

# **Pu Yi and Manchu Restoration in Media through the Lens of the New York Times from 1929 to 1934**

**Wan LI**

Department of Basic Science, Tianjin Agricultural University, Tianjin, China

Liwan28@aliyun.com

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**Abstract:** Studies on the image of Pu Yi and Manch restoration he involved in from the perspective of western media are relatively weak in China. Lacking of the documentary materials is one of the main reasons. Aiming at promoting the related study, the paper organized and analyzed the news reports from The New York Times which is one of the mainstream public media in Western Society. The paper reveals much more historical details about Pu Yi from 1929 to 1934 contributing to frame a typical and historical media image of him, depending on the reports. Simultaneously, the paper attempts to analyze how such an image was embedded in western liberal ideology and progress valuing system.

## **1. Introduction**

Pu Yi (PuYi, Pu-Yi), an insignificant little man in his early twenties, is a disregarded factor in the tragic drama of Modern China. The western society is concerning that with the Manchurian problem standing prominently, there is an enhanced interested in one puzzling figure in that vast, complex situation---Pu Yi , heir of of Manchu rulers, and “Regent” of the State of Manchukuo. Is he an independent executive, as Japan argues, or a puppet, as China holds from 1929 to 1934.

Foreign media organizations and journalists emerged as a very important force in building and spreading the image of Pu Yi and the nature of Manchu restoration to Western Society. Through their different professional practice, the image of Pu Yi and the essence of Manchu restoration have assumed unprecedented coverage and dissemination around the world.

The New York Times is one of the most prominent mainstream America journalism in the 20th century, which participated in the construction of the news reports about Pu Yi’s image.

Therefore, a close examination of The New York Times and his journalistic creation concerning Pu Yi is necessary and valuable. The study organizes thirty-five news stories about Pu Yi and Manchu restoration issued on The New York Times from 1929 to 1934. The purpose of the study is as follows:

To reveal more historical details about Pu Yi, the last Emperor in China;

To frame a typical and historical media image of Pu Yi from the perspective of western media depending on the western value;

To analyze how such an image was embedded in western liberal ideology and progress valuing system;

To restore Manchurian situation from a relatively outsider’s view.

## **2. The Brief Introduction of Pu Yi**

He is the son of the Manchu Prince Chun, a brother of the Emperor Kwangsu. Pu Yi was born in February, 1906. The old Dowager Empress selected little Pu Yi to fill the Dragon throne after the death of her son, Kwangsu on Nov.14, 1908. For four years the child-Emperor was the head of all China, which had the title of Hsuan Tung, his father acting as regent. Then came the first Chinese revolution and Pu Yi was deposed on Feb.12, 1912 and virtually imprisoned in the old Imperial Palace in Peiping, now called Beijing.[1]In 1917, when Pu Yi was only 11years old, the ambitious General Chang Hsun attempted a restoration, but he was forced to abdicate when the Young China

party gained control.

In November, 1924, Marshal Feng Yu-hsiang sent his soldiers into the Forbidden City and summarily ejected the former Emperor and his two young wives from the palace. At first he took refuge in the German Hospital, but the Japanese placed at his disposal one of the buildings in their legation compound. Finally the Emperor escaped disguised as peasant and traveled safely in a third-class railway coach to Tiensin, now called Tianjin, where he was placed under the protection of the Japanese in the Japanese Concession. He has lived with his families since then virtually as a Japanese prisoner in Tiensin in 1926, where he became Henry Pu Yi living for years.[2]

In 1931, when Japan clashed with the Chinese in Manchuria, Pu Yi disappeared from Japanese concession and early in 1932 turned up when the Japanese created Manchukuo and asserted it was an independent state. He was named “chief executive” of the empire Japan had established. On March 1, 1934, Pu Yi announced his ascent to the throne under the title of Kang Teh.

