

China's First Election Was Won by a 31-Year-Old. Two Days Later He Was Dead | Ep.16

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He died on the very day he

had just won. March 20, 1913.

Ten forty-five at night.

Zhabei, Shanghai. The Shanghai station of the

Shanghai-Nanjing railway. The station building was four

years old, designed by the British,

four storeys, built for three hundred and

twenty-nine thousand silver dollars, one of the

most presentable railway stations in all of

China. Tonight the fast train for Nanjing

was taking tickets. A man had just

walked out of the assembly members' waiting

room inside the station.

He had just shaken hands with the

people who came to see him off.

He was still talking.

Thirty-one years old, in a long gown,

carrying so little luggage you would think

he was going on an errand across

town. Then a shot.

The bullet entered from the right side

of his back, drove slanting down into

his abdomen, and stopped not far from
his heart. He was taken to the
Shanghai-Nanjing Railway Hospital on Laobazi Road, a road
called Wujin Road today. Two German doctors operated
for more than an hour, took out
the bullet, and found it had been
poisoned. He held on for seventeen hours.

At four forty-eight in the morning of
March 22, he was gone.

His name was Song Jiaoren.

That year, he had just led his
party to win the first nationwide election
in the history of this country.

And that is exactly the question.

A man who has just won,
why does he die on his way
to work? Who needed him dead?

And who, holding ten cheaper ways to
stop him, chose the most expensive one,
the loudest one, the one that could
never be hidden? And here is the
detail that will not let go:

the higher he climbed, the harder somebody
else fell. That somebody's family name was
Sun. This is not a lone shooting.

This is the scene of a transfer
of power that failed.

What we are going to do is
put that scene back together, inch by
inch. We will name no one.
We will leave the verdict to you.

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Almost everything until now has happened inside
the city of Beijing.

From this episode on, the camera follows
one man. Wherever he goes, we go.

His name was Song Jiaoren.

Courtesy name Dunchu. He signed his articles

"the Fisherman. " To make sense of that

one shot, we have to go back

to where he started: Taoyuan, in Hunan.

On April 5, 1882, he was born into a
family of scholars in Xiangchong, Shangfang village,
on the Yuan River.

At six he entered a private school.

At seventeen, the Zhangjiang Academy in Taoyuan.

In 1901, at nineteen, he passed the examination
and became a xiucai, a licensed scholar.

The script written for that age was
simple: the provincial exam, the metropolitan exam,
climb all the way up, become an
official, grow old in office.

He did not follow it.

In 1902 he went to Wuchang and sat

the entrance exam for the Wuchang General
Middle School. He came first.

In Wuchang he met a group of
men, and he settled one question in
his own mind: this dynasty cannot save
this country. In August 1903, in Changsha,
he met Huang Xing.

The two took to each other at
once. On November 4, he and Huang Xing,
Liu Kuiyi, Chen Tianhua and Zhang Shizhao
met to plan an organisation.

In February 1904, the Huaxing Society was formally
founded in the West Garden at Changsha.

Huang Xing became its president.

Song Jiaoren, at twenty-two, its vice-president.

What did the Huaxing Society do?

Rebellion. They planned to rise on the
seventieth birthday of the Empress Dowager Cixi,
in five places at once: Changsha,
Yuezhou, Hengzhou, Baoqing and Changde.

Song Jiaoren's assignment was the Changde column.

The rising failed. Word leaked.

The governor of Hunan ordered a sweep
of the city. You need to hear
what happened next, because it later turned
into a name. That day Song Jiaoren
was at his family home in Taoyuan

and knew nothing. A boyhood schoolmate ran
all the way to bring him the
news. He left in a hurry,
and on the river there was not
a single boat. The soldiers were closing
in. And then, out of the reeds,
a small boat was sculled into view.
An old fisherman rowed him across.
He kept his life.

To remember that stranger, he gave himself
a pen name: the Fisherman.

For ten years, every article he published
in the newspapers carried those two characters.

Hundreds of thousands read the Fisherman.

Almost none of them knew that under
those two characters lay a life an
old fisherman had saved.

In December 1904 he reached Japan.

