



REVOLUTION and Its Past

Third Edition

Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History

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*To Beth—
with love and gratitude*

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An Age of Rebellion: Defiance of and Commitments to Traditional Chinese Identities



Beset and besieged by Western powers, the Qing government faced an even more desperate threat in a series of mid-nineteenth-century domestic rebellions that one scholar says “constitute[d] what was probably the greatest wave of peasant wars in history.”¹ The devastation wrought by the largest of these, the Taiping War (1851–1864), was almost unfathomable: In the words of one observer, “smiling fields were turned into desolate wildernesses; ‘fenced cities into ruinous heaps.’ The plains . . . were strewn with human skeletons; their rivers polluted with floating carcasses; wild beasts descending from their fastnesses in the mountains roamed at large over the land, and made their dens in the ruins of deserted towns.”² Not only were foreigners destroying Chinese life and property, but Chinese themselves were also turning productive land into moonscapes and slaughtering each other in vast numbers.

TRADITIONAL REBELLIONS

The nineteenth century was born in domestic rebellion, mostly of the guerrilla variety. The rebellion of Miao aborigines (1795–1806) against the ever-increasing encroachment of Han settlers crossed the century mark. Buddhism gave rise to the White Lotus Rebellion,

which strove to establish a utopia on earth and also straddled the turn of the century (1796–1804), and to the 1813 rebellion of Lin Qing, which reached the Forbidden City in its aim to assassinate the Jiaqing emperor. Though each had its own context and meaning, there were similar patterns of setting, historical actors, agenda, and Qing dynasty responses. They prefigured patterns in the great midcentury rebellions.

Setting

These traditional rebellions were born in provincial border regions. Practically, such a setting made sense since bandits and rebels could quickly cross the boundary to another province if they were being pursued. Although authorities in the other province might eventually pursue them, it is obvious that the rebels did not cross the border where there were military garrisons or police posts. Many provincial border regions were known for their natural wildness—mountains, forests, deserts, areas where the population might be less sedentary and stable, often (especially in Central, South, and Southwest China) where the population was ethnically mixed. If there were ethnic diversity and accompanying language differences, ethnic consciousness often produced among each group a strong sense of the Other's presence. Maintaining order or bringing peace in areas marked by such social diversity and such environmental challenges often necessitated a substantial degree of militarization. The mix—ethnically diverse peoples, with a consciousness of that diversity, militarized, and potentially in trouble with the law—could easily become combustible if ignited.

The Miao Rebellion began along the mountainous border between Hunan and Guizhou but, even more significant, along the border between the Middle Yangzi and both the Upper Yangzi and Southwest China macroregions. At higher altitudes, they practiced slash-and-burn agriculture; at lower elevations, they farmed. The rebellion was ignited by the Qing dynasty's efforts to extend its political control in the area, a policy accompanied by a large influx of Han Chinese settlers. The White Lotus Rebellion took shape in the mountainous and forested lands on the borders of Hubei, Sichuan, and Shaanxi—or, again, more apropos, on the borders of three macroregions: Northwest China, the Upper Yangzi, and the Middle Yangzi. A utopian Buddhist ideology fueled this rebellion. Lin Qing's 1813 rebellion that the Daoguang emperor helped to quell does not fit the macroregional border pattern and thus points to the range of possibilities for rebellious activity. It erupted with the impetus of Buddhist beliefs in Shandong and near Beijing in the plains of the North China macroregion; but the world of its leader, Lin Qing, was the economically peripheral world of the poor North China peasant and the poverty-stricken urban underclass.

The Historical Actors and Their Agendas

Any rebellion required leaders. A leader might emerge from almost any social type—peddlers, Daoist or Buddhist monks, laborers, failed examination candidates, boatmen, charcoal burners, or geomancers. Yet all leaders had compelling messages or were charismatic or both. During his life, Lin Qing had many odd jobs: night watchman, clerk, coolie, construction worker—nothing, in short, to indicate exceptional talent. Yet after his arrest, a relative told the Qing authorities that the secret of his success was his convincing

description of how he would succeed and why people should contribute money to his cause. White Lotus Rebellion leader Liu Zhixie was reportedly charismatic, an able strategist who mobilized numerous congregations of White Lotus followers.

