

CHAPTER 19

Empires in Collision

Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia

1800–1900

Reversal of Fortune: China's Century of Crisis

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"Several centuries ago, China was strong. . . . In over 100 years after the 1840 Opium War, China suffered immensely from aggression, wars and chaos."¹ Speaking in early 2017, Chinese president Xi Jinping thus reminded his listeners of Britain's nineteenth-century violent intrusion into China's history bearing shiploads of highly addictive opium. This conflict marked the beginning of what the Chinese still describe as a "century of humiliation." In official Chinese thinking, it was only the victory of the Chinese Communist Party that enabled China to finally escape from that shameful past. Memories of the Opium War remain a central element of China's "patriotic education" for the young, serving as a warning against uncritical admiration of the West and providing a rejoinder to any Western criticism of China. Almost 180 years after that clash between the Chinese and British empires, the Opium War retains an emotional resonance for many Chinese and offers a politically useful tool for the country's government. ■

China was among the countries that confronted an aggressive and industrializing West while maintaining its formal independence, unlike the colonized areas discussed in Chapter 18. So too did Japan, the Ottoman Empire, Persia (now Iran), Ethiopia, and Siam (now Thailand). Latin America also falls in this category (see "The Industrial Revolution and Latin America in

the Nineteenth Century" in Chapter 17). These states avoided outright incorporation into European colonial empires, retaining some ability to resist European aggression and to reform or transform

◀ AP Comparison

To what extent does this image of European powers and Japan competing for "slices" of China depict actions that were similar to those taken by Europe in Africa in the nineteenth century?

their own societies. But they shared with their colonized counterparts the need to deal with four dimensions of the European moment in world history. First, they faced the immense military might and political ambitions of the major imperial powers. Second, they became enmeshed in networks of trade, investment, and sometimes migration that arose from an industrializing and capitalist Europe to generate a new world economy. Third, they were touched by various aspects of traditional European culture, as some among them learned the French, English, or German language; converted to Christianity; or studied European literature and philosophy. Fourth, they too engaged with the culture of modernity—its scientific rationalism; its technological achievements; its belief in a better future; and its ideas of nationalism, socialism, feminism, and individualism. In those epic encounters, they sometimes resisted, at other times accommodated, and almost always adapted what came from the West. They were active participants in the global drama of nineteenth-century world history, not simply its passive victims or beneficiaries.

At the same time, these societies were dealing with their own internal issues. Population growth and peasant rebellion wracked China; internal social and economic changes eroded the stability of Japanese public life; the great empires of the

Islamic world shrank or disappeared; rivalry among competing elites troubled Latin American societies. China, the Ottoman Empire, and Japan provide a range of experiences, responses, and outcomes and many opportunities for comparison, as they navigated this era of colliding empires.

AP Comparison

How did the responses to Western imperialism by China, the Ottoman Empire, and Japan differ?

Reversal of Fortune: China's Century of Crisis

In 1793, just a decade after King George III of Britain lost his North American colonies, he received yet another rebuff, this time from China. In a famous letter to the British monarch, the Chinese emperor Qianlong (chyan-loong) sharply rejected British requests for a less restricted trading relationship with his country. "Our Celestial Empire possesses all things in prolific abundance," he declared. "There was therefore no need to import the manufactures of outside barbarians." Qianlong's snub simply continued the pattern of the previous several centuries, during which Chinese authorities had strictly controlled and limited the activities of European missionaries and merchants. But by 1912, little more than a century later, China's long-established imperial state had collapsed, and the country had been transformed from a central presence in the global economy to a weak and dependent participant in a European-dominated world system in which Great Britain was the major economic and political player. It was a stunning reversal of fortune for a country that in Chinese eyes was the civilized center of the entire world—in their terms, the Celestial Empire or the Middle Kingdom.

AP Continuity and Change

To what extent was the policy of Qianlong a continuity in the interactions between China and those it perceived to be outsiders?

