

CHINA

The European presence in China increased dramatically between the late 1700s to the early 1900s. It was Napoleon who called China a “**sleeping dragon**” meaning that China could one day become one of the world’s mightiest nations because of its huge population, vast size, and abundance of natural resources. However, under the rule of the late **Qing (Manchu) emperors**, China continued to sleep. In fact its power decreased rather than increase. The Qing leaders did little to modernize or industrialize the nation.

China was not actually conquered or colonized; it was forced to grant so many privileges and economic concessions to foreign countries that its integrity as an independent nation was severely compromised. The Qing state also weakened internally during the 1800s, finally collapsing in 1911.

The Qing or Manchu were rulers that came from the North in 1644. They were ruthless leaders. Their dynasty’s peak was under the reign of Emperor Kangxi (1662-1722) and Emperor Qianlong (1736-1795). Qianlong was the Qing’s last strong ruler who defended the nation’s borders, improved economic growth, and sponsored art and learning. He kept the doors to China closed.

It was during this time that one of China’s greatest novels was written. The *Dream of the Red Chamber* was written by Cao Xueqin in 1791 and was about upper class family life in 18th century China and revolved around two young lovers who were living during the decline of a wealthy and powerful clan.

There were several reasons for the decline of China. After Qianlong’s death the quality of leadership declined and the new governments were riddled with corruption. The cost of maintaining the border defenses along the northern and western frontiers became exorbitant. The population grew from 300 million at the beginning of the 1700s to 400 million by the end of the 1700s. Revolts by the people against the government were common. The most notable being the **White Lotus Rebellion** which took the government from 1796-1804 to put down.

Trading with the West

Prior to 1810, China always held the upper hand with trading with Western countries. Now it was facing increased economic and diplomatic pressure from the West, especially from Britain. China was too strong to conquer. It enjoyed an enormous advantage in the balance of trade between themselves and the western countries.

The Europeans could only trade with China in a small number of designated ports and cities, which included **Kiakhta** in the north and **Canton** in the south. The island of **Macao** was the exception. It had been colonized by the Portuguese hundreds of years before and was a bustling trading center.

China's main **exports were silks, porcelain ware and tea** (mostly to Russia and Britain) China only accepted a few items from the West in trade. What they really wanted was payment in **Silver bullion**. Due to the high demand from the West for Chinese products, China amassed a great wealth in silver bullion.

Western nations complained about these trading conditions and constantly petitioned the Chinese rulers to allow them to sell more goods in China. In 1793, a delegation led by **Lord Macartney** of Britain received an appointment with Emperor Qianlong to discuss this matter. Macartney, in order to meet the emperor was compelled to lower himself onto one knee, and he was referred to by the Chinese not as an ambassador but as a tribute bearer. When Macartney asked that the British be allowed to sell more goods in China the Emperor replied "**Your country has nothing that we need.**" In 1816 a similar situation took place with another British ambassador, Lord Amherst.

The Qing dynasty refused to deal with the Europeans for two main reasons. Firstly, they had a very tough attitude towards business and wanted to keep it that way. Secondly, the fact that the Emperor was worshipped as the **Son of Heaven** and that China was the **Middle Kingdom**, the center of the universe, they believed that they were superior and that Westerners were all "**barbarians.**" What the Qing did not take into consideration was that these Western "barbarians" were more scientifically and technologically advanced than China. The days of Chinese intimidation towards foreigners was about to end.

The Opium Trade

The drug **Opium** had been used in China since the 1700s but it was scarce and not widespread in use. The British soon changed that scenario. A source of excellent opium was in **northeast India** (part of the British Empire). In the 182s and 1830s the British began to flood the Chinese market with opium. Its use rapidly spread across China. The opium made large profits for the British and payment for the drug was silver bullion, the same silver bullion that the British previously paid silk, porcelain and tea. Over time, other countries, such as France, Portugal and the United States sold the drug to China but the British dominated the industry. Estimates were that the British controlled 80% of the opium industry in China.

The Chinese government saw the opium trade as illegal. They were upset that the silver bullion was leaving China in large quantities, effecting the balance of trade and national economy. They were also outraged that the addiction was so widespread that it now affected the productivity of the Chinese workers. On any given day, millions of Chinese workers could not work because they were under the influence of opium. The Chinese officially protested to the West. One official wrote:

“The foreigners have brought us a disease which will dry up our bones, a worm that gnaws at our hearts, a ruin to our families and persons. It means the destruction of the soul of our nation.”

By the end of the 19th century an annual average of 4,500 chests of opium, each weighing 133 pounds were sold either legally or illegally by the Western nations to merchants on the south China coast. By 1839, nearly 40,000 chests in total had been imported into China. It was estimated that in 1838 about 1% of the nation’s 400 million population were totally addicted to opium.