First Tokyo's Hosei University, then the preparatory
course at Waseda. Notice what he studied
in Japan. Not bombs.

Not assassination. Not how to raise a
unit. He studied how elections are run,
how a parliament opens, how a cabinet
is formed, how a political party works
day after day. In those years he
translated a dozen books: The Japanese Constitution,

A Survey of the British System,
An Outline of the American System,
A Survey of the Russian System,
Police Systems of Various Countries.

In an age when every young man
was discussing how to overthrow a dynasty,
this man was copying out, page by
page, the rules of procedure of other
countries. In 1907 he did something else that
had nothing to do with revolution and
unexpectedly served the country.

He slipped back into Manchuria to stir
up a rising and failed.

But while he was there he wrote
a book, The Jiandao Question, arguing point
by point that this stretch of land
had been Chinese since the Zhou and
Qin. Later, when the Qing government negotiated
with Japan, they stood on that book
and held their ground.

A revolutionary under imperial arrest warrant rescued
the imperial government once.

That was not strange in those years,
because young men then knew the difference:
the dynasty is the dynasty, the country
is the country. In 1911 he came home
and became chief writer at Minli Bao

in Shanghai. When the Xinhai Revolution broke out, he drafted the Provisional Constitution of Ezhou, seven chapters, sixty articles.

The first document of a constitutional nature in Chinese history came from the hand of a man not yet thirty.

So far, the man's record is simple.

He read. He ran a newspaper.

He wrote institutions. He had no troops, no money, no territory.

He held exactly one thing: a real belief that rules could be made to work. And that is precisely where everything that follows begins.

.

Now the camera comes back to Shanghai.

Between December 1912 and March 1913, this country held its first national election.

First, some numbers, because these numbers carry more weight than any adjective.

Registered voters nationwide: over forty-two million, nine hundred and thirty thousand.

The population was then estimated at over four hundred and six million.

That means one Chinese in ten cast a vote. On this land, it was the first time anyone had ever spoken

by ballot. You had to qualify first.

Under the electoral law: male; twenty-one for the House of Representatives, twenty-five for the Senate; paying two yuan or more in direct taxes, or owning property worth five hundred yuan or more; and a primary-school education or above. In other words, the one in ten who qualified was usually literate, had something behind him, and lived not too far from the county seat. This was not universal suffrage.

But in China in 1913, it was an overturning of heaven and earth.

Then the results. Five hundred and ninety-six seats in the House, two hundred and seventy-four in the Senate, eight hundred and seventy in both houses together.

The Nationalist Party took two hundred and sixty-nine plus one hundred and twenty-three, three hundred and ninety-two in all, forty-five point one percent.

Its three opponents, the Republican Party with one hundred and seventy-five, the Unity Party with twenty-four, the Democratic Party with twenty-four, came to two hundred and twenty-three between them, not sixty percent of the Nationalist total. Who won that fight?

Song Jiaoren. On August 25, 1912, the Revolutionary Alliance joined with several smaller parties and reorganised as the Nationalist Party.

Sun Yatsen became chairman; Song Jiaoren a director, and soon after, appointed acting chairman by Sun Yatsen. In plain words:

Sun Yatsen was the name of this party. Song Jiaoren was its hands.

During the campaign he travelled Hunan, Hubei, Anhui, Shanghai and Zhejiang, speaking all the way. The papers gave it a name: the Song Jiaoren whirlwind.

In his speeches he said it flatly: for the present, a sound government must be organised at once; for a government to be sound, there must be a party cabinet; and the Nationalist Party now stands in that position.

On February 13, 1913, he came down the river from Hankou and reached Shanghai on the fifteenth, moving into number twenty-one, Tongfu Road, the house of Huang Xing.

On February 19 he spoke at the Nationalist Party's Shanghai communications office, on the constitution.

