

The Depredation of China by the Imperial Powers and Japan: The Fall of the Qing

Increasing Encroachments on China by the Imperial Powers

International settlements and foreign residents

The suppression of the rebellions brought the Qing a decade of internal peace, but the operation of the unequal treaty system which lasted one hundred years, from 1842 to 1943, and the endless intrusive activities and demands from the foreign powers, did not allow China to enjoy tranquillity for long. The period from 1842 to the early 1870s was a time when the western commercial and cultural interests predominated, and Britain, France, and America strove to enlarge the treaty provisions, to ensure their full enforcement, and if possible to enjoy the rights they had extracted from the Qing in a peaceful environment. The West's cultural penetration was mainly associated with the activities of the Protestant and Catholic missionaries, who did not limit their proselytizing to the treaty ports. International settlements began to be built, mostly on the waterfronts of various treaty ports, where the consular officials of each of the foreign treaty powers governed their own resident nationals, who were largely composed of merchants and missionaries. The foreign officials of the Qing MCS were also prominent members of the foreign society at the treaty ports.

As a treaty port, Canton (Guangzhou), to which all foreign maritime trade had once been confined, did not thrive, because the locals there remained hostile to foreigners and their commerce for many years after the Opium War. Instead, Shanghai rose to take its place and grew rapidly to become the most important entrepot in China. In 1844 44 foreign ships had entered Shanghai, but in a little over ten years the number had grown to 437 in 1855. The Anglo-American Shanghai International Settlement, with its own elected Municipal Council, and the French Concession, with its European architecture and Western way of life, resembled European colonial enclaves elsewhere in the world. The foreigners kept themselves socially apart, while relying on the services of the locals, such as shopkeepers, servants, and business agents to act as an interface

between them and the world of the 'natives'. The residents in these foreign concessions were not limited to the British, Americans, and French. In fact, people of many different European nationalities settled there, as well as others, among whom were Canadians, Australians, South Africans, and Jews of various nationalities.



The international settlements and the French concession in Shanghai c. 1930

(*The Asia-Pacific Journal*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from

<https://apjif.org/-Jeff-Wasserstrom/2980/article.html>)

Mizrahi Jewish traders from Iraq and British India arrived in Shanghai soon after it became a treaty port, and before long a thriving Jewish community came into being there. Some, like the Sassoons and the Kadooris, made fortunes by developing their businesses and they joined the international social upper crust; others served their community as teachers, doctors, shopkeepers and so on. Because of its openness to immigration, Shanghai became a safe haven where Jewish people suffering persecution elsewhere could freely enter without visas or other troublesome documentation. In the 1900s, many Jews fleeing pogroms in Russian found shelter in Shanghai. There were many Jews among the 8,000 or so Russians who settled in the French Concession after the Russian Revolution of 1917. From the early 1930s to 1941, around 20,000 Jewish refugees poured into Shanghai from Austria, Poland, and Nazi Germany, some with the help of 'protective' passports issued by Chinese diplomats. The number of Jews who came to Shanghai during the Holocaust was equal to the total who emigrated to all the British Commonwealth countries combined. Although some of these refugees emigrated to America or Australia, most of them stayed in Shanghai. In 1943, the Japanese occupation army in Shanghai moved the Jews into a ghetto in the Hongkou

district, where many were accommodated in group homes known as 'Little Vienna'. The people there survived the war, despite the scarcity of food and the lack of amenities. After World War II, during the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), or shortly after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, most of the Jews of Shanghai relocated themselves either to the West or to the state of Israel, which they helped to found.

In terms of numbers, the Chinese were the largest group in both the International Settlements and the French Concession, where the best residential and retail properties lay, but they had no say in running these foreign-controlled enclaves. There were also a significant number of foreigners in Shanghai not residing in the international concessions. A new type of Chinese business agent, known as compradors, who specialized in foreign commerce, emerged in Shanghai and the other treaty ports. From the middle of the 1840s, starting with a couple of hundred thousand residents living in the Chinese walled city, and a hundred or so foreigners outside it, by 1930 Shanghai had grown into a major modern metropolis of over 3 million people, including nearly 50,000 foreigners of many different nationalities.

Early Western economic impact

Imports entered China through the treaty ports, especially Shanghai, at a rate of duty fixed at 5% of the value of the goods, for all products. They incurred a transit tax of 2% when passing into the interior. Of a large variety of items imported, those of the highest value were opium, cotton textiles, and yarn. During the five years from 1870 to 1874, the total imported goods had an annual average value of 68,869,000 Hong Kong Taels (HKT), of which opium accounted for 25,987,000 HKT (39.2%), and cotton textiles and yarn for 21,451,000 HKT (32.2%). Twenty years later, in 1894, total imports reached 144,233,000 HKT, an increase of 109%. The value of opium imported, though still a high figure at 29,947,000 HKT, decreased to 21.1% of the total. The import of cotton textiles and yarn increased to 49,653,000 HKT, or 35.3% of the total. The damage done by the importation of opium to China has already been discussed. The expansion of the Chinese markets for cotton yarn and textiles from Britain and America was something new, for China had been self-sufficient using textiles produced by cottage industries in peoples' homes, or in small workshops or factories. This new development was partly connected with the industrial revolution of the textile industry in these countries, where machine production of textiles in modern factories rendered the end-products cheaper than the Chinese versions traditionally made by hand. Imports were also helped by the low import duty and transit dues. Spinning and weaving were long-established rural handicraft industries, the income from which formed an important part of the income of the farming families. The cheap imports damaged the fragile economy of the Chinese countryside and caused hardship. Other

machine-made cheap imports led to unemployment of those engaged in manual fabrication of those products. Another rural industry that suffered was the production of oil and lamps for lighting. This was destroyed by the widespread use of imported kerosene, and lamps from America. All these imports increased rural impoverishment.

The most important Chinese exports were tea and raw silk. The demand for tea from China continued to decrease from the 1890s, due to the increasing export of Indian tea from the maturing tea plantations established under British rule. The export of Chinese silk was also hit by competition from Japan and France, where more modern methods were used in the processing of silk filaments. Although the export of Chinese raw materials and agricultural or craft products increased in volume over the years, they were not a significant source of enrichment for the Chinese, because their added values were low. Furthermore, their export was controlled by foreign firms, which forced the prices of these products down so low as to leave very little margin for the producers. The demands of international markets induced some Chinese farmers to switch to cash crops like tobacco and cotton instead of food crops. With greater exposure to the world market, the Chinese producers for export also became more vulnerable to the upswings and downturns of the globalized marketplace.

From the early 1860s, both the British and the Americans went into the business of transporting passengers and goods on the inland rivers and along the seacoast of China using modern steamships. The foreign companies involved soon monopolized this lucrative line of business. This development took away the livelihood of many Chinese boatmen and owners of junks specializing in this type of carrying trade, and it also hindered the emergence of a modern Chinese steamship business. The Chinese economy suffered under the British-led 'imperialism of free trade', with the Chinese participants becoming passive victims rather than active stakeholders under an economic regime which had hardly been designed for the benefit of the Chinese people. The Chinese government had compromised its nation's sovereignty and signed away its right to determine even its own import and export tariff rate. Its people could not rely on their government to protect them from foreign exploitation.

This initial contact with the Western powers was just a foretaste of worse things to come. During the second half of the nineteenth century, as industrialization gathered pace among the Western nations and in a rapidly rising Japan, the gap between the economic and military strength of these imperialist nations and China grew alarmingly large. Their initial goal of controlling Chinese trade had shifted to exploiting China's natural resources and its cheap labour, and to developing and controlling its modern industries, railways, and financial markets. They also sought to make colonies out of the independent countries on China's periphery, which had been within China's political and cultural sphere of influence for centuries past.

Ultimately, they aimed to carve up China into their separate spheres of influence, as a prelude to outright colonial domination of China.

The European colonization of China's tributary states

The Sino-French war over Vietnam (1883-85)

Unlike Britain, France's interest in China had been territorial and cultural (in connection with spreading Catholicism) rather than commercial. Instead of going straight for a piece of China in full view of other predatory nations also interested in China, it was easier for France to begin the process by threatening the territory of a smaller country at China's border. During the 1850s, France sent an army to Annam (Trung Kỳ) in the south of Vietnam, a Qing tributary. Since the Qing was preoccupied with fighting for its own survival against the Taiping, it was in no position to help Vietnam. Later, in 1862, France forced Vietnam to sign the Treaty of Saigon that effectively turned the southern part of Vietnam into a French colony. When France invaded Hanoi in the north in 1873, the king of Vietnam invited Liu Yongfu, who commanded the Black Flags, a remnant Taiping army active on the border between Vietnam and China, to join his own force to fight the French. This mixed force managed to hold the French invaders at bay and to kill their commanding officer, Francis Garnier. In 1882, the French government under Jules Ferry, pursuing more strongly the policy of colonial expansion in Vietnam, sent reinforcements and captured Hanoi. The king once more asked Liu for help and the French were again defeated. The French increased their force further and captured Thuận An. After forcing Vietnam to sign the Treaty of Huế (1883), and the later renewed Patenôtre Treaty (Treaty of Protectorate), making Vietnam a French protectorate, the French asked the Qing to recognize French rule of Vietnam, and withdraw the Qing army stationed in the north of the country.

At the Qing court, there was a debate between a party for war, whose leading spokesman was Zuo Zongtang, and another for peace, headed by Li Hongzhang. Recalling the time before the Opium War forty-one years previously, the present court, with Emperor Guangxu (r. 1875-1908) on the throne and with his aunt the Dowager Empress Cixi as the power behind the throne, wavered between the two policies. An army was sent from the provinces bordering Vietnam, but the commanders were told to be passive and not to make any move 'to give the French a handle', meaning not to provoke the French or give them an excuse to open hostilities. At the same time, Li Hongzhang was instructed to conduct peace negotiations with the French. This 'softly, softly' approach only encouraged the French to overrun the north of Vietnam in 1884, occupying the Red River Delta and advancing towards the Chinese border to attack the Qing army stationed in north Vietnam. This started the Sino-French War of 1884-85. The timid Qing court was again reduced to the familiar peace-at-any-price stance. In April 1884, Li hastened to sign a brief Sino-French Treaty in Tianjin. The terms required China to accept the French demands to agree to all existing treaties as well as

any future treaties between France and Vietnam; to withdraw the Qing force from the north of Vietnam; and to open certain trading posts between Vietnam and China.

The French, however, were not ready for peace, for they wanted to weaken the Qing even further. They sought an excuse to drive home the lesson that the modern French naval force could seriously damage Qing China. In June 1884, the French army reached the spot where the Qing garrison was stationed in north Vietnam and issued an ultimatum to the Qing to withdraw within three days. The Qing representative explained that the order to withdraw had not yet been received from the court. The French killed the Qing representative and bombarded the Qing camp with their artillery. Forced to strike back, the Qing garrison fought strongly against the French force, which had to retreat.

The French immediately accused the Qing of breaking the new treaty, and moved their fleet to the Chinese coast, threatening Zhejiang Province, Taiwan, and especially Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian. Located at the port of Mawei in Fuzhou was a modern shipyard, built as a part of its programme of modernization by the financially strained Qing government using what precious resources it could command. The officers of the Chinese fleet, alarmed by the sight of the French fleet sailing straight into the Chinese naval base at Mawei, begged for permission to raise anchor and to prepare for action. The Qing court, desperate for the success of the peace negotiations then taking place in Shanghai, commanded all coastal defence forces to remain where they were and wait, and not make the first move. The officers of the modern fleet at Mawei were ordered not to raise anchor, and they were strictly forbidden to be the first to use their artillery. When the commander of the French fleet notified these officials that his force was going to attack, they had still made no preparations even to defend their own fleet. Instead, they asked the French commander to postpone the attack till the next day, but their request was refused. When the French started to bombard the Chinese fleet, which had prepared itself neither for war nor for self-defence, these senior officials fled. The remaining officers and men of the Chinese fleet fought bravely, but to no avail. Some of the ships were sunk even before they were able to raise anchor, and within half of an hour the entire Chinese modern fleet at Mawei was destroyed. Then the French proceeded to demolish the modern Chinese shipyard and coastal defensive positions at Mawei. At this point, the Qing court had no option but to declare war against the French. Outraged by the French invasion, Chinese people stormed and destroyed French churches along the coasts, overseas Chinese contributed money, and workers called a strike in Hong Kong.

The French success with their naval bombardment at Mawei was not matched by their military operations elsewhere, particularly on land. They met setbacks in Taiwan, Zhejiang, and especially when they invaded a border pass in Guangxi from Vietnam. The Qing troops guarding the pass, led by a seventy-year-old veteran commander, scored a major victory against the French. This disastrous defeat apparently brought

down the government of French Prime Minister Jules Ferry. The Qing court, rather than taking advantage of the military success and the confusion in the French capital to take a strong stance, continued to pursue a pro-capitulation policy, but in the face of opposition from some high civil and military officials. Shortly after the armistice agreement signed in Paris on behalf of the Qing government by Robert Hart's London agent, James Duncan Campbell, Li Hongzhang concluded a new unequal treaty with the French Ambassador in Tianjin, the Treaty of Tientsin, in June 1885. The Treaty of Tientsin confirmed the main provisions of the brief Sino-French Treaty signed in 1884, in which the Qing had agreed to the French colonial rule of Vietnam, and the opening of trading posts on the border between Vietnam and certain Chinese provinces. In return, the French agreed to evacuate from certain ports which they occupied in Taiwan. As the powers were competing over the right to invest in building railroads and open mines in China during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, this treaty contained many details of French demands in connection with these new economic developments, as well as provisions on commerce and tariffs. With the French ruling Vietnam, the Qing government had to continually fend off French demands for more and more privileges, including altering the boundary of Vietnam at many points further into Qing China.

Britain, Burma, and China

The kingdom of Burma had a tributary relationship with the Qing, who expected a tribute-bearing embassy to come to Beijing once every ten years to pay homage to the emperor. This low frequency meant that Burma had not been very closely tied to the Qing. The small military skirmishes along the border between Burma and the Qing province of Yunnan were mostly local and easily contained, because both sides preferred peaceful co-existence.