The Qing government began to arrest dealers, seize opium supplies and intercept ships carrying the drug. This aggressive action by the Chinese was seen as an excuse for war by the British. In 1839 the Chinese navy blockaded the port of Canton. This action caused the **First Opium War** (1839-1842) between Britain and China. The British won easily. The Chinese junks were no match for the British warships. The result of the war was the **Treaty of Nanking**. Under the terms of the treaty, the Chinese government had to **open five more ports** to foreign trade, **lower tariffs on British made goods**, and **grant extraterritorial rights** to areas of China where British citizens lived. This meant that British law, not Chinese law, prevailed in these areas. The final clause of the treaty was that China had to **surrender Hong Kong to Britain**.

The conflicts over the opium trade in China did not end in 1842. There was a **Second Opium War, also called the Arrow War**, again won by the British and a **Franco-British (French and British) expedition to Beijing** that took place between 1865 and 1860. The result of this war and expedition was that the Chinese government was forced to **make the opium trade legal**. They had to open more ports to foreign trade and grant greater powers to the Portuguese, French, British, Americans, and Russians who had now set up economic concessions on Chinese territory.

The Chinese government grew weaker and was constantly forced to give more and more privileges to foreign traders. In the late 1800s, Japan, Germany and Italy also gained concessions in China. Large amounts of territory along the Chinese coast were now under foreign, not Chinese control. By 1898 foreign vessels were allowed unrestricted travel up the rivers of China.

The Taiping Rebellion

This was the worst of the internal problems that faced the Qing at the same time as the pressure from foreigners increased. **The Taiping Rebellion**, which was from 1850-1864 was the costliest and most devastating civil war in world history.

The uprising was started by **Hong Xiuquan**. He was a clerk from the province of Canton who was partly educated by Protestant missionaries. Hong wanted to be a government official but, according to the laws of the land he had to take and pass the civil service examination to qualify. Hong failed the examination! When he was told of his failure he went into shock, and from all stories, it seems that this caused him to have visions. His vision was that he was **the younger brother of Jesus Christ**. His role was to establish a **“Heavenly Kingdom of Supreme Peace”** – the meaning of the word **“taiping”** in Chinese.



Hong's rebellion began in 1850. Hong attracted many followers. His vision of a new China was appealing to millions of ordinary Chinese people who resented the Qing's high taxes and oppressive rule. To the people, the Manchu emperors were foreign rulers who had dominated the Chinese people. By the end of the year they were able to organize a large, effective, modern army.

In 1853, the Taiping rebels had captured the major city of **Nanjing** and in 1860 they came close to taking over the great port of Shanghai. At their peak, Hong and the Taiping leaders controlled one third of China. After 1860 the Qing government began to take back most of the territory lost. They formed the **“Ever-Victorious Army”** which consisted of Chinese soldiers but commanded by an **American soldier of fortune, Frederick Townsend Ward** and later on by the famous **English General Charles Gordon (who was nicknamed Chinese Gordon)**.

Internal arguments within the Taiping leadership also caused many problems. By the early 1860s the Taiping forces were in retreat. In 1864, **Hong committed suicide** by taking poison. The remaining Taiping leaders were captured and executed.

The Taiping Rebellion claimed somewhere between **20 million and 30 million lives**. The exact figures are not known because the majority of the population of China at the time were peasants who had no formal identification documents and were rarely counted in a census by the government. This made it the second deadliest war in world history, next to World War II.

The Dowager Empress



It was not until 1878 that a new, strong leader emerged in China. The leader was strongly opposed to modernizing and allowing any westernization of China. The new leader was the **Empress Dowager Cixi**. She was to rule China until her death in 1908.

In the 1850s Cixi was a concubine to the emperor and she soon became a major figure at the Qing court. In 1878, she managed to place her nephew **Guangxu** on the imperial throne and gain for herself the position and title of regent. By claiming the title Regent, she controlled her nephew **and** the government of China long after Guangxu became an adult.

The Dowager Empress was not effective in keeping the outer regions of China under her control. The areas of Tibet, the Gobi Desert, Mongolia, and Chinese Turkestan broke away as they achieved autonomy from China or changed from Chinese rule to areas of foreign control.

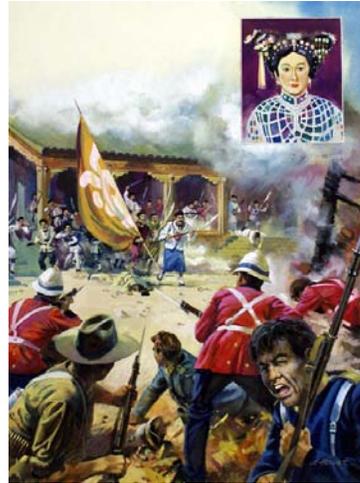
Cixi opposed all reform; she was against any pro-Western “treason” invading her country. In 1898 her nephew allowed himself to be persuaded by reformist advisers to his government and began Guangxu’s “**Hundred Days’ Reform.**” Cixi acted harshly. She placed her nephew under house arrest and executed the reformers.