In addition to leaders, of course, a rebellion needed masses of people who were organized and mobilized at least to some degree. The social structures and substance of rebellions varied geographically. In North China during the late Qing, a number of such social upheavals, including the White Lotus Rebellion, were inspired by a belief in the coming of the Buddha of the Future, who, it was thought, would establish a paradise on earth. At times of social trouble and disorder, local communities (in the case of the White Lotus sect, based on congregations) joined in defensive efforts by forming militia groups; in this way they quickly became the building blocks for rebellion. For disturbances to grow into major rebellions, leaders of these communities had to have links to other groups who were involved in the world of violence—for example, groups that practiced traditional martial arts. The White Lotus Rebellion spread in the beginning because of the links that sect communities had to bandits who lived in the forests of the three-province border region.

In South China, the building blocks of rebellion tended to be “lodges” in a secret blood brotherhood called the Triads. The Triads spread throughout the Southeast Coast and Lingnan macroregions in the eighteenth century and to the Lower Yangzi by the early nineteenth century. Composed mostly of the underclasses—laborers, pirates, smugglers, yamen clerks and runners, boatmen, and peasants—Triad organizations did not seek to overthrow legitimate society but to exploit it. A slogan put it this way: “The people of the top class owe us money; those of the middle class should wake up. Lower classes come with us! It is better than hiring an ox to plow poor land!” There was nothing revolutionary about the Triads. They looked back to the Ming and, with anti-Manchu venom, called for restoring the Ming to power. Like the White Lotus sects in the North, the Triads found a ready audience because of the growing social malaise brought on by changes coming from urbanization, migration, and expanding networks of domestic and foreign trade. In time of peace they served as mutual assistance organizations; they readily accepted women as members. In the South, the presence of strong and often feuding lineages further encouraged the growth of the Triads.

Qing Government Response

In the White Lotus Rebellion, the government sent regular banner forces against the guerrilla enemy. A key goal was to capture the leaders, the theory apparently being that a leaderless movement could be dealt with more quickly. The struggle then turned into what in the twentieth-century Vietnam War would be called “search-and-destroy” operations, with destruction often falling most heavily on civilians in their villages. The war dragged on, with local communities often left in charge of their own defense. There were two elements to the defense. First was utilizing an old tradition of “strengthening the walls and clearing the countryside”—that is, building to fortify the walls of urban settlements, bringing people and grain from the countryside into these “strategic hamlets.” Such a policy brought a more secure civilian population and deprived the rebels of food.

The second element of defense was the establishment of local militia units by local elites who also served as militia heads. These policies—and both meant relying on local solutions—eventually successfully met the threat of the rebellion.

THE TAIPING WAR (1851–1864): ATTEMPTING TO REVOLUTIONIZE IDENTITY

Though traditionally called a rebellion, this largest and most destructive such explosion in world history might best be considered a civil war that devastated much of East Central and South China and militarily embroiled to a greater or lesser degree sixteen of the eighteen provinces within the Great Wall. A rebellion is defined by the established power holders who are under siege; rebels endeavor to unseat existing rulers. A civil war, in contrast, pits armies composed of combatants without necessarily presuming that one is in a privileged position.³ Even more pertinent to the themes of this book is the revolutionary threat of the Taiping to traditional Chinese cultural identity: Taiping ideology and practice struck at the very heart of the Confucian framework and substance that were central to the Chinese identity. The Taiping War also underlined in blood one pernicious effect that Western Christianity came to have in the social tinderbox of South China. For the rebellion was the brainchild of Hong Xiuquan, whose sickbed visions left him with the conviction that he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ and that he had a holy mission.