Burma clashed with British-ruled India when Burma expanded westwards into Assam, which the British had deemed Indian. Having won three Anglo-Burmese Wars during the years 1824 to 1885, the British made Burma into a province of India in 1886. Subsequently, the Qing's *Zongli Yamen* signed a treaty with the British minister in China that endorsed the continuation of the decennial tribute embassy from Burma to the Qing court. The same treaty also called for the two sides to meet to discuss trade provisions, and to fix the previously amorphous boundary between China and Burma that had been left as a matter of jurisdictional history and precedents. The tribute embassy never arrived again from Burma, but there was a great deal of pressure from Britain on the Qing to develop trade, and a railroad, between China and Burma with a view to reaping economic benefits for the British. Over the years, during the repeated Sino-British negotiations over the boundary between Burma and China, the British persisted in trying to push this boundary deep into what had been regarded as Chinese territory, either by jurisdictional history or in terms

of the natural separation of states by rivers or mountains. The British succeeded in gaining a large amount of Qing territory at the border of Burma in one negotiation, during which a weak Qing negotiator made huge unwarranted concessions to the British.

British and Russian encroachment onto territory on China's borders

Qing China's efforts to retain Tibet

The British control of India also had a destabilizing effect on Tibet. As mentioned earlier, during the eighteenth century the Qing destroyed the power of the Dzungar Mongols who controlled Tibet, and after making this region secure, established a system of governance for it. An Amban was appointed to rule, on equal terms, with the Dalai Lama primarily, and to some extent with the Panchen Lama, the less powerful of the two lamas. Short of ruling Tibet as a province, Qing China had established an incontrovertible claim to sovereignty over Tibet. During the nineteenth century, both Britain and Russia, especially the former through its Indian colony, were interested in pulling Tibet away from a weakened Qing dynasty, which for its part tried to use diplomacy to fend off these aggressors and retain sovereignty over Tibet.

Trouble started when, in 1876, British India leased a part of Sikkim from its ruler for building a road from India through Bhutan for commercial purposes, without the permission of Tibet. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the people of Tibet felt aggrieved by this development, because both these countries were Tibetan dependencies in terms of tradition and history. Consequently, Tibet was preparing to go to war with British India. The Qing Amban tried in vain to restrain the Dalai Lama from taking military action. He was also unable to persuade the reluctant and hostile Tibetans to agree to opening Yadong and another city for trade with British India.

War broke out in 1887, and the Tibetan army, no match for the well-drilled troops equipped with modern firearms from British India, was defeated by the Anglo-Indian force, which, after having occupied all of Sikkim, was persuaded by the Qing Resident to stop the war and wait for the pending negotiations on border demarcation and other matters between the Qing and Britain. Negotiations soon took place between the Governor of India and the Qing Amban, supported by James Hart, a commissioner of customs and brother of the I. G. Robert Hart. In parallel with this, peace talks were also taking place between the Qing Ambassador in London and the British Foreign Office. Strongly desirous of peace and not powerful enough to oppose the British militarily, the Qing signed the first Indo-Tibetan Treaty in 1890 with the British, in which the Qing accepted the status of Sikkim as a British protectorate and fixed the boundary between it and Tibet largely on British terms. Later in 1893, the two sides agreed to extend the 1890 treaty to include

a provision that opened Yatung across the border from India to British trade, and another that obliged Tibetan nomads grazing in Sikkim to observe British regulations. The Tibetans did not accept this treaty, largely because of the loss of Sikkim to British India. They were also incensed by the provisions that allowed the British to trade freely at Yatung, while they had to abide by British rules when grazing their livestock in Sikkim, where they had once been free to roam.

In 1903, Britain invaded Tibet over a boundary dispute. The Russians, who had approached the Dalai Lama previously, now saw an opportunity to advance their interest in Tibet. The Dalai Lama had been tricked into believing that the Russians, who had come to him dressed in the costume of Mongolian lamas, had the same faith as the Tibetans. He therefore decided to enlist Russian support against the British. The Russians, having trouble with Japan at that time, were not able to engage directly in any military conflict with the British from India. Instead, they sold arms to the Tibetans and encouraged them to fight the British themselves.

The Tibetans once more fought with an Anglo-Indian force, with the same result, partly because their army lacked discipline. The Qing Amban, unable to prevent the war, offered to negotiate with the opposition. The Dalai Lama, still unwilling to negotiate, had no plan other than empowering the lamas of his temple to conduct ritual cursing as a means of causing the deaths of the Anglo-Indian soldiers. As the enemies drew near, the Dalai Lama hurriedly escaped and went into hiding in the neighbouring province of Qinghai. Having occupied Lhasa, the British in 1905 forced the Tibetan official, who represented the Dalai Lama, to sign an agreement that compromised Tibet's authority to govern itself, as well as its relationship with the Qing. The Qing did not accept this agreement and sent officials to India to conduct new rounds of negotiations.

From 1905 to 1908, officials of the two sides met many times, in both India and Beijing, to thrash out additional terms to the Indo-Tibetan Treaty that would incorporate the vital interests and concerns of both. The British had new economic demands and a strong interest in keeping Russia out of Tibet, while China's greatest concern was the preservation of its own sovereignty over Tibet. The agreements that were arrived at during this period included, with some changes, the previous Indo-Tibetan treaties between Britain and China in 1900 and 1903, and the agreement Britain had forced on Tibet during its occupation of Lhasa in 1905. There was an important new provision in which the British agreed not to annex Tibetan territory or interfere in Tibet's political affairs. This was aimed at addressing the Sino-Tibetan concern regarding Britain's ultimate interest in Tibet. It also stated that China had agreed not to permit any other nation to meddle with Tibet politically or territorially; this was targeted especially at Russia. There were provisions for additional trading posts to be opened exclusively for British commerce. At those cities opened for British trade, Britain was to discuss with China regarding its interests in establishing telegraphic communications

to India. China agreed to indemnify Britain the sum of 1,200,000 taels, on behalf of Tibet, for military expenses. China also agreed to buy back certain travel lodges, and a telegraph line between Gyantse (Jiangzi) in Tibet and the border of India. Even though the agreements did not explicitly state that Qing China possessed sovereignty over Tibet, the mere fact that Britain signed such agreements on Tibet with China implied admission of China's authority to govern Tibet, which was equivalent to acknowledging that China had sovereignty over Tibet. The detailed commercial provisions of the agreement in 1908 also bore the signature of a Tibetan high official, in addition to the Chinese and British negotiators.

These crises in Tibet prompted the Qing, during 1904-09, to change its existing governance of Tibet, and some areas in Sichuan where Tibetans had settled, to a well-trying policy known as *Gaitu Guiliu* (bureaucratization of native officers). This was a policy that replaced the local chiefs or petty rulers with roving officials appointed by the central government. During the eighteenth century, Emperor Yongzhen, and earlier rulers during the Ming, had used this method to govern many areas with large minority settlements. The introduction of this change stirred up many local powerholders concerned to resist it. The Qing sent a force from Sichuan that rapidly quelled the local rebellions. The Qing then allocated one million taels to open schools, build infrastructures such as roads and bridges, and support irrigation and farming as well as administrative reform in the pacified area, where a new province of Xikang was to come into being. However, a Tibetan invasion of Sichuan put this plan in jeopardy.

Qing officials believed that the Dalai Lama played a key role in fomenting the troubles in Sichuan. After his escape from Tibet in 1905, he remained in China until 1908, during which time he went to Ulan Bator (Ulaanbaator) in Mongolia, where there was a Russian Consulate, to seek Russian support. His disloyal behaviour did not prevent him from being received by the Qing court with the ceremony due to his station. During Dowager Empress Cixi's seventieth birthday celebration he was awarded a new honorific title, and received a gift of 10,000 taels, before being sent back to Tibet.

Having treated the Dalai Lama so courteously and benevolently, the Qing expected gratitude and cooperation from him. Instead, the court heard from officials in Sichuan that the Dalai Lama had bought Russian firearms and hired Russian instructors on his return journey, and they blamed the Dalai Lama for the Tibetan invasions in Sichuan. The Qing court ordered the Dalai Lama to withdraw the Tibetan troops. Receiving no satisfactory response from him, the Qing mustered a force of 3,000 elite troops from Sichuan to restore order. Early in 1909, when the Sichuan troops marched near Lhasa, the Dalai Lama fled to India under the cover of darkness. The series of Qing military campaigns in Tibet with its revitalized New Army from 1909 to 1911 was remarkably successful, conquering part of eastern Tibet and reorganizing it as the province of Xikang. Qing troops occupied Lhasa, removed certain uncooperative princes from power, and garrisoned several towns. They even marched to the borders of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim to demonstrate

their prowess to the British. The Qing moves, however, alienated the Dalai Lama, who had become better disposed towards the British. Relying on British support, the Dalai Lama adopted a more defiant and uncooperative attitude towards the Qing authorities after his return to Tibet in 1910.

Russian annexation of Qing territory

After the Russian expansion into the Far East during the middle of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, the Russian empire and the Qing shared a land border traversing China from the northwest to the northeast, all the way to the sea. During the time of the Kangxi and Yongzhen emperors, equal treaties were made between the two countries on border demarcation from the far eastern end to Kiakhata, and on trade, as mentioned earlier. When the Qing military weakness was exposed during the Opium Wars, the Russians became very active and persistent in their drive to annex Chinese territory all along their common borders, not just in Tibet where the British presence curbed their ambition. Elsewhere, they were spectacularly successful at annexing Chinese territory. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Russia annexed approximately 1,510,000 square kilometres of territory from Qing China, using a combination of force, trickery and intimidation of the spineless Manchu court, and its negotiators, on the various Sino-Russian treaties and ‘boundary surveys’.

In determining the borders between them, Russia and China did not use coordinates such as longitude and latitude to arrive at scientifically sound and accurate points and lines in fixing their boundaries: accuracy was not the point, especially from the Russian point of view. The Russian objective was to acquire as much land from their militarily weak neighbour as possible. To delineate borders the Russians favoured the use of mountain ranges, major rivers, and border checking points which were very infrequent, because this method enabled them to gain more Chinese land when a ‘survey’ or revision of certain sections of the boundary took place. In such an event, they might choose another mountain range or a river further into Chinese territory with non-existent border checking points, and demand to shift the new boundary there.

Starting in 1855, the governor of Russian Siberia revealed his ambition to encroach upon the Amur region of China’s northeast. As a part of his plan to develop Siberia, he wished to use this river for transportation and to acquire the coastal land from the mouth of the Amur as a Russian possession. He therefore sailed along the Chinese Amur River with a fleet and demanded the Qing to give the left bank of the Amur River and its mouth to the sea to Russia. His demand was rejected. When the Qing court fled from Beijing to avoid the Anglo-French invading force, the Russians sent an army to occupy Sikhote-Alin, which lay south of the Amur River and east of the Ussuri River, a region that had been a part of the Chinese empire since the thirteenth century. This time they succeeded in forcing the Qing negotiator to sign the Treaty of Aigun,

whereby the territory north of the Amur River and south of the Waixingan Ling (Stanovoy Mountains) was to be taken over by Russia, except for a tiny area of sixty-four settlements east of the river, where the Chinese retained jurisdiction and the right of permanent residence. This too was later taken away. The amount of territory involved here was 600,000 square kilometres. Another 400,000 square kilometres of territory at the east of the Ussuri River, including the island of Sakhalin, was to be under the jurisdiction of both Russia and China. The Qing court did not ratify this treaty.

In 1862, during the first year of Emperor Tongzhi's reign, the Russians wished to acquire territory in China's northwest, where Lake Balkhash and the land directly south of it had been a part of Qing China since the time of the Emperor Kangxi in the seventeenth century. The Russian negotiator Babukov insisted on demarcating the Sino-Russian boundary by internal customs checking points in Chinese towns, and two Chinese inland lakes. The talks broke down for a while because of Babukov's unreasonable bullying tactics. When the meetings resumed in 1864, Babukov threatened the Qing negotiator that the Russians were going to use force unless the Qing agreed to the boundary as drawn by the Russians. Soon afterwards, the Russians did send an army to occupy the Chinese territory they claimed. The broken-spirited Qing yielded once more to force, and concluded a Sino-Russian Northwest Boundary Survey Treaty that gave the Russians Lake Balkhash and the territory south and east of it, an area of 440, 000 square kilometres. This was not the only boundary survey treaty. Adding up the territory China ceded to Russia through the Treaty of Aigun, the Convention of Beijing, and a series of Sino-Russian boundary survey treaties up to 1881, the total reached the previously mentioned figure of 1,510,000 square kilometres. Later, Russia started to encroach deeply into China's northeast, until a rising Japan blocked her advance.

The rise of Japan and Japanese annexation of Qing territory

The modernization of Japan

Tokugawa Japan was as isolationist as Qing China before the Opium War, with its doors closed to Western trade and other contacts, apart from a small window in Nagasaki opened for Dutch commerce from Indonesia. Although several Western powers were pushing at the gates of Japan before the middle of the nineteenth century, it was the United States that led the pack in opening Japan for trade. The credit for accomplishing this went to a skilful American negotiator, Commodore Mathew Perry, whose cause was assisted by an array of gunboats aptly positioned outside Edo (Tokyo), the capital of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Although there was an emperor residing in Kyoto from whom the Tokugawa Shoguns derived their authority, he had been reduced to a figurehead centuries before. Since 1600, the Tokugawa Shoguns

gained supremacy over all other hereditary feudal lords of domains in the whole of Japan; their government in Edo dominated Japan. The Shogunate made very limited concessions in this first treaty with the Americans in 1854: the opening of two isolated ports for provisioning of American ships, a little trade, and the stationing of a consular representative at one of these ports, in addition to the most-favoured nation clause. Soon after, the Japanese also made similar treaties with the British, the Russians, and the Dutch.

Not satisfied with such small gains, Townsend Harris, the American Consul, succeeded in persuading the Japanese to sign a fuller commercial treaty with provisions similar to the Chinese unequal treaties. His task was made easier by the Japanese awareness of the Opium Wars, and the unequal treaties the Western powers had imposed on China by force. The Harris Treaty, signed in July 1858 between Japan and America, opened six Japanese ports for American trade, fixed low tariff rates for imports and exports, and granted extraterritoriality to the Americans. In addition, foreigners were to be allowed to reside in Edo and Osaka. Shortly afterwards, Japan signed similar treaties with Britain, Russia, France, and Holland. In contrast to China, the powers had not waged wars on Japan, nor had there been payments of heavy indemnities or cession of territories.