He spoke about how executive, legislative and judicial power should be separated, and how authority should be divided between the centre

and the provinces. Notice what he did
not speak about. He did not speak
about Sun Yatsen's five-power constitution.
He set aside the scheme his own
comrade had invented. At the same moment,
one more thing is worth recording.
On February 10, at the very point when
the election was being won and the
cabinet was about to be formed,
Sun Yatsen boarded the Yamashiro Maru for
Japan to study industry.
He did not discuss with Song Jiaoren
how any of this should be handled.
This is nobody's fault.
It is a fact: at that moment,
the two men at the centre of
this party were no longer thinking about
the same thing. So what was Song
Jiaoren thinking? Something very concrete.
He wanted a responsible cabinet system:
the cabinet answers to parliament; the president's
power is restrained by the cabinet and
the assembly. What he wanted was not
to be president. It was to form
a cabinet, to put the leader of
the majority party into the premiership,
parliament behind him, the president in front.

Someone will ask: wouldn't he have done better to be president himself?

Under the Provisional Constitution, the presidency was an empty seat. Real power sat with the premier. So in Beijing that year, the office that mattered was not president.

It was premier. And the premier had to be produced by the majority party in parliament. The majority party was the Nationalist Party. The man who actually ran the Nationalist Party was Song Jiaoren.

That piece of arithmetic, all of China could do. The newspapers were already calling him the future premier.

Why was the premiership so important?

Look back at the year before.

On March 11, 1912, the Provisional Constitution was promulgated, days before Yuan Shikai was to take office, changing the presidential system into a cabinet system. From that day, the real power of this country was written in black and white into the premier's hands.

And that cabinet never found its feet.

From the founding of the republic to September 1912, in less than half a year, the premiership changed hands three times: Tang Shaoyi, Lu Zhengxiang, Zhao Bingjun.

Tang Shaoyi lasted a little over two months, quarrelled with Yuan Shikai, and walked out. In other words: up to the spring of 1913, nobody had yet sat firmly in the premier's chair.

And the first man with a real chance of sitting firmly in it was Song Jiaoren, who had got there by votes. In Song Jiaoren's calculation, this is what a republic means.

He wanted to move power into institutions, peacefully, by ballot. What did he want: the power of the cabinet.

Who stood in his way: the real power in the president's office.

What means did he use: votes, seats, newspapers, all of it out in the open. The price: once the cabinet was formed, the president would have to give up real power.

So who was the man in the presidential office? Camera, follow him to Beijing.

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In the spring of 1913, Yuan Shikai from. How far did the case get? had plenty of ways.

To make the formation of a cabinet

Wu Shiying died in prison on April 24.
fall through, he did not need to
Ying Guixin died on a train in
lift a hand. He only needed not
January 1914. Zhao Bingjun died in Tianjin in
to nod. In name the cabinet is
formed by the majority party in parliament.
February 1914, officially of a stroke, and by
But the choice of premier and the
list of ministers all have to pass
common rumour of poison.
the president. He drags his feet,
Hong Shuzu ran, and ran until he
was caught in 1918; in April 1919, in Beijing,
does not nod, and there is no
cabinet. He had a second step:
he was strangled for having procured a
cut the money. The Nationalist Party's operating
killing. Four men: three never stood in
funds, the members' allowances, all of it
a court, one stood on the gallows.
could be blocked. He did not even
And the one sentence that mattered,
need to dissolve the party.
who gave the order, was never written
Letting it go hungry for a while
into any official conclusion.

would have been enough.

And one step further: to go north,

This republic had just declared that it

would do things by law, and its

Song Jiaoren had to take a train,

had to enter Beijing, had to deal

first great case stuck right here.

with the presidential office.

Every step of it was inside the

government's line of sight.

One telegram from Yuan Shikai and he

would never have reached the capital.

So here is the peculiar thing about

this case. Yuan Shikai had motive,

had power, and had slow, legal methods.

Assassination was the worst of them all.

He knew better than anyone what follows

an assassination: the whole country boils over,

the south moves at once, and he

has lit a fire at his own

door. Nobody who means to hold power

for the long run picks the road

that costs the most and pays back

the least. Which forces a more important

question. If the man who ordered it

need not have been Yuan Shikai,

then whose office decided that Song Jiaoren

must not reach Beijing?

Let us take this apart into four

layers. Each layer has its people.

Each layer does only its own piece.

Each piece looks proper on its own.

