The Decline of the Qing Dynasty

Section Preview
As the Qing dynasty declined, Western nations increased their economic involvement with China.

Main Idea
- Pressure from the West and corruption and unrest from within led to the decline of the Qing dynasty. (p. 380)
- War broke out when the British refused to stop importing opium into China. (p. 380)
- The Tai Ping Rebellion reflected the discontent of the Chinese with the Qing dynasty. (p. 382)
- The Chinese government adopted the self-strengthening policy that reformers called for. (p. 383)
- Western nations and Japan set up spheres of influence in China to gain exclusive trading rights. (p. 384)
- The United States proposed an Open Door policy to guarantee it would have equal trading rights with European countries in China. (p. 385)
- Chinese anger with foreign control in their country led to the Boxer Rebellion. (p. 386)

Content Vocabulary
extraterritoriality, self-strengthening, spheres of influence, Open Door policy, indemnity

Academic Vocabulary
decline, ensure

People to Identify
Hong Xiuquan, Guang Xu, Empress Dowager Ci Xi, John Hay

Places to Locate
Guangzhou, Chang Jiang, Hong Kong

Reading Objectives
1. Describe the internal problems that led to the decline of the Qing dynasty.
2. Identify the role that Western nations played in the Qing dynasty’s decline.

Reading Strategy
Compare and Contrast
Create a chart like the one below comparing the Tai Ping and Boxer Rebellions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1840</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1900</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Opium War begins</td>
<td>Tai Ping Rebellion begins</td>
<td>European troops seize Chinese capital of Beijing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ci Xi opposes reforms</td>
<td></td>
<td>Boxer Rebellion defeated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

California Standards in This Section

Reading this section will help you master these California History–Social Science standards.

10.4: Students analyze patterns of global change in the era of New Imperialism in at least two of the following regions or countries: Africa, Southeast Asia, China, India, Latin America, and the Philippines.

10.4.2: Discuss the locations of the colonial rule of such nations as England, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Portugal, and the United States.

10.4.3: Explain imperialism from the perspective of the colonizers and the colonized and the varied immediate and long-term responses by the people under colonial rule.
Causes of Decline

Main Idea Pressure from the West and corruption and unrest from within led to the decline of the Qing dynasty.

Reading Connection Has your community experienced traffic and congestion because of population growth? Read about population stresses in China during the Qing dynasty.

In 1800, after a long period of peace and prosperity, the Qing dynasty of the Manchus was at the height of its power. A little over a century later, however, humiliated and harassed by the Western powers, the Qing dynasty collapsed.

One important reason for the abrupt decline and fall of the Qing dynasty was the intense external pressure applied to Chinese society by the modern West. However, internal changes also played a role.

Terrific number of persons do not perish of famine in some part or other of China.” The ships, guns, and ideas of foreigners highlighted the growing weakness of the Qing dynasty and probably hastened its end.

Examining What factors led to the decline of the Qing dynasty?

The Opium War

Main Idea War broke out when the British refused to stop importing opium into China.

Reading Connection What does the American government do to control illegal drugs? Read to learn how China addressed drug problems in China in the mid-1800s.

By 1800, Europeans had been in contact with China for more than two hundred years. European merchants, however, were restricted to a small trading outlet at Guangzhou (GWONG•JO), or Canton. The British did not like this arrangement.

The British also had an unfavorable trade balance in China. That is, they imported more goods from China than they exported to China. For years, Britain had imported tea, silk, and porcelain from the Chinese and sent Indian cotton to China to pay for these imports. The cotton, however, did not cover the entire debt, and the British were forced to pay for their imports with silver. The British sent increasing quantities of silver to China, especially in exchange for tea, which was in great demand by the British.
At first, the British tried to negotiate with the Chinese to improve the trade imbalance. When negotiations failed, the British turned to trading opium. Opium, a highly addictive drug, was grown in northern India under the sponsorship of the British East India Company and then shipped directly to Chinese markets. Demand for opium in South China jumped dramatically. Soon, silver was flowing out of China and into the pockets of the officials of the British East India Company.

