

"Cixi was most responsible for the Chinese revolution of 1911." Many feel that Empress Dowager Cixi was the biggest factor for the Chinese revolution in 1911, which was a rebellion to overthrow the Qing dynasty. For this assertion to be true, it would mean that Cixi was the most significant factor which led to the revolution. While it is undeniable that Cixi made many decisions which were harmful to the Qing dynasty as a whole, there were other factors such as the lack of a strong military and a foreign trade imbalance which played major roles in leading to the Chinese revolution that caused the fall of the Qing dynasty. Therefore, I think that Cixi is not the most responsible for the fall of the Qing dynasty as there were more major factors that led to revolution.

Cixi's arch-conservatism and thirst for absolute power prevented much needed reforms from strengthening the Qing government that was already on the brink of collapse by 1908, which contributed to the downfall of the Qing government. Many of the people in the Qing court were conservatives and allies of Cixi, which helped to consolidate her power. One example of reform which failed due to Cixi would be the 100 days reform. In 1898, with the help of senior court officials, two reformers, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao were permitted to speak with the Emperor. The reforms proposed reforms which would later be known as the 100 days reform, as the reforms had only been carried out for approximately 100 days before they were overthrown. Two goals of the 100 days reform include modernisation of the Chinese military and changing the government from an absolute monarchy, to a constitutional monarchy. However, even though the reforms would modernise China, which was relatively backward in terms of technology and military, Cixi opposed reforms. With the support of the conservatives, Cixi was able to oppose the reforms and put Emperor Guangxu under house arrest. Therefore, Cixi's desire for power led her to oppose reforms needed for the improvement of China and which could have prevented the fall of the Qing government.

However, after failed reforms and war defeats such as China's loss in the Sino-Japanese war, Cixi did change and allow for some reform. For example, in 1902, the imperial reforms were established with the approval of Cixi. There were also efforts made to accept and work towards a constitutional monarchy. Even though the reforms were quite late, taking place only a few years before the revolution, there were some improvements to society caused by the imperial reforms, mainly on military modernisation. Therefore, Cixi did make an effort to reform, but these reforms were too late and too little to have enough benefits on society. Despite this, it would be untrue to claim that China was stagnant as there were some little improvements to society.

It is unreasonable to pin all the blame onto Cixi because there were other factors that could also be the causes of the Qing revolution. There were already deep seated problems in the Qing government. One of the deep seated problems would be that there were internal military weaknesses. China was technologically inferior to other countries in terms of military weapons. The Western powers had rifles and gunpowder but the Qing army fought with swords and cannons. The underdevelopment of China's military resulted in it being weaker as compared to the other partners and caused its defeats. For example, in the Sino-Japanese war, many expected China to win instead of the Japanese. This was because China had a larger population and was a much larger country as compared to Japan. However, Japan won the sino-Japanese war and claimed Taiwan and the Korean empire as its lands. This was because Japan had adopted western technologies and undertook reforms and changes to improve their military equipment, unlike China which was rather stagnant in terms of the military. The defeat of

the Qing army caused people to lose faith in the military , as they were incapable of defending their own lands. This ignited thoughts of revolution in the people as they wanted a government which could protect the country from foreign powers, and not one that refused to change. Hence, the people wanted a better government which would help to improve the military instead of the weak Manchu government.

Other than the lack of a strong military, the foreign trade imbalance was also one of the deep-seated problems of the Qing dynasty. Foreigners, especially the British, bought goods such as porcelain, silk and tea from China. However, the Chinese did not like to buy much foreign goods, resulting in a trade imbalance. Therefore, there was a trade imbalance. However, this changed at the end of the 18th century, when the British started to sell Opium, a highly addictive drug, to China. Quickly, the people of China were addicted to opium. Hence, China imported large quantities of opium. Opium drained silver out of China and ruined the health of the Chinese people, as not only was opium an addictive drug, it was also detrimental to one's health. This led to the Manchu government banning opium. However, the decision to ban opium had sparked the first opium war, in 1839. The British waged war on China as the ban on opium resulted in loss of profit for the British. As a result of China's military weakness, it lost the war in 1842. This resulted in China losing control over its ports. Before losing the opium war, China regulated trade using the canton system. However, after the opium war, large amounts of opium flooded into China as trade was no longer regulated. This worsened the foreign trade imbalance and negatively affected the economy. At this point in time, faith in the Qing government was lowered even more, because they were deemed as incapable of keeping the economy afloat. Hence, the people wanted a more capable government to lead the country, which sparked feelings of revolution.

Although Cixi's involvement in the revolution is undeniable, and her unwillingness to carry out reforms did weaken the country, the Qing government already had many deep-seated problems that existed before Cixi's rule.. Therefore, it would be unreasonable to pin all the blame on Cixi for the 1911 Chinese Revolution and pinpoint her as the main cause. Instead, other long term factors such as the military weaknesses and foreign trade imbalances should be considered when discussing the cause of revolution.