Conference of Young Nigerian Democrats

DEMOCRACY DIGEST

Compilation of E-Books on Democracy

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Qing Dynasty

INTRODUCTION

The Qing dynasty was established by a nomadic tribe known as the Jurchen, who lived in what is now Manchuria. Though not native Chinese, the Jurchen adopted many elements of Chinese culture. They adapted most of their governmental structure from that of the previous Ming dynasty.

Qing Dynasty, 1644-1911, also known as Ch’ing or Manchu, last of the Chinese dynasties. During the Qing period, imperial China reached its zenith of power and influence.

The Qing dynasty lasted for almost 300 years, extended China’s borders farther than they had ever been before, and perfected the Chinese imperial system. The Qing empire appeared so orderly and
prosperous in the 18th century that the French philosopher Voltaire praised the Chinese for having the most effectively organized government that the world had ever seen. European thinkers admired the powerful and learned Qing rulers as “enlightened despots,” and advised their own kings to copy Chinese methods of government.

Of all the Chinese dynasties, the Qing was the strongest and most glorious. It was also the last. After flourishing in the 18th century, it fell apart in the 19th. Like many complicated systems, it grew brittle and inflexible. It could not adjust as new problems arose. Bad harvests, warfare, rebellions, overpopulation, economic disasters, and foreign imperialism contributed to the dynasty’s collapse. A revolution erupted in October 1911. In 1912 the boy emperor Xuantong (Hsüan-t’ung, commonly known as Henry Pu Yi) abdicated, or stepped down, from the throne. The overthrow of the Qing dynasty marked the end of a system of government that China had known since the founding of the Qin (Ch’in) dynasty in 221 BC.

II THE EARLY QING DYNASTY

A Political History
The Forbidden City, Beijing

The Forbidden City, in the center of Beijing, housed the emperors of imperial China from the early 15th century until the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. The roofs of all buildings in the city were glazed in yellow, a color reserved solely for the emperor, and no one except the emperor and court officials was allowed inside.

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

The founders of the Qing dynasty were members of the Jurchen tribes, a nomadic people who hunted, fished, and raised horses in the area that is now northeastern China. As the 16th century drew to a close, they also prospered from trade in pearls, furs, and the medicinal plant ginseng.

Jurchen territory stretched between the northeastern Chinese border, marked by the Great Wall, and Korea. In the late 16th century, because of their strategic location, the Jurchen were engaged by the Chinese as allies to guard the northern frontier and to repel a Japanese invasion of Korea.

While cooperating with the Chinese, the Jurchen transformed their loose federation of tribes into a solid military state. They reorganized the Jurchen tribes into four banners, each with a flag of a distinct color, and each commanded by an appointed head rather than a hereditary tribal leader. As other peoples joined them, the Jurchen added banners of Mongols and Chinese.

From the Chinese, the Jurchen tribes learned new methods of administration. They gradually abandoned nomadic ways for a more settled life. They supplemented their tribal organization with a bureaucratic style of administration and, in 1625, set up a capital in Mukden. To develop their own writing system, they borrowed the alphabet of the Mongols. This enabled them to keep records and to translate Chinese works into their own language.

As the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) declined, the Jurchen gained strength. In 1616 Nurhaci (1559-1626) declared himself the khan (ruler) of the Jurchen and the founder of a new dynasty, which he named the Later Jin (Chin), after a 12th-century foreign kingdom of the same name.

In 1631 Nurhaci’s eighth son, Abahai, set up a Chinese-style administration in Mukden. Following Chinese practice, he divided administrative responsibilities among six ministries and recruited talented Chinese men who had lost confidence in Ming rule to fill some of the posts.
In 1635 Abahai renamed his people "Manchu" to give them a sense of a fresh start, free from past ties to the Chinese. In 1636 he declared the beginning of a new dynasty, which he named Qing (Chinese for "pure").

While the Jurchen transformed their social and military organization north of the Great Wall, China to the south faced serious crises. In the 1620s and 1630s, bad weather ruined one harvest after another. Starving peasants struggled to survive by scraping edible bark from trees and by selling their children into servitude. Joined by underpaid soldiers, peasants formed small bands to raid towns for food. From these bands emerged several leaders, among them Li Zicheng (Li Tzu-ch’eng). In 1644 Li declared a new dynasty, seized the capital of Beijing (Pei-ching or Peking), and designated himself emperor. To avoid the disgrace of capture, the Ming emperor hanged himself. A Ming general invited the Manchus into China to help fight the rebel Li. Taking advantage of the power vacuum, the Manchus captured Beijing from Li Zicheng in 1644 and took control of China. In 1645 they issued orders that made their domination clear: they commanded all Chinese males to shave the front of their heads and to wear a Manchu-style pigtail. For Chinese, who believed that hair was a gift from their parents and ancestors, the head-shaving was humiliating.