The Chinese reacted strongly. The British were not the first to import opium into China. The Chinese government had already seen opium’s dangerous qualities and had made its trade illegal. They appealed to the British government on moral grounds to stop the traffic in opium. A government official wrote to Queen Victoria: “Suppose there were people from another country who carried opium for sale to England and seduced your people into buying and smoking it; certainly your honorable ruler would deeply hate it and be bitterly aroused.”

The British refused to halt their activity, however. As a result, the Chinese government blockaded the foreign area in Guangzhou in order to force traders to surrender their chests of opium. The British responded with force, starting the Opium War (1839–1842).

The Chinese were no match for the British. British warships destroyed Chinese coastal and river forts. 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, limit taxes on imported British goods, and pay for the costs of the war. China also agreed to give the British the island of Hong Kong. Nothing was said in the treaty about the opium trade. Moreover, in the five ports, Europeans lived in their own sections of town. They were subject not to Chinese laws but to their own laws. This practice was known as extraterritoriality.

The Opium War marked the beginning of the establishment of Western influence in China. For the time being, the Chinese tried to deal with the problem by pitting foreign countries against one another. Concessions granted to the British were offered to other Western nations, including the United States. Soon, thriving foreign areas were operating in the five treaty ports along the southern Chinese coast.

Reading Check Summarizing What did the British do to adjust their trade imbalance with China?
CHAPTER 7 East Asia Under Challenge

The Return of Hong Kong to China

In 1984, Great Britain and China signed a joint declaration in which Britain agreed to return its colony of Hong Kong to China on July 1, 1997. China promised that Hong Kong would keep its free market, its capitalist economy, and its way of life. The formula was "one country, two systems."

In 1841, Hong Kong was a small island with a few fishing villages on the southeastern coast of China. A British naval force seized the island and used it as a port for shipping opium into China. A year later, after a humiliating defeat in the Opium War, China agreed to give the island of Hong Kong to Britain.

In 1860, the British took advantage of the declining power of China's Qing dynasty to gain additional lands next to Hong Kong. In 1898, the Chinese government granted the Kowloon Peninsula to Britain. In 1899, the Chinese granted the British a 99-year lease on the nearby New Territories, an area that provided much of the food for the colony of Hong Kong.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Hong Kong was filled with refugees from the new Communist regime in mainland China. The population of Hong Kong swelled to six million. The economy of Hong Kong boomed. Today, Hong Kong is the eighth-largest trading nation in the world.

The Tai Ping Rebellion

The Tai Ping Rebellion reflected the discontent of the Chinese with the Qing dynasty.

Reading Connection Have you read about utopian communities in America in the 1800s? Read to learn about the kinds of social rules that were followed during the Tai Ping Rebellion.

In the meantime, the failure of the Chinese government to deal with pressing internal economic problems 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 Christ.

Hong was convinced that God had given him the mission of destroying the Qing dynasty. Joined by great crowds of peasants, Hong captured the town of Yong’an and proclaimed a new dynasty, the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace (Tai Ping Tianguo in Chinese—hence the name Tai Ping Rebellion).

The Tai Ping Rebellion appealed to many people because it called for social reforms. These reforms included giving land to all peasants and treating women as equals of men. Women even served in their own units in the Tai Ping army.

Hong’s rebellion also called for people to give up private possessions. Peasants were to hold lands and farms in common, and money, food, and clothing were to be shared equally by all. Hong outlawed alcohol and tobacco and eliminated the practice of binding women’s feet. The Chinese Communist Revolution of the twentieth century (see Chapter 16) would have similar social goals.

In March 1853, the rebels seized Nanjing, the second largest city of the empire, and massacred 25,000 men, women, and children. The revolt continued for 10 more years but gradually began to fall apart. Europeans came to the aid of the Qing dynasty when they realized the destructive nature of the Tai Ping forces. As one British observer noted, there was no hope "of any good ever coming of the rebel movement. They do nothing but burn, murder, and destroy.”

In 1864, Chinese forces, with European aid, recaptured Nanjing and 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 in the course of the 14-year struggle.

