

initially good crops resulted from the virgin soil. The deforestation, however, produced a more rapid run-off of water, contributing to the disastrous floods of the nineteenth century. Chinese farmers traditionally relied on human excrement to replenish the soil. In the new areas this was not available in sufficient quantity. Soil impoverishment was the result, and from this, increasing famine resulted. China, on a far vaster scale, faced the problems of Ireland, in the same period. The demographic crisis was bound eventually to lead to a social and political crisis.

In science and medicine, China once so superior to the west, was slipping behind. In 1793, the Emperor Qianlong's favourite, He Shen, and the most powerful official in the Empire, was plagued by pains and illness. His Chinese doctors blamed a spirit which shifted from place to place in his flesh. Macartney's Scottish doctor, Hugh Gillan, put it down to rheumatism and a serious hernia. He recommended a truss.

CONCLUSION

There could be little doubt in the minds of the few European visitors to China that they were encountering a very old and impressive civilisation. Its cities still dwarfed those of Europe and the range of its products still hinted at fabled wealth. Contacts, still largely limited to Canton in the south, encouraged an air of mystery and romance and hid the very real weaknesses which over the next hundred years were to become all too apparent.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- 1 In what ways did the physical geography of China make possible extensive food production and commerce?
- 2 In what ways did Chinese writing and Confucian Ideas help to maintain the unity of China?
- 3 Which social customs indicated the inferior status of women in China?
- 4 In what ways might Qing China in the eighteenth century be regarded as a successful and impressive state?

10 China: 1900–1976

DYNASTIC TIMELINE

Xia c2200–1750 BC
 Shang c1600–c1100 BC
 Zhou c1100–256 BC
 Qin c221–206 BC
 Han c202 BC–AD 220
 Period of Disunion c220–589
 Sui 589–618
 Tang 618–960
 Period of Disunion 907–960
 Song 960–1127
 Jin in north and Song in South 1127–1234
 Yuan 1279–1368
 Ming 1368–1644
 Qing 1644–1912

CHAPTER 2

The last years and fall of the Qing Dynasty

INTRODUCTION

On 12th February 1912, the six-year old Xuantung Emperor, whose personal name was Puyi, peacefully abdicated, surrendering the throne of his ancestors. China became a republic. In theory, it was the end of Imperial China. In both theory and reality, it was the end of the Qing Dynasty which had ruled since 1644. Like most important events it was the product of a complex mix of circumstances and deep-seated causes. Very few Chinese doubted that the dynasty had lost the Mandate of Heaven.

THE IMPACT OF THE WEST

Nationalist Chinese writers and even some Western historians have often stressed as the prime cause of decline the humiliations heaped on China by the European powers and Japan. The starting point for this is usually taken to be the so-called **Opium War** with Britain in 1839–42. Lord Macartney's embassy had asked for extended trading rights and permanent representation in Beijing by a British diplomat; in other words, the setting up of an embassy. All his demands were rejected. China and her officials had no sense of equality between nations. There was the Son of Heaven in Beijing and there were tributary states. They could see no point in a permanent British diplomatic representative. Until 1815, Britain was too busy with the French Revolution and Napoleon to take the matter further. In 1816, a second mission was dispatched to Beijing. Britain as in 1793 was in keen competition with Dutch merchants from the Dutch East Indies. It was not even received. Trade remained limited to Canton and had to be conducted through a group of thirteen licensed merchants, the Cohong.

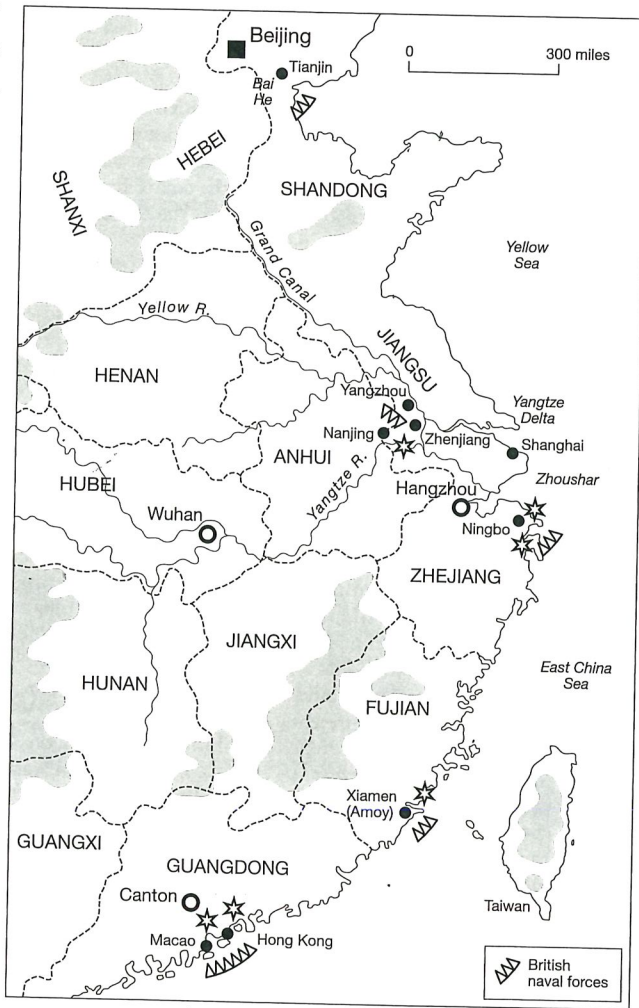
There were also disputes over the application of Chinese law to foreigners. The principles and practice of law in the Chinese Empire seemed very different from that of Europe. In 1784, a British sailor who had accidentally