Landmarks for Chapter 19

1775

1800

1825

1850

1875

1900

1925

CHINA

1793 China rejects British request for open trade

1840–1842 First Opium War

1850–1864

Taiping Uprising

1856–1858 Second Opium War

1898–1901

Boxer Uprising

1911–1912

Chinese revolution; end of Qing dynasty

OTTOMAN EMPIRE

1789–1807 Reforms of Sultan Selim III

1839–1876 Tanzimat reforms

1870

Teacher training college for women opened

1876–1909

Reign of Sultan Abd al-Hamid II

1908

Military coup by Young Turks

JAPAN

1830s

Famine, peasant uprisings, urban protests

1853

Commodore Perry's arrival in Japan

1868

Meiji Restoration

1880s

Small feminist movement emerges

1889

Japanese constitution proclaimed

1894–1895

Japan defeats China

1904–1905

Japan defeats Russia

AP EXAM TIP

Understand how empires during this period fell because of both internal and external factors.

AP Causation

What were the causes of the massive peasant rebellions in nineteenth-century China?

AP Comparison

To what extent were the causes of these peasant rebellions similar to those that led to the loss of the Mandate of Heaven in earlier Chinese dynasties?

AP Causation

Analyze the internal and external factors that led to the Taiping Uprising.

The Crisis Within

In some ways, China was the victim of its own earlier success. Its robust economy and American food crops had enabled substantial population growth, from about 100 million people in 1685 to some 430 million in 1853. Unlike in Europe, though, where a similar population spurt took place, no Industrial Revolution accompanied this vast increase in the number of people, nor was agricultural production able to keep up. Neither did China's internal expansion to the west and south generate anything like the wealth and resources that derived from Europe's overseas empires. The result was growing pressure on the land, smaller farms for China's huge peasant population, and, in all too many cases, unemployment, impoverishment, misery, and starvation.

Furthermore, China's governing institutions did not keep pace with the growing population. Thus the state was increasingly unable to effectively perform its many functions, such as tax collection, flood control, social welfare, and public security. Gradually the central state lost power to provincial officials and local gentry. Among such officials, corruption was endemic, and harsh treatment of peasants was common. According to an official report issued in 1852, "Day and night soldiers are sent out to harass taxpayers. Sometimes corporal punishments are imposed upon tax delinquents; some of them are so badly beaten to exact the last penny that blood and flesh fly in all directions."² Finally, European military pressure and economic penetration during the first half of the nineteenth century disrupted internal trade routes, created substantial unemployment, and raised peasant taxes.

This combination of circumstances, traditionally associated with a declining dynasty, gave rise to growing numbers of bandit gangs roaming the countryside and, even more dangerous, to outright peasant rebellion. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, such rebellions drew on a variety of peasant grievances and found leadership in charismatic figures proclaiming a millenarian religious message. Increasingly they also expressed opposition to the Qing dynasty because of its foreign Manchu origins. "We wait only for the northern region to be returned to a Han emperor," declared one rebel group in the early nineteenth century.³

China's internal crisis culminated in the **Taiping Uprising**, which set much of the country aflame between 1850 and 1864. This was a different kind of peasant upheaval. Its leaders largely rejected Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism alike, finding their primary ideology in a unique form of Christianity. Its leading figure, Hong Xiuquan (hong show-chwaan) (1814–1864), proclaimed himself the younger brother of Jesus, sent to cleanse the world of demons and to establish a "heavenly kingdom of great peace." Nor were these leaders content to restore an idealized Chinese society; instead they insisted on genuinely revolutionary change. They called for the abolition of private property, a radical redistribution of land, the end of prostitution and opium smoking, and the organization of society into sexually segregated military camps of men and women. Hong fiercely denounced the Qing dynasty as foreigners who had "poisoned China" and "defiled the emperor's throne." His cousin, Hong Rengan, developed plans for transforming China into an industrial nation, complete with railroads, health insurance for all, newspapers, and widespread public education.

Among the most revolutionary dimensions of the Taiping Uprising was its posture toward women and gender roles. This outlook reflected its origins among the minority Hakka people of southern China, where women were notably less restricted than Confucian orthodoxy prescribed. During the uprising, Hakka women, whose feet had never been bound, fought as soldiers in their own regiments, and in liberated regions, Taiping officials ordered that the feet of other women be unbound. The Taiping land reform program promised women and men equal shares of land. Women were now permitted to sit for civil service examinations and were appointed to supervisory positions, though usually ones in which they exercised authority over other women rather than men. Mutual attraction rather than family interests was promoted as a basis for marriage.

None of these reforms were consistently implemented during the short period of Taiping power, and the movement's leadership demonstrated considerable ambivalence about equality for women. Hong himself reflected a much more traditional understanding of elite women's role when he assembled a large personal harem and declared: "The duty of the palace women is to attend to the needs of their husbands; and it is arranged by Heaven that they are not to learn of the affairs outside."⁴ Nonetheless, the Taiping posture toward women represented a sharp challenge to long-established gender roles and contributed to the hostility that the movement generated among many other Chinese, including women.