This forceful opening of their country to foreign trade by the Western powers sent a shock wave through the 265 autonomous *Han* or feudal domains of this insular island nation under the overlordship of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Although, unlike China, the Japanese did not suffer from the ruinous imports of opium and exports of silver, the foreign menace roused the well-educated and politically active segment of the population into a heightened state of awareness of the peril their nation was facing, and the need for action. This social segment included the samurai, the Japanese hereditary military caste, which was relatively large, accounting for about 6% of the population in Japan (as compared with about 1% for the scholar-gentry and officials). Even though the Japanese ships and weapons were obviously no match for those of the foreign intruders, there were still many trigger-happy Japanese extremists, who were itching to try to 'expel the foreigners' by force, to keep their homeland pure. Others saw that the only way to save Japan was to learn from the foreigners, to transform Japan into as strong and rich a country as one of the European powers. Caught between these two policy poles, the Shogunate government retreated into inaction.

Faced with the government paralysis, the more militant members of outlying domains invoked the emperor's authority to execute their own impractical but desperate agenda for driving out the foreigners by force, without the sanction of the Shogunate. Their actions led to retaliatory foreign naval bombardments of certain Japanese cities, and punitive financial reparations imposed on the Shogunate government. These sharp lessons persuaded patriotic and politically engaged samurais that the only way for their nation to escape the fate of China and other Asian countries was to learn the secret of Western wealth and strength

and use Western technology to create a rich Japan with a strong military. It was significant that the samurai were not the top echelon of powerholders like the daimyos and the Shoguns, who had far greater vested interests in preserving the status quo. Before the samurais could implement policies to realize this vision for Japan as a whole, they needed a unified national government, not the decentralized domains governed by the daimyos and Shoguns. What better and speedier route towards forming a unified national government than to revive the ancient and yet still current imperial authority under the emperor?

With few exceptions, such as in countries with lawful democratic elections, existing rulers of governments do not normally give up their position and power without violent struggles. The Shoguns and their supporters fought for the survival of the old regime, but they were defeated in the civil wars that started in 1864, against forces marshalled by the visionary samurais from two outlying domains, Chōshū (Hagi) and Satsuma, who were bent on restoring the imperial government. The restoration of imperial rule in 1868 under Mutsuhito, better known in connection with his reign period as Emperor Meiji (r. 1867-1912), did not mean that Japan was to come under the personal rule of an autocratic emperor. The Japanese were accustomed to their emperor being a national symbol, a titular head of state, or the source of 'all legitimate authority', rather than the person actually exercising this authority. It did mean that a centralized national government was to replace the decentralized Shogunate, and that local prefectural administrative authorities were to take the place of the domains of the daimyos. It also meant the beginning of modernization of Japan with Emperor Meiji standing as the personal symbol of this movement. The emperor and his court were soon moved to Edo, renamed Tokyo, meaning 'Eastern Capital'. On its way to modernity, the Christendom of Europe had developed, through centuries of wars, into nation-states with their citizens imbued with a sense of self-conscious nationalism. The Meiji Reformation of 1868 was a most remarkable political revolution that accomplished within fifteen years, since the opening of Japan by Commodore Perry in 1854, the ending of centuries of feudalism and the beginning of Japan as a modern nation-state, its citizens consumed by a nationalism that must have been lying dormant.

With the authority of the imperial government behind them, the modernizers, who were mostly the young samurais responsible for the revolution, pushed through a series of major political, administrative, economic, financial, legal, and educational reforms with the goal of transforming Japan into a Western style military and industrial power. Having acquired important aspects of its high culture from ancient China, Meiji Japan, unlike Qing China, had no deep reservations about learning from the West. While the Chinese initially focused their modernization projects narrowly on the military and technology related to it, the Japanese adopted a more broadly receptive approach to things Western, because it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between what was idiosyncratically Western and the modern ideas and innovations that empowered the Western nations' military and economy. Despite the existence of Western models, and

because of its different historical, cultural, and social conditions, Japan was launching itself into uncharted territory. Inevitably, engineering appropriate changes involved a process of trial and error, of discarding the unproductive, and of fine-tuning the more successful approaches. Fortunately for Japan, its new leaders were pragmatic, flexible, and goal-orientated rather than doctrinaire or ideological.

Without a tradition of democracy, there had not been significant pressure for popular participation in the political process in Japan until almost a decade after the Meiji restoration. Believing that representative government was a part of the secret of Western strength, the Japanese oligarchs introduced, in 1889 and 1890 respectively, a constitution and a twin-chamber parliament called the Diet (of Anglo-Saxon inspiration). From this beginning, Japan evolved into a democracy in its own fashion. To strengthen its military, the new government brought in universal conscription following the French example, established a separate Navy modelled on the British, and adopted a German-style independent chief of staff answerable only to the emperor. Its centralized modern education system was modelled on that of the French. The government was willing to pay a high price for the expertise of various foreign advisors before they had their own Western-trained students returning from abroad.

Before the financial and economic reforms bore fruit, the Japanese imperial government was severely short of funds. Having to pay compensation to the feudal lords and their samurais as well as bear the cost of modernization, the government was forced to finance itself largely on credit. Except for a small amount of foreign loans, most of the money was raised internally as loans from rich Japanese merchants and as government bonds. Before long, by the mid-1880s, financial reform, changes in land tenure and its taxation, as well as an increase in income from agriculture through technological improvements and by bringing more land into cultivation, especially in Hokkaido in the north, improved the financial position of the government. In Qing China, by contrast, the cost of the suppression of rebellions, large-scale natural calamities, the cost of combating foreign invaders and the increasingly heavy burden of indemnities levied by the imperialists, left the Qing with hardly any financial resources to spare for modernization.

In the process of industrialization, the Japanese government, unlike its Chinese counterpart, took the initiative in investing not only in the military and related fields, but in many other areas of modern manufacturing. Because the government-managed modern enterprises that covered most sectors of the economy did not thrive during the early years, for reasons including lack of experience with modern machinery, the lack of a modern transportation system, and bureaucratic inefficiency, they were sold off as financial liabilities very cheaply to private companies with close links to government during the 1880s. However, the government kept in its own hands the strategic enterprises, such as shipbuilding and the making of ammunition and armaments. The Japanese government also developed modern transportation infrastructure such as roads, ports, and railways, and established telegraphic and postal services. It set up a

European-style central bank - the Bank of Japan - to implement its monetary policy, to maintain a sound currency. After initial difficulties had been successfully addressed, the small number of privileged private enterprises that had purchased from the government most of the modern industries took off and grew, through the Japanese way of cartel formation, into the industrial giants of the twentieth century.

The industrialization of Japan was a spectacular success story in which her central government played a vital role in providing political stability, law and order, sound monetary institutions, accessible credit and risk reduction for the private participants, as well as personal encouragement and many other kinds of support for entrepreneurs from different walks of life, so as to establish private enterprises in a range of modern sectors, and to thrive economically in a unified Japan free from internal trade barriers. The impoverished Qing government in China did not have the financial means to play such a role. The modern enterprises sponsored by the Qing government used capital and management provided by the merchants. This category of business that was labelled as *Guandu Shangban*, meaning 'official supervision and merchant operation', was too much hampered by bureaucratic control to flourish. Had Japan remained under the decentralized feudal Tokugawa Shogunate that restricted business and foreign trade, the modern economic transformation would likely not have taken place. Although massive imports of cheap machine-made cotton textiles from abroad led to large trade deficits for a couple of decades from 1869, the trend was reversed after the Japanese adopted foreign technology and formed large cartels in this industry in the 1890s, when the native cotton textile boom began. The much gentler opening of Japan to foreign trade provided the stimulus for the revolutionary changes, and its consequences, on balance, did Japan more good than harm. The impact of the much more violent 'opening of China' was largely negative, particularly in the short term.

In just half a century after Japan's fateful encounter with Commodore Perry, this island nation was well on its way to achieving its dream of building a rich country with a strong military through modernization, and thereby attaining its goal of national security against possible foreign subjugation. No longer willing to be bound by the unequal treaties forced on her, Japan, after having demonstrated her military prowess through wars against China and Russia, was able to negotiate new treaties on terms of equality with the Western powers concerned between 1894 and 1911. By 1905, the Japanese economy had expanded enormously through industrialization, almost stretching credulity, and its population had also increased from 30,000,000 half a century before to above 45,000,000. Japan was the only country in East Asia, or in the world outside Europe and the United States of America, to modernize during the nineteenth century. From that time onward, on the foundations she had laid, Japan continued to develop, politically and economically, in parallel with the modern nations of the Western hemisphere.

Having leapt into the modern age by learning from the West, Japan also embraced whole-heartedly the Western ideology of imperialism, building empires at the expense of militarily weaker nations. Security from, and equality with, the Western powers no longer seemed to satisfy the ambition of the new militantly nationalistic Japan. Apart from the activities of Japanese pirates along the Chinese eastern seaboard, and the Japanese invasions of Korea during the Ming period, the Japanese had not been in the habit of attacking their neighbouring countries. But in the late nineteenth century, Japan seemed to be in a hurry to get in on the act of imperialist exploitation using her newly strengthened military forces, targeting Korea, Taiwan, which had been a part of the Qing province of Fujian since the eighteenth century, as well as China itself.

In 1874, Japan invaded Taiwan with 5,000 troops, but met stout resistance from the locals. At that time, Taiwan was still administered as a part of Fujian province, before its upgrade into a province itself after the French invasion in the mid-1880s. In response, the court sent an official to Taiwan to organize defensive measures. However, the easily intimidated Qing government, yielding to the advice of the British and American mediators, agreed to a Special Treaty of Beijing with Japan, whereby the invaders were paid 500,000 taels to withdraw their troops.

At about the same time, the Japanese also started focusing their expansionist drive on Korea, which had closed her doors tightly against foreign trade, as China and Japan had once done. Half-hearted Western efforts to open Korea earlier in the nineteenth century came to nothing. In 1875, emulating Commodore Perry, the Japanese anchored several warships off Incheon, a Korean city near Seoul, and demanded that Korea open certain ports for trade. As a tributary of the Qing, the matter was referred to the *Zongli Yamen*, which urged Korea to settle with Japan directly. In 1876 Korea signed an unequal treaty with Japan that opened three ports for trade and declared Korea to be an 'independent state'. Under the guidance of Li Hongzhang, the most powerful Qing foreign affairs official, Korea also signed similar treaties with other Western powers from 1883 to 1886. This strategy was aimed at letting the powers keep each other in check and giving Korea time to modernize through 'self-strengthening' on the Chinese model.

Meanwhile, inside Korea conflicts at the court between the pro-Chinese faction, and the pro-Japanese one sponsored by Japan, sometimes led to military intervention from both countries. Because Japan was not ready for serious military engagement over Korea during the 1880s, she signed the Li-Ito Convention (also known as the Convention of Tientsin) whereby both China and Japan were to withdraw their armed forces and military advisers from Korea, and each was to notify the other before sending them back if trouble recurred. By 1894, Japan felt sufficiently strong to carry out its long-nurtured 'continental policy' of expansion by plunging into an aggressive war against China over the control not just of Korea, but of parts of China also.

The Sino-Japanese War and its consequences

A peasant insurrection early in 1894 prompted the Korean court to ask the Qing for help. Li Hongzhang promptly sent a small force of about 1,500 soldiers and informed Japan of this fact, with a promise to withdraw as soon as the trouble was over. Using the excuse of accompanying the Japanese ambassador to Korea and protecting the Japanese residents there, Japan sent an army to occupy certain strategic points in Korea. Soon the rebellion subsided, and the Qing, preparing to move its soldiers home, proposed that both countries withdraw their troops in accordance with the Li-Ito Convention. The Japanese not only refused to do so but increased the number of their soldiers in Korea to over 20,000, several times that of the Qing, and moved them to Seoul so as to dictate policy to the Korean government through the appointment of a 'regent' amenable to their wishes. Without declaring war, on 25 July 1894 the Japanese suddenly attacked Chinese ships, sinking a transport vessel leased from the British with over 700 soldiers on board. With its hand thus forced, the Qing declared war on Japan on 1 August, when the Japanese also declared war on China.

Although the Qing did declare war, the court was split between a party for war and one for appeasing the Japanese, with the powerful Li Hongzhang, who was a favourite of the imperial powers as well as of the Dowager Empress Cixi, strongly advocating peace. Li had concluded many pro-capitulation treaties that satisfied the desires of the foreign powers for annexing Chinese territory, for exploiting China economically, and for paying compensation by China for the aggressive wars the powers waged against China. Li pleased Cixi because he helped her regime to survive many crises of foreign diplomatic pressure or military intervention, through his adherence to the Qing policy of peace-at-any-price with the foreign intruders. Even when war was imminent, Li refused to send more troops to the Korean front to support general Ye Zhichao, who had wired him an urgent request for reinforcements. Putting his faith in the intervention of the Western powers to rein in the Japanese, Li commanded Ye to make no move until he gave the order to fight. Li, the chief appeaser, controlled both the Huai Army and the modern Beiyang Fleet that could engage the Japanese. This made it almost impossible for these forces to pursue the war, both defensive and offensive, with the energy and initiative required, since they were under Li's orders to avoid military combat.

Ill-prepared and outnumbered, the Qing forces resisted but could not withstand the Japanese onslaught, first on Asan and then on Pyongyang, and the demoralized general Ye Zhichao fled with his troops to China across the Yalu River during the latter part of September 1894. Shortly after taking Pyongyang, the Japanese attacked the Beiyang Fleet on the Yellow Sea near the Yalu River. This fleet was a centrepiece of Qing military modernization under Li Hongzhang's initiative. The opposing fleets, twelve vessels on each side, were similar in tonnage, but the Chinese fleet, being inexperienced in sea battles came out lined up abreast

like cavalry troops ready to charge and was outmanoeuvred and encircled by the Japanese vessels. After battling fiercely for five hours, the Chinese lost five vessels, but they inflicted such serious damage on five Japanese ships, including the enemy flagship *Matsushima*, that the Japanese had to withdraw from the scene of battle. Through the courage and determination of the wounded Admiral Ding Ruchang and his subordinates, the introduction of the Beiyang Fleet and its officers to naval warfare was by no means a disaster. There were still four battleships remaining intact, and ready for the next engagement.