KEY EVENT

The **Opium War** was a clear demonstration of how weak China had become *vis à vis* the advanced nations of Europe. Sporadic fighting began around Canton in 1839, but the main British fleet did not arrive till June 1840. Instead of attacking Canton, it moved north to the mouth of the Yangtze and then north to the Dagu forts guarding the approaches to Tiajin and Beijing. Negotiations began and a compromise peace was arranged which was rejected by both British Foreign Minister Palmerston and the Emperor. Fresh British reinforcements arrived from India in 1842 and Shanghai was captured and Nanjing threatened. This produced peace on British terms.

The last years and fall of the Qing Dynasty 11

killed a Chinese boatman in firing a salute had been handed over to the Chinese authorities for justice and had been strangled. The memory of this still rankled on British ships and among British merchants and sailors.



The Opium War, 1839-42

The British were anxious to extend their trade and force China into what they saw as a more modern and open relationship. By the 1830s, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, was prepared for tough action.

The Chinese authorities had their own growing problems arising from foreign trade. Imports of opium for non-medical use had been repeatedly banned by the Chinese authorities throughout the eighteenth century, and the British East India Company respected this but private traders did not. Imports grew rapidly in the 1820s and 1830s causing both social problems and a drain of silver. In 1838, the Emperor decided to prohibit the trade in opium. He dispatched the jinshi holding official, Lin Zexu, to implement it. Three million pounds of raw opium were seized in 1839. Mixed with water, salt and lime, they were flushed into the sea. What the effects on marine life were is not recorded, but prayers were offered urging all creatures to move away. Some British merchants were imprisoned. As a result of intensive lobbying of the government in London by the merchants in Canton, an expedition of 16 warships, four newly armed steamers and 4,000 troops were dispatched to Canton to make China enter the modern commercial world. Initially, the Chinese ruling elite underestimated the power of the British:

The English barbarians are an insignificant and detestable race, trusting entirely to their strong ships and large guns: but the immense distance they have traversed will render the arrival of seasonal supplies impossible and their soldiers after a single defeat, being deprived of provisions will become dispirited and lost.

(A mandarin's report to the Emperor before the conflict)

The war exposed the technological backwardness of China. Their war junks were no match for armed steamers and modern cannon. Monkeys armed with primitive bombs were encouraged to hop on to the British ships but often returned to their Chinese hosts with bombs intact. The banning of the export of rhubarb was conceived as a war winning strategy, the Chinese being under the impression that the British had a fatal propensity to constipation. This did not bring Britain to

her knees and, in June 1842, the British captured Shanghai and then moved up the Yangtze halting all traffic on the Grand Canal. The result was the humiliating Treaty of Nanjing. Five Chinese cities, including Shanghai, were to be open to British merchants and Hong Kong Island was to be transferred to the sovereignty of the British crown. China agreed to pay compensation for damages suffered by British merchants and to accept Britain as an equal in terms of diplomacy.

In 1844 the Americans and the French extracted new treaties extending their trading rights. Shanghai became a symbol of the new relationship with a rapid expansion of trade and a thriving foreign community of merchants, particularly British. Here they created, at the centre of a Chinese community, a part of England, with an Anglican Church and an English Public School. In 1855, 437 foreign ships entered the port and the numbers continued to grow.

The second Anglo-Chinese War

Fresh conflicts continued to grow. The British attempted to extend commercial access, particularly inland up the Yangtze. Piracy and law and order remained an issue and the original demand of Lord Macartney for a permanent ambassador in Beijing had not been met. The chance to press these aims came late in 1856, following the **Arrow incident**. This time the British struck close to Beijing seizing the Dagu Forts and threatening to take the strategic port and city of Tianjin. A fresh treaty was conceded by the Emperor's representative official, giving the British most of what they wanted. It amounted to an abandonment of Chinese sovereignty over various ports as British warships could enter any Chinese port in pursuit of pirates. Symbolically, the Qing Emperor was to receive a British ambassador in Beijing and stop using the character (yi) to describe the British. 'Yi' meant alien. This was too much for the Emperor who refused to ratify the treaty. After further hard fighting and initial defeat, a British force reinforced by the French, marched on Beijing. The Emperor's summer palace in the suburbs of the city was burned down. The Emperor, duly chastened, now accepted the 1858 treaty with even greater concessions than in the original Treaty of Tianjin. A

KEY EVENTS

The **Arrow incident** was the seizure by the Chinese authorities in Canton of a vessel registered in Hong Kong, and therefore technically British. In reality, its registration documents were out of date and the Chinese Mandarin responsible was in the right. This did not stop the new British government of Lord Palmerston pressing the quarrel and, when defeated in the House of Commons on a debate, holding and winning a general election. The British public approved of a vigorous policy and the Mandarin was seized and exiled to India.

KEY EVENT

The Treaty of Tianjin (1858/60)

allowed the establishment of western embassies in the capital, gave the British access up the Yangtze to Hankow and allowed missionaries and others the opportunity to travel freely.