After the conquest, the Manchus faced the problem of keeping control over a huge Chinese population. The Manchus, who numbered roughly 2 million, were greatly outnumbered by the 100 million Chinese. To surmount this disadvantage, they took over the existing Chinese administrative structure, modifying it only in small, strategic ways. They used Chinese scholars to fill 80 to 90 percent of the posts, but they reserved the most powerful positions for people whom they could trust: their own tribesmen, and the Mongol and Chinese soldiers who had collaborated with the Manchus before the conquest. The Manchus placed these trusted officials at the top of the administrative hierarchy and gave them authority over the Chinese bureaucrats serving below. To accommodate this multiethnic administration, the rulers also insisted that all government records be kept in both Manchu and Chinese.

The Manchu rulers introduced an elaborate system of checks and balances into the bureaucratic organization. Sometimes they appointed two officials, one Manchu and one Chinese, to the same post.
Sometimes they assigned overlapping responsibilities to two different positions. Both strategies encouraged officials to keep an eye on one another.

The Manchus took over the Ming capital of Beijing as their administrative center. At the time, the city had a population of around one million, which included 10,000 government officials and numerous clerks.

Deep in the center of Beijing, far from the ordinary people, was the Forbidden City, where the emperor resided and carried out affairs of state. Spread out over a large area were audience halls, libraries, and theaters, all covered in tile roofs glazed in a yellow hue reserved solely for the emperor. Surrounding this area was the Imperial City, with granaries, temples, residences for high officials, and workshops of artisans who provided services and goods for the imperial household. Circling that was the Tartar City, occupied by Manchu bannermen; and to the south was the Native City, where the Chinese resided. Each of these cities within cities had its own walls, which clearly organized and defined the status of its residents.

After seizing Beijing, the Manchus continued to wage numerous military campaigns to secure control of the rest of China. One threat came from three southern provinces—Yunnan, Guangdong (Kwangtung), and Fujian (Fukian)—which had been placed under the jurisdiction of three generals who had cooperated with the Manchu conquest. However, the alliance between these Three Feudatories, as they were called, and the Manchus was uneasy, and in 1673 one of the generals rebelled against the Manchus. In 1681, after a long civil war, the Manchus finally subjugated the Three Feudatories. They then tightened their grip on the southern coast by annexing the island of Taiwan (Formosa) in 1683, which had been the stronghold of rebels still loyal to the Ming dynasty.

The Manchus also dealt with the problem of Russian expansion into northeastern Asia. In 1689 the Treaty of Nerchinsk was signed by an envoy from the Manchu court and a Russian representing Peter the Great. The treaty, the first between China and a Western country, established territorial boundaries and defined rules of commerce for the two powers.
Through the mid-18th century, the Manchus continued to consolidate their power. In 1720 the Qing ruler sent forces to fight the Mongols in Tibet and then claimed Tibet by placing Manchu imperial agents there. In 1756 and 1757, Qing forces launched an assault against the Zungar Mongols of central Asia, whom they perceived to be a threat. The Manchus then took control of the Ili River region in Turkistan, which came to be known as Sinkiang (literally, "the new territories").

B  Important Rulers

The early Qing dynasty owed its success to three extraordinary emperors, who ruled in succession from 1654 to 1796. All three were energetic, politically astute, learned in Chinese culture, and familiar with Manchu ways.

The Kangxi (K'ang-hsi) Emperor was enthroned in 1661, at the age of 7. At age 13 he shrewdly got rid of the regents who were supervising him. Thereafter he personally managed his administration. Believing that one act of negligence could bring sorrow throughout the empire, he worked hard, often to the point of exhaustion. A master of public relations, the Kangxi Emperor took care to win the goodwill of the Chinese people, many of whom regarded the Manchu conquerors with hostility. Accompanied by a huge entourage and with much ceremony, he made six tours of the south. He thus learned about local conditions, reminded local officials of his command, and publicized his concern for the people.