Regional Context

The historical and spatial contexts provided Hong with the people and the support that made his movement a threat not only to the ruling Manchus but to traditional Chinese civilization as well. The Taiping movement was born in the Canton region in the troubled years following the Opium War; it grew in large part because of the destabilization of the region from the opium scourge and the war itself. For several decades, opium smuggling, trafficking, and smoking had been major problems in the region. In their daily lives, people in the area had experienced the full impact of ballooning taxes caused by the currency instability that resulted from the outflow of silver to pay for the opium. There were other longer-term political problems for some in this region. Two centuries earlier, this had been the last region conquered by the Manchus, and many areas had not—even after all that time—ever reconciled themselves to the control by these outsiders. In that context of distrust and contempt, this area had then watched the pitiful performance of the regime's military forces in the Opium War. It is almost certainly the case that such a humiliating defeat brought to some people in the region thoughts and perhaps talk about the Mandate of Heaven. Was it beginning to slip from the dynasty's grasp? Further, the treaty system itself opened up to Westerners not only the walled city of Canton (which had been off limits to the West earlier) but also the interior; to see "foreign devils" was an immediate reminder that the Manchus had not been strong enough to keep them out. Given such a reality, Manchus, their military, and their bureaucrats could become obvious targets.

The new treaty system itself made the possibility of social unrest in the region more likely. In the rapid growth of trade with the West in the late eighteenth century, tea and silk had been the West's prime objectives. Though some were produced in the Canton area, the main tea- and silk-producing regions were in Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Fujian provinces. During the approximately eighty years (1760s-1842) when Canton was the only port open to the West, overland and riverine trade routes had developed from the Lower Yangzi and Southeast Coast macroregions to Canton. Shippers and brokers were involved along these routes, as were local toughs who were enlisted to protect the expensive commodities; they all made their living from this domestic trade. They were generally men who, by the nature of their occupations, knew how to deal with dangerous situations and handle themselves amid potential violence and criminal behavior. With the opening of the treaty ports of Ningbo (Zhejiang province) and Shanghai (Jiangsu province) in the Treaty of Nanjing, tea and silk could much more easily and quickly be carried to these closer new ports. No longer needed, the old trade routes dried up and, with them, the livelihood of the transporters and security guards who had worked the routes. The unemployment of these transport workers—many of whom were roughnecks at best—created a new, potentially destabilizing factor in the region.

The introduction of another unsettling population increased the tinderbox situation. Pirates had been a traditional threat along the Southeast Coast. Because the ports opened with the Treaty of Nanjing were along this coast, Western ships plying these waters became the objects of pirate raids and attacks. The British therefore began a policy of suppressing the maritime pirates. This campaign was on the whole successful, allowing safer ocean travel, but it forced the now-unemployed maritime pirates into the interior, where they were transformed into land- and river-based bandits who preyed on the local Chinese population.

In addition to these new forces, there were old ethnic rivalries that tore at the region's social amity. There were Hakkas, "guest people," Han Chinese immigrants from North China centuries earlier, who remained separate from the locals. They spoke their own dialect. Hakka women did not bind their feet, as respectable and sophisticated Han Chinese women did. Thus, women joined men in working the fields. Hakkas often worked the poorer land since the area had already been settled when they moved in; there were frequent clashes with locals over land use and irrigation rights and even over patterns of residence. Yet even Hakkas fit in more easily with the longtime resident Han Chinese than the Miao and Yao tribesmen who inhabited the mountainous areas. Hakkas often found themselves in competition and skirmishes with the Miao and Yao peoples. The ethnic diversity in the area increased the likelihood of social unrest.

Thus, considerable social tensions had arisen from ethnic divisions, poverty, the presence of a variety of unruly and criminal types, and contempt for the Manchus and Westerners. But until there was some vehicle to express this malaise and give it shape, it was amorphous and aimless. Beginning in the mid-1830s, those vehicles began to appear in the form of secret societies and religion-based sects. An 1836 rebellion led by a Yao minority tribesman who was also the leader of a White Lotus community was only the first of several uprisings that eventually involved the Triad society. Like this

one, mini-rebellions in 1847 and 1849 were put down. When secret societies and religious sects became involved in the increasingly bitter rivalry between Hakkas and locals, social tensions and violence threatened to explode in social fragmentation.