With a rapidly swelling number of followers, Taiping forces swept out of southern China and established their capital in Nanjing in 1853. For a time, the days of the Qing dynasty appeared to be over. But divisions and indecisiveness within the Taiping leadership, along with their inability to link up with several other rebel groups also operating separately in China, provided an opening for Qing dynasty loyalists to rally and by 1864 to crush this most unusual of peasant rebellions. Western military support for pro-Qing forces likewise contributed to their victory. It was not, however, the imperial military forces of the central government that defeated the rebels. Instead provincial military leaders, fearing the radicalism of the Taiping program, mobilized their own armies, which in the end crushed the rebel forces.

Thus the Qing dynasty was saved, but it was also weakened as the provincial gentry consolidated their power at the expense of the central state. The intense conservatism of both imperial authorities and their gentry supporters postponed



Taiping Uprising Western powers generally supported the Qing dynasty during the Taiping Uprising and even provided it with some military support. This image shows a group of the Taiping rebels and a British soldier they have captured. (Private Collection/Peter Newark Military Pictures/Bridgeman Images)

AP[®] Contextualization

To what extent does this French painting portray the European concept of cultural superiority over non-European societies?

AP[®] Comparison

To what extent were the causes and results of the Taiping Uprising similar to those of the rebellions you learned about in Chapter 16?

AP® DIGGING DEEPER

In comparison to the Taiping Uprising, the U.S. Civil War—the bloodiest war in U.S. history—cost about 600,000 lives.

AP EXAM TIP

The Opium Wars were a major turning point leading to China's decline in the nineteenth century.

AP Analyzing Evidence

What aspects of this photograph appear to be posed? What was the photographer's purpose in taking this photo?



Addiction to Opium Throughout the nineteenth century, opium imports created a massive addiction problem in China, as this photograph of an opium den from around 1900 suggests. Not until the early twentieth century did the British prove willing to curtail the opium trade from their Indian colony. (Hulton Deutsch/Getty Images)

any resolution of China's peasant problem, delayed any real change for China's women, and deferred vigorous efforts at modernization until the communists came to power in the mid-twentieth century. More immediately, the devastation and destruction occasioned by this massive civil war seriously disrupted and weakened China's economy. Estimates of the number of lives lost range from 20 to 30 million. In human terms, it was the most costly conflict in the world during the nineteenth century, and it took China more than a decade to recover from its devastation. China's internal crisis in general and the Taiping Uprising in particular also provided a highly unfavorable setting for the country's encounter with a Europe newly invigorated by the Industrial Revolution.

Western Pressures

Nowhere was the shifting balance of global power in the nineteenth century more evident than in China's changing relationship with Europe, a transformation that registered most dramatically in the famous **Opium Wars**. Derived from Arab traders in the eighth century or earlier, opium had long been used on a small scale as a drinkable medicine; it was regarded as a magical cure for dysentery and described by one poet as "fit for Buddha."⁵ It did not become a serious problem until the late eighteenth century, when the British began to use opium, grown and processed in India, to cover their persistent trade imbalance with China. By the 1830s, British, American, and other Western merchants had found an enormous, growing, and very profitable market for this highly addictive drug. From 1,000 chests (each weighing

roughly 150 pounds) in 1773, China's opium imports exploded to more than 23,000 chests in 1832. (See Snapshot, page 833.)

By then, Chinese authorities recognized a mounting problem on many levels. Because opium importation was illegal, it had to be smuggled into China, thus flouting Chinese law. Bribed to turn a blind eye to the illegal trade, many officials were corrupted. Furthermore, a massive outflow of silver to pay for the opium reversed China's centuries-long ability to attract much of the world's silver supply, and this imbalance caused serious economic problems. Finally, China found itself with many millions of addicts—men and women, court officials, students preparing for exams, soldiers going into combat, and common laborers seeking to overcome the pain

SNAPSHOT Chinese/British Trade at Canton, 1835–1836

Calculate opium exports as a percentage of British exports to China, Britain's trade deficit without opium, and its trade surplus with opium. What did this pattern mean for China?