After this naval encounter, Li Hongzhang, for the sake of saving the military base of his political power, ordered all the Beiyang Fleet to anchor in the harbour of Weihaiwei and keep the vessels safe by avoiding the enemy. He instructed the fleet's officers 'not to engage the enemy under any circumstances'. Li failed to foresee that instead of finding a safe haven, the Beiyang Fleet in Weihaiwei were herded together like lambs ready for the slaughter. He had no reason to assume that the Japanese would not attack Weihaiwei. This situation was reminiscent of the Chinese modern fleet anchored in Mawei that had prepared itself for neither defensive nor offensive warfare against the French, because Li Hongzhang and the Qing court were afraid of provoking the French who, indeed, had needed no provocation to make war on China.



Map of South-East Asia at the end of the nineteenth century (*Omniatlas*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from <https://omniatlas.com/maps/asia-pacific/19000616/plain/>)

Japan's next move was to invade China on land with a two-pronged attack: one across the Yalu River from Korea to capture Jiulian and Andong (present Dandong), and the other to land on the Liaodong Peninsula to occupy Jinzhou, with the aim of taking Lushun and Dalian. The Japanese achieved these military

objectives by late November 1894 with relative ease, partly because of the lack of fighting spirit of the Qing military, and partly because Li Hongzhang was, as usual, more ready to sue for peace than to pursue the war. Li refused Admiral Ding Ruchang's plea to aid Lushen with the Beiyang Fleet. Li's once formidable Huai Army, which had suppressed the Nian Rebellion two decades earlier, had become as feeble as the Manchu Banner and the Chinese Green Standard forces when it was deployed against the Japanese. Administrative decline and corruption had sapped the strength of the military force of the Qing.

In January 1895, the Japanese were ready to advance against Weihaiwei. To attack the Beiyang Fleet from behind, the Japanese army landed on the Shandong Peninsula to occupy the shore surrounding its harbour, against which their navy had already imposed a blockade. Then they turned their big guns both from the shore and from their ships on the entrapped Beiyang Fleet. Under fearsome artillery bombardment, Admiral Ding Ruchang and several patriotic officers fought courageously. Refusing to surrender when urged by the Japanese to do so, he ordered his subordinates to break out of the blockade but was unsuccessful. In desperation, he ordered his officers to sink their ships to prevent them falling into enemy hands. All but one of his officers refused to do so. Seeing the hopelessness of the situation, he and some other officers of the fleet committed suicide. After his death, a foreign employee surrendered the remaining eleven vessels of the fleet to the Japanese. Faced with the ruin of its modern fleet, continuing defeats on land, and the desire of Empress Dowager Cixi to avoid having her sixtieth birthday celebration spoiled by a continuation of the fighting, the Qing court desperately sued for peace. America, which had been friendly to Japan throughout the latter's aggression against China, acted as a mediator.

As a newcomer to the imperialist club, the Japanese made up for their belated entry by showing a voracious appetite for devouring their prey. Japan had exposed how weak Qing China's military forces, both army and navy, had become despite China's modernization projects in the 'Self-strengthening Movement' since 1861. Now, Japan was to lead the other imperialist powers in starting a new era of more intense penetration of China for economic exploitation and political control - the era of 'scramble' for partitioning China into foreign 'spheres of influence'. The defeat by Japan was a great catastrophe for China, which was soon to be reduced to a quasi-colony of the Western powers and Japan, with the Qing government sinking into the position of an internal peacekeeper and tax-collector for its oppressors.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki that brought the war to an end in April 1895 obliged Qing China to cede Taiwan, the Pescadores (Penghu) and the Liaodong Peninsula to Japan, to pay Japan an enormous indemnity of 200,000,000 taels of silver, and to open seven cities including Shanxi, Chongqing, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Wuzhou to Japanese trade, in addition to allowing Japan to trade in all the existing treaty ports. This treaty ended China's suzerainty over Korea, whose 'independence' China was to recognize. An important new concession Japan extracted from China involved the right to establish industrial and manufacturing facilities

in China's opened ports. The other treaty powers had Japan to thank, as the most-favoured-nation clause enabled them also to enjoy the same right to build factories in all the treaty ports, and to trade in the additional opened ports in China. Soon, not only the right to build factories to take advantage of the cheap Chinese labour, but also the rights to operate mines, construct railways, and to set up banks, were to be conceded to all the treaty powers by China. These concessions signified a new phase of heightened foreign economic exploitation of China. This type of new development enabled the rich industrialized or industrializing countries to extract large profits from investing their surplus capital in China, whereas previously the focus was solely on trade, which continued as before.

Since Russia also had territorial ambitions in China's *Donghai* (the Northeast region of China), she was not happy with Japan's occupation of the Liaodong Peninsula. (The terms *Dongbei*, and *Dong San Sheng* – the Three Northern Provinces - were used by the Chinese in reference to what the Japanese later called Manchuria. The Japanese invented the term Manchuria to justify their detaching this whole region from China.) After being pressured by the 'Triple Intervention' of Russia allied with Germany and France in April 1895, Japan was obliged to give up Liaodong in exchange for a compensation of 30,000,000 taels from China. But China was not allowed to keep Liaodong for very long. A total of 230,000,000 taels, amounting to 3 years of the total income of the Qing, had to be paid to Japan within 3 years.

Because the Qing was financially exhausted by the war, between 1895 and 1898 it raised three loans of 16,000,000 GBP each, at punitive terms from foreign banks, one from a Russo-French syndicate of six banks, and two from an Anglo-German syndicate, composed of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (the present-day HSBC) and the Deutsch-Asiatische Bank. These loans were secured on the maritime customs service (MCS) revenue. Owing to the insufficiency of the customs revenue from foreign trade at this point, the income of seven *Lijin* stations was to be dedicated to the repayment of these loans. These stations were to be placed under the control of the Inspector General of the MCS. The contracts of both Anglo-German loans contained an article stating that the status quo of the MCS was to be preserved during the duration of the loan. This meant that the MCS was to be managed and controlled by a British I.G. until 1943.

Modernization in nineteenth century China and Japan

The Sino-Japanese War brought out the stark contrast between China's failure to modernize and Japan's success. Although both were East Asian countries with considerable similarities in culture, there were important differences, in addition to their obvious disparity in size. One should be cautious when making comparisons between them regarding modernization, and attributing reasons for the success of one and the failure of the other. Nevertheless, we shall suggest some possibilities. One important reason certainly lay

in leadership. Although the centralization of the Qing might have appeared to be an advantage, unfortunately there was decay at the top. Japan was fortunate in that when the foreign threat appeared, she was ruled by the decentralized regime of the Tokugawa Shogunate, which though too corrupt and incompetent to provide resolute leadership against the foreign menace, left room for some of the outer domains to experiment with different strategies for meeting the foreign challenge. When the winning strategy emerged, the modernizers from the outer domains had the good fortune to awaken a dormant imperial authority, which could be used as a rallying point to overthrow the decaying Shoguns and the feudal lords. With the dead wood at the top removed, Japan was able to start afresh to modernize Japan, with a strongly centralized imperial authority and with the modernizers at the helm backed by the authority of the Meiji emperor. Alerted by the example of China's defeat in the Opium Wars, but without being so badly battered by the foreign invaders and being also relatively free from China's cultural pride and deep attachment to old traditions, the Japanese leaders were able to pursue modernization single-mindedly, without having to compromise on account of criticism from colleagues or adverse public opinion.

Leaving quality of leadership aside, the Qing government, since the 1840s, had been continuously troubled by domestic insurrections and foreign pressures that left it with neither any breathing-space of prolonged peace, nor financial resources to focus on systematic modernization, even if it had had the will to do so. Apart from a short period of civil war, Japan had been free from serious and prolonged domestic rebellions since its opening. Considered much less of a target for economic exploitation, Japan had not been under such continuous and relentless pressure as China from the imperial powers. The Japanese did not have the bitter experiences of the Chinese and could be persuaded more easily by their leaders of the advantages of modernization, and to change, even in revolutionary ways, by adopting whatever seemed to be needed from the West for the sake of making their nation strong and wealthy.

With China's rural economy largely ruined by wars, cheap imports, and the outflow of silver, the government had to exercise restraint in collecting taxes from the impoverished and restless peasants to meet its increasing financial needs. To make up for the shortfall, the Chinese authorities resorted to foreign loans with high interest rates, which had to be repaid, and the income from the *Lijin* transit tax on Chinese goods, which rendered the domestic products less competitive against similar imports. Japan, on the other hand, could rely on taxing her peasants to support her early modernization projects, and her fiscal policy encouraged and protected her young modern industries, which could be expected to provide government revenue from taxes when they matured. The privatized Japanese industrial enterprises provided a much more successful model for modern industrial growth than the Chinese type of industrial operations supervised by government officials, which were not reliable as a regular source of tax revenue, though they

lined the pockets of those in charge of them. Although the Japanese under the Shoguns had to pay reparations to certain foreign authorities for killing their nationals, these limited sums were nothing in comparison with those the Chinese had to pay.

The example of Europe seems to suggest that successful modernization requires the unifying force of nationalism or of national identity. The emergence of modern Chinese nationalism was a result of imperialism, but the process was relatively slow when compared with Japan. Most of the people under Qing rule, including those who wished to restore the Ming and destroy the Qing, such as the members of the Triad society, and even the Taiping rebels, were not able to make the leap in identifying themselves fully as members of a Chinese nation, and recognizing what nationhood stood for, until after China's transformation from the Qing empire into a nation-state.

In fact, the name *Zhongguo Ren* (literally a person or people of the central or middle country or state) as applied to a Chinese person or people became current only during the twentieth century. Earlier, it was common for the Chinese in the West to describe themselves as *Tang Ren*, *Han Ren*, or *Hua Ren* (a person or people of the ancient dynasty of Tang or Han, or the even older Huaxia cultural area). From the start of the imperialist encroachments in the 1840s to 1911, there were various kinds and degrees of a consciousness that grew and developed into Chinese nationalism of the twentieth century, but the maturity of this nationalism in China appeared more slowly than that in Japan. When Sun Yat-sen strove to unite and restore China as a nation starting from the late nineteenth to the early decades of the twentieth century, he described the Chinese people as a 'sheet of loose sand', out of his frustration. Japan's reaction to the Western threat was intensely nationalistic soon after Western intrusion began. It was easier, it seemed, for a compact island nation like Japan, which had a relatively homogeneous people sharing the same language, culture, and historical experiences to develop nationalism under aggressive foreign impact, than for a vast multi-ethnic country like China, with striking regional differences and greater diversity among her peoples.

The 'scramble' for concessions

After China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-5, it was obvious that China's efforts at modernization had borne little fruit. Since this was a time when the technological changes in the capitalist countries of the West were gathering momentum, the gap between China and the industrializing nations in terms of military power and economic development became even wider. As a result, China was bound to be on the receiving end of a new phase of heightened imperialist drive to carve China up into 'spheres of influence', where the powers commandeered leased territories to extract inordinate returns through

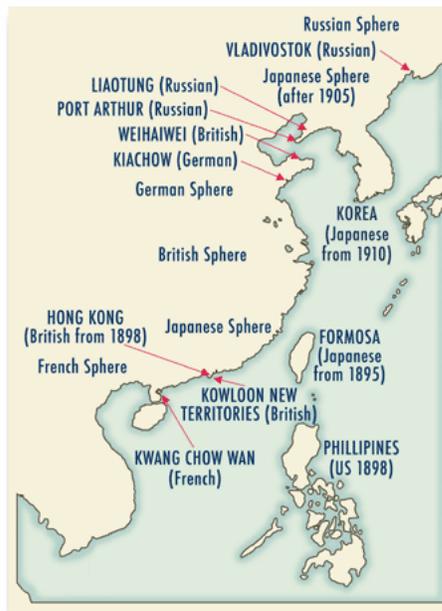
exploiting China's natural resources and cheap labour, through developing railways and steamship transportation, and establishing banks and other modern enterprises in these territories. The rivalry among the powers prompted them to aid and abet their allies, or to exercise checks against the advancement of a competitor. They closely watched each other's moves, jostling and competing in a chain of frenzied one-sided negotiations with the defenceless Qing, with results that resembled a vulgar scramble for concessions. Within a short period of four years, the most economically desirable parts of China had become the 'sphere of influence' of one European power or another and Japan, as we shall shortly see. This development further impinged on China's sovereignty and administrative integrity, as the Qing were forced to give to the power concerned the right to station troops and to administer the leased territory in its sphere of influence. China sank more deeply into the position of a semi-colony of all these powers, the competition between which, however, prevented China from becoming the colony of any single one.

Soon after the Sino-Japanese War ended, France, a participant in the 'Triple Intervention' in April 1895 which forced Japan to relinquish Jiaozhou, asked the Qing, as did Russia and Germany later, for further concessions. Having control of Vietnam, the French were interested in extending their power and influence into Chinese territories adjacent to Vietnam in China's south and southwest. In 1895, the French began to press the Qing for the right to build a railway from Tonkin to southwest China, and to open mines there. In 1897, France requested the Qing to provide a guarantee not to cede or lease to another power the provinces of Yunnan, Guangxi, and the island of Hainan. At the same time, France also asked the Qing for a 99-year lease for Guangzhou Bay in Guangdong province. France got what she desired: in 1899, the Qing signed a treaty with France, whereby Guangzhou Bay was leased to France together with the right to build certain railway lines to southwest China. These three provinces in China's south and southwest thus became the sphere of influence of the French.

Russia, a French ally, was greedier. In 1896, the Russians requested Li Hongzhang to represent the Qing at the coronation of Czar Nicholas II in Moscow, with the intention of getting this powerful official to agree to a premeditated Russian scheme. Since Russia was one of the powers that had forced Japan to return Liaodong, it did not take much persuasion, in addition to a substantial bribe, for Li to sign in Moscow a secret mutual defence pact between Russia and China against Japan. This pact allowed the Russian navy to frequent all Chinese ports and gave Russia the right to build a 950-mile-long Chinese Eastern Railway across Heilongjiang and Jilin in China's northeast, to connect with the Trans-Siberian Railway, which was in the process of being built, and would extend to Vladivostok. In 1897, Russian naval forces in China flexed their muscles in support of the Russian demand for leasing Dalian and Lushun (which had been renamed by the Westerners as Port Arthur to make it sound less Chinese). Yielding to the Russian threat, Li Hongzhang signed a new protocol, this time with the Russian representative at Beijing, which leased

these two port cities for 25 years to the Russians, as well as the right to build a 650-mile north-south railroad line, the South Manchurian Railway, which would connect the Chinese Eastern Railway to these two port cities. On the land adjacent to all these railway lines, the Russians were given the right to log, to build factories, to open mines, to enjoy either reduction or exemption from customs and transit duties, to station troops and police forces, and to have local jurisdiction during the leased period. These protocols allowed Russia to make China's northeast into her sphere of influence. The Russians designated this region as their province of Guangdong (east of Sanhai Pass). Since Japan was desperate to get hold of this region also, the seeds for a Russo-Japanese conflict were sown.

