly recruits who had never seen battle.
The best fighters of Hubei were transferred
away. What remained in Wuchang were recruits
who had never seen battle, yet had
long since made contact in secret
the spark for the next episode is
buried in this very step.

.

What was drawn away was the longest-trained,
best-equipped contingent of the Hubei New Army;
yet among those who stayed, many had
secretly joined revolutionary groups.
This brings us to Zhang Zhidong.
His New Policies in Hubei — training a
new army, founding schools, opening factories
inadvertently planted another seed in Wuchang.
The new army he trained had an
abnormally high literacy rate; many soldiers were
farm boys who could read, some even
xiucai degree-holders. These men could read newspapers
and take in new books; their disappointment
with the court came earlier and ran

deeper than others'. The schools and new
army Zhang Zhidong founded in Hubei were
meant to give the court a usable
force, yet they placed literate men and
rifles under the same roof — a consequence
he never foresaw. At the time Wuchang
had two main revolutionary organizations: the Literary
Society, its core mostly junior officers and
soldiers of the new army; and the
Gongjin Association, with broader outside contacts.
In their daily rounds they made contact
through barracks, teahouses and schools.
Walk into Wuchang today and you can
still touch those traces: the Chu Wang
Tai arsenal, the city's central storehouse of
guns and ammunition; the old Engineering Battalion
site, by Ziyang Lake.
Whoever held Chu Wang Tai held the
whole city's bargaining chip — a point clearer
to people then than to anyone since.
The Hubei New Army was organized into
divisions and brigades, some fifteen thousand men,
and in several battalions the Literary Society's
members made up a considerable share.
Zhang Zhidong's New Policies in Hubei also
included the Hanyang Iron Works, the Hanyang
Arsenal, and a cluster of academies such

as the Lianghu Academy and the Ziqiang
School. The factories made guns, the schools
made men — and neither ended up serving
the purpose the court intended.
The troops stationed in Wuchang were scattered,
while the ammunition was concentrated at Chu
Wang Tai; between the two lay a
distance of a whole night — this geographic
mismatch would later decide the course of
that night. The new army's dress was
utterly unlike the old Green Standard soldier's:
queues cut off, or coiled up inside
the cap; on top, a Western-style standing-collar
uniform with rank badges on shoulder and
collar; on the feet, leather shoes;
at the waist, a leather belt;
and slung on the shoulder, mostly the
Hanyang Make rifle from the Hanyang Arsenal.
Life in the barracks had its own
rules: drill at dawn, roll call at
night, pay at month's end, the silver
arriving on time. In those years a
farm boy who got full meals and
monthly pay already counted as a man
of standing. Off duty their favorite haunt
was the teahouse — a pot of tea
for a few coppers, and news spread

across the table. Chu Wang Tai was
the city's central arsenal, yet the troops
were scattered and the ammunition lay a
whole night away — that distance would later
decide the course of that night.

.

The Literary Society and the Gongjin Association
were not really one family; their minds
even ran differently. Jiang Yiwen of the
Literary Society was silent and pragmatic,
with deep roots among the soldiers,
his words heeded; Sun Wu of the
Gongjin Association was hot-tempered and full of
schemes, with wide outside connections.
Liu Gong put up the money,
Sun Wu worked the outside, Jiang Yiwen
managed the barracks — three men, three sets
of ideas. Men like Ju Zheng and
Liu Gong, some handling documents, some supplies,
all nominally given posts; yet when the
moment of truth came, who would heed
whom, no one below felt sure.
Had the Sichuan upheaval not forced the
situation to a crisis, this hand might
never have clasped. They agreed to make
Jiang Yiwen commander-in-chief and Sun Wu military
chief, yet those below understood clearly that

who would heed whom was still unsettled.
This looseness later became a fatal flaw:
the moment a command went astray in
transmission, the whole game fell into disorder.
Yet it was precisely this looseness that
made it unlike a conspiracy, more like
the stacked wagers of countless ordinary men.
Two organizations, three sets of minds
a hand that could never have clasped
was forcibly pressed together by an upheaval
far away.

.