### **3. The Image of Pu Yi on the New York Times’ Report**

In The New York Times’ report, there was an interview with Pu Yi, who was described as a mild-mannered and studious-looking youth. It said, his eyes were dark and his expression was thoughtful, more so perhaps than is was usual in a young man of his age. Pu Yi has a taste for good literature which has been carefully fostered by his four tutors. His excellence in calligraphy has repeatedly won the admiration of experts. He has never been taught to draw either in Chinese or in foreign style, but he has a native talent which enables him to produce very vivid and rapid sketches.

Sir Reginald Johnston, professor of Chinese in the University of London, served as the “boy Emperor’s” English tutor at the imperial palace in Peking, now in Beijing. In his interview, he said, ‘Pu Yi spoke some English – enough for ordinary purposes- and was well versed in English and American history. The most note-worthy thing about him was his readiness to listen to the new ideas, his tolerance, the voracity with which he devoured the newspapers and his immeasurable advance in familiarity with the social and political worlds of both East and West.[3]

### **4. Pu Yi’s Loneliness and Helplessness**

Even if Pu Yi is an emperor, he has a lot of helplessness. Sir Reginald Johnston recalled to The New York Times that Pu Yi was suffering much from headaches then and also from stomach trouble, which I was convinced was caused by the condition of the Emperor’s eyes. His tutor told him that his eyes ought to be examined but the high officials of the court would not hear of it. It was obviously impossible for the Emperor to go to the hospital. It seemed like a small thing that he was eventually persuaded to wear glasses, but in the atmosphere of the palace the English tutor had to resign before he could force his view on the court that it was absolutely imperative for the Emperor’s eyes to be examined. The American head of the hospital gave a really alarming report on the state of the Emperor’s eyes, and the Emperor wore glasses even since. His headaches ceased at once, his stomach trouble ceased soon after, and he enjoyed normal health.[3]

### **5. Pu Yi’s Lofty Ideals and High Aspirations**

From the New York Times’ perspective, Pu Yi was not without a mind of his own as he desired to be a Chinese patriot rather than a disaffected schemer against the government. Since coming of age Pu Yi was known to have evaded repeated proposals for restoration of the throne or for damaging the Chinese Republic.[4] In the New York Times’ report on Oct.12 1932, it said, There was no doubt that the former Emperor wanted to return to the throne because of deep political convictions. By temperament and training he was a careful conservative, and he was convinced that if his dynasty was not restored to the throne China would go from bad to worse. In this report, the former boy Emperor deplored the present condition of China and the miseries brought to the Chinese people by the long series of civil wars which were followed his abdication. He considered the Chinese as his people and in his conviction that he and the system of government which his

family represented could do more for the Chinese people than any other leader or form of rule.[2]

In the New York Times' report on Jul 17, 1932, Sir Reginald Johnston who had an intimate insight into the real Pu Yi mentioned that Pu Yi was greatly interested in the growth of the English constitutional monarchy. He was an admirer of the Prince of Wales, of whom he had read for many years. Mussolini was another of his heroes, and he had been heard to say that China needed a Mussolini to bring her out of her troubles. It was worth noting that among Eastern countries his personal sympathies are pro-Japanese. In view of the fact that he undoubtedly owned his life to the Japanese.[3]

This was perhaps understandable that when Pu Yi was compelled to flee with his two wives from the palace to the Japanese legation by Feng Yu-hsiang. The flight was arranged by his English tutor. Subsequently they were placed under the protection of the Japan and lived in the Japanese concession in Tientsin for years.

## **6. The Japanese's Manipulation of Pu Yi**

British and French observers confirmed in the New Yorks Time on Mar 1, 1934, that Japan undoubtedly aiming at domination or leadership of the people of the Far East, probably, would re-establish the monarchical form of government in China. Pu Yi therefore became the logical person to receive Japan's support.[2]

In the New York Times report in Nov. 1933, Chinese and Manchu officials of the Manchukuo Government started openly that Japan had already made promises to restore Pu Yi to Imperial rank, and eventually to assist him to reoccupy the Dragon Throne, which was conceived obviously as an important phase of Japan's Asiatic policy. As one of steps to invade North China, Tokyo need arrange Pu Yi to depart from Tientsin to Mukden, now called Shenyang.[2]