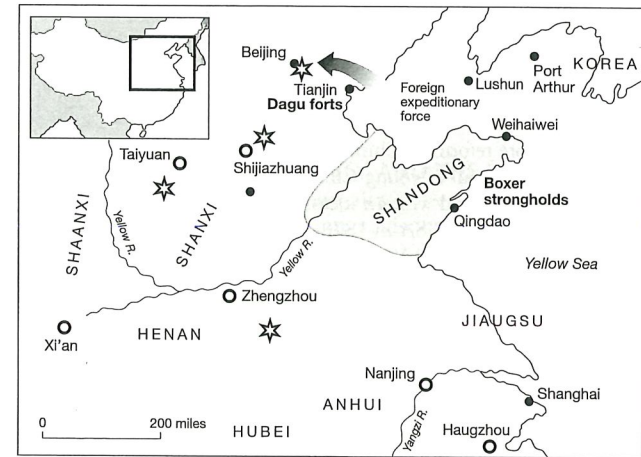
contemporary British comment makes clear the importance of the war and the subsequent treaty:

By this war we have practically opened out the trade of the Yangtze River, whence a vastly increased commerce is to be expected. We have inflicted a severe blow upon the pride of the Hsien-feng Emperor that the whole face of Chinese politics and our relations with that country must change, before he will dare insult our flag or obstruct our commerce.

(Lt Col G J Wolseley)

One result of this second Anglo-Chinese War was the establishment of a Chinese foreign ministry, the Zongli Yamen, dominated by the Emperor's uncle, Prince Gong.

By the 1860s, the influence of foreigners began to increase as contact between them and the Chinese elite and Chinese merchants increased. There was an increasing need to learn foreign languages and language schools were opened in many of the major ports. In Beijing the original language school developed into a fully fledged western-style college in 1867. Such developments inevitably excited opposition. One mandarin argued that the contemporary drought was a direct result of the



Boxer rising and foreign response

opening of the new college. Heaven was showing its disapproval.

The establishment of missionaries

Perhaps the greatest resentment was directed against missionaries, whose scale of operations had been extended by the treaty of 1860, which gave them freedom to travel throughout the Empire. They and their converts were often persecuted and sometimes killed. Besides many Catholic missionaries who looked to France for protection, there were many Protestant ones from Britain and the USA. These Christians displayed a tendency to baptise children and in particular sick and dying children, of which there were many. The burial of these led to a widespread belief that Christians used body parts in witchcraft. Small corpses were dug up from Christian burial grounds and used to demonstrate the wickedness of the west. It was against the Catholics who had built a large church in Tianjin that one of the most dramatic of anti-Christian outbursts took place. Sixteen French missionaries including ten nuns, who were first stripped, were killed by an angry crowd in 1870. The French government demanded punishment of the guilty and 16 Chinese were duly executed by the Chinese authorities.

This was no more than a small hiccup in the process. The missionaries continued to pour in, opening schools and, most welcomed by the Chinese at all levels, hospitals. Missionaries and their schools were to have considerable influence on the China of the twentieth century. Chinese pupils often became imbued with western ideas and the need to promote reform in China. Charlie Soong was one of the most successful of young Chinese men who embraced the west and western ideas. Born in southern China, he went to the USA in 1878 and, after various jobs, trained as a missionary and returned to China in 1886. He found selling bibles to other missionaries more profitable than preaching and from this, and later the factory production of noodles, made a fortune. He used part of his wealth to fund revolutionary activities and his three daughters and son were major figures in twentieth-century Chinese politics. The enemy to these reformers usually appeared to be the Confucian gentry, who were often behind the mobs that attacked missions and their converts.

KEY TERM

Tributary status The Chinese emperors had long claimed a general overlordship with regard to North Vietnam and Korea. While being left for the most part to govern themselves, their rulers on accession sent gifts to Beijing and sought approval of their rule.

THE LOSS OF THE TRIBUTARY STATES

A further clash with France developed in the 1880s, over the French consolidation of its hold on Vietnam. Traditionally, Vietnam like Korea occupied a **tributary status** with regard to Imperial China. The rulers of both Vietnam in the south and Korea in the north recognised the lordship if not the direct rule of the Emperor in Beijing. The French brutally severed any link, destroying a Chinese fleet in Fuzhou in August 1884, in the process. Five Frenchmen and 521 Chinese men died.

In 1894 Qing China suffered a serious humiliation over the other tributary state, Korea, and this time at the hands of an Asiatic power, Japan. Japan, newly reformed and invigorated, was anxious to extend its influence into Korea at China's expense. A rebellion in Korea against the monarchy there led both powers to rush in troops.

A ship carrying Chinese reinforcements was sunk by a Japanese cruiser and for good measure Japanese forces crossed into Chinese territory proper, seizing the port of Lushun in Manchuria and even the Shandong peninsula near to Beijing itself. The Treaty of Shimoneseke was more humiliating than that of Nanjing in 1842. China abandoned Korea and even ports in China to Japan. The treaty elicited protests from the elite. Gathered in Beijing for the prestigious Jinshi examination, China's most brilliant Confucian scholars demonstrated against the treaty and demanded reform. The Qing Dynasty was beginning to totter.

LOSS OF SOVEREIGNTY AND THE BOXER RISING

In 1898 and 1899, China almost seemed on the point of partition between the imperialist powers. The Russians who had forced the Japanese out of some of their gains, notably the port of Lushun, now occupied much of Manchuria and Lushun, renaming it Port Arthur. The Germans occupied a port in the Shandong peninsula and the British, not to be outdone and to stop anyone else having it took Weihaiwei. They also extended their hold on the south by extracting a 99-year lease on the Kowloon Peninsula to the north of Hong Kong. The French also seized territory in the south. The Qing

government seemed helpless and unable to defend Chinese sovereignty.