Speak of revolution and many think first
of Sun Yat-sen. But before October 1911,
Sun Yat-sen was not in Wuchang,
nor even in the country; he was
abroad, traveling to raise funds.
On the fund-raising there is a matter
later much disputed. Several participants recorded that
before several uprisings Sun promised comrades at
home that arms, ammunition and pay would
be procured from overseas, yet many promises
were never fulfilled, and the front often
faced overwhelming odds, losing men for nothing.
Zhang Taiyan, between 1907 and 1909, publicly criticized the Tongmenghui's
opaque fund-raising; such accounts appear in his
collected works and contemporary letters.

The later break between Sun and Zhang
was sparked, among other things, by how
the money was raised and spent.
From the 1895 Guangzhou uprising to the
1911 Huanghuagang, Sun launched more than ten
uprisings over a dozen years, most failing
before a shot was fired.
The front repeatedly came up empty;
a recurring story: the guns, ammunition and
pay promised before the rising arrived late,
and when the men showed up and
the plot leaked, they found themselves empty-handed.
What Zhang Taiyan cursed was precisely this
disconnect between fundraising and dispatch.
The above accounts come partly from participants'
memoirs and opponents' records; the original sources
await further verification. We present them as
they are, without judgment.
One thing is clear: for those far
overseas, every penny raised bore on the
life and death of the front at
home. And the one who truly charged
the front line, who poured in his
life, was another man.
The man placed at the very front
was not present; the one truly charging
the front was another name — yet this

man, too, was still on his way.

.

Huang Xing was among the few revolutionaries
who truly stood on the front line.
In his early years he founded the
Huaxing Society in Hunan, later becoming the
military mainstay of the Tongmenghui.
In 1904 he plotted an uprising in Changsha;
when it leaked he fled, and from
then on staked everything on the front.
Rather than sit and theorize, he chose
again and again to stand before the
guns. On 27 April 1911, at the Huanghuagang battle
in Guangzhou, he led men against the
governor's yamen; his finger was shot off,
yet he kept directing the retreat.
That battle is commonly called the Seventy-Two
Martyrs, though eighty-six are verifiably counted,
many young scholars who went and did
not return. The following year, at the
Yangxia campaign, Huang Xing held the front
at Hanyang and Hankou for over forty
days. In armed uprising, Huang Xing's practical
role was more direct and more forward
than Sun Yat-sen's, who raised funds far
overseas. Yet in October 1911, Huang Xing was
not in Wuchang either; he was still

on his way. This fire in Wuchang
was lit by those at the bottom,
at a time when neither of the
two great men was present.
Neither of the two great men was
in Wuchang. Then who lit this fire?
The answer is those whose names never
made it into the textbooks.

.

On 9 October 1911, at Baoshan Lane on the edge
of the Russian concession in Wuhan,
a Gongjin Association hideout ran into trouble.
Sun Wu and Deng Yulin and others
were there rushing the manufacture of explosives
and flags, preparing to rise.
While mixing explosives, Sun Wu set off
an accidental detonation, wounding himself on the
spot and blowing the whole conspiracy into
the open. Others in the hideout,
Deng Yulin among them, scattered to hide
once it happened, but the flags and
seals on site were too late to
clear. Later the arrested Liu Tong,
unable to withstand interrogation, betrayed the hideout
and a number of comrades, making the
search suddenly precise. The Russian concession police
came at the sound, and seized the

uprising's flags and seals, and a name
roster. That roster listed who in Wuchang
had taken part. The police handed the
things to the Huguang governor-general, Rui Cheng.
In an instant, an uprising still hidden
in the shadows became an open hand.
According to records, it was the arrested
Liu Tong who, unable to withstand interrogation,
betrayed the hideout and comrades, making the
search suddenly precise. One explosion blew the
hidden conspiracy into the open; and that
roster would next be delivered into the
governor's hands.
.
Rui Cheng got the roster, and that
night the whole city was placed under
martial law; arrests by name began.
Rui Cheng was a man who,
when trouble came, thought first of saving
himself; normally leaning on the Beiyang clique,
at the critical moment he could not
make up his mind.
He ordered the Wuchang gates closed and
a house-to-house search for those on the
roster; suddenly the whole city lived in
terror. For those on the roster,
only two choices remained: wait to be