The Rebellion Takes Shape

It was into this world that Hong Xiuquan, a Hakka, the son of a poor farmer, was born in 1814. Since he seemed to be a bright child, his family arranged for Hong to be tutored so that he might take the civil service examination. He failed in his first two attempts. In 1836, when he was in Canton to try again, he was handed a collection of biblical passages and explanatory sermons called "Good Words for Exhorting the Age." The author was one Liang Afa, a convert to Christianity early in the century, who had become an evangelist. The work was explicit in asserting that moral decline was putting Chinese society in great peril; its "stark fundamentalist message hammer[ed] home the omnipotence of God, the degradation of sin and idolatry, and the awesome choice between salvation or damnation."⁴ Hong reportedly did not read the material but took it home and set it aside. The next year he failed the examination yet again. Overcome with humiliation and shame, he reportedly spoke at length to his parents about his feelings of worthlessness. And then he fell ill; it is not certain to what extent his illness was physically related and to what extent it was a nervous breakdown.

During his illness, he had a vision. He ascended to Heaven, where he was purified and his body regenerated with new internal organs. A venerable man with golden hair and beard dressed in black robes handed him a sword and emblems of royalty, instructing him to kill the demons. Feeling as righteous and powerful as he had felt worthless before, Hong set out on quests that spanned the cosmos, carrying out the golden-haired man's orders. Accompanying him on these missions was a middle-aged man whom Hong thought to be his older brother. When his illness abated, Hong turned to teaching in the village school, though he clearly remembered his hallucinatory vision. In 1843 he tried to pass the civil service examination once more, and once more he failed. Angry with himself but more so with the system, he returned home.

At this point he apparently read the Christian tracts that he had brought home seven years earlier. It was a eureka experience that explained his earlier vision. The venerable old man was none other than God, and the middle-aged man was Jesus. God addressed Hong as the heavenly younger brother; he was, in effect, God's Chinese son. And it was God who had instructed Hong to slay the demons. Yet, in his comprehension of the vision, Hong did not immediately see any political import. His writings in the years after 1843 depicted his charge as one of converting Chinese to Christianity. Further, Hong seemed to want to merge the Christian message, which in his hands meant primarily worship of the One God, with Confucianism, especially an emphasis on living an upright and morally orthodox life. Hong's impassioned beliefs led him to begin to convert family and friends and to antagonize his community by destroying statues of gods in the local temple.

In 1844 Hong and one of his earliest converts, his close friend Feng Yunshan, left his native village and journeyed to the hill country of southern Guangxi to begin proselytizing. Hong returned to his home village later that year and spent the next two years writing and

teaching about his beliefs; he studied for two months in 1847 with the American Baptist missionary Issachar Roberts in Hong Kong. Feng in the meantime proved to be a master missionary and organizer, by 1850 converting many Hakka communities. He organized local congregations and linked them together in multivillage networks stretching over a dozen counties; they comprised the God Worshipping Society.

In many ways, this organization was a secret society, founded, like the White Lotus sect, on religious ideas. The context of communal struggle and vendettas among ethnic groups, serious famines in 1847 and 1849, and the consequent appearance of many bandits helped fuel the spread of the God Worshippers. God Worshippers, who were in the main Hakkas and Miao tribesmen, began to set up their own militia units for self-defense; in the tense atmosphere, they frequently fought with militia units formed by non-Hakka, non-Miao local inhabitants. Members of the Triad Society began to join the God Worshippers, adding a contingent to the organization that actively called for the overthrow of the Manchus. It was in this context that Hong's message began to become politicized, with many coming to see that the demons God had ordered exterminated were Manchus.

History often turns on contingencies. In late 1848 Feng was seized by a local militia leader, accused of sedition, and sent to Guangdong to the governor-general's office; Hong left also to argue Feng's case. They were gone for seven months, a critical period in the movement's development because it allowed other leaders to emerge. Probably the most powerful was a local bully from Thistle Mountain, the headquarters of the God Worshippers—Yang Xiuqing, an illiterate charcoal maker. His crony, Xiao Chaogui, was also a charcoal maker. Two others came from wealthier backgrounds: Wei Changhui, of aboriginal stock, came from a landlord pawnshop-owning family and Shi Dakai from a wealthy farm family. Of these four, only Shi had some education. Yang and Xiao took a page from the divinity book of Hong Xiuquan. Whereas Hong was the Heavenly Younger Brother, Yang announced—as an obvious reflection of his ambition—that when he spoke it was the voice of God the Father, and Xiao alleged that his voice was that of Jesus. These developments had all the makings of future trouble: When divinity clashed with divinity, who could mediate?

