

## Father of the Chinese Republic - Sun Yat-sen or.....??

It's extraordinary what one finds out in conversation with one's friends. We have been playing badminton for some years with a Chinese friend from Hong Kong and over coffee, a few weeks ago, the subject of Sun Yat-sen and the revolution came up. Then, without saying a word, he drew out of his pocket an ageing photo and began to describe his family's connection with Sun Yat-sen and his great uncle, Yang Quyun or Yeung Kūwan as he signed himself. This is how the story unfolded.

Our friend told us that his family had had in their possession this somewhat controversial photograph of a group gathered in 1898 to discuss ways of overthrowing the Qing dynasty - the last Imperial court. The photo shows his ancestor, Yeung Kūwan in a prominent position with Sun Yat-sen in a minor role - a photo that was later coveted by Chiang Kai-shek who was willing to pay 1 million silver dollars for it and its negative! But more of that later.

Yeung Kui-wan was born in Dongguan, Canton (now Guangzhou) in 1861 but followed his father at a young age to Hong Kong and was educated and worked there. He eventually became a teacher of English and had access to Western literature on revolutionary theory. He was quick with his fists when foreigners took advantage of Chinese people and he began to formulate ideas on how to overthrow the Manchu dynasty, who were weak and refused to learn more modern forms of government from Westerners.



In March, 1892, he, along with Tse Tsan-tai (who was born in Sydney, Australia and who later founded the *South China Morning Post*) and others, started the **Furen Literary Society** (or **Chinese Patriotic Mutual Improvement Association**) in Pak Tse Lane, Hong Kong. Their guiding principals were: "Open up the People's Minds", and "Love your Country with all your heart". The Society released books concerning the future of China and advocating the overthrow of the Qing government and the establishment of a Republic.



Leaders of the '**Revive China Society**'  
L to R: Tse Tsan-tai (Treasurer), Yeung Kui-wan (President), Sun Yat-sen (Secretary)

When Sun Yat-sen returned to Hong Kong from Hawaii in 1895, he met up with Yeung and they merged the Furen Literary Society with the newly-formed Hong Kong chapter of Sun Yat-sen's "**Revive China Society**" (Sun had formed the Revive China Society in Honolulu the previous year). Yeung was elected president due to his being the elder of the two by 5 years and because the majority of the members came from the Furen Literary Society. Sun Yat-sen was the secretary.

They immediately started planning to capture Canton. The attempt won the support of several influential people including Ho Kai, a Chinese barrister-at-law and a member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council, Thomas H. Reid of the China Mail and Chesney Duncan of the Hong Kong Telegraph. While a revolt was being prepared, the

revolutionaries in Hong Kong selected the President-to-be of the Provisional Government, if the revolt should succeed. The struggle for supremacy was keen - while members of the **Chinese**

***Patriotic Mutual Improvement Association*** supported Yeung, Cheng Shih-liang and Ch'en Shao-pao sided with Sun. It seems that Sun was elected future president but was forced to withdraw in favour of Yeung. This fight almost split the movement.

The rebellion was to take place on the tomb-sweeping festival of 1896, October 26th. At the last moment, the revolt was postponed for two days to allow preparations in Hong Kong to be completed by Yeung, but plans leaked out and about 50 of the rebels were arrested in Canton and 205 revolvers and ammunition confiscated. Sun Yat-sen sent a warning to Yeung in Hong Kong but it failed to reach him. The British Colonial authorities were now under pressure to ban Yeung and Sun from Hong Kong. Sun escaped to Hong Kong but then fled to Japan, with a \$1,000 (Chinese silver dollars) price on his head. Yeung, with the same price on his head, left Hong Kong for Saigon and then Singapore eventually arriving in South Africa where he founded another 'Revive China' branch and later he went to Japan.

Yeung's relationship with Sun was complicated although they came from similar backgrounds - working class as opposed to scholar/official/gentry class. Neither Yeung, Sun nor Tse had had the traditional Chinese education but had gained new ideas from foreign schooling and in their travels had seen the efficient administration of countries such as Malaya, Honolulu, Australia and Hong Kong. They had seen the discontent of the Chinese peasants with incompetent rulers and knew that a change was needed. Sun, however, believed that a form of monarchy could still exist, but Yeung was adamant that they fight for a new republic.