arrested, or rise tonight.
This is the cruelest logic of an
uprising: when a secret can no longer
be hidden, not to rise is to
die. A group still hesitating was pushed
by a single roster to the edge
of the cliff. The roster in Rui
Cheng's hands had been compiled by the
revolutionaries themselves — names, native places, units,
all complete — in effect handing the governor,
in one move, everyone in the city
who had taken part.
That night the Wuchang gates were shut
tight; those inside could not get out,
news from outside could not get in.
It is recorded that several battalions issued
cartridges that very night, yet no one
knew whom to fire on.
In official circles, Rui Cheng's first thought
was self-preservation: he pushed the arrest duty
onto subordinates and stayed in the yamen
awaiting Beijing's reply. But however fast the
telegram, it could not outrun the smell
of gunpowder already spreading through the city.
Once the roster reached the governor's hands
and the Wuchang gates were shut,
for those on the list only two

choices remained: wait for death, or rise
tonight.
.
Late on the night of 9 October,
Jiang Yiwen issued the uprising order,
agreeing that a gunshot would be the
signal and all battalions would act together.
But the order, half delivered, was interrupted
by a search; most units never received
it at all. Yang Hongsheng's transport of
explosives was also exposed; Liu Fuxing,
in a panic at the hideout,
threw a bomb to cover his comrades,
yet exposed still more.
The agreed time passed; the gun did
not fire, yet the men were already
alarmed. Jiang Yiwen himself escaped; what he
left behind was a group of junior
officers and soldiers who knew not whether
to advance or retreat.
The plan was in disarray; the uprising
seemed about to die unborn.
Yet the roster was already in the
governor's hands, and time was no longer
on their side. The uprising order was
cut off mid-delivery, most units never received
it — the plan seemed about to die

unborn, yet time was no longer on
their side.
.
Those on the roster could no longer
hide. Peng Chufan, a clerk in the
military police, was captured without losing his
composure; according to accounts he denounced his
accusers even before execution — a stubborn,
hardened man. Liu Fuxing, a core member
of the Gongjin Association from Changde in
Hunan, of the fiercest temper, after arrest
spoke openly and never concealed his convictions.
Yang Hongsheng, a Hubei man responsible for
transporting explosives and ammunition, was caught when
the plot failed and under interrogation would
not implicate others. The three were taken
to the Huguang governor's yamen, interrogated through
the night, and before dawn dragged outside
the yamen gate and beheaded.
From arrest to martyrdom was but a
few hours. The order was given by
the Huguang governor-general, Rui Cheng.
In the small hours of 10 October 1911,
the three were killed — these are the
later-called Three Martyrs, Peng, Liu and Yang.
They were no great men; only ordinary
people whose names had been written into

that roster, yet at that moment they
left their lives in Wuchang.
Peng Chufan was in his twenties when
he died, with an aged mother at
home; Liu Fuxing had been married only
recently; Yang Hongsheng left behind a child
just learning to walk.
These details appear in later compilations of
the martyrs' biographies; we record them as
they are, without comment.
That night the governor's yamen followed old
routines: torches on the hall, bailiffs standing
to either side, the interrogation by the
stale formulas of the penal code
first the accomplices, then the instigator.
The townspeople only learned at dawn that
men had been killed outside the yamen;
the bold came to look and saw
three bodies no one dared claim.
A Wuchang morning should have begun with
the stevedores' calls at the docks,
the opening of the teahouses.
That day those sounds were still there,
only the people of the city already
knew something had changed.
Three ordinary men died, yet those still
alive on the roster all understood one

truth: wait any longer and the next
would be oneself. That night, it was
truly coming.

.

The blood of three men thoroughly doused
the hesitation. Those still alive on the
roster all understood one truth: wait any
longer and the next would be oneself.
On the night of 10 October, the mood
in Wuchang was like a string pulled
to its limit. In whose hands this
string would snap, we leave for the
next episode. Come to Wuchang today and
you can still touch the traces of
that night on Peng-Liu-Yang Road, at the
Red Building, at Chu Wang Tai.
The Red Building is the former site
of the Wuchang Uprising military government;
the old Engineering Battalion site still stands
by Ziyang Lake. One city, one railway,
three names — they pushed an era to
its turning point. And beyond the turning
point lay longer turmoil, and countless ordinary
people who paid the price for this
revolution. We tell of this fuse not
to glorify any side, but to make
clear: when a regime repeatedly disappoints its

own people, what comes loose is not only trust but the very base of the whole order. The price that followed was, for the most part, silently borne by the most ordinary people of that time.

Source / 出處：sylogs.com