Germany, a latecomer on the imperial scene like Japan, was also in a hurry to make up for her tardiness. In 1897, Germany used an unfortunate incident involving a German mission in China as a pretext to send troops to occupy the Jiaozhou Bay in the southeast of Shandong Province. Then in 1898, with Russian support, Germany was able to force the Qing to sign a treaty to lease Jiaozhou Bay including Qingdao for 99 years, during which time this region would be under German jurisdiction. Germany also obtained the right to build two railways and to open mines within 15 kilometres along these lines. As a result, Shandong became a German sphere of influence.



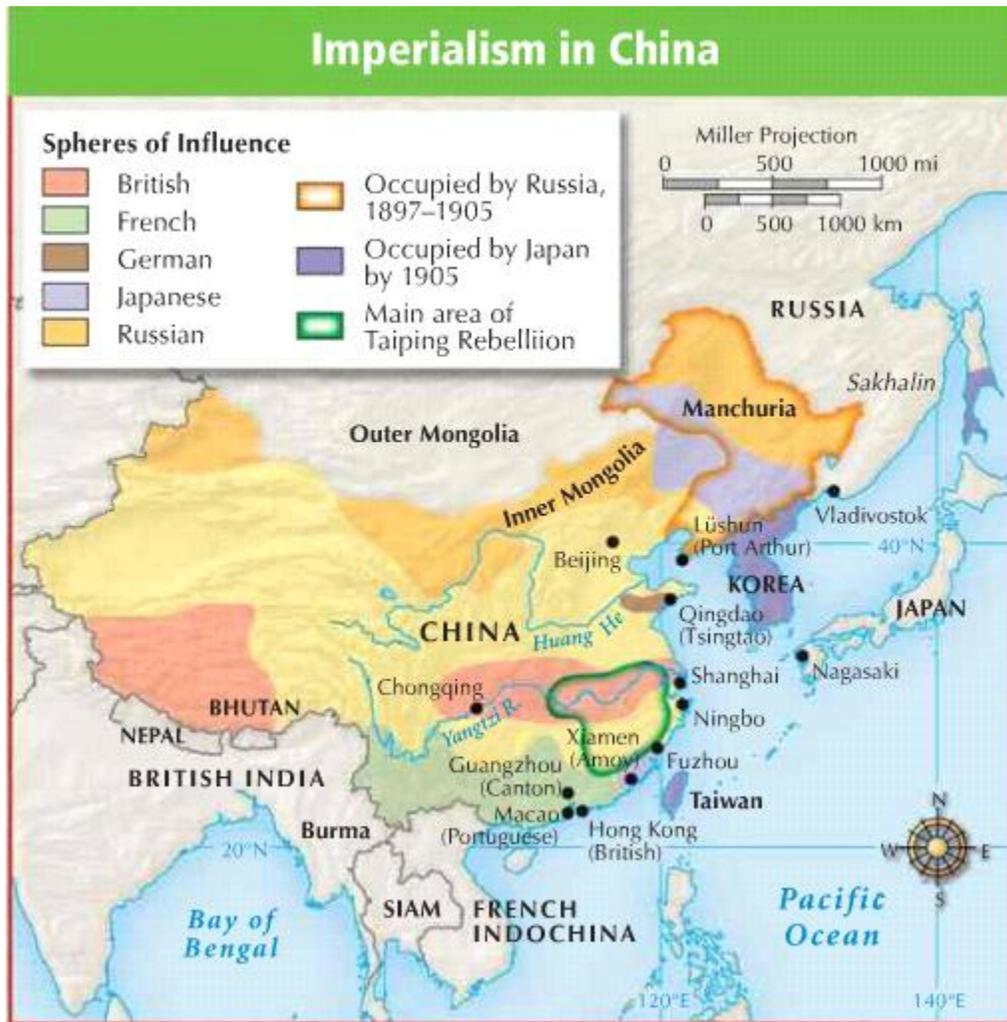
Spheres of influence of the imperialist powers (*MIT*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/throwing_off_asia_03/toa_essay01.html)

Britain, the most senior of the imperialist powers, still dominated China's foreign trade. Although remaining deeply interested in maintaining the treaty system it had introduced, Britain was not going to be left behind in the scramble to divide up the spoils in China. Having a strong navy and the control of the land frontiers from Burma and India to China, the British were well placed to develop spheres of influence in the different regions of China. To balance the French influence in south and southwest China, Britain obtained the right to build a railway in 1897 from Burma to southwest China, and to trade along the Xi (West) River to Guangzhou. Britain considered the region along the Yangtze River as her primary sphere of influence and decided formally to stake her claim by forcing the Qing to guarantee, in February 1898, not to alienate the entire Yangtze Valley and Delta to a third party. A few months later, the British forced the Qing to lease an area around Kowloon, a peninsula near Hong Kong, for 99 years. This could be viewed as another balancing act against the French, this time in southern China. Soon afterwards, Britain leased Weihaiwei, an important north China port city in Shandong, opposite Lushun that had been leased to Russia, to check the southward advance of Russia. In western China, Britain's designs on Tibet and her rivalry with Russia led to her using persistent military and diplomatic pressure on the Tibetans and the Qing, especially from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, to exclude Russian influence from this region and to pry Tibet away from Qing China.

Watching how other powers were rapidly dividing up China, Japan became dissatisfied with possessing only Taiwan. In 1889, she forced the Qing to agree not to cede or lease Fujian, the Chinese province opposite Taiwan, to any other country. Thereafter, Fujian effectively became a Japanese sphere of influence.

America did not participate in the 'scramble' in China, because she was preoccupied in 1898 with a war against Spain over Cuba, though the main military contest took place in the Philippines, which was taken over as a colonial possession by America from Spain, which lost the war. In 1899, the United State was free to turn her attention to China, but the desirable regions had all been taken. In order not to be handicapped by the spheres of influence of the other imperialist powers, America proposed the 'Open Door Policy', the acceptance of which by all the powers would ensure equal and impartial trade in all parts of China, and protect the rights guaranteed by treaty to them all. When most of the powers except Russia agreed with the American proposal, America proclaimed it as an operative principle, even though there was no provision to back it up by force, should it be violated. For it to operate, China needed to exist as an integral unit to collect the duties and enforce the customs provisions, as well as to guarantee the rights and privileges she had given away. The Open Door Policy was therefore partly intended to help Qing China to continue to exist, rather than to be broken up into colonies of the imperialist powers. But it is more likely

that what saved the Qing at this point was the result of the rivalry of the powers, and their realization that there was more to be gained by letting the Qing remain viable.



Imperialism in China towards the end of the Qing (*Pinterest*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/561261172290490415/>)

The 'Hundred Days' reforms

When the news of the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Shimonoseki with its harsh terms reached Beijing, where the candidates were gathered to take the metropolitan exam for the highest *Jinshi* degree, these promising young Confucian scholars and potential government officeholders became deeply alarmed. With two outstanding patriotic activists Kang Youwei (1858-1927) and his pupil Liang Qichao (1873-1929) as prime movers, in May 1894 over 1,300 of these scholars put their names to a long petition to Emperor Guangxu (r. 1875-1908) urging him to reject the peace terms, move the capital to a less vulnerable region, strengthen

the military for determined resistance against aggression, and implement a programme of wide-ranging and radical reforms to make China strong and prosperous. Although the petition was blocked by conservatives in the office responsible for its transmission and never reached the emperor, it had an impact on society because it became widely known to the educated public through its printing and circulation.



Portraits of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao (*The China Project*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from <https://thechinaproject.com/2018/10/15/kuora-kang-youwei-or-liang-qichao-for-president/>)

Soon afterwards, Kang passed the exam and was given an official post at the Ministry of Works. He continued to write impassioned memorials to Emperor Guangxu, making a cogent case for radical reforms using Meiji Japan as a model. In contrast to the earlier ‘Self-strengthening Movement’, this generation of reformers not only wanted to acquire Western gunboats, guns, and other technology of material production; they also espoused institutional reforms and changes at a much deeper level. Although some of Kang’s memorials did reach the emperor, others were intercepted by the anti-reform conservative officials.

Without any power to influence the actions of the government, Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and other patriotic reformers, such as Tan Sitong (1865-1898), endeavoured to inform the public and to gather support for their drive to change and save China by organizing study groups and meetings, and by publishing journals and newspapers in Beijing, Shanghai, Changsha, Tianjin, and other big cities. Also notable among these was Yan Fu (1854-1921), who had been to England and devoted much effort to publishing his translation of Western works to promote radical ideas, such as peoples’ rights and constitutional monarchy. His translation of Thomas Henry Huxley’s ‘*Evolution and Ethics*’ (1893) was to serve as a warning that unless the Chinese made themselves strong, they would not be fit to survive. This was an age when social Darwinism went hand in hand with imperialism. Yan’s works were influential among the educated, particularly the reformers. Although there were enthusiastic public responses all over China to the

reformers' call, with a mushrooming of patriotic study groups and journals, the political impact of the public support was not immediately felt, because China was not a democracy. And, unlike their counterparts in Japan, the Chinese gentry reformers lacked the power of the modernizing samurais. Indeed, they had powerful enemies among the recalcitrant conservative officials. The latter opposed them strenuously and attacked them vehemently with the support of Empress Dowager Cixi.

In 1897, through the good offices of Weng Tonghe, the personal tutor of Emperor Guangxu and a Grand Minister of the Privy Council, Kang's reforming ideas, with which the emperor had some previous acquaintance, were made known and elucidated more fully to him. Kang wanted Guangxu to emulate Peter the Great, who introduced Western advancement to Russia. Kang was not aware that, unlike the Russian Czar, Guangxu had little real power, even though Weng Tonghe tried to make Kang realize how manipulative the empress dowager was, and how ubiquitous were her informers in the palace.

By 1897 Emperor Guangxu had been on the throne since the age of four for twenty-two years after the death of Emperor Tongzhi, the son of the Dowager Empress Cixi, but political and military power still resided largely in the hands of his aunt, the dowager empress. Cixi had chosen him and put him on the throne as a minor so that she could continue the tradition of presiding at court, while sitting behind a curtain (*Chui Lian Ting Zheng*), and running the country as she had done for many years during Tongzhi's minority. Taught by his aunt since the age of four to fear and obey her as his father, mother, and sovereign all rolled into one, Guangxu had difficulty escaping the fate of being Cixi's puppet, even though by 1887 Cixi had to keep her promise of letting the sixteen-year-old Guangxu start managing the affairs of state himself, as an adult at the court (*Qin Zheng*). To retain the reins of power, she placed her own trusted officials in key posts, made her own niece Guangxu's empress, and required the young emperor to see her daily and report to her all important matters that came up at the court before acting on them. This situation still prevailed in 1897, notwithstanding that Guangxu had already ruled as an adult for ten years and had managed to appoint a few men who were loyal to him to important posts. During this period, Cixi kept herself busy pulling strings at court and monitoring Guangxu's activities, while living outside the palace in Yiheyuan (the Summer Palace), ostensibly in retirement. Today this beautiful scenic spot with its famous marble, built with money diverted from funds for China's modern Beiyang Fleet, has become a popular tourist attraction.



Portrait of the Dowager Empress Cixi (*popmatters*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from <https://www.popmatters.com/180025-empress-dowager-cixi-by-jung-chang-2495676757.html>)

During the Sino-Japanese War, the emperor supported the war party, but he was out-manoeuvred by the peace party led by Li Hongzhang and supported by Cixi. He was deeply unhappy about having to put his seal on the Treaty of Shimonoseki, and the subsequent ‘scramble for concessions’ compounded his unhappiness. Kang Youwei’s ideas on reinvigorating China through reform, transmitted through Weng Tonghe, were received by Emperor Guangxu like rain falling on a parched desert. When Guangxu wished to see Kang himself, he was thwarted by prince Gong, who reminded him of the rule that only officials of Fourth Grade or above were allowed to have an audience with the emperor; Kang, being only Second Grade, was too junior. At the beginning of 1898, Guangxu decided to invite Kang to come to an office of the *Zongli Yamen* where, using Weng Tonghe as an intermediary, he and Kang were able to have a conversational session without coming face to face. Then he ordered the officials concerned to transmit all Kang’s memorials to him without delay. Soon after, Kang presented more memorials exhorting Guangxu to promulgate edicts on reform, emulating the modernization of Meiji Japan, and using his royal prerogative, like Peter the Great of Russia, to force through a slate of reform measures. Kang used Poland, which had

suffered the fate of being partitioned (by France, Russia, and Austria), as an example of what might befall China, unless Guangxu acted quickly.

Feeling an urgent need to advance the reform measures, Emperor Guangxu had asked a royal relative to transmit to Cixi the message that ‘if the Empress Dowager would not give him the authority to act, he would prefer to give up his throne than to be the monarch who lost China’. In view of the grave situation in China, Guangxu made up his mind to strike out on his own, even without Cixi’s prior blessings, and he embraced reform with an edict on 11 June 1898. A few days later, he arranged to meet Kang, who was promoted to work in the *Zongli Yamen* to focus on matters concerning reforms. Several of Kang’s fellow reformers, with Tang Sitong among them, were given official posts with ranks above Fourth Grade to work with him and the emperor. During the three months between 11 June and 21 September, Emperor Guangxu, with the help of the reformers, flooded the country with around 180 edicts, promulgating a wide range of reforms covering educational, economic, and military fields, in addition to political and cultural institutions.

The reforms on education included changing the contents of the state-sponsored examination, setting up a modern school system and a university in Beijing, sending students to study abroad, and establishing translation bureaus. On the economy, the state was to set up bureaus to protect and encourage agriculture, commerce, and industry, and to develop railways and mines. There were to be rewards for innovations. The old government postal relay stations were to be replaced by a state-wide post office. Changes were to be introduced in government administration, and a budget office was to be established in connection with financial reform. The old military organizations were to be replaced by a new-style army and navy, with the forces trained and drilled along modern Western lines. On political matters, the people were to have the right to publish and to form study societies, and to send memorials to the government to express their opinions. For understandable reasons, Guangxu’s decrees did not include the reformers’ proposals for a parliament and a constitutional government.