In 1670 Kangxi issued the Sacred Edict, which consisted of 16 moral maxims that were based on Confucian teachings. He ordered local officials to read these aloud and deliver lectures about them at village meetings. These maxims instructed the people to respect their parents and ancestors, to be generous, and to be frugal; to work hard, to pay taxes, and the like. Through these maxims, the Kangxi Emperor encouraged the ordinary people to behave. He also showed that, although he was a Manchu, he was an educated, moral leader who was familiar with Chinese Confucian values.

To win over Chinese scholars, who were necessary for running the bureaucracy, the Kangxi Emperor sponsored several ambitious literary projects. In 1679 he held a special examination to recruit 50
scholars to write the history of the Ming dynasty. He set other scholars to work on a dictionary (Kangxi zidian, or The Kangxi Dictionary) that contained entries for nearly 50,000 Chinese characters. He also sponsored the compilation of an encyclopedia in 5000 volumes, the Gujin tushu jicheng, which was published shortly after his death. Those scholars who were selected for these grand projects felt flattered and quickly forgot their grievances against the Manchu invaders. Moreover, by sponsoring these projects, Kangxi made it widely known that he not only endorsed the cultural values of the Chinese but had also mastered them. Indeed, through such ambitious projects, he showed that he could outperform his Chinese predecessors.

Kangxi's son, the Yongzheng (Yung-cheng) Emperor, reigned briefly (1723-1735), but accomplished much, especially in strengthening the powers of the monarchy. He did this by setting up an inner core of advisers called the Grand Council, by developing a secret system of memoranda that bypassed regular bureaucratic channels, and by warning all scholars and officials against forming factions or political alliances. These measures increased imperial power at the expense of the officials.

The Qianlong (Ch'ien-lung) Emperor, who reigned from 1736 to 1796, combined his father's authoritarianism with his grandfather's support of culture. He sponsored an enormous literary enterprise that both benefited scholars and kept them under his control. This was the compilation of the Siku quanshu (The Complete Library of the Four Treasuries), which included 3450 titles in 36,000 volumes and a descriptive catalog of over 10,000 titles, which is still consulted today. These projects provided scholars with rewarding work, but they were also used by the court to find and destroy all books considered harmful to the empire.

C

Foreign Relations

In the area of foreign relations, Chinese rulers had traditionally assumed that China was at the center of the world and superior to all other countries. The Chinese word for China, Zhongguo, literally means Central or Middle Kingdom. This view seemed justified to them because for centuries China had been the largest and most culturally advanced country in East Asia.
Taking China’s superiority for granted, Qing rulers demanded that foreign countries engage in what has come to be called the “tributary system.” Representatives from foreign states showed their subservience to Chinese rulers by kowtowing (knocking their heads on the ground) before the emperor, and by offering gifts, or tribute. In exchange, Qing rulers, like protective parents, bestowed benefits on the tributary country. With few exceptions (the Japanese emperors and Mongol khans, for example), rulers of most foreign states accepted this arrangement.

**Economy**

*Chinese Peasants Planting Rice*

During the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) Chinese peasants planted and harvested rice by hand in much the same way as they had throughout China’s entire imperial history. Work was done mainly by hand, often with entire villages helping to get the harvest in on time.

Private Collection/Archives Charmet /Bridgeman Art Library
The early Qing rulers endorsed policies that stimulated agriculture and favored the small farmers, who made up 80 percent of the population. To benefit those poor peasants who owned only small plots of land, the Yongzheng Emperor changed the tax system. Previously, taxes had been based on the number of male residents in each household. After Yongzheng’s reform, they were based on the amount of land owned.

Whenever harvests were bad, the early Qing rulers reduced taxes or allowed the peasants to skip payments. Also with poor peasants in mind, the Qing rulers ordered that “ever-normal” granaries be established in each of the 1282 districts of China. These granaries were used to stabilize prices, that is, to keep them “normal forever.” When crops were abundant, the government bought grain so that peasants would continue to get good prices. When harvests were bad, and during famines, the government distributed grain from the granaries to bring prices down, supply food kitchens, and make inexpensive loans.

The Qing rulers also encouraged the reclamation of land. Everywhere, areas that had never before been cultivated were made productive. Marshes were drained, hillsides were terraced and irrigated, and the southwestern frontier was cleared.

Farmers expanded the cultivation of new crops that had begun to trickle into China from the Americas toward the end of the Ming dynasty. These included corn, sweet potatoes, peanuts (which were pressed for oil), and tobacco. Some of these crops thrive in poor soils and were especially suitable for planting in the marginal reclaimed land.

