

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



Challenge and Transition in East Asia, 1800–1914

Lesson 1 The Decline of the Qing Dynasty

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How can new ideas accelerate economic and political change? How do cultures influence each other?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

highlighted centered attention on

exclusive limited to a single individual or group

Content Vocabulary

extraterritoriality living in a section of a country set aside for foreigners but not subject to the host country's laws

self-strengthening a policy promoted by reformers toward the end of the Qing dynasty under which China would adopt Western technology while keeping its Confucian values and institutions

spheres of influence areas in which foreign powers have been granted exclusive rights and privileges, such as trading rights and mining privileges

Open Door policy a policy, proposed by U.S. secretary of state John Hay in 1899, that stated all powers with spheres of influence in China would respect equal trading opportunities with China and not set tariffs giving an unfair advantage to the citizens of their own country

indemnity payment for damages

TAKING NOTES: *Comparing and Contrasting*

ACTIVITY As you read, create a chart like the one below to compare and contrast the Tai Ping and Boxer Rebellions.

	Tai Ping	Boxer
Reforms Demanded		
Method Used		
Outcomes		

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Challenge and Transition in East Asia, 1800–1914

Lesson 1 The Decline of the Qing Dynasty, *continued*

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

China wanted to keep its culture free of Western influences. However, the Qing government grew weak. Foreign countries moved into China and set up trading posts. The Chinese tried to fight off outside influences, but they did not succeed. As a result, the imperial government was weakened even more.

Causes of Decline

Guiding Question *What factors influenced the decline of the Qing Empire?*

After a long period of peace and prosperity, the Qing dynasty of the Manchus was at the high point of its power in 1800. A little more than a century later, the Qing dynasty collapsed after harassment and humiliation by Western powers.

There were several causes for the decline of the Qing dynasty. One reason was the strong pressure that Western countries put on Chinese society. Internal problems were another cause.

After a long period of growth, the Qing dynasty began to suffer from corruption, peasant unrest, and incompetence of the bureaucracy, or unskilled public officials. The rapid growth in the country's population made these problems worse. There were 400 million people in China by 1900. Population growth created a serious food shortage. By the 1850s, a large number of Chinese people were dying from starvation every year.

The ships, guns, and ideas of foreigners **highlighted**, or put the focus on, the growing weakness of the Qing dynasty. In fact, these outside influences probably helped speed up the dynasty's end.

By 1800, Europeans had been in contact with China for more than 200 years. But the Qing dynasty wanted to limit contact with outsiders. European merchants were restricted to a small trading post at Guangzhou (GWAHNG•JOH), or Canton. The merchants were allowed to deal with only a few Chinese businesses. The British did not like this situation.

Britain had a trade deficit, or an unfavorable balance of trade, with China. That is, Britain imported more goods from China than it exported to China. Britain imported tea, silk, and porcelain from China. It exported Indian cotton to China. In the end, Britain had to pay China with silver for the difference in cost between its imports and its exports. At first, the British tried to negotiate with the Chinese to improve the trade imbalance. The British were not able to make a deal with the Chinese. The British turned to trading opium—a highly addictive drug—with China.

The Opium War

The British East India Company sponsored the growing of opium in northern India. It then shipped the opium directly to Chinese markets. Demand for opium in South China greatly increased. Soon, the balance of trade changed to favor the British. Silver from China went into the pockets of the officials of the British East India Company.

The Chinese were angry and reacted strongly. They asked the British government to stop the traffic in opium. They based their request on moral grounds, or principles of right and wrong. Lin Zexu, a Chinese government official, wrote to Queen Victoria, the ruler of Great Britain. He asked her to consider how she would feel if a foreign country sent opium to Britain and her people.

The British refused to stop selling opium to China. As a result, the Chinese blockaded the foreign area in Guangzhou. They forced traders to give up their opium. The British responded with force, starting the Opium War (1839–1842).

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Lesson 1 The Decline of the Qing Dynasty, *continued*

The Chinese were no match for the British. British warships destroyed Chinese forts on the coast and along rivers. When a British fleet sailed almost unopposed up the Chang Jiang (Yangtze River) to Nanjing, the Qing dynasty made peace.

In the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, the Chinese agreed to open five coastal ports to British trade. They limited taxes on imported British goods and paid for the costs of the war. China also agreed to give the British the island of Hong Kong. The opium trade was not mentioned in the treaty.