In July 1850 the leaders called all God Worshippers, about 20,000 strong, to Thistle Mountain. They had left their homes behind; all their movable possessions they put into a common treasury. They had been farmers, charcoal makers, miners, Triads, and pirates. Now they made up a vast military camp. The Qing government recognized the threat as serious: A Christian cult had militarized and was now forming an army. In response, it sent the state's army, which was promptly defeated by the God Worshippers in several engagements. With victories under their belts, in January 1851 the God Worshippers declared the establishment of a new dynasty, the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace (*Taiping tianguo*). As a visible symbol of their anti-Manchu identity, they abandoned the Manchu hairstyle, letting their hair grow long all over their heads; people called them the "long-haired rebels." So coifed, they set out on a military campaign to realize the Heavenly Kingdom on earth now.

The year and a half between the Taiping seizure of the small city of Yongan in Guangxi province and the capture of Nanjing in March 1853 saw the rapid growth of

the movement, in many cases because the Qing armies, disorganized and poorly disciplined, could not execute any coordinated military strategy. The Taiping suffered serious defeats; in one, the movement's most prolific proselytizer and best organizer, Feng Yunshan, was killed in summer 1852. Then in the fall, Xiao Chaogui, the voice of Jesus, died of wounds suffered in battle, a death that, taken on its face, should have created a theological crisis of major proportion. But no one seemed to notice.

In the God Worshippers' march north to the Yangzi River, a key was crossing over from the Lingnan macroregion, with its east-flowing rivers, to the Middle Yangzi, with its vast Yangzi River tributary network. As transportation was made easier after the crossing, triumphs seemed to come the same way. They took the Hunan provincial capital, Changsha, in September 1852; the Hubei provincial capital, Wuchang, on the Yangzi River in January 1853; and then Nanjing. With each victory the number of Taiping swelled: After Changsha, an estimated 120,000; after Wuchang, possibly 500,000; after Nanjing, perhaps 2 million. On the taking of Nanjing, the Taiping leadership followed the orders the golden-haired man had given Hong long ago back in his native village: They began to exterminate the demons. In an act that might be called the first Nanjing massacre, all of the 40,000 Manchus who lived in Nanjing who were not killed in the fighting were stabbed to death, drowned, or burned alive.