	Item	Value (in Spanish dollars)
British Exports to Canton	Opium	17,904,248
	Cotton	8,357,394
	All other items (sandalwood, lead, iron, tin, cotton yarn and piece goods, tin plates, watches, clocks)	6,164,981
	Total	32,426,623
British Imports from Canton	Tea (black and green)	13,412,243
	Raw silk	3,764,115
	Vermillion	705,000
	All other goods (sugar products, camphor, silver, gold, copper, musk)	5,971,541
	Total	23,852,899

Data from Hsin-Pao Chang, ed., *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), 226–27.

and drudgery of their work. Following an extended debate at court in 1836 on whether to legalize the drug or crack down on its use, the emperor decided on suppression. An upright official, **Commissioner Lin Zexu** (lin zuh-SHOO), led the campaign against opium use as a kind of “drug czar.” (See *Zooming In: Lin Zexu*, page 834.) The British, offended by the seizure of their property in opium and emboldened by their new military power, sent a large naval expedition to China, determined to end the restrictive conditions under which they had long traded with that country. In the process, they would teach the Chinese a lesson about the virtues of free trade and the “proper” way to conduct relations among countries. Thus began the first Opium War (1840–1842), in which Britain's industrialized military might proved decisive. The Treaty of Nanjing, which ended the war in 1842, largely on British terms, imposed numerous restrictions on Chinese sovereignty and opened five ports to European traders. Its provisions reflected the changed balance of global power that had emerged with Britain's Industrial Revolution. To the Chinese, that agreement represented the first of the “**unequal treaties**” that seriously eroded China's independence by the end of the century.

But it was not the last of those treaties. Britain's victory in a second Opium War (1856–1858) was accompanied by the brutal vandalizing of the emperor's exquisite Summer Palace outside Beijing and resulted in further humiliations. Still more ports were opened to foreign traders. Now those foreigners were allowed to travel

AP Analyzing Evidence

What do these figures suggest about the role of opium in British trade with China?

AP Causation

To what extent did actions by outsiders lead to significant changes in China during the nineteenth century?

Lin Zexu: Confronting the Opium Trade

When the Chinese emperor decided in 1838 on firm measures to suppress the opium trade, he selected Lin Zexu to enforce that policy.⁶ Born in 1785, Lin was the son of a rather poor but scholarly father who had never achieved an official position. Lin, however, excelled academically, passing the highest-level examinations in 1811 after two failed attempts and then rising rapidly in the ranks of China's bureaucracy. In the process, he gained a reputation as a strict and honest official; he was immune to bribery, genuinely concerned with the welfare of the peasantry, and unafraid to confront the corruption and decadence of rich and poor alike.

And so in December of 1838, after some nineteen personal audiences with the emperor, Lin found himself in Canton, the center of the opium trade and the only Chinese city legally open to foreign merchants. He was facing the greatest challenge of his professional life. Undertaken with the best of intentions, his actions were unable to prevent a war with



Commissioner Lin Zexu ordering the destruction of opium.

Britain, which propelled the country into a century of humiliating subservience to an industrializing Europe and forced growing numbers of Chinese to question their vaunted civilization.

In established Confucian fashion, Lin undertook his enormous task with a combination of moral appeals, reasoned argument, political pressure, and coercion, while hoping to avoid out-

right armed conflict. It was an approach that focused on both the demand and supply sides of the problem. In dealing with Chinese opium users, Lin emphasized the health hazards of the drug and demanded that people turn in their supplies of opium and the pipes used to smoke it. By mid-1839, he had confiscated some 50,000 pounds of the drug, together with over 70,000 pipes, and arrested some 1,700 dealers. Hundreds of local students were summoned to an assembly where they were invited to identify opium distributors and to suggest ways

photo: Pictures from History/The Image Works

freely and buy land in China, to preach Christianity under the protection of Chinese authorities, and to patrol some of China's rivers. Furthermore, the Chinese were forbidden to use the character for "barbarians" to refer to the British in official documents. Following later military defeats at the hands of the French (1885) and Japanese (1895), China lost control of Vietnam, Korea, and Taiwan. By the end of the century, the Western nations plus Japan and Russia had all carved out spheres of influence within China, granting themselves special privileges to establish military bases, extract raw materials, and build railroads. Many Chinese believed that their country was being "carved up like a melon" (see Map 19.1 and the chapter-opening photo).