With the Sino-Japan problem standing out more prominently than ever, there was an enhanced interest concerned in Western Societies. The track of Pu Yi was kept close eye on in the New York Times, which ran six news reports from Nov.9 to Nov 16 in 1931. On Nov. 15,1931, Pu Yi was reported to had been accompanied by four followers and went to stay with one of the members of the Peace Maintenance Committee,(The Peace Maintenance Committee headed by Yuan Chin-Kai, was the civil government set up after the Japanese overthrew Marshal Chang's administration.), whence rumors reported repeatedly that the Japanese were planning place him on the throne in Manchuria before Nov.16,1931.[5]

As for Pu Yi, the vision of the future of Far Eastern affairs appealed to him. Before he left his refuge in the Japanese Concession in Tientsin for Manchuria, early in 1932, Pu Yi was known to have nourished an ambition for a restoration due to The New York Times story on Oct.12, 1932. It was asserted that Pu Yi and the Manchu-Chinese members of his entourage hoped that the opportunity for such expansion of Manchukuo would be provided after the Japanese military occupation of Jehol had occurred.[6]

He cherished his ambitions and attempted to make a deal with Japan to restore the glory of that monarchy if possible. In the report on Feb 21,1932, it said, Henry Pu Yi had refused to assume office in the new State of Ankuo unless he was made king or emperor, insisting on a restoration of the "Dragon Throne".[7]However, Tokyo just regarded the one-time boy Emperor of China as a "Puppet" ruler for Japan's Asiatic policy.

Depending on the statement of Pu Yi's English tutor, Sir Reginald Johnston, on Nov.15,1931 before Pu Yi was whisked out of Tientsin by the Japanese, he appealed to him .And Sir Reginald replied, he regretted he couldn't help, because if Japan insisted on the use of force, justice would not aid Pu Yi.[5]

According to the description from Pu Yi's Chinese personal physician, who recently escaped from Japanese hands in Manchuria, in the New York Times news story on Dec. 11,1932, he recalled that Tientsin riot happened in 1931, was used by Pu Yi's uncles and Japanese agents to get him out of China. Pu Yi was informed , so the story goes, that the Chinese mob was clamoring for his life and that the Japanese, while shooting in his defense, wished him to embark immediately for Dairen, now called Dalian, both for his own sake and that of Tientsin city.

Not until he reached Darien was he apprised of his new role . Pu Yi stubbornly objected, refusing to proceed to Chang Chun until, according to the physician, he was struck down by the flat of an officer's sword. After he reached the new capital, he was informed that his title would be "President",then "Premier". But the blood of emperors in him revolted at this. A plain citizen he preferred to be, certainly a "President" or am "Premier" be would not be. On this he was adamant. And so his Japanese masters and their Chinese collaborators compromised with him on the title "Regent", dug up from fourteenth-century Japanese history. Withal a "Regent"who held real power and was not ruling in the name of any one seemed anomaly.[4]

Pu Yi did not see himself as a "Puppet" ruler, the report from the New York Times' on Mar 10,1932 described that the Regent himself proclaimed the independence of Machoukuo and the severance of all ties with China. He declared that his policy would be to promote the welfare of all the people of the new state.[8]

## **7. The New York Times' View**

From the perspectives of The New York Times, on behalf of the western mainstream medias' opinion, Pu Yi was described as the "loneliest and most isolated monarchy in the world", which was given limited power .The report on Dec 11, 1932, said that Pu Yi is not without a mind of his own, although his definite stands are taken on trivial ceremonial matters rather than on the large issue of statesmanship. When the former Emperor went from Tientsin to Manchuria last year there were prophets who believed the Manchu dynastic line would soon share the fate which Japan meted out to the Korean royal family, that after Pu Yi had served Japan's purpose he would be quickly deposed and that Manchuria would soon be formally annexed to the Japanese Empire.[2]

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