In 1900, Yeung returned to Hong Kong, now a middle-aged man with a family to support, and he had to make a living by teaching. But he and Sun Yat-sen then began planning another uprising in Huizhou, in North-East Guangdong. It started October 8, 1900, and this time the object was to capture the coastal area and then advance north-east towards Fujian province - nearer to Formosa (Taiwan) - Sun had gone to Japan to try to persuade the Japanese to supply arms from Taiwan - while Yeung remained in Hong Kong to organise support from there. But Japanese arms did not come and after several skirmishes, the commander, Cheng Shiliang, disbanded his troops. On October 28, an attempt was made to kill the governor of Canton, to support belatedly the Huizhou rebellion (It had been meant to occur at the beginning of the Huizhou action...). The bomb went off but the governor was unhurt. The perpetrator, Shih Chien-ju, was caught and he named Yeung as the inspiration for the attempt. Although Yeung was warned to leave by friends, he did not flee!

The end came at 6 o'clock in the afternoon January 10, 1901, when Yeung was shot in the head and chest by four Qing assassins whilst tutoring students in his home. The assassins broke through the door and pulled out their guns. Yeung, who was holding his young son, Zhozhi on his lap, tried to open the desk drawer, which contained his own gun, but it was impossible because of the child on his lap. He picked up a large English dictionary and protected his head. One bullet penetrated the book but drove past his forehead and hit the wall. Zhozhi scrambled under the desk and more bullets were fired into Kuwun's head and chest. Seeing they had been successful, the assassins shot out the lights and left. Meanwhile, his wife was in the back room putting their daughter to sleep and hearing the noise, suspected that an oil lamp had crashed to floor. She sent their eldest daughter in and she found her father on the floor bleeding from his wounds. Her father asked her for a scarf to bind up his wounds and he walked to the local hospital! He told hospital officials that he had no enemies, only political ones...! He died from his wounds the following day and was buried in the Hong Kong cemetery in an unnamed tomb (his dying request), which was known only as 'Tomb 6348'.



Yeung Kui-wan's unnamed tomb in Happy Valley Cemetary, Hong Kong, May 2011



It was agreed between his friends that, if and when the revolution succeeded, his body would be reburied back to China. (Later, during the Chinese Republic, a request for this was refused). Sun Yat-sen was overseas when Yeung was assassinated, but he set up a fund for help and support of Yeung's family. The donations came from all over, in particular from South Africa where Yeung had set up a 'Revive China' branch.

On the internet (ie: unverified), there are some suggestions that Sun Yat-sen may have known of the plan to assassinate Yeung but did nothing about it. We will never know the truth....

After the death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925, Ch'en Chie Jiu, Chiang Kai-shek's second wife wrote in her autobiography, that she had always been taught that Yang Ch'ü-yün (Yeung Kui-wan) was "**the patron saint of our republic**". Chiang (in 1927, when he was setting up the Nationalist government in Nanjing) said that he wanted Sun Yat-sen to be celebrated as the Father of China and not Yeung. And when he found that there was a photo of Yeung seated in the most important position and Sun in a minor position at the back, he immediately asked that the photo and its negative be recovered and he was willing to pay 1million Chinese silver dollars for it. However, Yeung's family carefully concealed it and now it is available today for anyone to see.



Yeung Kui-wan and Sun Yat-sen in Japan, 1898, with symapathisers. [Chiang Kai-shek](#) offered a million dollars for this photo and its negative, as it shows Yeung Kui-wan (seated to left of Hirayama Shu, central) in a more honoured position than Sun Yat-sen (standing, central).

More recently, Yeung Kui-wan's nephew, Yeung Hing-on (our friend's brother) has worked for the last 20 years in Hong Kong to get official recognition of his great-uncle and the part he played in the beginning of the Republic. He has collected as many personal reports from Yeung's associates as possible. As part of this campaign, the beginning of the 2009 film *Bodyguards and Assassins* features the assassination of Yeung Kuwan (who is played by Jacky Cheung).

Due to Yeung Hing-on's efforts the Hong Kong authorities have this year placed a commemorative plaque next to the house where Yeung was assassinated and, only this month, they erected an explanatory plaque near his grave, Tomb 6348.