Put the four together and you have

one complete chain. First layer: Beijing,

the cabinet. In March 1913 the premier was

Zhao Bingjun. In his Ministry of the

Interior there was a secretary named Hong

Shuzu, a man who travelled constantly between

Beijing and Shanghai. Second layer: the Shanghai

underworld. Hong Shuzu knew a man named

Ying Guixin, also called Ying Kuicheng.

In Shanghai this man had enormous reach.

He came out of the secret societies,

and yet carried the official title of

Jiangsu inspector. Money, contacts, and a talent

for dirty work. Third layer: the platform.

Ying Guixin found a man, Wu Shiying.

On the night of March 20, this man

lay in wait near the ticket barrier

at Shanghai station. And then the case

was solved with astonishing speed.

A dozen hours after the shooting there

was still no lead.

The police of the Shanghai International Settlement

posted a reward of ten thousand yuan.

The Shanghai-Nanjing railway administration put up five thousand. The military governor of Jiangsu, Cheng Dequan, telegraphed the province to hunt the killers and set a deadline.

On March 24, the fourth day after the shooting, Wu Shiyong was arrested in Ying Guixin's house. The case was first heard at the Mixed Court in the International Settlement, then handed over to the Chinese side.

At the preliminary hearing Wu Shiyong confessed clearly: Ying Guixin told him to do it. But when the trial proper opened, he took it back.

Then the police searched Ying Guixin's house and found a batch of telegrams.

Those telegrams are the hardest thing in this whole case. Let me read a few of them to you.

March 13, Hong Shuzu to Ying Guixin: destroy Song, and the rank of merit is your reward. Translated: ruin him, and I will repay you with a decoration. March 14, Ying Guixin replies: the bandit chief of Liangshan is stirring up trouble everywhere, the danger is real, urgent orders have been issued to hunt him down.

He calls Song Jiaoren the bandit chief
of Liangshan. He calls murder a hunt.
March 19, Hong Shuzu telegraphs again: proceed at
once. March 21, Ying Guixin reports: the bandit
chief is destroyed, our men not one
wounded, rest assured. By then Song Jiaoren
had been lying in hospital for nearly
a day. Hong Shuzu later explained that
what he wanted was to destroy Song's
reputation, not the man, and that the
decoration was an empty promise. Ying Guixin plainly did not read it that way. A
deputy handed a vague instruction to a man with great reach and plans of his own.
That is where the ambiguity grew

.

Let us put the conclusion first.
Measured with four rules, Yuan Shikai is
the least likely man to have ordered
Song Jiaoren killed. This is not excusing
him. Quite the opposite: what Yuan Shikai
did later, this film hides nothing of.
He dissolved the Nationalist Party.
He tore up the constitution.
He made himself emperor.
All of that is his.
But as far as this one shot
is concerned, putting the account on his
head is the least defensible entry in

the ledger. Why? Four measures.

Let me show you them one at

a time. Before we measure, one thing

has to be added: where did Yuan

Shikai's position come from in the first

place? On February 12, 1912, the Qing emperor issued

the edict of abdication.

The sentence in its first half,

the ruling power is hereby made public

to the whole nation and the state

shall be a republican constitutional one,

is the one everybody quotes.

But the sentence that actually decided the

next four years is the one that

follows, and here it is in the

original words: Yuan Shikai, having previously been

elected prime minister by the Advisory Council,

and this being a time when the

old gives place to the new,

there must be a way to unify

north and south; let Yuan Shikai therefore,

with full powers, organise the provisional republican

government and consult with the revolutionary army

on the manner of unification.

Listen to that sentence carefully.

On the day the Qing emperor stepped

down, the full power to organise the

provisional republican government was already written in
black and white to Yuan Shikai.

His position was not seized from Song
Jiaoren. It was handed to him by
that edict. Hold on to that layer,
or the four measures will not measure
straight. Measure one: motive.

Whose position grew worse because Song Jiaoren
was about to form a cabinet?

Yuan Shikai's did. Under the Provisional Constitution,
real power sits with the premier;
once Song Jiaoren formed his cabinet,
the president would have to hand that
power over. This is true, and there
is no need to argue it for
him. So on the first measure Yuan
Shikai stands: he had motive.

