

October 2021



Dear Club Members,

On the 10th October 1911 a dynasty that had ruled China for 276 years came to an end. This was the finale of 2132 years of imperial rule, and the beginning of a republican era.

The last monarchy were the Qing dynasty. This family ruled the 4th largest empire in the world at it's peak in 1790, and at the time of it's fall, 432 million people lived under their rule, the most populous country in the world at that time.

As ever, the British are partly responsible for the political upheaval that led to this revolution. The British used Opium as a way of controlling trade with China. During the 18th century Chinese goods were in high demand, leading to large amounts of European money being used to purchase these goods from Chinese merchants. In order to create demand for a product that the Chinese need to purchase from the West the British East India company began growing Opium in vast quantities in the land they had seized in India, and shipping it to China. Huge numbers of Chinese people became addicted to Opium, and in response the Chinese government seized supplies of Opium from merchants. The British government then responded by sending in the Royal Navy, in a conflict that became known as the First Opium War.

The Chinese Navy had no hope of standing up to the vast power of the Royal Navy, and were defeated, forcing the Chinese Government to sign what they described as "an unequal treaty". British merchants were now exempt from Chinese laws, ports were opened up under the power of the British, and Hong Kong was ceded to the British Empire. Not content with this the British demanded to renegotiate this treaty just 12 years later. Insisting that the Opium trade be legalised, that British imports be exempt from internal taxes, and for an English language version of all treaties to take precedence over the Chinese language. Unsurprisingly conflict arose again, and between 1856 and 1880 the Second Opium War was fought, again won by the British. Other world powers also recognised that this was a chance to exploit China, and supported the British. They then benefitted from favourable terms in the subsequent treaties. British ships were now allowed to transport indentured Chinese to the Americas, many of these labourers were used to build infrastructure like railways, under horrendous working conditions.

In 1898 Northern China experienced a number of natural disasters leading to famine, foreigners were blamed for much of this, and converged on Beijing, trapping soldiers, missionaries, diplomats and merchants in the diplomatic quarter of the city. An eight nation alliance of American, Austro-Hungarian, British, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Russian troops invaded China in order to lift the siege, leading the to ruling Empress Dowager Cixi to now declare support for the rebellion (a group known as the Boxers), having previously been hesitant about lending support to their case. The western forces broke the siege and plundered Beijing. Afterwards any government official believed to have supported the rebellion was executed, and China had to pay the equivalent of \$10 billion (at 2018 silver prices) in compensation. This figure was more than the government's entire annual tax revenue.

In order to pay this compensation, the Qing court made huge financial and administrative reforms. These reforms were not popular with political activists, and led to the formation of underground organisations working towards the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. Many students and intellectuals who had been studying abroad returned home and supported these groups. From 1900 onwards a number of uprisings, organised by different underground groups all aimed to overthrow the Qing dynasty, and their cabinet. This cabinet had been created to try and reduce the political unrest, but of 13 members 9 were from the imperial family.

Tibet, which had been under Chinese control, also experienced uprisings, and the imperial representative was executed in 1911. In 1912 the last Manchu troops were forced out, and the Dalai Lama declared Tibet to be independent. China failed to respond to this, and Tibet was left to rule itself for 30 years. In 1911 Mongolia also declared independence.

By November 1911 the Qing dynasty had lost control over southern China, and at a conference held in Shanghai the last Emperor, Xuantong was made to abdicate. Sun Yat-sen became the first President of China, and is now known as "Father of the Nation".

The short space in this letter is all too brief to cover this period of history, it is vastly complex, and the subsequent political changes in China are the topics of many books, and definitely beyond our scope here. For the ordinary people very little changed after the revolution, the people who took power were military leaders, local bureaucrats, and those who already owned estates and lands. They had little to no interest in ending poverty, and improving working conditions.

Your fibre today is inspired by the flag that was used by China towards the end of the Qing dynasty. Yellow was traditionally the imperial colour, members of the Royal Family were the only ones allowed to wear yellow, or to use it in their buildings. By the 1860's the lack of official flag for Chinese sea craft to fly was causing diplomatic issues. A triangular yellow flag was created based on the yellow dragon flag, used as one of the Eight Banners of the Chinese army. Until 1889 this flag was only used officially on sailing vessels, though occasionally was used to represent China at international exhibitions. Having seen western powers fly flags on state occasions the Qing dynasty chose to emulate this, and selected a rectangular version of the triangular flag to be the first Chinese national flag. The blue dragon in the centre of this flag is my inspiration as it also appeared on the national emblem used by the first Republic.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Further Reading/ Watching-

Flag of the Qing Dynasty

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag\\_of\\_the\\_Qing\\_dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_Qing_dynasty)

<https://theflagger.com/qing-dynastys-flag/>

## Opium Wars

<https://asiapacificcurriculum.ca/learning-module/opium-wars-china>

<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/opium-war-1839-1842>

<https://www.historytoday.com/archive/opium-wars>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00776k9>

<https://www.soas.ac.uk/gallery/opium-silk-and-the-missionaries-in-china/>

## Qing Dynasty

<https://www.history.com/topics/china/qing-dynasty>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/znmk4xs/articles/zkqsp4j>

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/how-do-empires-work/content-section-2>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3gelZhbFoY>

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/video/era-modernization-china-part-one-fall-qing-dynasty>

## Artwork from the Qing Dynasty

[https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/qing\\_1/hd\\_qing\\_1.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/qing_1/hd_qing_1.htm)

The largest encyclopaedia in the world (until Wikipedia) which was nearly lost in the invasion by foreign forces after the Boxer Rebellion

<https://www.historyofinformation.com/detail.php?entryid=2761>

<https://www.shine.cn/feature/art-culture/2010238284/>

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label

50% Corriedale

25% Bamboo Viscose

20% South American Wool

5% Viscose Tweed Nepp