Using outside sources, research the current political and cultural situation in Hong Kong. Explain what the formula “one country, two systems” means. Evaluate whether or not the formula has been successful since Hong Kong was returned to China.
Their struggle against Western powers made it hard for the Qing dynasty to deal with internal unrest. From 1856, the British and French were applying force to expand their trading privileges. In the Treaty of Tianjin of 1858, the Chinese agreed to legalize the opium trade and open new ports to foreign trade. They also gave up the Kowloon Peninsula to Britain. When the Chinese resisted parts of the treaty, the British seized Beijing.

**Reading Check**  
What social reforms did the Tai Ping Rebellion demand?

**Efforts at Reform**

**Main Idea** The Chinese government adopted the self-strengthening policy that reformers called for.

**Reading Connection** Do you know why reforms are adopted in your community? Read to find out why the Chinese government adopted the self-strengthening policy in the 1870s.

During the Tai Ping Rebellion, China’s government had relied on regional warlords to recruit the troops necessary to restore order. The warlords had collected taxes to finance these private armies. After crushing the revolt, many warlords refused to dismiss their units. With the support of local leaders, they continued collecting taxes for their own use.

In its weakened state, the Qing court finally began to listen to reformers who supported a policy they called “self-strengthening.” They wanted China to adopt Western technology, but to keep its Confucian values.

Some reformers wanted to change China’s political institutions by introducing democracy. However, such ideas were too radical for most reformers. From the 1870s, the Chinese government tried to modernize its military forces and build up industry without imposing on the basic elements of Chinese culture. Railroads, weapons factories, and shipyards were built, but the Chinese value system remained unchanged.

**Reading Check**  
Explaining What was China’s policy of “self-strengthening”?
Even more ominous changes were taking place in the Chinese heartland. European states began to create spheres of influence, areas where the imperial 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 or railroad-building and mining privileges. In this way, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan all established spheres of influence in China.

In 1894, another blow weakened the Qing dynasty. China went to war with Japan over its inroads into Korea, a land that the Chinese had long controlled. The Chinese were soundly defeated. Japan then demanded and received the island of Taiwan (then called Formosa), and the Liaodong (LYOW•DOONG) Peninsula. Fearing Japan’s growing power, however, the European powers forced Japan to give the Liaodong Peninsula back to China.

New pressures for Chinese territory soon arose. In 1897, two German missionaries were murdered by...
Chinese rioters. Germany used this pretext to demand territories in the Shandong (SHON•DOONG) Peninsula. When the Chinese government approved the demand, other European nations made new claims on Chinese territory.

**Internal Crisis** This latest scramble for territory took place at a time of internal crisis in China. In the spring of 1898, the young emperor Guanx (GWANG SHYOO) launched a massive reform program based on changes in Japan (see Section 3). During the following weeks, known as the One Hundred Days of Reform, the emperor issued edicts calling for major political, administrative, and educational reforms. With these reforms, the emperor intended to modernize government bureaucracy by following Western models; to adopt a new educational system that would replace the traditional civil service examinations; to adopt Western-style schools, banks, and a free press; and to train the military to use modern weapons and Western fighting techniques.

Many conservatives at court, however, opposed a policy of copying the West. As one said, “An examination of the causes of success and failure in government reveals that . . . the adoption of foreignism leads to disorder.” According to these conservatives, traditional Chinese rules needed to be reformed, not rejected in favor of Western ways.

Most important, the new reform program was opposed by the emperor’s aunt, Empress Dowager Ci Xi (TSUH•SEE). She became a dominant force at court and opposed the emperor’s reforms. With the aid of the imperial army, she eventually imprisoned the emperor and ended his reform efforts.

**Reading Check** Examine How did foreign nations obtain trading rights in China at this time?

**People In History**

**Ci Xi**

1835–1908—Chinese empress

Empress Dowager Ci Xi, through her unwillingness to make significant reforms, helped bring about the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. Ci Xi was at first a low-ranking concubine to Emperor Xian Feng. Her position became influential in 1856, when she gave birth to the emperor’s first and only son.