These decrees electrified the country and galvanized the diehard conservative officials to rally around the empress dowager for support. There were even suggestions of her returning to take over the reins of state again. They insisted on adhering to the ancestral ways, and feared the harm these radical changes might do to China. Many of them ignored or resisted the reform decrees. Soon after the appearance of the first reform edict, Cixi demonstrated her power and displeasure by forcing Guangxu to dismiss Weng Tonghe and to appoint Ronglu, a staunch supporter of hers, as the governor general of Zhili and the supreme commander of the Beiyang Army. Since Beijing was situated inside Zhili, she was sure of military support if her power were challenged. Despite this setback and warning, Emperor Guangxu went ahead with his plan, and he even fought back, dismissing Li Hongzhang, Cixi’s protégé, and some other high officials who obstructed the reforms. Since Cixi repeatedly sent emissaries to Tianjin to have secret meetings with Ronglu, who

made certain alarming troop movements, rumours began to spread, both in Beijing and Tianjin, that the empress dowager and Ronglu were conspiring to force the emperor to abdicate during the time when she and the emperor were due to review the new troops in Tianjin.

For many years previously, the empress dowager had balanced her support for both the self-strengthening type of modernizers and the recalcitrant conservatives in her government, and she played one side against the other to bend both to her will; but this time she came down strongly against the reformers. In addition to her own conservative sympathies, the empress dowager must have felt threatened by Guangxu's new assertion of independence, and his attempt to control his own and the country's destiny, instead of remaining an instrument of her will. At that point they were opposing each other on the most critically important issue of the day. It became a struggle not just of whose policy was going to prevail, but of who had the power to rule. It was an unequal power struggle, because most of the top military and civil officials owed Cixi their loyalty. Guangxu did not have many powerful supporters among the high officials, and the reformers were inexperienced neophytes in government.

As the day for the review of the troops drew near, the deeply worried Guangxu sent, on 13 September, a secret message to the reformers, alerting them to the fact that his own position had become insecure. He wrote that unless the reforms were carried out, China could not be saved. To go through with the reforms, the conservatives with the contrary outlook had to be removed and the open-minded, courageous, and outstandingly able officials must be put in charge. He informed them that the empress dowager did not see things this way, and that his repeated appeals to her only angered her more. Revealing his fear and anxiety, he urged them to find a way to save the situation quickly. At first, they were at a loss as to what to do. As a last resort, they staked their hope on a military man, Yuan Shikai, who had attended a study society they had organized in the past. They approached him on the assumption that he was sympathetic to their aims. They also went to the Legation Quarters in Beijing to enlist the support of foreign ambassadors, who expressed sympathy but declined to interfere. They then worked out a plan in which Yuan, who commanded a modern army of over 7,000 soldiers stationed near Tianjin, was expected to play the key role. According to this plan Yuan was to kill Ronglu during the review of the troops, and then use his troops to surround the Summer Palace. Being an opportunist, Yuan agreed enthusiastically to support the emperor, who promptly promoted him to a high rank.

Unfortunately for Emperor Guangxu and his supporters for reform, Yuan was not worthy of their trust. Having been a subordinate of Ronglu, and a calculating politician by nature, he placed his bet on the side the empress dowager. Yuan promptly revealed the reformers' secret plan to Ronglu. The latter lost no time in warning the empress dowager, who hastened to return to the Forbidden City on 18 September to keep Guangxu in check. On 21 September 1897, Cixi staged a coup: she imprisoned Emperor Guangxu in the

palace, and then declared in an edict that she was returning to the court to manage the affairs of the state as she had done before Emperor Guangxu began to rule officially. Discovering that they were betrayed, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao escaped abroad. Tan Sitong, refusing to flee, was willing to face martyrdom in the name of reform. He and five other leading reformers were soon arrested and executed, and other officials, who supported the reform, were dismissed. Thus, the *Wuxu Bianfa* (the 'Hundred Days' Reform) came to an abrupt end.

Despite the political setback, the seeds of reform had been sown. The efforts and sacrifices of the reformers marked another halting step on China's long road towards modernization. Although Tan Sitong's life was tragically cut short, he is still remembered by many, particularly in his province of Hunan, as a hero and martyr. His best-known work, *Ren Xue* (On Benevolence), that denounced autocratic monarchs and advocated peoples' rights, contributed to the revolutionary current that was soon to engulf China. The failure of this movement politically did not prevent it from having a profound impact on Chinese culture, rendering it more open to modern influences.

With Cixi's return to power, Guangxu's reform edicts were shunted aside for the time being, apart from the one creating a modern university in Beijing. However, during the next few years, the court found it necessary to enact many measures contained in Emperor Guangxu's reform edicts, because of the pressure of public opinion. It was China's great misfortune that someone like Cixi dominated China during the long period of forty-eight years, from 1860 to 1908, when China was seriously menaced by imperialism. This was a crucial time, when strong central leadership was desperately needed to steer China onto a course of modernization much like Japan, and to join the West in earnest in the deployment of capital and in industrial development. Because Cixi's central concerns were focused on her own personal pleasures and her desire to hold on to the reins of power, rather than the fate of her country and the distress of her people, a government controlled by her did not and could not provide such leadership. When her nephew, the nominal emperor, and the young, innovative gentry reformers had ventured, in a desperate bid, to put China on the path towards modernization, she had promptly put an end to it. Japan, on the contrary, had the good fortune that, during the reign of Emperor Meiji, the old regime under the Togugawa Shoguns, who might have undermined efforts at reform, were out of the way when the new regime, led by the dynamic young samurais under the banner of the reinvigorated imperial authority, was ready to go ahead with implementing their policy on the modernization of Japan.

The Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901)

After her coup, the empress dowager wanted to force Guangxu to abdicate, but Britain, Japan, and America were against it. She then declared that the royal physician had found Guangxu seriously ill, whereupon the

British Ambassador warned the *Zongli Yamen* that the Western powers might act in way detrimental to China should the emperor die at this juncture. When the British sent a well-known physician to check up on Guangxu's state of health, he was found not to be ill. Cixi's next abdication ploy was to set up an Heir Apparent to replace Guangxu in due course. Although this was against ancestral rule, because Emperor Kangxi had abolished this institution, Cixi managed nevertheless to select a fifteen-year-old royal prince and instal him as the Heir Apparent. Again, the imperialist powers expressed their disapproval and refused to attend the installation ceremony. The powers favoured Guangxu, not because he wished to make China strong, but because of his expressed intention to open China more to the West. They wanted to avoid China returning to the closed-door era, under the leadership of the diehard conservatives. Although Cixi was incensed by the imperialist interference, she dared not force Guangxu to abdicate. She saw her chance for revenge in the militant anti-foreign peasant uprisings - the *Yihe Quan* or *Tuan* (the Righteous and Harmonious Fists or Society) - that began to draw the authorities' attention in 1898 in Shandong Province. The foreigners called them the Boxers because they practised Chinese boxing to improve themselves physically and morally. Their adherents superstitiously believed that they could render themselves invulnerable to bullets through magical powers.

The Boxers were groups of peasants attached to various secret societies such as *Gelao Hui* (Brothers and Elders Society), *Dadao Hui* (the Big Sabre Society) or even some branches of the ancient White Lotus Society, that perennially lurked under the surface in rural and sometimes even urban China. The resurgence of these militant self-help and grievance-filled groups was often a sign of rural economic distress and a precursor to insurrections. Sometimes social or political issues or injustices also spurred the growth of these societies. During the closing years of the nineteenth century, the Chinese economy was indeed in dire straits, as we have seen.

Groups of Boxers first broke into open rebellion in Shandong, attacking foreign churches and properties and driving away missionaries, with the slogan of 'support the Qing, destroy the foreign'. Parts of Shandong had already been laid waste by the Sino-Japanese War, invaded by the Germans and the British, and devastated by floods and famine. The Boxers' slogan and attack on all things foreign demonstrated Chinese patriotism or even nationalism, though not of a fully developed and conscious kind.

Christianity and the missionaries

Why did the Boxers target the Christians and Christian churches as objects of their hatred? It was likely the result of the countless conflicts and disputes that sometimes erupted into violent incidents, which had occurred over the years between the missionaries and Chinese people of various localities.

Had China being mistress of her own house, Christian missionaries in China would not have had the privilege of extraterritoriality and the protection of foreign gunboats; they would have had to exercise far greater circumspection operating in the Chinese environment, where the culture and traditions were very different from their own. In the context of the unequal treaties, the Westerners were placed in a privileged position without being bound by Chinese law, and the Chinese were often at a disadvantage should disputes arise between them and the Westerners. In the treaty ports, the Westerners kept themselves to their own communities, while enjoying the services of Chinese inside the international settlements, and the cooperation of the local officials and merchants outside. Friction between the foreign and Chinese communities seldom occurred in the treaty ports. But after the French wrested the right to buy land and establish mission stations not just at the treaty ports, but also in the interior of China in the 1840s, the spread of Christian missions, especially the Catholic ones, into the interior of China led to countless conflicts and disputes between local Chinese and missionaries and their Chinese converts, who became effectively extraterritorialized under the protection of the foreign missions. If the missionaries and the Chinese Christians rode roughshod over the local Chinese from their privileged positions, Chinese officials were often reluctant to protect the interest or to redress the wrong of the Chinese parties, for fear of provoking foreign military intervention, or the threat of it. Many incidents involving missionaries did result in the intervention of foreign governments, leading to the Qing having to indemnify, apologize, or give more privileges to the foreigners. Furthermore, some Chinese found it difficult to understand and accept that the foreigners who came to reside in their midst not only rejected the culture, tradition, and usage of the Chinese, but made their Chinese converts do the same. Over the years, grievances and resentment built up among the Chinese, with the literate resorting to anti-foreign propaganda while the illiterate took to rioting and violence. Later, by the 1920s, when the tide of modern Chinese nationalism reached a high point, the foreign missionary movement came under attack as a form of cultural imperialism.

To be fair to those who came to China primarily to spread the Christian Gospel and save souls, it was not their purpose to stir up social unrest in China. When considering the overall missionary efforts and activities in China during the treaty century (1842-1943), one should not forget the missionaries' pioneering work in bringing to China modern education, medicine, and knowledge of the West, as well as their charitable activities, such as famine relief and caring for the sick and the poor. In addition to the Chinese who believed that their souls were saved, all those who benefited from the missionary efforts in doing good works in the secular society were likely to look upon the missionary movement more favourably.

While the Catholic missionaries, mostly French, concentrated their efforts on conversion and on doing pastoral and charitable work among their flocks, many of the Protestant evangelists established educational and social institutions in addition to churches, because they valued improving the prospects of their living

communicants as well as the salvation of their souls. There was a strong belief among some of the Protestant missionaries, as exemplified by Timothy Richards, that humanity could be brought closer to the Kingdom of God through improving earthly institutions. For this reason, some of the British and American missionaries established many modern schools, some of which later became colleges or universities, set up hospitals and dispensaries of medicine, and campaigned against Chinese institutions of which they disapproved. They also published journals, notably the *Wanguo Gongbao*, translated as the *Globe Magazine* or the *Review of the Times*, which provided news of Western countries and spread ideas, information, and knowledge from the modern West to the interested Chinese. This journal was a source of Western knowledge to the Chinese reformers of 1898. Many of the modern institutions pioneered by the missionaries of this period endured and contributed to China's modern transformation.

As regards making Christian converts, it was a slow and uphill struggle, especially for the Protestant missionaries. Though their number doubled every decade, from a tiny trickle in the 1840s to over 1,300 in 1890, the number of Chinese communicants reached only 37,000 during half a century. Although the number of Catholic missionaries was half as many as that of the Protestant ones at that time, there were half of a million Chinese Catholics in China. Considering this rather small number of Christians scattered among China's population of well over 400 million in the late nineteenth century, the friction and hostility between local Chinese communities and the foreign missionary communities, which included Chinese Christians, led surprisingly often to serious ill consequences for China. The Boxers' rampage against Christian churches was an example of such a phenomenon. Since their hostility was directed not only against the Christians and the foreign armies of occupation, but to all things foreign, their patriotism was mixed with xenophobia.

The Boxer rebellion erupts, and the powers intervene: the defeat of the Boxers

As the violent disturbances of the Boxers spread rapidly in Shandong in the late 1890s, some of the officials like Yuan Shikai were for suppressing the movement. With his modern army of about 7,000 and the support of the local forces, he moved against the Boxers energetically, and succeeded in restoring order in Shandong province. Others, like Yuxian, the governor of Shandong, preferred appeasing them and organizing the more cooperative ones into militia, although he also fought against the recalcitrant ones. Officials at the court in Beijing were similarly divided. The British and Americans, whose interests in China remained largely commercial, pressed the Qing to suppress the Boxers and restore a peaceful and stable environment favourable to trade. The Qing Court's vacillation between suppression and appeasement only helped the movement to grow.

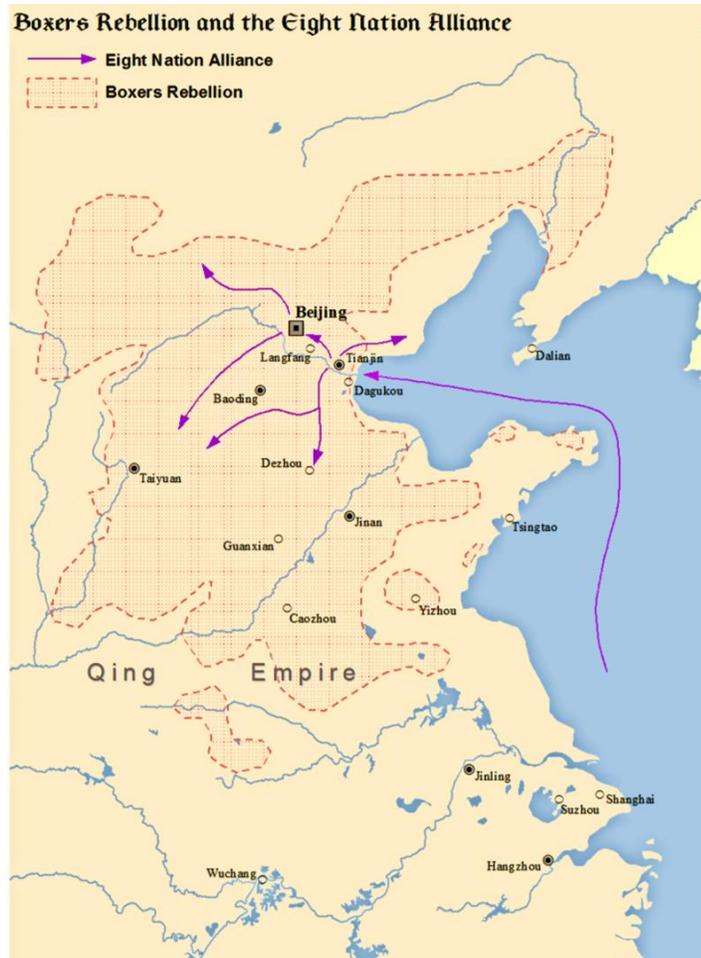
Early in 1900, some of the Boxer insurgents, driven from Shandong by Yuan Shikai, moved to Zhili, where they joined forces with local Boxers. With the support of some of the gentry and officials there, they spread like wildfire, threatening both Beijing and Tianjin, where foreigners were concentrated. The foreign communities became alarmed. The British, American, French, and German ambassadors all warned the Qing court in April 1900 that their governments were considering military intervention, unless the Qing put an end to the Boxer menace within two months.