During the early Qing period, foreign demand for Chinese goods grew, causing huge amounts of silver to flow into China from the Americas via the Philippines and Japan. Gradually, peasants were drawn into a money economy. They supplemented the cultivation of basic grains—millet and wheat in the north, and rice in the south—by producing cotton cloth, porcelain, silk, and tea. Some abandoned planting grain altogether for such profitable cash crops as cotton, peanuts, tobacco, or even the highly addictive drug opium, which, though illegal, had been smuggled by Portuguese and British traders into China since the 1700s. Although peasants profited from these new opportunities, they also became dependent on the whims of the economy and lost their self-sufficiency.
With the growth of commerce, a banking system developed. Rather than risking travel with large amounts of cash, merchants deposited money in one city and then used a bill of credit to obtain funds in another city.

Cities and towns became lively and busy. *Huiguan* (merchant lodges), which provided storage facilities and meeting rooms as well as room and board, sprang up. Each lodge represented a specific region and served the needs of merchants and officials from that region. In time, some of these huiguan evolved into specialized guilds serving not travelers from a particular region, but members of a particular trade, such as paper or textile merchants. The proliferation of such guilds suggests the beginnings of a more complex economy.

**E Society**

In terms of status and prestige, the social hierarchy under the emperor, who was at the top, was divided into four levels. Immediately below the emperor, the elite, who made up 10 to 15 percent of the population, consisted of, in descending order, the imperial clansmen, a small number of officials who had hereditary titles; the civil bureaucrats (sometimes called scholar-officials or mandarins) who had earned their positions by passing a sequence of civil service examinations; and well-to-do educated men who had passed or hoped to pass some of the civil service examinations but had no official position. Beneath the elite were the farmers, or peasants, who made up roughly 80 or 90 percent of the population. The lowest 10 percent of the hierarchy included artisans and merchants, and at the bottom, prostitutes, actors, beggars, and butchers.

This was the hierarchy in theory. In actuality, the picture was more complex. Merchants ranged from peddlers who lived on the margins of poverty to powerful brokers who resided in urban mansions, socialized with officials, and collected fine art. Many elite families prospered by following the strategy of having one son enter the bureaucracy to bring the family prestige and power and another son engage in commerce to bring in money.
At every level of society, women were considered subordinate to men. As was often stated, women, when young, should obey their fathers; when married, should obey their husbands; and when old, should obey their sons. It was also widely believed that "only women who lacked literary talent were virtuous." To encourage widows to remain chaste and loyal to their deceased husbands, men routinely built monuments to widows who had chosen to commit suicide rather than remarry.

Nonetheless, there were signs that attitudes toward women were changing. A famous 18th-century poet, Yuan Mei, taught women to write verse and published their works. The official Chen Hongmou (Ch’en Hung-mou) believed that women should be taught to read so that they might in turn help to educate their children.

### Education

About 45 percent of the male population was partially literate. This percentage, which is remarkably high for a preindustrial country, was achieved because the Chinese greatly valued education. They believed that learning, not family background, was the basis for becoming a government official. In theory, anyone who had mastered the classics of Confucius could take the civil service examinations, earn office, and achieve honor and prestige. In practice, however, members of wealthy families had the best opportunities to prepare for and pass the civil service examinations. Few peasant boys could afford time away from work to study. Nevertheless, the educational ideal had for centuries inspired Chinese emperors and local communities to sponsor education for the poor. In 1713 the Yongzheng Emperor specifically ordered that elementary schools for poor boys be established throughout the empire.

Education was also an instrument of socialization. In the southwestern frontier province of Yunnan, where most residents were non-Chinese ethnic minorities, one Qing official renovated or established nearly 700 elementary schools for the poor. He hoped to "transform the customs"—in other words, civilize—the inhabitants.
However, there were no schools for girls. It was unthinkable that girls should leave their homes to study or should prepare for the civil service examinations. Some girls, however, did find ways to learn to read. Especially in elite households, they learned from the tutors who taught their brothers. About 10 percent of females were partially literate.

Daily Life

With the expansion of commerce, the quality of daily life changed for the peasants. They increasingly had spare money to spend on entertainment. On market days they visited tea houses and gambled. They also listened to storytellers or watched open-air operatic performances. Through this entertainment, peasants acquired much information. They learned legends about historical heroes and villains, and about religious gods.

Members of the elite used their surplus wealth to collect art, build up libraries, construct gardens, and participate in poetry societies. Merchants and gentry who had a social conscience spent their free time and surplus resources on community projects. They financed and supervised the construction of city walls, orphanages, poorhouses, and firefighting associations, and established food kitchens and medical clinics for the poor.