In this situation, popular feeling in north-east China erupted into what became known as the Boxer Rising. Tension had been growing for some time over western missionaries and their Christian converts. In the spring of 1900 isolated incidents coalesced into a mass frenzy of anti-western outrage. It was fuelled by a mixture of primitive magical beliefs and outraged Han pride. Railways which were spreading in the north were thought to disturb dragons, and telegraph wires which dripped rusty water after rain were regarded as sources of poison. Europeans and even those Chinese in possession of dangerous foreign objects such as clocks were killed. Such events were to be repeated during the Cultural Revolution of 1966, which was marked by similar xenophobic lunacy.

Mobs from the countryside spread to Tianjin and Beijing. The German ambassador was shot and Europeans retreated to the British legation (embassy) to withstand a siege. The Empress Dowager Cixi in control of the Qing court threw her support behind the Boxers, in effect declaring war on the west. It was popular but hopeless. In August 1900, an international force advanced on Beijing and relieved the legation. The Qing court fled to Xi'an far to the west, leaving the veteran mandarin Li Hongzhang to negotiate peace. Massive damages were extracted, which amounted to nearly twice the annual revenue of the state. Here was a crippling burden comparable to the reparations later to be heaped on Germany at the end of the First World War and, like those forced payments, these on China produced a similar reaction of outraged bitterness and nationalism.

18 China: 1900–1976

KEY EVENT

The Boxer Rising (1900) took its name from the participants' self-adopted name – the Boxers United in Righteousness. Many were members of secret societies practising martial arts. Its ranks were largely filled with poor young peasants. There were some women among them known as the Red Lanterns Shining.



The Empress Dowager Cixi

THE NATIONALIST BACKLASH

Sixty years of repeated defeats had elicited an incoherent and doomed protest in the form of the Boxer Rising. In the early years of the twentieth century, they began to bring about a genuine nationalist movement among the educated elite, which was to be the driving force of change throughout twentieth-century China. Initially, hostility to the west among some of the educated Confucian gentry was an ostrich-like ignoring of all things western, but others came to see that this was a recipe for further humiliations. Japan provided a model of a more effective way to react. Japan had been forced to open her doors to western traders in the 1850s. In 1867–68, this shock produced a transformation in these islands lying so close to the Chinese mainland. The Meiji Emperor became the figure-head for reform. The only way to compete with and survive the western challenge was to embrace western technology and various aspects of western government and society. The Japanese took what they perceived to be the most powerful European models. Their army was to be like that of Prussia, their navy modelled on Britain. Yet change was wrapped in a conservative garb headed by the venerable figure of the Emperor, who, it was claimed, was now restored to power in place of the Shogun. For China, the deadly fall-out of this process was the brutal defeat in Korea in 1894. Japan had joined the ranks of the predators.

Increasingly, many younger members of the scholarly class drew the conclusion that China should take Japan's path of reform. One of the youngest and most strident was Zou Rong. He had studied in Japan and came to believe that only with the destruction of the Qing Dynasty could China be saved. He appealed in a book, *The Revolutionary Army*, published in 1903, to Han resentment of the ruling Manchu and detestation of the western 'foreign devils'. His book was used and distributed widely by an even more famous nationalist, Sun Yat-sen. Like many Chinese nationalists, Sun had spent much time abroad. Such years in exile led to reflection on Qing China and also a heightened sense of what it was to be Chinese.

KEY PEOPLE

Zou Rong (1885–1905) was a remarkably influential figure for one so young. He published his book *The Revolutionary Army* at 18 and died in prison just before his twentieth birthday.

The last years and fall of the Qing Dynasty 19

There was a growing number of nationalist protests in the first decade of the twentieth century. There were protests against the Russians in Mongolia and Manchuria, against the latest threat from the British in Tibet and, most dramatic of all, extensive outrage at US immigration restrictions and mistreatment of Chinese visitors to the World Fair in St. Louis. In June 1905, this outrage led to the declaration of a total boycott of American goods by Chinese merchants in many of the most important ports. It was to last until September.

The attitude to Japan was one of ambivalence, particularly after 1905, when for the first time an Asiatic country inflicted defeat on a European power. Japan's victory over Russia in that year, in particular at the former Chinese port of Lushun (Port Arthur), sent a pleasant shiver of anticipation through the politically conscious young in China. If Japan could do it, perhaps China could do it to her tormentors, if she fully embraced reform. Thousands flocked to Japan for education. One of these was so outraged by a photograph he saw there of the execution in 1894 of a Chinese prisoner that he gave up the study of medicine to devote himself to the transformation of China. His pen name was Lu Xun.

THE INTERNAL CRISIS IN CHINA

Even without foreign pressure and humiliation, China faced growing and probably insoluble internal problems. At the root of these lay the population explosion of the eighteenth century (see Chapter 1, page 9).

A further economic crisis developed from the growing addiction to opium and its purchase from foreigners. Apart from the social damage, serious economic problems developed as a result of the out-flow of silver from China (9 million taels per annum by the 1830s). This produced a serious silver shortage which damaged internal commerce.