Coupled with its internal crisis, China's encounter with European imperialism had reduced the proud Middle Kingdom to dependency on the Western powers as it became part of a European-based "informal empire," an area dominated by Western powers but retaining its own government and a measure of independence.

of dealing with the problem. Opium-using officials became the target of investigations, and five-person teams were established to enforce the ban on opium smoking on one another.

Lin applied a similar mix of methods to the foreign suppliers of opium. A moralistic appeal to Queen Victoria argued that the articles the English imported from China—silk, tea, and rhubarb—were all beneficial. “By what right,” he asked, “do [the barbarians] use this poisonous drug to injure Chinese people?” He pointedly reminded Europeans that new regulations, applying to Chinese and foreigners alike, fixed the penalty for dealing in opium at “decapitation or strangling.” Then he demanded that foreign traders hand over their opium, and without compensation. When the merchants hesitated, Lin tightened the screws, ordering all Chinese employed by foreigners to leave their jobs and blockading the Europeans in their factories. After six weeks of negotiations, the Europeans capitulated, turning over some 3 million pounds of raw opium to Lin Zexu.

Disposing of the drug was an enormous task. Workers, stripped and searched daily to prevent looting, dug three huge trenches into which they placed the opium mixed with water, salt, and lime and then flushed the concoction into the sea. (See the image in this feature, which shows the commissioner overseeing this process.) Lin also offered a sacrifice to the Sea Spirit, apologizing for introducing this poison into its domain and “advising the Spirit to tell the creatures of the water to move away for a time.” He informed the emperor that throngs

of local people flocked to witness the destruction of the opium. And foreigners too came to observe the spectacle. Lin reported, “[The foreigners] do not dare to show any disrespect, and indeed I should judge from their attitudes that they have the decency to feel heartily ashamed.”

Had Lin been correct in his appraisal, history would have taken a very different turn. But neither Lin nor his superiors anticipated the response that these actions provoked from the British government. They were also largely unaware that European industrial and military advances had decisively shifted the balance of power between China and the West. Arriving in 1840, a British military expedition quickly demonstrated its superiority and initiated the devastating Opium War that marked Lin’s policies in Canton as a failure.

As a punishment for his unsatisfactory performance, the emperor sent Lin to a remote post in western China. Although his career rebounded somewhat after 1845, he died in 1850 while on the way to an appointment aimed at suppressing the Taiping rebellion. While his reputation suffered in the nineteenth century, it recovered in the twentieth as an intensely nationalist China recalled his principled stand against Western imperialism.