Artistic and Cultural Developments
Tranquil Spring

Western themes and styles began to influence Chinese art during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), and as a result, European artists were sometimes employed by the Chinese court. This painting, Tranquil Spring, which shows the Qianlong Emperor as a young boy with his father, was done by the Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione.

Under the conditions of peace and prosperity, many art forms grew more elaborate and luxurious. Porcelains lost the stately elegance of their Ming predecessors and became ornate and colorful, even gaudy. Western art and designs began to influence Chinese artists and artisans. Manufacturers of Chinese export porcelains satisfied foreign tastes by copying designs from European paintings. These designs in turn influenced domestic porcelains as well. Qing painters who saw European art experimented with such Western techniques of representation as perspective, shading, and aerial views.

One bridge between Western and Chinese art was the Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione. He hoped to spread Christianity to China but ended up working as a painter and craftsman for the Kangxi and Qianlong emperors. When Qianlong saw fountains in a European painting, he asked Castiglione and a Jesuit engineer to design several European-style buildings for the Summer Palace outside Beijing. These constructions included fountains and Western-style landscaping, with topiaries and a huge maze.
formed by shrubs. Few Chinese saw the Summer Palace, however, and outside the imperial court Chinese architecture and landscaping generally remained untouched by Western influence.

Lin Daiyu

Lin Daiyu, the heroine of the 18th-century Chinese novel The Dream of the Red Chamber, is portrayed here holding a book of poems. Considered by many to be China’s greatest novel, The Dream of the Red Chamber details the decline and fall of an elite family during the Qing dynasty.

Asian Art and Archaeology

Fiction writing flourished. One mid-Qing novel, often called China’s greatest, is *Hong lou meng* (1792; *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 1929), by Cao Zhan (also known as Cao Xueqin). It portrays the decline of an elite family and shows keen psychological insight into its numerous characters. Another well-known work is *Ru lin wai shi* (1768; *The Unofficial History of the Literati*, also translated as *The Scholars*, 1957) by Wu Jingzi (Wu Ching-tzu), a satire that pokes fun at the civil service examination system and many social customs.

### III DECLINE OF THE QING
From the beginning of the 19th century, Qing prosperity steadily waned. A population explosion stretched government resources and capabilities to the limit. The actions of foreign powers, who took advantage of the weak Qing government to gain Chinese trade and territory, hastened the decline. Furthermore, factionalism and division at court prevented the Qing dynasty from dealing effectively with these problems. Eventually, problems grew so severe that the people began to take matters into their own hands, and the fall of the dynasty resulted.

A1 Political History

The Onset of Decline

Qianlong’s death in 1799 marks the end of the era of Qing success. Throughout his reign, Qianlong was self-confident and powerful. In retrospect, however, signs of dynastic decline began to show during the last decades of his life.

As Qianlong aged, his judgment deteriorated. In 1775 he began favoring a young Manchu bodyguard, Heshen (Ho-shen), and during the next two decades, he steadily increased Heshen’s authority over government affairs. Heshen took advantage of the emperor’s trust to build up his personal fortune. Complacent about his power, Qianlong was blind to Heshen’s dishonesty. The extent of Heshen’s corruption came to light immediately after Qianlong died. Heshen had accumulated gold bowls, silver bullion, land, and pawnshops. The total was valued at half of what the state collected in revenues over a 20-year period. Heshen was forced to commit suicide, but the dynasty had difficulty recovering from the damage. Heshen’s example of corruption had spread throughout the bureaucracy.

Qianlong also failed to recognize social problems caused by overpopulation and the breakdown in government administration. Under the benevolent policies of the early Qing rulers, the population grew from 100 million in 1644 to 430 million in 1850. The number of government officials, however, remained constant. Consequently, the local magistrates who governed the 1282 districts were overburdened with administrative work. To alleviate the problem, they turned responsibilities over to their underlings, or they relied on members of the local gentry to supervise granaries, irrigation
projects, and social welfare programs. The imperial government thus lost a considerable amount of control over the rural population. Toward the end of the 18th century, signs of this deterioration began to appear. From 1796 to 1803, frequent uprisings were led by followers of the Bailian jiao (White Lotus Society). This was a popular religious group derived from Pure Land Buddhism, a Chinese sect that had gained popularity for its promise of salvation for all. In 1799 the non-Chinese Miao aboriginal group revolted in the provinces of Hunan and Guizhou. Pirates made raids along the southeastern coast. The military campaigns waged by the government against these rebellions were costly and further drained imperial resources.