But notice: motive is not an order.

What this column proves is only that
he did not want Song Jiaoren in
office. It does not prove that he
struck. Measure two: means.

Here Yuan Shikai collapses completely.

To make sure Song Jiaoren could not
form a cabinet, did he need a
gun? Not at all.

The choice of premier and the list

of ministers all had to pass the president. He only had to withhold his nod, and there would be no cabinet, and Song's trip north would have been for nothing, and he would have gone back to Shanghai. Here was a road that cost almost nothing and had a fair chance of success.

And he had a second step:

cut the money. The party's funds, the members' allowances, all of it could be blocked. He did not even need to dissolve the party.

Let it starve for a while;

that would have been enough.

Why would a man holding that many legal, cheap and quiet options choose the one the whole country would see, the one that traces straight back to him? And one harder sentence: Yuan Shikai was not a man who built his career on assassination. What he used all his life was armies, silver, office and treaties. Assassination was neither his habit nor a means he had no way around.

Measure three: timing. To go north,

Song Jiaoren had to take a train.

Which train, what hour he arrived,
which barrier he walked through, all of
it was inside the government's view.

One telegram from Yuan Shikai and he
would not have left Shanghai.

And the fact is: he left.

What this column means is that whoever
you want to charge, someone had to
do the stopping, and the Beijing end
did not do it.

Measure four: gain. What did Yuan Shikai
get when Song Jiaoren died?

A moment of safety, and the curses
of the whole country.

The south moved at once; four months
later the Second Revolution broke out,
and he was forced to use a
war to solve a problem he could
have solved by not nodding.

More than that: with Song Jiaoren dead,
what Yuan Shikai lost was an opponent
he could negotiate with under rules.

What he got in exchange was a
set of enemies he could only deal
with by gun. However you add it
up, this account loses.

Put the four measures side by side

and it is clear.

Motive: he had it.

Means: he did not need it.

Timing: he did not stop him.

Gain: he lost the most.

So this film says it plainly:

Yuan Shikai is the least likely man
to have ordered the assassination of Song
Jiaoren. Then who is the most likely?

This film names no one.

But one thing has to be put
on the table, and it is documented:
in the spring of 1913, the voice
inside the Nationalist Party was changing hands.

The party's real power was in Song
Jiaoren's hands. The votes in parliament were
won by his own travelling.

The papers were already calling him the
future premier. And in his speeches he
talked about separation of powers, and never
once mentioned the five-power constitution his own
comrade had invented. On February 10, with the
cabinet about to be formed, Sun Yatsen
took the Yamashiro Maru to Japan and
did not discuss any of it with

Song Jiaoren. These are facts, not guesses.

Later writers have used these facts to

point suspicion toward the party's own end.

That is one school of opinion among

later writers. It is not this film's

conclusion. This film's conclusion is a single

sentence: Yuan Shikai is the least likely.

As for whose name goes in that

last cell, this film leaves it to

you. What follows is inference, not record.

If there had been one plain-clothes policeman

on that platform that night.

If he had been willing to let

two attendants walk ahead of him.

If the Shanghai newspapers had printed the

rumour that someone meant him harm one

day earlier. Then that shot might have

missed. Every one of those ifs really

existed at the time.

Not one of them was impossible.

History did not go that way,

and we cannot say the outcome would

certainly have been different.

But we can say this: that road

did exist. This is inference, not record.

Now read the chain once more,

backwards. At both ends, the people who

could have prevented it were absent.

At Yuan Shikai's end, a single telegram

could have stopped him, and he did not send it. At Song Jiaoren's end, two more men, a later train, three days' delay, any of it would have worked, and he did none of it. Neither end was guarded.

That is why someone in the middle could act.

.

Now let us turn the clock back to the night of March 20 and walk those seventeen hours, hour by hour. That night he had just shaken hands with the people seeing him off.

He was still talking.

After the shot he did not fall down. He could still speak, and he told the people around him that he had been hit. Yu Youren ran out of the station, stopped a car in the road, and got him to the Shanghai-Nanjing Railway Hospital on Laobazi Road.