Commemorative marker of the site where Yeung Kui-wan was assassinated. Located at 52 Gage Street, corner of Aberdeen Street, Hong Kong. The marker is part of the [Dr Sun Yat-sen Historical Trail](#) and of the [Central and Western Heritage Trail](#).



Yeung spent 10 years of his life in his fight for the Chinese Republic without any thought of self-aggrandisement. His family life was disrupted, his own life threatened and he sacrificed any prospects he might have had for a better position - all in the hope of a better China. 110 years have passed since Yeung was assassinated and he has slept in a nameless grave until recently when recognition has come in time for the 100th anniversary celebrations of the Xinhai Revolution which resulted in the Chinese Republic that Yeung fought and died for.

In a book written about Yeung's life, '*Story of Yang Quyun*', Youlie describes Yeung as:

**"a man who made something difficult, easy;  
who made something bad, good; and who made something silly, clever.  
He had courage, benevolence and wisdom. Something that very few leaders had."**

Youlie further said,

**"He is bright as the sun on the equator and pure as the ice on the North Pole!  
The foundation of the republic was built on Yang."**

*Teri France, October 2011.*

**Some useful links:**

[Wikipedia article on Yeung Kui-wan](#)

This article has much info included in Teri's article. But, it also needs updating.

[Youtube video of news report on Yeung's tomb and plaque](#)

In English

[Another Youtube video on Yeung's tomb and plaque](#)

In Chinese

[Video of TV Programme \(21 minutes\) on Yeung Kui-wan](#)

In Chinese

[Text of an e-mail](#) giving Hong Kong news report on spelling mistakes on YKW plaques

In Chinese and English

# Text of an e-mail to Duncan France

Hi Duncan

You would probably be interested with the following news - on Appledaily Newspaper (Hong Kong) today [Oct 3, 2011].

## 辛亥先烈紀念牌印錯字

### Memorial monument for Xinhai Hero misprinted



孤寂百年的墓碑昨重光得名，墓上斷柱表示楊衢雲死於非命。曾顯華攝

The unknown tomb stone for more than a century is finally come to light, the memorial monument noted that [Yueng Kui-Wan](#) died of misfortune.

2011年10月03日

【本報訊】辛亥革命百周年之際，繼早前由市建局活化的百子里公園被發現輔仁文社序言刻字有錯後，政府聯同中西區議會負責修葺的革命先烈楊衢雲被刺殺處紀念牌，又將輔仁文社寫成「輻仁文社」。楊氏後人批評，當局對待革命烈士的歷史態度馬虎，以致連番錯誤，令人難以接受。

At the centennial memorial for the Xinhai Revolution, following from previous account where mistakes were found on the carving the Pak-Tze Lane Park was renewed by the Urban Renewal Authority about the [Furen Literary Society](#), the Government and the Central-West Local Council have decided to work together to restore the memorial monument on the spot where Yeung Kui-Wan was assassinated, but have called Furen Literary Society as Leungren Literary Society. Descendants of Yeung complained that the officials' attitude towards a great figure of the revolution was casual, and caused many mistakes, which is not acceptable.

出現錯字的紀念牌位於中環結志街 52號街角，那裏是輔仁文社創辦人楊衢雲百年前被清廷派人刺殺之地，現納入孫中山史蹟徑第七站，五年前由政府及中西區區議會斥資修葺，立有一塊紀念牌，講述楊衢雲及輔仁文社事迹。

The monument with the mistake is located on the corner of 52 Gage Street, Central, and this is where the founder of Furen Literary Society Yeung Kui-wan was assassinated by the Ch'ing imperial agents, and it is currently included as the 7th stop of the Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Trail, five years ago the Government and the Central-West Local Council restored the area, placed a memorial monument that describe the history about Yeung Kui-Wan and Furen Literary Society.

楊衢雲紀念活動籌委會主席楊丕漢發現，紀念牌上誤將輻仁文社寫成「輻仁文社」。

Yeung Kui-wan Memorial Activities Committee Chairman Yeung Pei-Han found that they have mistakenly named the 'Furen Literary Society' as 'Leung-Ren Literary Society', i.e. used the incorrect Chinese character.



