

Qing Empire
AP World History
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The Qing Dynasty was the last imperial dynasty in Chinese history. Foreign powers took over China during the Qing and eventually an early twentieth century revolution against the foreign powers led to a democratic government in China. So how did one of the greatest powers in the world decline? Well, you have to remember that China was in decline ever since it shut itself off from the world in the late 1400's. Zheng He's exploration missions proved that China was superior and the Chinese decided to concentrate on problems at home rather than continue expensive missions of exploration. They turned inward, concentrating on domestic problems, and lost touch with the new technologies impacting the world. By the time China began trading again with the world, they were four hundred years behind in military technology.

The Qing rulers never fully understood how far behind they were, and even if they did, they would have needed to make drastic cultural changes to their society in order to modernize. The first problem was that Qing leaders were insulated against the knowledge that they were behind. Advisors to the Qing emperors often continued to tell their leaders that China was just as advanced as other countries. Advisors were concerned that leaders did not want to hear bad news and would be angry with the advisors that their country was behind. So the myth was continued year after year, with China falling further and further behind. Even if Chinese leaders wanted to change, there were cultural traditions in China that prevented industrialization. China had always been a society centered around agriculture because early Chinese leaders understood that people with abundant food are less likely to rebel. This idea was outdated, however because technological changes in agriculture by the nineteenth century allowed for a small number of farmers to produce what a whole nation of farmers once did. Industrialization would have meant the same amount of food. The other reason this idea was outdated was that China's population was growing much faster than its food supply. The population of China doubled between 1650 and 1800, much too fast for subsistence farming to keep up. Industrialization would have helped feed China's growing population. China also lacked a middle class due to the fact that they had always discriminated against merchants and those associated with trade. The lack of an educated middle class meant less money and fewer people educated outside the nobility.

The other internal factor that led to decline of the Qing was rebellion. There were two major rebellions in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the White Lotus Rebellion and the Taiping Rebellion. The White Lotus Rebellion (1794-1804) involved rebellion by a religious sect called the White Lotus that combined elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and a few doomsday prophecies. They believed that the problems of their country would be solved when Buddha was reincarnated. Buddha would then usher in new era of prosperity like the prosperity that existed under the Ming Dynasty. The Taiping Rebellion of 1850 was started by a young scholar named Hong Xiuquan [hoong shee OH chew an] who repeatedly failed his civil service exams. One day he heard a Christian missionary giving a sermon, became very interested in Christianity. Following another failed exam, he had a nervous breakdown, during which he became convinced that he had met God and was, in fact, Jesus Christ's younger brother, sent down to earth to eradicate all evil. He founded a religious movement, the Taiping Movement or Movement of Great Peace which regarded the Manchus as foreigners and demons to be exterminated. Only then, he believed, would the great Kingdom of Heavenly Peace descend from heaven to rule the

world.

There were also several foreign wars that led to the decline of the Qing, the Opium War and the Boxer Rebellion. The Opium War (1839-1842) started due to a trade deficit between Britain and China. Britain bought massive amounts of tea from China with silver, but China bought nothing back. China was self-sufficient and needed little in the form of trade from other countries. Britain wanted to create export an economy in China and to do so began smuggling opium into China to balance trade. They would hook the Chinese people on opium and create something that the Chinese needed from the British Empire. The Chinese began destroying British opium in May 1839 after opium addiction spiraled out of control. The British responded by attacking China and destroying its armies. Ultimately the Opium War led to foreign domination of China. China and Britain signed the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 in order to end the war. The treaty created British "extraterritoriality" in China, meaning that British citizens would be subjected to British, not Chinese, law if they committed any crime on Chinese soil. The British also would no longer have to pay tribute to the imperial administration in order to trade with China. Britain gained five ports for British trade: Canton, Shanghai, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Xiamen. No restrictions were placed on British trade in these port cities. Hong Kong was also "leased" to the British for a hundred and fifty years. Essentially, Britain owned Hong Kong from 1842 to 1992. Britain actually held on to Hong Kong for five extra years, returning control of Hong Kong to China in 1997.

The most important aspect of the Opium War was that it weakened China to the point where they were unable to resist foreign imperialism. Germany, France, Japan, and the United States all forced the Chinese to allow them to trade following the Opium Wars. The Chinese did rebel against foreign control in a rebellion called the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, but the revolt was easily crushed during a two month period by a coalition of foreign powers. The war was settled by the United States. American Foreign Secretary John Hay created a treaty called the Open Door Policy which allowed all nations access to the Chinese trade markets. One other impact of the decline of the Qing was a wave of migration out of China that began in the period 1750-1900. Pushed from China by war and instability, many Chinese workers ended up in Southeast Asia, Australia, and the United States. The abolition of slavery during the 19th Century led to a huge demand for workers and Chinese workers filled that void. So many Chinese workers came to these areas of the world, however, that many countries tried to restrict immigration after a while. The United States passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1888 and Australia passed its notorious "White Australia Policy" in the mid 19th Century. Both were designed to protect "native" peoples of those areas and were likely a byproduct of imperialistic racism.

The crises of the mid-nineteenth century all combined to push the Manchu regime to pursue a course of reform. This reform effort, called the "Self Strengthening Movement" had two main components. The first involved learning Western technology, industry, and even language, in order to meet the Western powers as equals. The second component was deeply Chinese and Confucian in nature. Conservative scholars and officials believed that the success against the rebellions and the new revival was largely due to the traditions and institutions of imperial government. They believed that Chinese political institutions were the strongest and most moral form of government in the world. In contrast to this, the Western powers were characterized by conflict, aggression, selfishness, anarchy, and disunity. So, China tried to bring in industry and technology while still keeping their same political institutions and traditions. Unfortunately

countries really can't industrialize without progress and China was trying too hard to cling to their traditions.