Moreover, in the five ports open to British trade, the Europeans lived in their own sections. They did not have to obey Chinese laws, a practice known as **extraterritoriality**.

After the Opium War, Western influence grew in China. The Chinese dealt with the problem by trying to make the foreign countries fight against one another over trade. Concessions granted to the British were offered to other Western nations, including the United States. Soon, busy foreign areas were operating in the five ports open to foreigners along the south Chinese coast.

The Tai Ping Rebellion

In the meantime, the Chinese government failed to deal with internal economic problems. This failure led to a peasant revolt, known as the Tai Ping (TIE PING) Rebellion (1850–1864). It was led by Hong Xiuquan, a Christian convert who viewed himself as a younger brother of Jesus.

Hong believed that God wanted him to destroy the Qing dynasty. Joined by large crowds of peasants, Hong captured the town of Yongan. He proclaimed a new dynasty, the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace (in Chinese, *Tai Ping Tianguo*—which is why this was called the *Tai Ping Rebellion*).

In March 1853 the rebels seized Nanjing, the second largest city of the empire. They massacred 25,000 men, women, and children. The revolt continued for 10 more years but gradually began to fall apart. Europeans realized how destructive Tai Ping forces were. They helped the Qing dynasty fight against them. A British visitor noted that the rebels would never cause any positive change and that all they did was to burn, murder, and destroy.

Chinese forces, with European aid, recaptured Nanjing in 1864, and they destroyed the remaining rebel force. The Tai Ping Rebellion was one of the most devastating civil wars in history. As many as 20 million people died during the 14-year struggle.

As a result of the continuing struggle with the West, the Qing dynasty was not able to deal well with problems inside the country. Beginning in 1856 the British and the French used force to gain greater trade privileges. As a result of the Treaty of Tianjin in 1858, the Chinese agreed to make the opium trade legal and to open new ports to foreign trade. They also surrendered, or gave up, the Kowloon Peninsula to Great Britain.

Efforts at Reform

By the late 1870s the Qing dynasty was in decline. Chinese government troops were unable to restore order on their own. As a result, they relied on forces gathered by local military leaders, or warlords, to help fight the Tai Ping rebellion. The warlords had collected taxes from local people to finance their armies. After the revolt, many of these warlords kept their armies.

In its weakened state, the Qing rulers finally began to listen to the requests of officials who wanted reform. The reformers called for a new policy, which it called “**self-strengthening**.” This meant that China should adopt Western technology but keep its Confucian values and institutions.

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Challenge and Transition in East Asia, 1800–1914

Lesson 1 The Decline of the Qing Dynasty, *continued*

Some reformers wanted to change China's long-existing political institutions. They wanted to introduce democracy. However, such ideas were too radical for most reformers. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Chinese government tried to modernize China's military forces. They also tried to build industry without changing the basic elements of Chinese civilization. Railroads, weapons factories, and shipyards were built. The Chinese value system remained the same.



Reading Progress Check

Analyzing Information Why do you think the Qing dynasty wanted to limit contact with foreign nations?

The Advance of Imperialism

Guiding Question *Why were spheres of influence established in China?*

In the end, the changes in China did not keep the Qing in power. The European advance into China continued during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Internal conditions also continued to deteriorate, or grow worse.

Mounting Pressures

In the north and northeast, Russia took advantage of the Qing dynasty's weakness. Russia forced China to give up territories north of the Amur River in Siberia. In Tibet, the struggle between Russia and Great Britain kept both powers from seizing the territory outright. This allowed Tibet to become free from Chinese influence.

Even more troubling changes were taking place in the Chinese heartland. European states began to create **spheres of influence**, or areas where the European powers had exclusive trading rights. After the Tai Ping Rebellion, warlords in the provinces began to negotiate directly with foreign nations. In return for money, the warlords granted these nations **exclusive** trading rights. They also allowed them to build railroads and mines. In this way, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan all established spheres of influence in China.

In 1894 another blow contributed to the downfall of the Qing dynasty. The Chinese went to war with Japan. The Japanese had made contacts and trade agreements with Korea. Korea had been under Chinese control for a long time. The Chinese were badly defeated in the war. Japan demanded and received the island of Taiwan and the Liaodong (LYOW•DOONG) Peninsula. European nations feared Japan's growing power. They forced Japan to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China.