Two German doctors operated for more than an hour and took out the bullet.

It had entered from the right side of the back, drove slanting into the abdomen, and stopped close to the heart.

Before it went in, the bullet had been poisoned, or so the Shanghai papers said at the time.

After the operation the pain was unbearable. He vomited continuously. There was blood in his urine. On the morning of the twenty-first, men like Zhang Jian and Zhang Binglin came. The doctors operated a second time. He knew he could not hold on. He said to Yu Youren, who stayed at his side, that there were three things he wanted his comrades to do. First: the books I have deposited in Nanjing, Beijing and Tokyo, give them all to the Nanjing Library. Second: my family has always been poor, and my old mother is still living; I ask my old friends to look after her. Third: comrades, go on fighting to save the country, and do not set down your duty because of me. Then he asked Huang Xing to write for him, and sent his last telegram to Yuan Shikai. I will read you the whole of it, without changing a word. To President Yuan in Beijing. Tonight I was to take the Shanghai-Nanjing

train to the capital to pay my
respects. At ten forty-five, at the station,
a villain suddenly fired on me from
behind. The bullet entered above the waist
and passed into the lower abdomen,
and death is certain.

I have reflected: since I first received
instruction, I have kept myself clean.
Though I have not succeeded in avoiding
fault, I have never made a private
enemy of any man.

The Qing government was bad, and I
rose to reform it; I also honoured
human decency and held to public right,
and I have not dared to keep
the smallest thought of power or profit.

Now the foundations of the state are
not yet firm and the people's welfare
not yet increased. To let go so
suddenly, I die with regret remaining.

I beg that the President, with an
open heart and public justice, will do
his utmost to guarantee the rights of
the people, so that the nation may
obtain a constitution firm and unshakable.

Then the day of my death is
as the year of my life.

These words are spoken on the edge
of death; I pray they will be
accepted. Song Jiaoren. Stop at these two
lines. A man who has just been
shot and is waiting to die,
and the first defence he offers for
himself is: I have never made a
private enemy of any man.

The second: I have not dared to
keep the smallest thought of power or
profit. More than a hundred years later,
these are the two hardest lines in
this case to answer.

The last thing a man who has
just been assassinated leaves his country is
a request that the president guarantee civil
rights and settle a constitution.

At four forty-eight in the morning of
March 22, Song Jiaoren died, tears in his
eyes. He was thirty-one.

Among the comrades who had watched all
night, Chen Qimei wept aloud.

Huang Xing, crying as he worked,
washed his body. He lay on his
side in white bedding, the upper body
bare, a bruise on the right side
of his abdomen where the dressing had

been taken off. Tan Renfeng later wrote
that in Japan someone had once told
Song Jiaoren's fortune and said he would
be a peaceful chief minister for thirty
years. The stars were no guide,
the way of heaven too dark to
question; after he was struck, only seventeen
hours passed and he was dead.

The man who three months later should
have been sitting in the premier's chair:
from the bullet to the last breath,
seventeen hours. On the afternoon of March 23,
the body was moved from the hospital
in Zhabei to the Hunan Guild Hall.

At the head of the procession,
a formation of the five-coloured flag,
then a military band.

His portrait was placed in a bower
of flowers. The coffin of nanmu wood
rode on a flower-decked double-horse carriage.

Behind came the naval band, wreaths from
every quarter, troops with shouldered rifles,
then one thousand five hundred Nationalist Party
members, white gauze in hand, many of
them weeping all the way.

And at the end, over two hundred
cars of guests. The citizens who came

to see him off kept gathering.

The procession ran from Zhabei into the
old city, more than ten li long.

On April 13, Shanghai held a memorial service.

Over twenty thousand people came.

The hall was hung with elegiac couplets.

Among those who came were old men
of the Revolutionary Alliance, and also constitutionalists
who were not of the Nationalist Party's
road. The heaviest couplet of all,
the one by Tang Hualong, was hung
at that time. Sun Yatsen's couplet read:
to guard the rights of the people,
who is not one who survives you;
to shed blood for a constitution,
you are truly the first.