The last years of the Qianlong emperor also saw mounting corruption on the part of officials. At the centre was the Emperor's favourite, He Shen, who took bribes on a massive scale, skimming off his take from other officials who then replicated the process with their juniors. It spread down the hierarchy to the lowest village

KEY PEOPLE

Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) is considered by many as the father figure of modern China. He trained as a doctor in Hong Kong and then became involved in anti-Qing activities, trying to promote a revolt in 1895. He fled to Europe and was kidnapped in London by the Imperial Chinese government. In 1905, he organised the Revolutionary Alliance devoted to the overthrow of the Qing and the establishment of a republic. He became a hero to radical Chinese reformers. He was partly funded by Charlie Soong, whose daughter he married.

KEY PERSON

Lu Xun (1881–1936) is generally considered the most important Chinese writer of the twentieth century. He devoted himself to satirising traditional Chinese culture. His first book, *Diary of a Madman*, was published in 1918. He never joined the Communist Party but was held in high regard and was praised by Mao Zedong.

KEY EVENT

The **Taiping Rebellion (1851–64)** has been described as the greatest rebellion in world history and killed up to 20 million people – more than the First World War in Europe. It is testament to the infinite lunacy of the human imagination. Its leaders were drawn from the ethnic minority Hakka group of southern China.

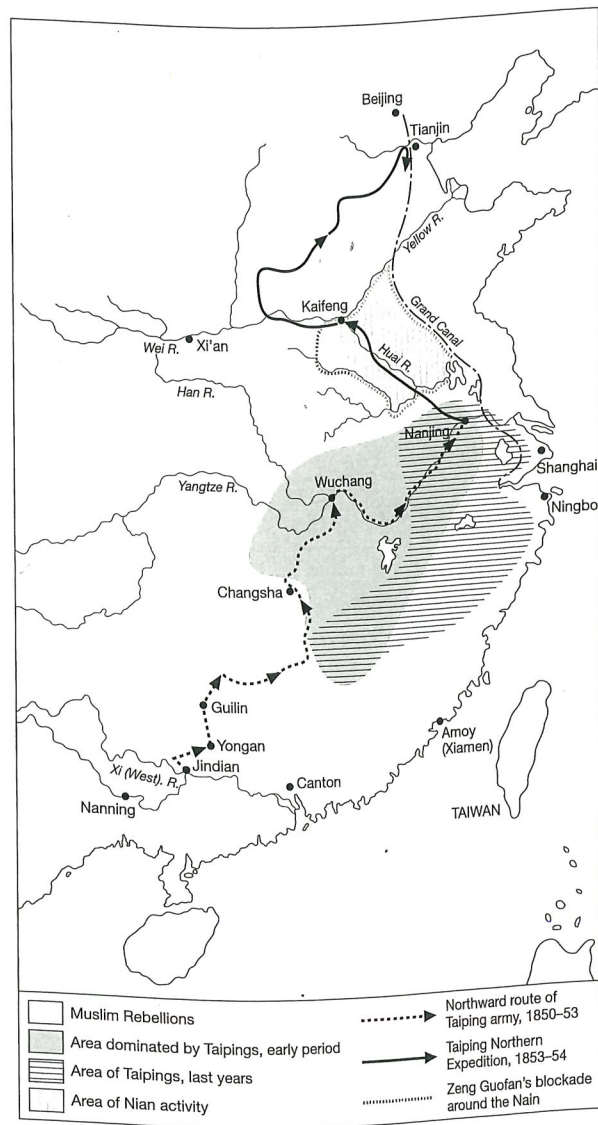
and town level. When the Qianlong emperor died in 1799, his successor forced He Shen to commit suicide. He was found to be holding millions of taels of silver, equivalent to two years' revenue of the entire realm. Despite his death, corruption remained endemic, and the central government failed to extract the taxes that its predecessors had been able to do. This was to be a serious weakness in resisting the challenges of foreigners.

Rebellions of the nineteenth century

Population pressure, governmental financial weakness and corruption came together to produce a series of spectacular rebellions against the Qing authority. Traditionally, this had always been a sign of dynasties losing the Mandate of Heaven. The problem was present in the latter years of the Qianlong emperor, facing what became known as the White Lotus Rebellion between 1796 and 1804. Like so many such rebellions, it was partly inspired by religious mysticism, in this case Buddhist. It clearly exposed weaknesses in the Qing state costing a hundred million taels to suppress, and showing the incapacities of the military organisation.

The greatest of all the rebellions was the **Taiping Rebellion** of 1851–64, which threatened the very existence of the Qing Empire. Like so many would-be revolutionaries in all countries, its founder and leader, Hong Xiuquan, had suffered deep personal disappointment. He had failed in the scholar examinations. In compensation, he had hallucinations of ascending into heaven and being told by the Christian God to exterminate demons. He came to believe that he was the younger son of Jesus. The demons came to be associated with the Manchu regime in Beijing and he and his southern associates spread their message further north to the Yangtze valley, offering a mix of religious mysticism and political and social reform.

The great city of Nanjing was captured and renamed Heavenly Capital. Power was divided among various commanders, each taking the title of king. Hong took the title of Heavenly King, but the most militarily effective was Yang Xiuqing, the Eastern King, who claimed to speak as the Holy Ghost. Dissension



Areas of rebellion in the nineteenth century

KEY TERM

Banner armies were the traditional military organisation of the Manchu, dating back to the seventeenth century. Fighting tribesmen and their families were divided into eight banners - plain yellow, white, blue and red and the same colours with borders. Later, Chinese banner troops were added. By the nineteenth century, the system had ceased to produce efficient troops and they proved incapable of dealing with either the 'foreign devils' or rebellions.