New pressures for Chinese territory soon arose. In 1897 Chinese rioters murdered two German missionaries. Germany used this event as an excuse to demand that China give territories in the Shandong (SHON•DOONG) Peninsula to it. The Chinese government agreed to the demand. As a result, other European nations made new claims on Chinese territory.

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



Challenge and Transition in East Asia, 1800–1914

Lesson 1 The Decline of the Qing Dynasty, *continued*

Internal Crisis

While European countries rushed to claim territory, China faced an internal crisis. In June 1898 the young emperor Guang Xu (GWANG SHYOO) started a huge reform program. He used changes made in Japan as a model. The following weeks were known as the One Hundred Days of Reform. The emperor issued edicts, or formal orders, calling for major political, administrative, and educational reforms. Guang Xu intended to modernize the government bureaucracy by following Western models. He planned to establish a new education system that would replace the long-existing civil service examinations. He also would adopt Western-style schools, banks, and a free press. In addition, Guang Xu planned to train the military to use modern weapons and Western fighting methods.

Many conservatives opposed these reforms. They saw no advantage in copying the West. Conservatives feared that the introduction of foreign ideas and institutions would lead to disorder, not improvement. In their view, China's old ways needed to be reformed—not rejected in favor of Western changes.

The most effective opposition came from Empress Dowager Ci Xi (TSUH•SEE), the emperor's aunt. Ci Xi became a dominant force at court. With the aid of the imperial army, she eventually imprisoned the emperor. Other supporters of the reforms were imprisoned, exiled, or prosecuted. Guang Xu's reforms were ended. Guang Xu's efforts had limited support within Chinese society overall.



Reading Progress Check

Drawing Conclusions Why did Guang Xu's reforms fail to achieve the modernization of the government and military?

Responses to Imperialism

Guiding Question *What were the responses to imperialism in China?*

Foreign pressure on the Qing dynasty grew stronger. Both Great Britain and the United States feared that other nations would take control of the country if the Chinese government collapsed.

Opening the Door to China

In 1899 U.S. secretary of state John Hay wrote to Britain, Russia, Germany, France, Italy, and Japan. Hay made a proposal that ensured all nations equal access to the Chinese market. In addition, it preserved, or kept safe, the unity of the Chinese empire. None of the governments of the nations expressed opposition to the idea. Hay then announced that all major countries with economic interests in China had agreed to his proposal. China would have an Open Door policy.

Reading Essentials and Study Guide

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Challenge and Transition in East Asia, 1800–1914

Lesson 1 The Decline of the Qing Dynasty, *continued*

In part, the **Open Door policy** reflected American concern for China’s survival. It also reflected the interests of some U.S. trading companies. These companies wanted to operate in open markets, in which all countries could trade. They disliked the existing division of China into spheres of influence controlled by individual countries.

The Open Door policy did not end spheres of influence. However, it did reduce the limits placed on foreign imports by the dominant power within each sphere. The Open Door policy also reduced imperialist panic over access to the China market. The policy reduced fears in Britain, France, Germany, and Russia that one power would try to dominate the China market for itself. With this policy, there was less chance that other powers would take advantage of China’s weakness.

The Boxer Rebellion

The Open Door policy came too late to stop the Boxer Rebellion in China. Members of a secret organization called the Society of Harmonious Fists also were called *Boxers*. Members practiced a system of exercise called shadowboxing, in which they boxed with an imaginary opponent. They believed the use of this system would keep them from being hurt.

The Boxers were upset by China’s economic problems and by the foreign takeover of Chinese lands. They wanted to push foreigners out of China. Their slogan was “destroy the foreigner.” They especially disliked Christian missionaries and Chinese converts to Christianity. These people seemed to threaten Chinese traditions. At the beginning of 1900, Boxer bands roamed the countryside and murdered foreign missionaries and Chinese Christians. Their victims also included foreign businesspeople and even the German government representative to Beijing.

Western powers immediately responded to the killings. An allied army of 20,000 British, French, German, Russian, American, and Japanese troops attacked Beijing in August 1900. The army restored order. Then the countries demanded more concessions from the Chinese government. The Chinese government was forced to pay a heavy **indemnity**, or fee for damages, to the powers that had crushed the uprising. The imperial government was now weaker than ever.



Reading Progress Check

Drawing Conclusions Did the Boxer Rebellion do anything to reduce the foreign presence in China? Explain your answer.