Tang Hualong, leader of the Democratic Party,
wrote: what countryman could bear to tear
down the long wall of ten thousand
li with his own hands.

Calmly you came, my lord, but drawing
the knife and setting down the brush,
to whom can one speak.

Yu Youren, under the pen name Sao

Xin, wrote a plainer line: I do
not weep for a private friendship.

I do not weep for Minli Bao

or for the Nationalist Party.

I weep for the future of the

Republic of China. And then the burial.

Where the coffin should go was discussed.

Some proposed sending it back to Hunan,

for a leaf to fall at its

root. In the end it was settled:

he stayed in Shanghai.

He was buried in Zhabei, on ground

later called Song Park, later still renamed Zhabei Park,

and it is still there today.

In front of the grave stands a

square stone tablet, zero point seven five

metres on each side, one point two

metres high. On the front, two characters:

the Fisherman. That is Zhang Binglin's hand.

On the back is an inscription composed

by Yu Youren and written by Kang

Baozhong. Let me read you the heaviest

lines. That the gentleman died, all the

world grieves. What the gentleman did,

all the world knows.

What more should I record?

If I write straight, the straight writer

is killed. If I write crooked,

the crooked writer is destroyed by heaven.

What does it mean?

Write it true, and fear being killed.

Write it slanted, and heaven will not
forgive it. A man who has just
lost his closest friend stands in front
of the stone and says: I dare
not write, and I cannot not write.

Two lines follow. Cut it into the
empty mountain, and wait for an honest
historian. Engrave it on the heart and
liver, and lay it before heaven and
earth. Set this stone in the mountain
and wait for an historian who will
tell the truth. Those few lines are
the method this episode is made by.

We name no one, not because we
are avoiding it, but because the sources
available today cannot carry a verdict.

So we set the facts out one
by one and leave the judgment with
you. That is what waiting for an
honest historian means. One more thing about
that stone tablet is worth telling.

In 1966 the grave was destroyed.

Several park workers pushed the tablet into a
water pit and covered it with earth.

In 1981 a new grave was completed;
the tablet saw daylight again and was

set up once more before the grave.

Some people wanted it to disappear.

It did not.

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Less than eight months after Song Jiaoren died, this country became a different thing.

On November 4, 1913, Yuan Shikai ordered the Nationalist Party dissolved and cancelled the credentials of its members of parliament.

After that step, party politics in this country stopped in substance.

Parliament still sat, and the majority party no longer existed. The constitution was still being drafted, and the people drafting it had been driven out.

For more than ten years afterward, nobody again treated forming a cabinet as a political goal. Not because people did not want to, but because it had been tried once, and the price was Song Jiaoren. The premise of party politics is that the other side also keeps the rules. Once the other side decides to use force, you discover that every advantage you had, the votes, the seats, the newspapers, all of it works inside the assembly, and on a railway platform,

none of it is worth anything.

That is the most expensive lesson 1913

left this country. If you go to

Shanghai today, there are still two places

you can find. One is that station.

The building is still there, the one

the British built in 1909.

It is the Shanghai Railway Museum today.

In the exhibition hall there is no

sound of gunfire, only old timetables.

The other is in the northwest corner of Zhabei Park.

Song Jiaoren's grave is still there,

and on top of it an eagle

with spread wings. On one side,

the gunshot in Shanghai, the millions of

newspapers, the whole ambition of a peaceful

transfer of power. On the other side,

two characters cut on a stone tablet.

That age put both of those things

into the same stretch of history,

and less than a year lay between

them. What he wanted was very simple.

Let parliament sit. Let a cabinet be

formed. Let the president step back.

The answer Song Jiaoren gave with his

life is simpler than anyone's: the moment

you win by the rules, the rules

become dangerous. This republic had just learned
how to vote, and it learned something
more important: how dangerous voting can be.
And that lesson it has gone on
learning to this day.

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July 1913. Hukou, in Jiangxi.

Li Liejun fired the first shot there.

After the Song case, the first war
of this country was opened by a
single province. That war lasted a little
over a month. And its outcome decided
the next dozen years of this country.

Next episode.

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