

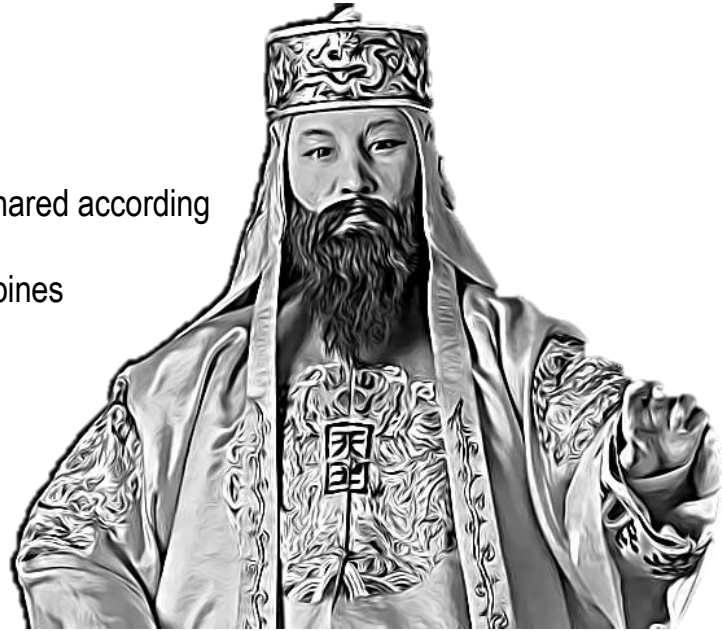
Collapse of the Chinese Imperial System

Notes taken from *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past* (McGraw Hill, 2006)

- The Unequal Treaties were devastating for China.
 - By 1900:
 - ninety Chinese ports were under the effective control of foreign powers
 - Foreign merchants controlled much of the Chinese economy
 - Christian missionaries sought converts throughout China
 - Foreign gunboats patrolled Chinese waters
 - Several treaties released Korea (grabbed by Japan in 1895), Vietnam (grabbed by France in 1885) and Burma (grabbed by the British in 1886) from Chinese authority and influence
 - China had been carved up into spheres of economic influence by the British, French, Germans, Japanese and Russians (the Qing government was forced to grant monopolies to colonial powers for railroads and resource developments).
 - The Chinese population had grown from 330 million (1800) to 475 million
 - The growth of land under cultivation was much slower than the population increase
 - Land remained in the hands of wealthy elites
 - Widespread corruption existed throughout the government
 - Opium addiction was spreading rapidly



- In 1850, rebellions erupted throughout China – the most dangerous of these was the Taiping (“Great Peace”) Rebellion (1850-1864).
 - Schoolteacher Hong Xiuquan provided the inspiration and leadership for the rebellion. He called for the destruction of the Qing Dynasty (seen as foreigners by many Chinese) and the radical transformation of Chinese society.
 - Hong’s followers demanded:
 - Abolition of private property
 - Creation of communal wealth to be shared according to needs
 - Prohibition of foot-binding and concubines
 - Free public education
 - Simplification of the written language
 - Literacy for the masses
 - Equality of men and women
 - Some Taiping leaders also called for the establishment of democratic political institutions & the building of an industrial society.



- Hong and his followers swept through southeastern China, taking Nanking and making it the capital of their new kingdom. With Nanking as their base, Taiping armies attacked the Qing Dynasty.
- However, the Chinese gentry sided with the Emperor (Why?). With the aid of European advisors and weapons (Why would they help?) regional armies of Chinese soldiers overcame the Taiping forces.
- Hong commits suicide in June 1864, and Qing Forces took Nanjing (slaughtering 100,000 Taipings). In all, 20-30 million people died – the agricultural production of the country was so badly disrupted that populations in war-torn regions took to eating grass, leather, hemp and human flesh.
- Qing authorities realized they had to act, and tried to introduce a series of reforms to answer the series social and economic problems facing the country, even laying the foundations for industrialization.



- Empress Dowager Cixi¹ (1835-1908), a former concubine that was effectively ruler of China from 1858-1908, diverted vast sums of money intended to invest in industrial endeavors to enhance Imperial properties.
- In 1898 the “Hundred Days Reforms” were introduced to try and make radical changes to the Imperial system. Emperor Guangxu launched a sweeping program to transform China into a constitutional monarchy and industrial society.
 - The broad range of reforms outraged members of the Imperial household and gentry – including the Dowager Empress. After 103 days the Dowager Empress nullified the reforms, imprisoned the Emperor in the Forbidden City and executed reformers within the government.
 - The Dowager Empress then threw her support behind the anti-foreigner uprising known as the Bower Rebellion. With the Empress’ encouragement the Boxers organized themselves to rid China of the “foreign devils,” killing foreigners and Chinese Christians.
 - Believing that foreign weapons could not harm them, 140,000 Boxers attacked foreign embassies in Beijing in the summer of 1900. They were slaughtered.
 - The Chinese government was forced to pay damages and allow foreign troops into their country. The Dowager Empress and Qing Dynasty was blamed for the defeat.
 - One day after the mysterious death of the imprisoned Emperor, the Dowager Empress Cixi died in 1908. Before her death, she appointed the 2-year old Puyi to the Imperial throne.

¹ “Teh-chi”
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