When the emperor died, Ci Xi ruled China on behalf of her son. Later, she ruled on behalf of her nephew Guanx. With the aid of conservatives at court and the imperial army, she had Guanx jailed in the palace.

Empress Dowager Ci Xi ruled China for almost 50 years, during a crucial period in the nation’s history. She was well aware of her own power. “I have often thought that I am the cleverest woman who ever lived . . . I have 400 million people all dependent on my judgement.”

**Opening the Door to China**

**Main Idea** The United States proposed an Open Door policy to guarantee it would have equal trading rights with European countries in China.

**Reading Connection** Have you heard U.S.-Chinese trade policy discussed? Read to learn how America gained access to the Chinese market in 1900.

As foreign pressure on the Qing dynasty grew, Great Britain and the United States feared that other nations would overrun China if its government collapsed. In 1899, U.S. secretary of state John Hay presented a proposal to ensure equal access to the Chinese market, while preserving China as a nation. When no other imperialist power opposed this idea, Hay proclaimed there was agreement on his Open Door policy.

In part, the Open Door policy reflected American concern for the survival of China, but it also reflected the interests of American businesses. These businesses wanted to operate in open markets and disliked the existing division of China into separate spheres of influence dominated by individual states. The Open Door policy did not end the system of spheres of influence, but it did loosen restrictions on trade among the imperialist powers within the spheres. The Open Door policy also helped to reduce imperialist hysteria over access to the China market. The policy lessened fears in Britain, France, Germany, and Russia that other powers would take advantage of China’s weakness and attempt to dominate the China market for themselves.

**Reading Check** Analyze Why did the United States want an Open Door policy in China?
The Boxer Rebellion

**Main Idea** Chinese anger with foreign control in their country led to the Boxer Rebellion.

**Reading Connection** Does your family have particular traditions? Read to find out how Chinese people reacted when they felt their traditions were under threat in the early 1900s.

The Open Door policy came too late to stop the Boxer Rebellion. Boxer was the popular name given to members of a secret organization called the Society of Harmonious Fists. Members practiced a system of exercise—a form of shadowboxing, or boxing with an imaginary opponent—that they thought would protect them from bullets.

The Boxers were upset by the foreign takeover of Chinese lands. Their slogan was “destroy the foreigner.” They especially disliked Christian missionaries from the West and Chinese converts to Christianity who seemed to threaten Chinese traditions. At the beginning of 1900, Boxer bands roamed the countryside and slaughtered foreign missionaries and Chinese Christians. Their victims also included foreign businessmen and even the German envoy to Beijing.

Response to the killings was immediate and overwhelming. An allied army consisting of 20,000 British, French, German, Russian, American, and Japanese troops attacked Beijing in August 1900. The army restored order and demanded more concessions from the Chinese government. The Chinese government was forced to pay a heavy indemnity—a payment for damages—to the powers that had crushed the uprising. The imperial government was now weaker than ever.

**Reading Check**

**Explaining** How did the Boxers get their name?

**Checking for Understanding**

1. **Vocabulary** Define: decline, extraterritoriality, self-strengthening, spheres of influence, ensure, Open Door policy, indemnity.

2. **People and Events** Identify: Hong Xiuquan, Guang Xu, Empress Dowager Cixi, John Hay.

3. **Places** Locate: Guangzhou, Chang Jiang, Hong Kong.

**Reviewing Big Ideas**

4. **Analyze** how the Tai Ping Rebellion helped to weaken the Qing dynasty.

**Critical Thinking**

5. **Causes and Effects** Why did European nations agree to follow the Open Door policy proposed by the United States? CA H.2

6. **Organizing Information** Create a diagram listing the factors that led to the decline of the Qing dynasty.

**Analyzing Visuals**

7. **Examine** the illustration of the Tai Ping Rebellion on page 383. What visual evidence shows British and Chinese determination?

**Writing About History**

8. **Expository Writing** Using outside sources, research, write, and present a report explaining the effects of population on modern China. Remember to include government laws enacted to curtail population growth, and the consequences of disobeying these laws. CA 10W2.3