A2 Increasing Power of the West

**Chinese Opium Smokers**

In the second half of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), Western powers reaped huge profits by importing the addictive drug opium into China, mainly through the port city of Guangzhou (Canton). China’s efforts to curb the opium trade were unsuccessful and led to defeats in the First and Second Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860). By 1890, it is estimated that over 15 million Chinese were addicted to opium.

Stapleton Collection/Bridgeman Art Library, London/New York
Qianlong also poorly understood the changes in the world beyond China. He had grown accustomed to thinking of China as the most culturally advanced and prosperous country in the world. Up to the mid-18th century, the European traders who visited China accepted the rules laid down by the Chinese. But then their expectations changed. While the Chinese stuck to the view that all other countries were inferior to China, Europeans wanted to be treated as equals.

One British merchant tried to improve trading conditions by writing directly to Qianlong. The emperor was outraged. The merchant had failed to go through proper channels and had, moreover, broken a law forbidding foreigners to learn Chinese. In a decree of 1759, Qianlong imposed numerous restrictions on foreign trade. Trade was limited to one port—Canton; foreign merchants were forbidden to have contact with Chinese officials and were required instead to carry out all transactions through monopolistic Chinese firms called hongs. This new “Canton system” put traders at the mercy of Chinese agents who could demand high payments for their services.

A second effort to improve conditions for European traders was led by an ambassador from Great Britain, Sir George Macartney. Bearing expensive gifts of telescopes, watches, globes, and astronomical instruments, Macartney won an audience with the emperor in 1793, but with unsatisfactory results. Qianlong accepted the gifts as a sign of respect but declared that the Chinese had no need for foreign goods.

The conflict between British trade ambitions and China’s policy of seclusion came to a head in the First Opium War, which was settled in 1842 at great cost to the Chinese. The Chinese were forced to open up five ports, to pay an indemnity of $21 million to the British, to hand over the island of Hong Kong to the British, and to legalize the importation of the addictive drug opium. They also agreed to end the monopolistic system of trade that had frustrated the foreign merchants.

Despite the treaty of 1842, misunderstandings between the Chinese and Europeans continued; small incidents flared up into major battles, including the Second Opium War (1856-1860); and the Qing dynasty suffered one humiliating defeat after another. Foreigners took advantage of mishaps to increase their demands for concessions from the Chinese. In 1860 British and French troops occupied
Beijing, forced the emperor to flee to his summer residence in Jehol, north of the Great Wall, and burned and looted the magnificent Summer Palace outside Beijing.

In addition to being besieged by foreign intruders, China also faced serious internal problems. Much economic suffering and social unrest followed the Opium Wars. The opening of new ports drew commerce away from the area around Canton and put many of the inhabitants out of work. Because the Qing government had to pay huge indemnities to foreign countries, it lacked funds for social welfare and public works, which would have helped to stabilize and enhance Chinese society.

During the mid-19th century, several destructive rebellions ripped through the country. The most widespread of these was the Taiping (“Great Peace”) Rebellion (1850-1864). It started in the economically depressed south under the leadership of Hong Xiuquan (Hung Hsiu-ch’üan). Combining Chinese and Christian beliefs into a revolutionary social program, Hong founded the so-called Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace in Nanjing (Nan-ching or Nanking). Before it was finally put down in 1864, his rebellion had devastated 16 provinces, destroyed more than 600 cities, and nearly brought about the collapse of the Qing dynasty.

Coinciding with the Taiping Rebellion were several other uprisings. The Nien Rebellion (1853-1868), launched by federations of street gangs, disturbed eight provinces. Several Muslim rebellions brought much destruction, especially to the southwestern province of Yunnan. All told, these rebellions resulted in the deaths of between 20 million and 30 million people.

A3 The Rise of Regional Armies

To put down the Taiping rebels, a new type of military organization became necessary. The government troops had become corrupt and undisciplined. In 1852 the court assigned a Chinese scholar-official, Zeng Guofan (Tseng Kuo-fan), to organize a local militia against the rebels.

To recruit and train an army, Zeng used the same techniques that the rebels themselves were using. Commanders relied on their own social networks to recruit soldiers, so that bonds of personal loyalty
would be formed within the army. Soldiers were recruited from the naive, rural peasantry, so that they would be easy to train.