KEY PEOPLE

Zeng Guofan (1811-72) and Li Hongzhang (1823-1901) were both jinshi holders and while promoting reform developed powerful regional bases which attracted envy and suspicion. Both were men of considerable ability and courage and made possible the prolongation of the Qing Dynasty, but both were very much from within the system. Zeng Guofan, in particular, exemplified the strengths and weaknesses of the Confucian scholar elite.

inevitably broke out among the kings, and Hong, the Heavenly King, allied with the Northern King to kill Yang in 1856. The younger brother of Jesus had thus seen off the Holy Ghost. The Northern King was then also killed by Hong.

A complex array of forces was mustered by the Qing to regain control of the central provinces. The traditional **banner armies** of the regime proved strangely inept, but local gentry-led armies like that of Zeng Guofan from Hunan province and known as the Xiang Army (after the main river of Hunan) proved much more effective in fighting the fanatics. On leave in 1852, mourning in the correct form for his deceased mother, he was urged by the court to attempt to defeat the Taipings. With no previous military experience, he read up on military strategy and then formed an army, which proved much more effective than the Manchu banner armies. He came to embody the ideal Confucian scholar-official. Similarly, another force led by a British officer, Charles Gordon, made such a considerable impact on the Taiping power bases that it became known as the 'Ever Victorious Army'. A combination of various forces finally crushed the rising, but 100,000 rebels died in the storming of Nanjing. Hong and his rebellion both perished in 1864. But the continuing need for locally organised and led armies was ominous for the continuing control of the Qing Dynasty in Beijing.

A less destructive but still persistent rebellion broke out in the north along the course of the Yellow River. It was known as the Nian Rebellion and lasted from 1852 to 1868. Nian means band or group. The disruption caused by the flooding of the Yellow River in 1853 encouraged a bandit guerrilla movement to develop. It was a case of Robin Hood on a vast scale. The gentry and wealthy were pillaged and plundered (the bandits operated over an area the size of England). Eventually, armies led by **Zeng Guofan** and **Li Hongzhang**, who had played a major part in crushing the Taiping Rising, brought order to the devastated provinces.

Reformers and their opponents

The challenges of the nineteenth century inevitably produced a questioning of China as it was. There were those alienated individuals like Hong Xiuquan, leader of the Taiping Rising, who wished to overthrow the regime and rebuild a new Jerusalem. There were those thoroughly westernised by travel abroad, like Sun Yat-sen, who wanted to modernise China and set up a republic, modelled on the USA. Most reformers, however, were not from the fringes of Chinese society like the above, but intelligent and reflective scholars and Manchu grandees who could see that things could not go on as they had been allowed to do. The price of survival was change.

The first such movement became known as the 'self-strengthening movement' and it grew in influence following the humiliations of the Arrow War and the defeat of the Taiping Rising. Its central figures were the Manchu Prince of the Blood, Prince Gong, who headed the new Zongli yamen, or foreign office, and was closely advised by Wenxiang, a jinshi scholar, who was its organising member. These two operated in Beijing, promoting education and modernisation. However, Prince Gong fell from favour and power in 1884 having crossed the powerful Empress Dowager, when he had one of her favourite court eunuchs executed.

In the provinces, two other Jinshi scholars played a major part in trying to push a reform agenda – Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang. The latter was governor general of Zhili and promoted both a modern navy and army and industrialisation, particularly railroads and telegraph communication. The movement produced individual triumphs like the Chinese Merchants Steam Navigation company in 1872 and the new foreign language school in 1862, but despite some success its limitations were cruelly exposed by the defeat of China by Japan in 1894.

The coup of 1898 and Han Discontent

As indicated already, the defeat of China in Korea by Japan gave massive impetus to the idea of reform among the scholar-gentry, who were to find leaders in two

KEY PEOPLE

Kang Youwei (1858–1927) was a constitutional monarchist and eminent thinker who really did wish to transform the Chinese state. As well as contributing to practical political reform, Kang challenged the whole Confucian intellectual tradition from the inside. He portrayed Confucius as a reformer, through the textual criticism of many revered Confucian texts. In 1898, he published *Confucius as a Reformer*, which had enormous intellectual impact. For the first time he gave China the idea of progress, a key western idea since the enlightenment but one alien to China, which thought in terms of endless repeated cycles since a mythical golden age.

KEY PEOPLE

The Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) was the dominant person at the Qing court. She became regent for her son, who was a minor, in 1861 until 1873 and on his death in 1874 once again for her nephew until 1889. Even after this she continued to make the key decisions and, in 1898, organised a coup against her nephew the Emperor which left him powerless under house, or more accurately, palace arrest.