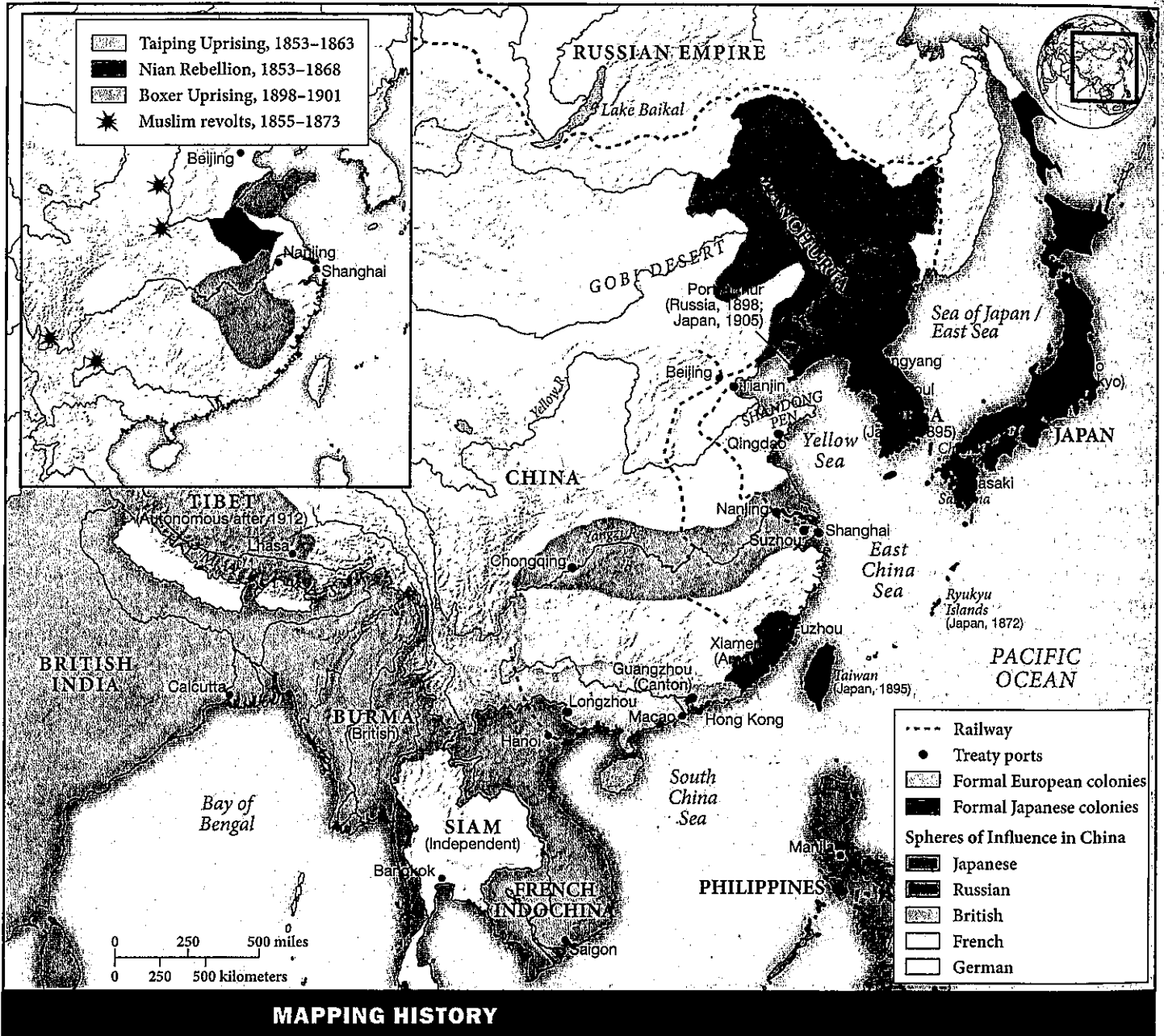
QUESTIONS

What other methods might Lin Zexu have used to stop the British opium trade in China?

China was no longer the center of civilization to which barbarians paid homage and tribute, but just one weak and dependent nation among many others. The Qing dynasty remained in power, but in a weakened condition, which served European interests well and Chinese interests poorly. Restrictions imposed by the unequal treaties clearly inhibited China’s industrialization, as foreign goods and foreign investment flooded the country largely unrestricted. Chinese businessmen mostly served foreign firms, rather than developing as an independent capitalist class capable of leading China’s own Industrial Revolution.

The Failure of Conservative Modernization

Chinese authorities were not passive in the face of their country’s mounting internal and external crises. Known as “**self-strengthening**,” their policies during the 1860s and 1870s sought to reinvigorate a traditional China while borrowing



MAPPING HISTORY

AP Comparison

To what extent was the European presence in Asia different from the European presence in Africa (Map 18.2, page 790)?

Map 19.1 China and the World in the Nineteenth Century

As China was reeling from massive internal upheavals during the nineteenth century, it also faced external assaults from Russia, Japan, and various European powers. By the end of the century, large parts of China were divided into spheres of influence, each affiliated with one of the major industrial powers of the day.

READING THE MAP: Which foreign powers gained the most from their “unequal treaties” with China? What geographic features in China did foreign powers value?

INTERPRETING THE MAP: To what extent were Japan’s imperialist efforts in China more successful than those by European powers?

cautiously from the West. An overhauled examination system, designed to recruit qualified candidates for official positions, sought the “good men” who could cope with the massive reconstruction that China faced in the wake of the Taiping rebellion. Support for landlords and the repair of dikes and irrigation helped restore rural social and economic order. A few industrial factories producing textiles and steel were established, coal mines were expanded, and a telegraph system was initiated. One Chinese general in 1863 confessed his humiliation that “Chinese weapons are far inferior to those of foreign countries.”⁷ A number of modern arsenals, shipyards, and foreign-language schools sought to remedy this deficiency.

Self-strengthening as an overall program for China's modernization was inhibited by the fears of conservative leaders that urban, industrial, or commercial development would erode the power and privileges of the landlord class. Furthermore, the new industries remained largely dependent on foreigners for machinery, materials, and expertise. And they served to strengthen local authorities, who largely controlled those industries, rather than the central Chinese state.