In the spring of 1900, with the Boxer Rebellion gathering enormous momentum, some conservative royal princes and other high officials at the court counselled appeasement, or even making use of the Boxers against the foreigners. The insurgents' rallying cry of 'support the Qing, exterminate the foreigners' aroused a sympathetic chord in them, for they desired nothing less than to drive out the foreigners and regain control over China. If they thought they could rely on large mobs of ignorant and superstitious peasants without military training to accomplish what their army and navy could not, as some indeed did, they must have allowed despair and despondency to overrule their better judgement. The empress dowager had her own grudge against the imperialists because they had thwarted her attempts to dethrone Emperor Guangxu, and given shelter to the escaped reformers, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, enabling them to continue to promote Guangxu's cause in Japan. She decided to listen to the voice of the appeasement party and to channel the energy and power of the insurgents against their common enemy, the imperialists. With the collusion of the court, the Boxers, no longer treated as outlaws, streamed into Beijing and Tianjin, where they harassed foreigners and destroyed their properties. The phenomenal growth of the Boxers inspired disaffected peasants in other provinces in the north, and in parts of the south, to rise up under the banner of 'support the Qing; exterminate the foreigners'.

Towards the end of May until early June 1900, as their deadline to the Qing approached and the situation further deteriorated, the representatives of the foreign legations in Beijing moved several hundred soldiers from the more than 2,000 stationed in Tianjin to Beijing, to protect themselves and their headquarters. Meanwhile, two dozen warships from various imperialist nations assembled at Dagu, the port near Tianjin, ready for action. After having received the go-ahead from their home countries, on 10 June 1900 over 2,000 troops from eight different nations - Japan, Russia, Britain, America, Germany, France, Italy, and Austria - formed the Eight Nation Alliance and landed at Dagu, under the leadership of a British officer, in the name of 'rescuing embassy officials' in China's capital. Even with their primitive weapons, the Boxers supported by Qing soldiers forced the Eight Nation Army to find shelter in the international settlement in Tianjin, instead of proceeding to Beijing. Around that time, the foreign fleet at Dagu demolished the Qing shore batteries and landed more troops, including 2,000 Russians, to invade Tianjin. Despite having cannons, these foreign forces also sustained heavy casualties at the hands of the Boxers, the Qing army,

and the Red Lanterns, a young women's brigade. The news of foreign forces coming to Beijing emboldened the foreign soldiers and staff at the Legation Quarters, an area of about three-quarters of a square mile, to attack the Boxers. The German minister, Clemens von Kletteler, was particularly provocative in firing on Chinese soldiers and militias. On 20 June, he was killed when they returned fire, and from that date angry Boxers and Qing soldiers began to surround the Legation Quarters, which accommodated, apart from the foreign embassy officials, their families, their Chinese employees, and several hundred foreign soldiers, in addition to many foreign missionaries and some 3,500 Chinese Christians who were sheltering there.

On 16 June, about a week after the landing of foreign forces in Dagu, and the start of armed combat between the Boxers and Qing soldiers on one side and the Eight Nation Army on the other in an undeclared war, the empress dowager began to hold daily meetings on the question of war or peace, and how to deal with the Boxers. On the one side were the revenge-seeking conservative officials, including two royal princes, who made a case for appeasing the Boxers and using them to fight the foreigners with their 'magical prowess'. Opposing them were the advocates for suppressing the Boxers to achieve peace with the powers, and to stop their forces from advancing to Beijing. Permitted to attend these meetings, Emperor Guangxu spoke strongly for peace. Pointing out that China had lost a war fighting Japan alone, he questioned how China could possibly oppose the military strength of the combined forces of the imperialists. He was also sceptical of the magical power of the Boxers. As regards sending them out to battle, he asked: 'Why play games with peoples' lives?' The empress dowager hesitated between the two options and temporized. She did not move to suppress the Boxers on the one hand, but on the other hand she sent soldiers to protect the Legation Quarters. She was politely rebuffed when her officials tried to persuade the foreign ambassadors to stop the advance of the Eight Nation Army.



The Boxer Rebellion and the Eight Nation Alliance (Wikipedia: retrieved on 27 December 2023 from <https://medium.com/the-dock-on-the-bay/the-boxer-rebellion-db217283f0b2>)

Her inclination towards war increased considerably after she received a notice, allegedly from the imperialist powers, which demanded her retirement and the restoration of Emperor Guangxu to power. Even though she later discovered that some members of the war party had forged the notice, the trick achieved its purpose. On 17 June, at an audience at court she rehearsed a drama in which she took a warlike stance. On 21 June, after the news of the foreign destruction of Dagu reached her, and war could no longer be stopped, she decided to declare war with an edict in Emperor Guangxu's name. As soon as war was mooted, the *Zongli Yamen* asked the foreign officials, their families, their staff, and their guards at the Legation Quarters to leave for Tianjin within twenty-four hours. This was not a demand that they could practically obey, and on 20 June the Legation Quarters once more came under attack. She then ordered the 'righteous' - meaning obedient - Boxers in Beijing to be registered and organized into official units; those who resisted orders were to be treated as criminal or bandits. After war was declared, the Boxers in some

northern provinces carried out attacks on foreign missions and Christians, both foreign and Chinese, without official restraint. In Shanxi Province, the pro-Boxer governor Yuxian treacherously initiated the Taiyuan massacre in July 1900, which killed forty-four missionaries and members of their families to whom he had promised protection.

The court's declaration for war was strongly opposed by most of the heads of provinces south of the Yangtze River, and along the eastern seaboard. These included Li Hongzhang, Zhang Zhidong, and Yuan Shikai, and many wired their objections to the court. With the British anxious to keep the commerce of the Yangtze Valley from being damaged by the war spreading south, the foreign consuls in Shanghai and local Qing officials produced an agreement that the Chinese authorities were to protect southern and eastern China from anti-foreign violence, while the powers were to keep the Shanghai international settlements secure. This kept the provinces south of the Yangtze and along the eastern seaboard out of the war, and the authorities there strenuously suppressed the Boxers and similar movements. The regional leaders felt sufficiently strong to defy the central government, because after the Taiping Rebellion the balance of power between the centre and the regions had shifted in favour of the latter. The senior regional officials' staunch anti-war and anti-Boxer stance weakened the Empress Dowager's resolve and swayed her to their side. Instead of reprimanding these officials for objecting to her declaration for war, she praised them for their prudence, and asked them to prepare for war, nevertheless. She also pointed out to them that China did not start the hostilities. Four days after she declared war, she started a peace overture to the ambassadors in the Legation Quarters, promising them protection and stating that she was looking for opportunities to punish the Boxers. However, in the absence of a peace accord, the attacks on the legations were resumed.

Meanwhile the war proceeded inexorably from the imperialist side. By early July, the number of foreign troops had increased to 18,000, and they started to besiege Tianjin, where the Boxers and Qing defenders put up a stout resistance. At this point, the court ordered a strongly anti-Boxer military commander to fight, not against the foreign invaders, but to annihilate the Boxers. Attacked from both sides, the Boxers lost their ability to defend Tianjin, which was captured by the Eight Nation Army on 14 July. After Tianjin fell, the empress dowager made fruitless appeals to the German Kaiser and the Presidents of America and France to stop the fighting. She also ordered Ronglu to stop the attack on the Legation Quarters and instead sent fruits, vegetables, and other foodstuffs to each of the eleven legations. The off-again and on-again attacks on the Legation Quarters did result in some foreign fatalities, but the unit with modern weapons under Ronglu did not coordinate with the Boxers to press the attack home, sparing the lives of most of the residents until the end of this calamitous episode.

Despite the empress dowager's appeals and friendly gestures, the war did not stop. International rivalry slightly delayed the march of the multi-nation expeditionary force that had been built up to around 20,000

(about half of which were from Japan) to Beijing until 4 August. Because a single German, Clemens von Ketteler, had lost his life, the Kaiser won the right to put a German, Alfred von Waldersee, in overall command of this force. Neither the Boxers nor the Qing army were able to withstand this mixed modern foreign army, competing to enter Beijing. On 14 August, the British-led Indian troops, who entered Beijing through the Water Gate under the city wall, were the first to relieve the siege of the Legation Quarters. Early next morning, the empress dowager fled hurriedly westward in disguise, with Emperor Guangxu and several other royals in tow, accompanied by some 2,000 guards.

After the foreign expeditionary force overran Beijing, there was a mad rush by the invaders and other foreigners there to kill the Boxers and plunder the city. They emptied the Forbidden City and the Summer Palace of their treasures and took away priceless books and historical and cultural relics accumulated there since the Ming. The Japanese robbed the Ministry of Finance of more than 3,000,000 taels of silver. A total of approximately 60,000,000 taels of silver were taken from other offices of the government.

From the Forbidden City, then doubling as the foreign command centre, the commanders of the imperialist powers continued sending their armies out, all the way to the Shanhai Pass in the northeast of China. The Boxer episode gave the Germans an opportunity to demonstrate their military prowess, and they continued military action for another six months. Under Alfred von Waldersee as commander-in-chief, the Germans continued to increase the number of their troops and conducted punitive expeditions against some two dozen cities in north China. They also attempted to occupy the city of Yantai and strengthen German control of Shandong Province. In the name of protecting their railways, the Russians also took advantage of the Boxer episode to send 150,000 troops to occupy almost the entire Northeast of China. As Japan also aspired to expand into this region, the Russian action sowed the seeds of future military conflict between these two imperialist powers.

Since the landing of the soldiers of the Eight Nation Army¹ in Dagu, there had been many atrocities: burning, pillaging, and indiscriminate and unrestrained killing of civilians in the cities and countryside, where the imperialists conducted their campaigns. Since the Russians sent 150,000 troops spreading all over Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Shengjing (present-day Liaoning Province), the inhabitants of this region suffered severe depredations, countless villages were burned to the ground, and people there were massacred en masse. Far from driving out the foreign aggressors, the anti-foreign Boxer movement, and the folly of the Qing Court in using this rabble against modern well-drilled armies, equipped with artillery and guns, merely invited further foreign aggression. The insurrection of the Boxers, and the foreign invasion in connection with it, was yet another calamity for China, which had fought five wars against foreign

¹ Actually, it became an army of eleven nations after Spain, Italy, and Belgian, each of which had an endangered legation in China, also joined the fray.

invaders and four prolonged domestic rebellions during the sixty years since the 'opening of China' in the early 1840s.

Soon after the imperialists took over China's capital, the empress dowager, still on the move, issued an edict blaming the Boxers for the disastrous events and ordering their eradication. Before she left Beijing, she had already appointed Li Hongzhang and a Manchu prince to start peace negotiations with the eleven powers involved. The negotiations were somewhat prolonged, not because the empress dowager could not accept the harsh terms, but because of lack of agreement among the powers, each of which wanted to get the maximum benefit out of this invasion for its own country. On condition of the Qing agreeing to Russia's sole control of China's northeast, Russia was willing to support the Cixi's return to rule the country and end the war with troop withdrawals. The British favoured restoring Emperor Guangxu to power under their tutelage and without interference from Cixi. The Germans wanted to punish her, in addition to a list of high officials, whom the powers collectively found culpable for their support of the Boxers. The Germans would not settle for peace until they had taught the Chinese a lesson on anti-foreign violence by spilling more blood on Chinese soil. The French supported the Russians because of their rivalry with the British in southern China. After a year of contentious negotiations among themselves, the powers settled once more for America's 'Open Door' proposal of preserving China's nominal territorial and administrative integrity. To avoid open hostility with each other over what each of the imperialist nations wanted out of China, they agreed to let the Qing continue to exist so as to serve their collective interests. It was in their common interest to let the Qing maintain the treaty systems, collect the taxes that were channelled into paying indemnities to them, and strike down Chinese rebels, so that they did not have to bear the cost of stationing many soldiers in China to keep peace and order, without which commerce and industry could not thrive. They agreed to allow the empress dowager to continue to rule, because she accepted their onerous demands without demur.

Peace was formally achieved by the Boxer Protocol concluded in September 1901 between Qing China and the eleven countries that participated in the invasion of China in 1900. Among its provisions were apologies to the foreign governments, the erection of monuments in memory of the over two hundred deceased Westerners, the execution of the leading Qing official supporters of the Boxers, and the prohibition of Chinese anti-foreign movements in perpetuity, with the death penalty for those who violated the ban. Defensive armaments and foreign guards were to be placed permanently to protect the foreign Legation Quarter, where Chinese were not allowed to reside. The *Zongli Yamen* was to be replaced by a new Foreign Ministry, which was to take precedence over all the other ministries in the Qing government. The defensive artillery emplacements in Dagu were to be removed. The powers were allowed to station troops on strategic spots along the railways from Tianjin and Beijing to the Shanhai Pass in the Northeast. The powers extracted

a crushing indemnity of 450,000,000 taels of silver, which was to be paid in annual instalments over a thirty-nine-year period in gold, with an interest of 4% until the debt was extinguished on 31 December 1940. At the end of this period the total amount paid by China would have amounted to 982,238,150 taels. This was a colossal sum, considering that the total Qing annual tax collection around that time was estimated at 250,000,000 taels.