The Dowager Empress Cixi could do little to stop the foreign domination of China. Three new nations were to emerge as additional foreign rulers of sections of China.

- **Germany** took over the territory on the Shantung Peninsula, which included the major trading port of Tsingtao.
- **Japan** was to emerge as a strong nation during this time. They were to start a war against China, the **Sino-Japanese War** which was from 1894 to 1895.
- **The United States of America** was to demand trade with China under its **Open Door Policy**. This meant that all Western nations would now have equal access to the Chinese markets.

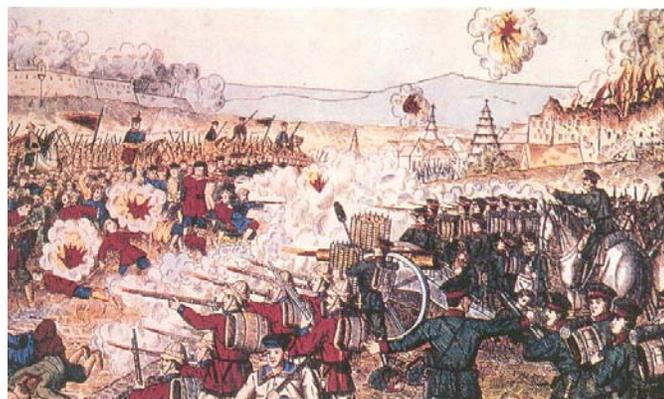
Christianity began to spread across China. As the amount of foreign control was increasing, so was the role of the **Protestant and Catholic missionaries**. They had both a negative and positive impact on China. The missionaries changed Chinese culture as they brought an “unwanted” religion and also taught the people Western languages that were contrary to ancient traditions. The same missionaries also brought scientific and technical knowledge to China. The missionaries were active in curing diseases with their **Western medicines** and also changed some of the oppressive cultural practices (such as **foot-binding**) that were still a key part of Chinese culture.

In 1900 there was a severe drought causing a famine in China and widespread unemployment in the cities. Tension between the Chinese people and the foreigners was intense. A rebellion started that summer, which became to be known as the **Boxer Rebellion**. It was called this as many of the rebels were **martial-arts experts** and the Westerners nicknamed them “boxers.” Cixi promised support for the Boxers but when the time came for their rebellion she gave no support or military backing as agreed.



American and British forces fighting the Boxers Note Cixi’s picture is inserted as she promised her support to the rebels

In **Beijing**, the capital, the rebels attacked foreign residents in their homes and advanced toward the foreign districts within the city that were exclusively controlled by the Western nations. In the end the rebellion was put down, mostly by foreign troops. In revenge for the Boxer Rebellion, the foreign communities in China burned several temples and forced the Qing government to pay a heavy financial penalty for their damages and lost revenues due to the rebellion.



Foreign coalition troops defending Beijing



German propaganda cartoons about the War in China and the Boxer Rebellion

After the rebellion Cixi started a committee to see if reforms could be made in China. She wanted to write a constitution but her attempts came too late. In 1908 both Cixi and her nephew, Guangxu died. Reforms did come during the reign of the next emperor **Henry Puyi**. He allowed the formation of local assemblies for regional governments and planned a national election for 1910. Puyi's reforms were not enough and many opposition groups began to form. These groups mostly attracted the younger Chinese who opposed the Manchu dominations and were for Western modernizations.

From the opposition groups, one man was to emerge as a new leader of the people. His name was **Sun Yat-sen** and he soon became known as the **“Father of Modern China.”** During the early 1900s, Sun Yat-sen brought together several opposition groups and formed the **Revolutionary Alliance**. His goal was to lead a government takeover and rule China. He wanted this military takeover to then lead to the formation of a **constitutional democracy** in China.

The Revolutionary Alliance was found on **three principles**:-

- **Nationalism** (the opposition of the foreign rule of the Manchu)
- **Democracy**
- **People's Livelihood**

The Qing dynasty collapsed in 1911. Later that year an uprising began in the industrial region of Wuhan. Sun Yat-sen was in control of the rebellion, even though he was in the United States when it began. When the rebellion spread to other parts of China, Sun Yat-sen returned home and founded a **Republic** and declared himself president. In 1912 the party he formed was called the **Nationalist Party or Kuomintang**. For the first time in Chinese history, the nation was no longer ruled by a dynasty or a foreign conqueror.

The new Chinese Republic would not last long. China was, for the next thirty years, be in constant change thanks in part to two world wars and a civil war.