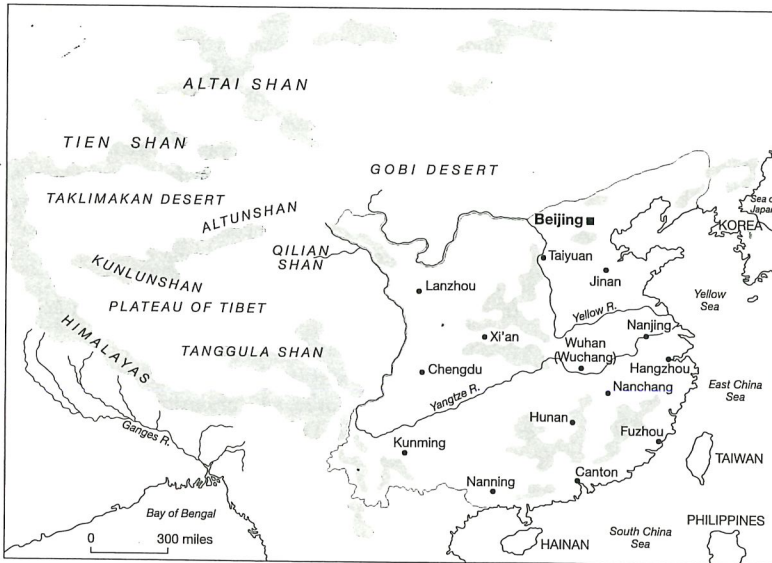
eminent Confucian scholars, Kang Youwei and his disciple, Liang Qichao. Both began to campaign for radical political changes involving the abolition of the traditional examination system and, even more radically, the notion of some degree of direct popular participation in politics through study groups and associations. The whole Chinese tradition was one of authoritarian top-down politics. All private societies were illegal. Study societies sprang up in Beijing and Shanghai and then Hunan province. Membership was drawn from the local gentry elites and teachers. The first newspapers appeared, published by the Study Societies and were often given away free. The Manchu authorities tried to close down both groups and papers and sometimes succeeded but in 1898 the unexpected happened.

Kang and his proposals reached the ear of the 27-year-old Guangxu emperor, through the influence of the imperial tutor. Kang presented extensive proposals for reform and was admitted to the inner cabinet of government. The result was the Hundred Days of Reform which lasted from mid-June to the third week in September (1898). Reform edicts poured from Beijing in the name of the Emperor. It looked as if China was going to embrace an even more radical course of reform than Japan had done in 1867. It was not to be. The Empress Dowager Cixi, who still wielded much power among the court officials and eunuchs of the forbidden city, rallied the conservative forces in Beijing and the provinces and launched a palace coup on 21st September. Kang and Liang escaped, but six leading reformers were put to death including Kang's brother. The Emperor was placed under close arrest and kept a prisoner for the rest of his life.

The coup of 1898 slowed the process of reform but did not stifle the demand for it, which continued to grow. Constitutionlists looked to the exiled Kang for leadership and the more radical to Sun Yat-sen and his more openly republican movement. In July 1905, Sun Yat-sen had founded the Tongmenghui or Revolutionary Alliance in Tokyo. It published a revolutionary paper which was smuggled around China and read by students

and reformers. Underground cells sprang up in many of the major cities, plotting the downfall of the Qing. Seven abortive uprisings took place between 1906 and 1908 and the active membership had grown to about 10,000 by 1911. It was heavily supported and funded by overseas Chinese communities, particularly those of South East Asia.

The Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 was a powerful boost to the case for reform. Changes had been underway for some time in northern China in organising a modern army, well equipped and trained. The originator was Li Hongzhang. Under him was Yuan Shikai who eventually became the key military personality in China. He played a vital part in the events of 1911–12. Now, in 1905, a more modern army was accepted. The degree system was swept away in that year ending a thousand-year tradition. The first western style universities were introduced. Constitutional reforms were announced in 1906, but then



Centres of revolt, 1906–8

there was to be a nine year preparatory period, which produced widespread protests.

In October 1909, provincial assemblies were introduced which promptly became the focus of the simmering discontent. By this time, the central control of the provinces was slipping. The Empress Dowager died in 1908. For all her faults, she at least provided some semblance of authority and power. The day before she died, so did the Guangxu Emperor, probably murdered on her orders. Another minor, aged 3, now ascended the throne. The pace of reform accelerated, but it was too little too late. A national consultative council was established in 1910, and in 1911, what was meant to be a responsible cabinet. Unfortunately, nine of the 13 places went to imperial relatives and Manchu nobles. This excited Han resentment still further. Rebellious students began to cut off their pigtails, symbols of Han servitude to the ruling Manchu. Manchu troops sometimes executed such young men as insolent rebels.

The revolution of 1911–12

The final downfall was the product of a complex interplay of causes. The child Emperor who could not govern symbolised the impotence of the dynasty, yet it still took much to topple the monarchy. A massive budget deficit was developing to pay for reforms and the reparations dating back to the Boxer Rising. The new armies being phased in to replace the traditional banner armies were particularly expensive and many officers were infected with radicalism. Increased taxes were necessary and new duties were levied on tea, wine, salt and other products, as well as increased land taxes. As if to emphasise the loss of the Mandate of Heaven, torrential rains in 1910 and 1911 deluged the Yangtze valley, causing widespread floods. Grain prices rose, vast numbers died and the cities filled with homeless peasants.

It was agitation connected to the building of railways that actually triggered the revolt in some areas. The first years of the twentieth century witnessed a massive increase in railway construction, most of it under foreign direction and control. This produced a nationalist backlash and the founding of railway protection

movements in many of China's provinces. Local associations of Chinese gentry and merchants attempted to raise money to take over and develop their local railways. Money was raised from overseas Chinese businessmen and the whole issue became a passionate symbol of the new Han Chinese national identity. In Beijing, things were seen differently. The provincial groups threatened central control and seemed slow and inefficient at getting on with railway building. Trunk railways were also profitable and might, if owned by the state, have made some impact on the mounting budget deficit. The upshot was a decision by a new minister of communications to nationalise all trunk lines with limited compensation. The decree was published in May. Money would be raised from foreign loans to continue building lines. To most Han Nationalists, here was a conspiracy of the Manchu oppressors and foreign devils, the twin curses of the last century. Riots and demonstrations spread. The whole of Sichuan province in the west was in chaos by the middle of September. The young Emperor issued a plaintive appeal on the orders of his guardians:

The whole Empire is seething. The minds of the people are perturbed ... All these things are my fault ... Being a very small person standing at the head of my subjects, I see that my heritage is nearly falling to the ground.