Zeng’s innovations were decisive for the course of China’s subsequent history. They shifted the control of military power from the court to regional armies, and from Manchu to Chinese commanders. Zeng was a man of great honesty who did not misuse his army to build his own power. But the regional armies that he and his followers created paved the way for an era of warlordism (1916-1928), in which army commanders grabbed power for themselves.

The Self-Strengthening Movement

Shocked by the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion, Chinese scholar-officials tried to revive the dynasty by beginning what they called the “Self-strengthening Movement.” They modernized China’s military forces and manufactured Western-style steamships and weapons. One of the earliest projects was the enormous Kiangnan Arsenal, which Zeng Guofan and his protégé Li Hongzhang (Li Hung-chang) built in 1865 near Shanghai. Eventually, merchants joined forces with the government in setting up textile mills, coal mines, iron factories, railroads, and telegraph and electric companies.

The Self-strengtheners recognized that the traditional education in the Confucian classics was inadequate for their times. They therefore set up schools for learning Western languages and science. They also sent students abroad for training in Western technology.

The introduction of railways and steamships facilitated the transport of goods. The students who went overseas brought back machinery and technological skills. Nevertheless, the Self-strengthening Movement met with only limited success. The Chinese lacked sufficient capital for investing in these ambitious enterprises, and the government failed to provide needed leadership. This failure of leadership has been blamed on the Empress Dowager Cixi (Tz’u-hsi). Mother of the Tongzhi (T’ung-chih) Emperor, Cixi came to power as regent when the emperor was enthroned as an infant. Upon his death at the age of 18, she had her nephew made emperor, while she remained regent. Through manipulation and intrigue, she essentially ruled China for almost 50 years. To keep power in her own
hands, Cixi played one group off against another, with the result that conservative forces at court repeatedly undercut the efforts of the reformers.

A5  Loss of Territory

Henry Pu Yi

Henry Pu Yi (1906-1967) was the last emperor in Chinese history. After the Republican Revolution of 1911, the six-year-old emperor was forced to abdicate, putting an end to both the Qing dynasty and 2000 years of imperial rule in China. He is shown here in one of the many gardens of the Imperial Palace in Beijing’s Forbidden City.

As foreign aggression continued throughout the late 19th century, China’s territory and sphere of influence shrank. The Russians encroached upon Sinkiang, and in 1874 the Japanese raided Taiwan. One by one, states that had paid tribute to China and had been under China’s influence were seized by foreigners. The French took Annam (northern Vietnam) in 1885. Japan occupied the Ryukyu Islands and then began to encroach upon Korea, which had been sending four tribute missions to China each year.

In 1894 China went to war with Japan over Korea and suffered another humiliating defeat. The Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) ended Korea’s tributary relationship with China. It also stipulated that China pay a costly indemnity to Japan, cede to the Japanese the island of Taiwan, open up several ports to foreign trade, and allow Japanese to build factories in China.
Following the Treaty of Shimonoseki, other countries found excuses to seize Chinese territory. Germany took over parts of the Shandong (Shantung) peninsula in 1897, and the Russians annexed parts of the Liaodong Peninsula in 1898. The Western powers agreed upon the Open Door Policy, which guaranteed each of them equal rights to trade in China, and tried to further increase their commercial opportunities in China.

**Boxer Rebels, Beijing, 1900**

Members of a secret Chinese nationalist society, known to Westerners as Boxers, rebelled against Western intervention in China during the Boxer Uprising in 1900. The Boxers destroyed telegraph lines and burned buildings in Beijing, as shown in this illustration from a French journal.

Mary Evans Picture Library /The Image Works

As foreign merchants and missionaries poured into China, waves of antiforeign feeling spread through the Chinese population. In 1900 the hostility flared up into the Boxer Uprising. The Yihetuan, ("Society of Righteousness and Harmony"), known by Westerners as the Boxers, practiced martial arts with the belief that, being possessed by spirits, they had a magical invulnerability to weapons. With some encouragement from the conservative members of the court, the Boxers, who opposed foreign
influence in China, stormed the foreign legations, killed foreign missionaries and Chinese who had converted to Christianity, and destroyed such signs of foreign influence as railways.

The Boxer Uprising resulted in a further defeat for the Chinese. In the settlement between the Chinese court and the foreign powers (the Boxer Protocol of 1901), the Chinese agreed to pay out 450 million silver dollars to the foreign allies, to destroy several Chinese forts, and to allow foreign troops to control the railway stretching from Tianjin (Tientsin) to Beijing.