他批評當局對歷史不認真、對革命烈士不尊重，「喺外國出現呢啲錯誤，隨時有官員要辭職負責啦」。他要求當局盡快公開道歉及更正錯誤，「香港作為辛亥革命發源地，短短一條街，兩個紀念革命嘅地方都出現錯字，實在太過份，叫人點接受」。

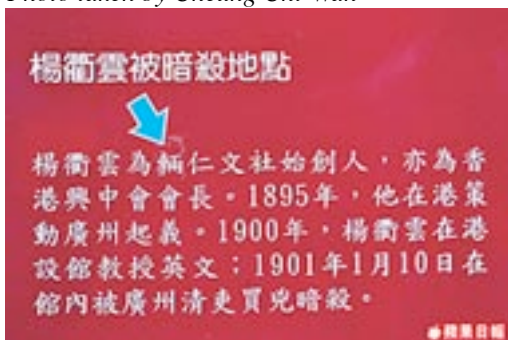
He argued that those responsible did not take history seriously, and were not respectful to the Great ones of the revolution, "if this happened overseas, government officials would resign to be made responsible." He asked the officials for an official apologies and to make the changes immediately, "Hong Kong is the founding place for the Xinhai revolution, and within such a short trail, there are mistakes on two significant memorial revolution plaques, this is too much is and not acceptable."



楊衢雲當年在結志街 52號的位置被清廷刺殺，該處現豎立一塊紀念牌。張志華攝

Yeung Kui-wan was assassinated by Ch'ing agents on 52 Gage Street, and a memorial monument has been installed.

Photo taken by Cheung Chi-Wah



位於孫中山史蹟徑第七站的紀念牌，竟將「輔仁文社」誤寫為「輛仁文社」（箭嘴示）。

Memorial monument placed on the seventh stop of the Sun Yat-Sen Historical Lane, where Furen Literacy Society was mistakenly written as Leung-ren Literacy Society. (Where the arrow is)

## 楊衢雲墓正名 堂姪欣喜

**Yeung Kui-wan's gravestone named, nephew rejoices**



楊興安對政府替他堂伯父重新立碑感到高興。

Yeung Hing-On was happy that the government have named the gravestone for his uncle.

市建局斥資 4,000萬元活化的百子里紀念公園本月竣工，但日前有中大內地生發現，刻有輔仁文社序言的亭架上，將「**日**」字全部錯刻成「**日**」字，市建局事後承諾盡快更正。

Urban Renewal Authority spent \$4billion to renew the Pak-Tze Lane Memorial Park which opens this month, but a Mainland Chinese student from the Chinese University found that, on the plaque about the Furen Literacy Society, all the words "said (**日**)" was written as "sun (**日**)", and the Urban Renewal Authority has promised to correct them as soon as possible.

中西區民政事務處發言人表示，曾在錯字表面貼上正字，但近期脫落，多謝市民提醒；該處正製作新的紀念牌，以盡快更換出錯的紀念牌。

Spoke person from the Central-West Home Affairs Department ????: They have previously put stickers with the correct words over the wrong ones, but they have now fallen off, and thank you for the reminders from the public; they are creating new memorial plaques and will change the wrong ones as soon as possible.

此外，楊衢雲 1901 年在中環結志街被清廷派員槍殺後，遺體一直安葬於跑馬地墳場，為免埋骨之處被清廷發現，石碑一直未刻上名字。

In addition, after Yeung Kui-wan was assassinated by Ch'ing officials on Gage Street, Central, his body remained in the Cemetery in Happy Valley, and because they do not want his body to be found by Ch'ing, the headstone never had the name engraved.

楊衢雲堂姪楊興安指出，他十多年來兩度去信港府，要求為堂伯父的墓碑正名，紀念堂伯父對革命的貢獻，至本月終獲接納，石碑旁加一塊簡介楊衢雲生平的紀念碑。

Yeung Kui-wan's nephew Yeung Hing-On said, he has written to the government twice in the last decade, asking for the headstone to be named, to commemorate the contribution his uncle made to the revolution, and it was finally accepted this month, that a memorial monument about Yeung Kui-wan's life will be placed next to his gravestone.

孤寂百年的楊衢雲墓添上紀念碑後，有學生到墓前致送鮮花致意。楊興安希望墓碑正名有助新一代了解辛亥革命歷史。

After the memorial monument was installed for the unknown Yeung Kui-wan, students have placed flowers at his tombstone to commemorate. Yeung Hin-on would like the memorial monument to help the new generation to have a better understanding of the history of the Xinhai Revolution.