On 9th October 1911, in the city of Hankou, an unfinished bomb being prepared by a group of young revolutionaries prematurely exploded. This triggered the **Wuchang Uprising**. Loyal troops had already been moved west to Sichuan. The Manchu governor of the city felt he had the situation under control when he arrested and executed on 10th October several members of the revolutionary group. Han troops still left in the neighbouring city of Wuchang mutinied, believing rumours that Han people were to be butchered. They wiped out the remaining Manchu regiment and then turned on any Manchu civilians they could find. Two months of confused fighting followed.

Many units of the new armies mutinied and there were widespread massacres of Manchu troops and civilians, particularly in the Shaanxi capital of Xi'an. Peasants and

KEY EVENT

The **Wuchang Uprising (1911)** is usually taken to mark the beginning of the revolution, as it was the first major city the Manchu authorities lost control of. Wuchang is one of three neighbouring cities on the Yangtze that are known by the joint name of Wuhan. The other two are Hankou and Hanyang.

KEY TERM

The **abdication settlement** gave the Emperor the right to continue to live in the Forbidden City and ownership of all the imperial treasures. He was given an income of US\$4 million a year.

others were forcibly deprived of their pigtails, to mark Han freedom. In other areas, loyal troops massacred rebels, often taking as a definition of rebel those without a pigtail.

In desperation, the court turned to the creator of the new armies, Yuan Shikai, and in November appointed him chief minister. In December, the Qing suffered a major blow when they lost control of Nanjing. Province after province now declared their independence from Qing rule – Sichuan on 22nd November and Shandong near to the capital on 12th December.

CONCLUSION

Sun Yat-sen had been in the USA at the time of the Wuchang Rising and now hastened back. He arrived in Shanghai on 25th December, and at the end of the month delegates from 16 provinces meeting in Nanjing elected him President of the Chinese Republic, but real power lay with the new armies and here Yuan Shikai was the key figure. Sun Yat-sen recognised the situation and wrote to him to say it was Yuan who should accept the presidency. The only Manchu strong man who could perhaps have rallied a last-ditch defence, the deputy chief of staff, was removed by a bomb in January. The Emperor's mother negotiated a favourable abdication settlement with Yuan Shikai who received an edict bestowing full powers from the Emperor on the same day as he announced his abdication. The blessings of the Emperor and the popular revolutionary leader thus confirmed the position of Yuan Shikai who had twice failed his juren examination. For the next few years the ruling of China would belong to soldiers not scholars.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- 1 In what ways does the growth of nationalism explain the downfall of Imperial China in 1911–12?
- 2 'It was China's humiliation at the hands of the west and Japan that destroyed the Qing regime.' How far do you agree with this statement?

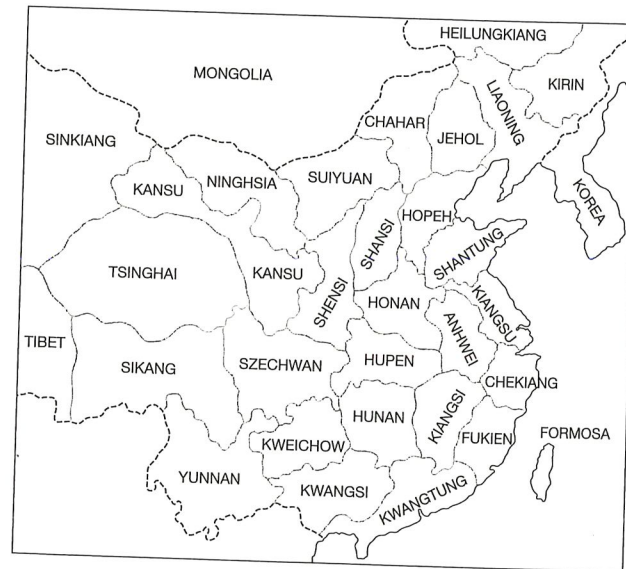
- 3 Why did attempts at reform fail to preserve the Imperial regime?
- 4 'A chapter of unfortunate accidents account for the revolution of 1911-12.' How far do you agree with this statement?

CHAPTER 3

The new China: a troubled and chaotic childhood, 1912-27

INTRODUCTION

The fall of a dynasty had sometimes been followed by a period of disintegration when the Chinese state seemed to fall apart. But a common heritage, whose living embodiment were the scholar-officials, kept the idea of unity alive until some soldier could re-impose political order and found a new dynasty. Now the Confucian examination system had been abolished, would China really fragment, like Europe at the end of the Roman Empire into separate kingdoms and republics? In reality, the disintegration was to be short lived, a mere 37 years. These years were, however, to be years of terror and misery for many ordinary Chinese men and women. The excitement and pig-tail cutting of 1911 led for many not to a fuller life but to rape, torture and death.



China in 1912 - Provinces