The terms of the Boxer Protocol deepened fear among the Chinese that foreigners would carve up China. Japan's defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1905) stabilized relations in East Asia, but it also undermined Chinese respect for old institutions. The Chinese, who had long considered Japan to be inferior, saw Japan benefit from its political reforms, in particular its introduction of a Western-style constitutional government.

Accelerating their efforts, Chinese reformers put a new system of education in place and established new government organizations. They abolished the civil service examination system. In doing this, they essentially rejected the Confucian classics and eliminated a classical education as the basis for social status. Revolutionary groups wished to go further by changing the entire political system. In 1911 the Chinese Nationalist Party, the Kuomintang, led by Sun Yat-sen, overthrew the dynasty and founded the Republic of China.

B  Economy
Beijing, Early 1900s

This street scene shows the poor living conditions many people faced during the end of the Chinese Qing dynasty (1644-1911). The vast economic gulf between the ruling class and the common people became one of the primary causes of the Republican Revolution of 1912.

China in the late 19th century faced severe economic problems. The battles against the Taiping rebels and foreign aggressors were costly and ate up funds that might have been used to repair dikes and stock granaries. Because public works had deteriorated, floods and droughts brought famine and disease. In the drought from 1876 to 1879 alone, around 10 million people died.

As China became caught up in world trade, the rural economy changed. The demand for Chinese goods during the first half of the dynasty had stimulated peasants to specialize in cash crops and to work for small regional industries. But in producing for the market, they gave up their self-sufficiency and became vulnerable to world trade conditions. When prices for their crops and handicraft industries fell, they suffered. This problem was especially acute after 1895. Native industries could not compete with Japanese factories set up in China.
In 1853 a new tax, the *likin*, had been introduced to raise funds for putting down the Taiping Rebellion. This tax, which was imposed on goods transported within China, was easier to collect than other types of taxes and provided revenues for the province in which the taxes were collected. However, it had an unfortunate consequence: It gave foreign goods, which were exempt from the likin, an unfair advantage, while discouraging the advancement of native industries. It thus deepened China’s economic plight.

C. Society

The events of the 19th century transformed Chinese society. They gave influence and social standing to segments of society that had previously been voiceless and weak.

Merchants had traditionally been low in status, but as industry and trade became important, they gained wealth and respect. Among these were the *compradores*, Chinese agents who assisted foreign merchants and learned foreign languages and business practices. These men prospered from new business opportunities, and some of them in turn invested in Chinese industry.

A new type of military man emerged. Soldiers of the past had been uncouth and uneducated and were decidedly inferior to the cultured officials. Not so the new militarists. Educated at modern military academies and trained in modern military techniques, they earned power and prestige.

Traditionally, young people had been taught to obey their parents, respect their ancestors, and serve their families. They thus grew up accepting the values of their parents. Conditions in the late 19th century also changed familial relations. New opportunities, such as studying abroad or joining study societies, detached young people from their families and gave them a sense of independence. Moreover, what the students learned about foreign customs and political institutions undermined Chinese traditions.

Women in the past had accepted that they were subordinate to men. As the 19th century drew to a close, opportunities opened up for girls to attend schools and to study abroad. Once educated, they
worked as school teachers, promoted women’s rights, wrote for journals, and fought for political causes.

Cultural Changes

Following the traumas of the Opium Wars and the mid-19th-century rebellions, Chinese scholars reevaluated their political institutions and gradually detached themselves from past traditions. Foreign works of all sorts were translated into Chinese. Western missionaries translated the Bible and religious works. Then, especially after the Taiping Rebellion, the Chinese themselves translated works on science, military arts, and technology, as well as novels, philosophical works, and political treatises.

Modern-style newspapers began to appear in the 1870s, and, along with magazines, they proliferated in the early 20th century. By their very nature as frequent publications, these periodicals drew attention to current events and focused on change. They accelerated the circulation of information throughout the country and engaged readers throughout the nation in the same issues at the same time. The press stimulated debate and the expression of public opinion. Satires of government officials and criticisms of foreign imperialists stirred up anger among the masses and aroused such public protests as the Boxer movement.

The press and translations of foreign works gave Chinese readers much new information about political systems and economic strategies. Among the concepts introduced during this period were ideas of evolution and progress. Gradually, Chinese thinkers and activists abandoned the cyclical concept of history, which contended that dynasties inevitably repeat the same pattern, rising and falling. Accepting instead the idea that history advances through stages, they put an end to the Chinese dynastic system of rule and ushered in a new era.

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