How was China to pay this enormous debt? The powers saw to it that all available maritime customs revenue, which had grown into a major source of Qing revenue on account of the increasing Sino-foreign trade, was to be earmarked entirely for the payment of the Boxer indemnity. They knew that they could rely on the security of payment from this source, because the Qing MCS in 1901 was a foreign-managed organization and was likely so to continue in the foreseeable future. But more money was needed than the maritime customs collection. The revenue collected from several local regular customs and salt gabelles were also committed to pay the Boxer indemnity. These tax offices were transferred from the normal Qing system, to be placed under the oversight of the foreign MCS's Inspector General who, in 1901, was still Robert Hart.

The Boxer Protocol imposed additional infringements on Qing China's already seriously compromised sovereignty and administrative integrity. China sank further into the quagmire as a quasi-colony of the imperialist powers. The massive indemnity meant greater hardship on an already impoverished people and obliged the financially straitened Qing government to levy miscellaneous fees and taxes. When these highly damaging terms of the Boxer Protocol were presented to the empress dowager, she was only relieved that she did not find herself on the list of the guilty Qing officials, against whom the powers demanded punishment for their crime of supporting the Boxers. She was grateful that the victors did not force her to hand over power to her nephew Guangxu, who was still nominally the emperor. She therefore accepted the foreign-imposed peace terms willingly, stating that she was ready 'to win the good graces of the powers to the limit of China's material resources.' As regards any of the Boxers who might have survived and continued their agitations, she ordered their destruction without any equivocation. As long her own position was intact, she seemed to accept her role willingly as an instrument and tool of the foreign imperialists. After concluding the peace protocol in January 1902, the empress dowager returned with Emperor Guangxu to the Forbidden City, where she presided over two unprecedented receptions, one for the members of the foreign diplomatic corps, and another for their ladies, as gestures of reconciliation.

Russo-Japanese Hostilities

While all the other powers were withdrawing their invading armies, the Russians, pursuing their ambition to annex the whole of China's Northeast, refused to do so. They even managed to force the Chinese governor general there to sign a draft agreement that implied the Russian annexation of this region. When its terms became known, Britain, Japan, and America protested strongly against it. As a result, the Qing found the strength to resist its ratification. In April 1902, a Sino-Russian Agreement obliged the Russians to withdraw their troops within six months. When the time arrived, instead of withdrawing their forces, they put forward further demands, which the Qing regarded as unreasonable and with which they refused to comply. The Russians then decided to disregard China and negotiated with Japan. As an imperialist power straddling both Europe and Asia, Russia could make a deal with Japan, the rising East Asian empire, on sharing out some of the spoils in East Asia.

Japanese power had been growing steadily after the Sino-Japanese War in 1894. Her military expenditure in that war was more than paid for by the hefty indemnity of 230,000,000 taels of silver, the payment for which the impecunious Qing government had to borrow from European banks at a high rate of interest secured, as already noted, on the maritime customs revenue. The injection of this fund brought Japanese economic prosperity and allowed the country to go on the gold standard in 1897. To support her imperialist ambition, Japan had been rapidly building up her army and navy with huge increases in military expenditure. With so many other ambitious imperialist powers in East Asia competing for economic or territorial advantages, or both, to achieve her expansionist goal Japan had to play the game not only militarily, but also diplomatically, building alliances or making bilateral agreements so as to strengthen her hand against an opponent, or to neutralize a third party.

A veteran Japanese statesman, Ito Hirobumi, favoured a Russo-Japanese agreement, whereby Japan would recognize Russia's special position in China's Northeast, which the Japanese named Manchuria, in exchange for Russian recognition of Japan's special position in Korea. Other prominent Japanese politicians believed that Russia had to be stopped by military means, so they proceeded to strengthen Japan's military. With the memory still fresh of having to give up Liaodong on account of pressure from Russia, France, and Germany acting in concert, the Japanese would need an ally if they were to tackle Russia.

Britain appeared the most promising candidate because of her rivalry with Russia in Tibet and other parts of the world, and her objection to Russia's attempt to annex China's Northeast. If Japan needed Britain as an ally, would an alliance with Japan suit the British? With a global empire to defend, the British found their military resources stretched too thin if simultaneous military actions were required in different parts of the world. For example, between 1899 and 1902, with 250,000 troops tied down by the Boer War in South Africa, the British found themselves not in a position to take strong action against Russian aggression in East Asia, if they had so wished. Furthermore, Britain was concerned about the rapid rise of an aggressive

Germany as a rival in global imperialism. Although Japan was also a rapidly rising and imperialist nation, she was not competing for empire with the British globally. Consequently, Britain ended her 'splendid isolation' to sign, in January 1902, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance with Japan to counter Russian expansion in East Asia, to pre-empt a possible settlement between Russia and Japan along the lines proposed by Ito Hirobumi, to secure Japan's support for the treaty system in China, and to make up for any British military shortfall in Asia. For Japan, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had the advantage of isolating Russia, should she go to war against the latter. According to the terms of the alliance, Britain would be obliged to come to Japan's aid if another party joined the war on Russia's side. Another benefit of the alliance was British recognition of Japan's special position in Korea.

With Britain as an ally, in August 1903 the Japanese were able to negotiate with Russia from a position of strength. Although Russia would accept Japanese domination of Korea in exchange for Japanese recognition of Russian domination of Manchuria, Japan, using the preservation of China's integrity as a justification, would only accept Russia having rights along the railways developed by the Russians. As the negotiations stalled, the movement of 7,000 troops per month by the Russians into this region using the Trans-Siberian Railway prompted the suspicious Japanese to terminate the talks and torpedo the Russian fleet in Lushun on 8 February. On 10 February, Japan declared war against Russia.

The Qing declared neutrality. The weak court let its own territory, Liaodong, become the battlefield, where many innocent people suffered death and other disastrous consequences of a year-long war between the two foreign powers. Constantly outflanked by the Japanese on land, the Russians evacuated Shenyang (Mukden) to the north. Hoping to gain victory at sea, the Russians had despatched their Baltic fleet of a motley collection of 45 vessels in October 1904. They had to take the long route of rounding the Cape in Africa because the British would not let them through the Suez Canal. Finally, in the Spring of 1905, the fleet reached a safe haven in French Indochina before proceeding to Vladivostok. En route, it was waylaid by a Japanese fleet ready for battle at the Straits of Tsushima, where the Japanese sank 32 out of the 35 ships that got there. This naval battle effectively brought the Russo-Japanese War to an end. In the prevailing climate of racial consciousness, Japan's defeat of Russia, of a white power by an Asian one, was considered a remarkable feat. This striking victory made Japan a fully-fledged member of the imperialist club. Britain renewed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance for another five years, and this time the two powers agreed to join together to fight any third party, with India included in the area covered.

Through America's diplomatic efforts under President Theodore Roosevelt, Japan and Russia signed the Treaty of Portsmouth on 5 September 1905 that restored peace between them. This treaty gave the Russians a sphere of influence on the Liaodong peninsula, which included Lushun and Dalian, and the South Manchurian Railway built by Russia to Japan. It also recognized Japan's 'paramount interest' in Korea. It

awarded the southern half of Sakhalin to Japan, which was not able to extract an indemnity. In 1907, Japan and Russia secretly divided China's Northeast between them, with Russia taking the north and Japan the south, while they continued to declare themselves publicly as supporters of China's integrity, and America's 'Open Door' policy.

Late Qing Reforms, and Moves Towards a Constitution: The End of the Qing

After the dust of these wars settled, China was in an even deeper grip of imperialism. Although the country had survived outright partition, the powers intensified their encroachment, especially in connection with their spheres of influence. They coerced the Qing for railway rights inside their spheres of influence and vied with each other to build railways elsewhere in China. Within a certain distance from these railway lines the foreign power or powers concerned would normally obtain the right to exploit the natural resources, such as mining and logging. They also wrung from the Qing the right to transport and station troops. Foreign establishments controlled the production of over 90% of the coal from mechanized mines, and 100% of iron. In an age when railways became the new arteries of popular transportation and communication, it was easy to see that the power that controlled the railways of a given area effectively dominated that area.

To the educated Chinese, the ringing of the alarm bells that had alerted the Hundred Days of Reform in 1898 continued to ring even more loudly during the first decade of the twentieth century. Amid growing pressure for reform from the educated and local elites, the court introduced, from 1901 onwards, a limited number of new measures borrowed from Kang Youwei's programme, insisting that the changes it was making were orderly, while Kang's were disorderly.

These measures included abolishing the government examinations for official selection, setting up modern schools, sending students abroad, reorganizing the military, setting up a police force for maintaining public order, creating new government offices, promoting new Chinese industries, and preparing for a government constitution. To win its subjects' support, the Qing was willing to adjust some of its institutions, but not the essentially autocratic character of the regime. To ensure the powers' support, the Qing pointed out to them that the changes introduced should enhance friendly relations with them and help them to enjoy boundless benefits from China in perpetuity. The court also responded positively to foreign demands to lay down regulations to protect foreign investments in railways, mines, and other sectors in China. While the purpose

of Kang's reforms was to make China strong and prosperous to free her from foreign domination, those of the late Qing were aimed at keeping the Manchus in power.

Instead of strengthening the embattled dynasty, many of these measures produced the opposite results. Modernizing schools and sending students abroad bred revolutionaries. In military modernization, the Qing established local war boards in the provinces to train and equip with modern weapons a 'New Army' with 36 divisions of 12,500 men each. When it tried to bring this New Army under central and Manchu control, through establishing a new Ministry of War in 1906 with a Manchu official, Yinchang, at its head, the provincial ties, personal loyalty, and revolutionary ideology of the officers and men rendered central control difficult to achieve. This army did succeed in restoring Qing control of Tibet, but it would play a crucial part in toppling the dynasty in 1911.

In September 1906, the court proclaimed its willingness to prepare for a constitution, after the high officials it sent to Japan, Europe, and America to investigate the subject, in 1905, declared on their return that such a move would help the Qing to perpetuate the monarchy, and lessen internal disorder. The provincial elites, and some Chinese abroad, among whom were the famous reformers in exile, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, received the court's announcement with enormous excitement, and promptly proceeded to organize committees to prepare themselves for political participation. They became known as the constitutionalists, as they networked with one another inside and outside their provinces to pursue this goal actively. Since the abolition of the official examination in 1905 removed the traditional path for the educated to enter officialdom, a constitutional monarchy would open up a new route for them to become members of the ruling elites, through participating in the provincial assemblies, or as representatives of their provinces at the capital. Pointing to the ignorance of the people, and its own need to work out the regulations and institutions in connection with the introduction of a constitution, the court enjoined the public to accept some inevitable delay.

Nearly two years passed, owing to the lack of action on the part of the Qing on this matter, and in August 1908 the constitutionalists sent a joint petition to Beijing, urging the court to convene a National Assembly. In response, the court proclaimed its 'Outline of the Constitution', stating that the rule of the Qing emperor was sacred and supreme, and all powers of the government were to be concentrated in his hands. He controlled the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government, and the appointment of civil and military officials, together with the institutions and laws to govern them. He was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces with power to declare war, make peace, and sign treaties with foreign countries. He had the authority to convene, to close, and to dismiss the National Assembly, which had no authority to interfere in matters concerning the military, appointments, and foreign relations. Provincial Advisory

Bureaus were to be set up to take part in the preparation for the Constitution. The preparatory phase was to take nine years, at the end of which a National Assembly was to convene.

Not long after the court's pronouncement, on 13 November 1908 Emperor Guangxu died, ending his thirty-four years' reign as a figurehead. The day after, Empress Dowager Cixi, who had already celebrated her seventy-fourth birthday, also passed away. She had been the actual ruler of China for 44 years, during the reigns first of her son and then of her nephew. Before their deaths, she had already chosen, as Guangxu's successor, his three-year old stepbrother, Puyi, who was to rule as Emperor Xuantong (r. 1909-1911) upon Guangxu's death. Since Xuantong was a minor, his father, prince Chun, assumed power as the regent.

Wishing to win public support, prince Chun encouraged the speedy formation of Advisory Bureaus in the provinces and at the capital to continue the preparation for the constitution. Although the Qing 'Outline on the Constitution' said nothing about limiting the emperor's power, many of the provincial constitutionalists threw themselves into setting up advisory bureaus. They joined together to petition the Qing on three occasions, pressing the court to shorten the period for the preparation of the constitution, and to convene the National Assembly in 1911, when they expected the formation of a cabinet. The court agreed to convene the National Assembly in 1913, rather than the original plan of 1917. In May 1911, it announced the establishment of the Cabinet. This new office was composed of 13 members, 9 of whom were Manchu aristocrats, including 5 who were members of the imperial clan. It was dubbed the 'Imperial Cabinet'. Instead of limiting the power of the monarchy, and establishing a more broadly based government, the court used the constitutional movement to affirm its autocratic control and consolidate the power of the Manchus. The constitutionalists and other local powerholders felt cheated. They considered the Qing approach a violation of the principle of constitutional monarchy and demanded the court to form another cabinet. Upon the court's refusal, the Provincial Advisory Bureaus joined together to publish a 'Declaration to the Entire Country', in which they painfully admitted their 'utter despair of the Qing'.

The Qing dynasty was finally brought to an end in 1912 by Yuan Shikai, who forced Emperor Xuantong to abdicate, and his regent to resign. Yuan held the essential lever of power – the control of the entire Beiyang Army. He became president of a reunited Republican China but would soon reveal his preference for an imperial system.

References (for chapters 5, 6, and 7)

1. General sources:

A History of Chinese Civilization by Jacques Gernet (English Edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, second edition 1996), chapters 22-29.

The Search for a Modern China by Jonathan D. Spence (W. W. Norton & Company, New York and London, 1990), chapters 2-11.

East Asia: The Modern Transformation by Edwin O. Reischauer, John K. Fairbank, and Albert M. Craig (George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1965).

China: A History Volume 1 From Neolithic Cultures through the Great Qing Empire 10,000 BCE – 1799 CE by Harold M. Tanner (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2010), chapter 11.

2. The Taiping:

The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire by Thomas H. Reilly (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2014).

The Taiping Revolutionary Movement by Jen Yu-Wen (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1973).

3. The Chinese Maritime Customs Service:

The Chinese Maritime Customs Service in the Transition from the Ch'ing to the Nationalist Era: An Examination of the Relationship between a Western-style Fiscal Institution and Chinese Government in the Period Before the Manchurian Incident by Jean Aitchison (Thesis, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1983).

4. Aspects of the British Empire in Asia:

Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World by Niall Ferguson (Penguin group, London, 2004).