The general failure of “self-strengthening” became apparent at the end of the century, when China suffered a humiliating military defeat by Japan (1894–1895). This failure was only confirmed when an antiforeign movement known as the **Boxer Uprising** (1898–1901) erupted in northern China. Led by militia organizations calling themselves the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists, the “Boxers” killed numerous Europeans and Chinese Christians and laid siege to the foreign embassies in Beijing. When Western powers and Japan occupied Beijing to crush the rebellion and imposed a huge payment on China as a punishment, it was clear that China remained a dependent country, substantially under foreign control.

No wonder, then, that growing numbers of educated Chinese, including many in official elite positions, became highly disillusioned with the Qing dynasty, which was both foreign and ineffective in protecting China. By the late 1890s, such people were organizing a variety of clubs, study groups, and newspapers to examine China's desperate situation and to explore alternative paths. The names of these organizations reflect their outlook—the National Rejuvenation Study Society, Society to Protect the Nation, and Understand the National Shame Society. They admired not only Western science and technology but also Western political practices that limited the authority of the ruler and permitted wider circles of people to take part in public life. They believed that only a truly unified nation in which rulers and ruled were closely related could save China from dismemberment at the hands of foreign imperialists. Despite the small number of women who took part in these discussions, traditional gender roles became yet another focus of opposition. No one expressed that issue more forcefully than Qiu Jin (1875–1907), the rebellious daughter of a gentry family who started a women's journal, arguing that liberated women were essential for a strong Chinese nation, and became involved in revolutionary politics. (For more on Qiu Jin, see Working with Evidence, Source 19.3, page 859.) Thus was born the immensely powerful force of Chinese nationalism, directed alike against Western imperialists, the foreign Qing dynasty, and aspects of China's traditional culture.

AP® Continuity and Change

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To what extent were these self-strengthening strategies a continuation of Chinese policies toward outsiders, and to what extent were they a change?

AP® EXAM TIP

A frequent exam question topic is gender roles in Chinese society through the centuries.

The Qing dynasty response to these new pressures proved inadequate. A flurry of progressive imperial edicts in 1898, known as the Hundred Days of Reform, was soon squelched by conservative forces. More extensive reform in the early twentieth century, including the end of the old examination system and the promise of a national parliament, was a classic case of too little too late. (See *Working with Evidence: China: On the Brink of Change*, page 857.) In 1912 the last Chinese emperor abdicated as the ancient imperial order that had governed China for two millennia collapsed, with only a modest nudge from organized revolutionaries. This **Chinese revolution of 1911–1912** marked the end of a long era in China's long history and the beginning of an immense struggle over the country's future.

The Ottoman Empire and the West in the Nineteenth Century

AP EXAM TIP

As you read about the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, make comparisons with China during the same era.

Like China, the Islamic world represented a highly successful civilization that felt little need to learn from the “infidels” or “barbarians” of the West until it collided with an expanding and aggressive Europe in the nineteenth century. Unlike China, though, Islamic civilization had been a near neighbor to Europe for 1,000 years. Its most prominent state, the Ottoman Empire, had long governed substantial parts of southeastern Europe and had posed a clear military and religious threat to Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But if its encounter with the West was less abrupt than that of China, it was no less consequential. Neither the Ottoman Empire nor China fell under direct colonial rule, but both were much diminished as the changing balance of global power took hold; both launched efforts at “defensive modernization” aimed at strengthening their states and preserving their independence; and in both societies, some people held tightly to old identities and values, even as others embraced new loyalties associated with nationalism and modernity.

“The Sick Man of Europe”

In 1750, the Ottoman Empire was still the central political fixture of a widespread Islamic world. From its Turkish heartland in Anatolia, it ruled over much of the Arab world, from which Islam had come. It protected pilgrims on their way to Mecca, governed Egypt and coastal North Africa, and incorporated millions of Christians in the Balkans. Its ruler, the sultan, claimed the role of caliph, successor to the Prophet Muhammad, and was widely viewed as the leader, defender, and primary representative of the Islamic world. But by the middle, and certainly by the end, of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was no longer able to deal with Europe from a position of equality, let alone superiority. Among the Great Powers of the West, it was now known as “**the sick man of Europe**.” Within the Muslim world, the Ottoman Empire, once viewed as “the strong sword of Islam,” was unable to prevent region after region—India, Indonesia, West Africa, Central Asia—from falling under the control of Christian powers.