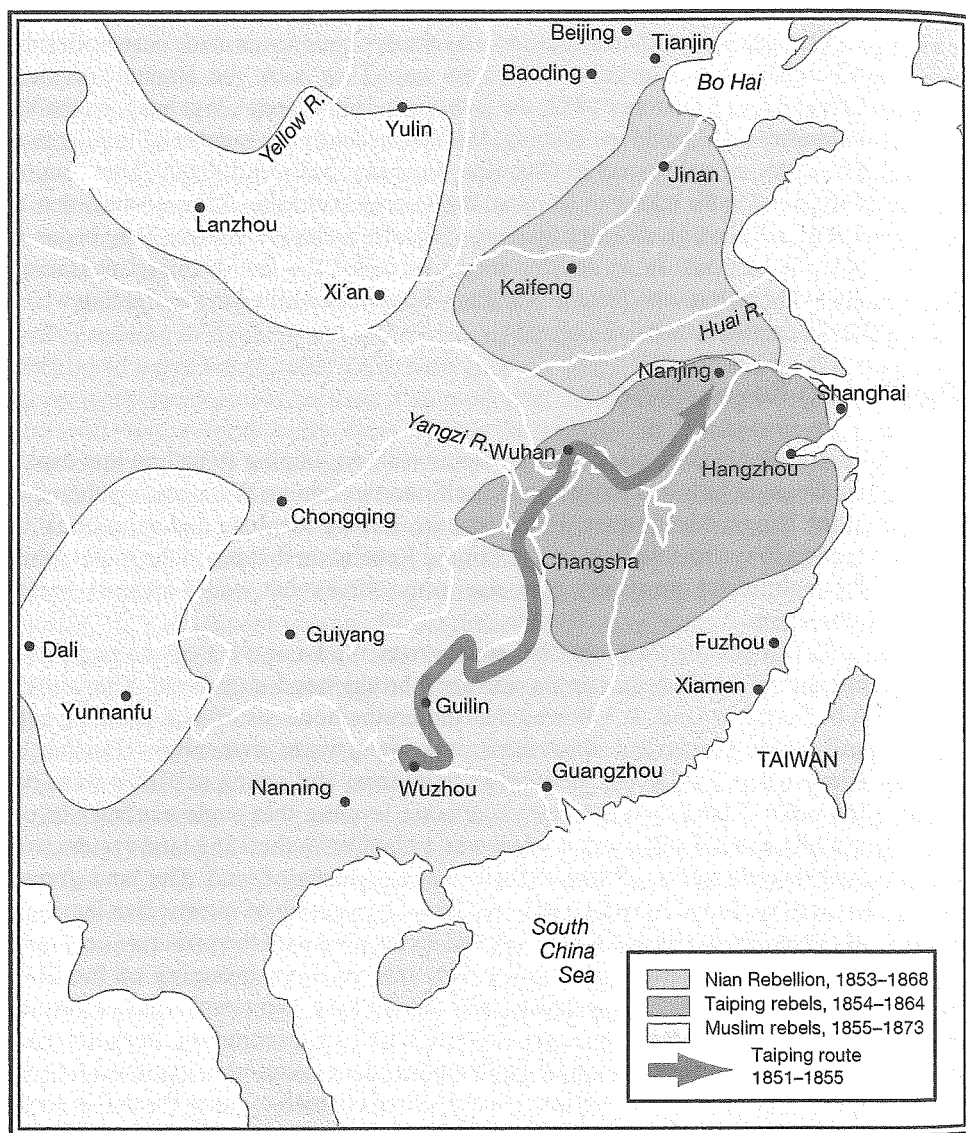
The Taiping Revolution

The Qing dynasty had enough problems with the Taiping Rebellion that exploded out of the Guangxi hills and transformed itself into the Taiping War once it gathered momentum in the Yangzi River valley. But it was the Taiping ideology and its political, social, and economic systems making up the Taiping Revolution that posed the most serious threat to the regime and eventually gave rise to the forces that would crush the whole Taiping movement.

Underlying Taiping Christianity was the basic idea of the equality of human beings before God, creating a universal brotherhood-sisterhood. The world and all in it belonged to God. It followed that the brotherhood-sisterhood used the natural world and its products but that there was no private ownership. Further, economic competition, exploiting the world's resources, and acting selfishly were condemned. Implicit, of course, was a clear economic leveling that made extremes of poverty and wealth untenable. The social ideal was embodied in the 1853 land system, which specified that all men *and women* receive equal shares of land. The land grants were not owned but rather cultivated in common by a grouping of twenty-five families, the basic social-political unit in Taiping society. In keeping with the primitive economic communism that was a hallmark of the new regime, each grouping of families shared a common treasury. The grouping was headed by a "sergeant" who performed multiple roles. He kept records of production and of the common treasury. He mediated disputes and served as judge. He managed the education of the families' children. As the grouping's military leader, he selected militiamen to serve for the unit's defense. He oversaw church services on the Sabbath. The structure of this commune-like system came in large part from an old traditional Chinese work, the *Rituals of Zhou*; but since

much of the ideology was based on Christian idealism, the system was clearly a hybrid. It is perhaps not surprising, given the commune-like structure and the primitive form of economic communism, that twentieth-century Communists saw the Taiping movement in a positive light.

The social roles and position of women in Taiping society were markedly superior to those of women in Qing society. That women could be allotted land is the first



Mid-Nineteenth-Century Rebellions

indication of the gender revolution that the Taiping were ready to engineer. Women were also allowed to take the new civil service examinations based on the Bible and the various writings of Hong Xiuquan. Women could, as a result, hold some offices in the bureaucracy. In addition, women could actively participate in military units. This near-revolution in gender relations scandalized those with traditional Confucian sensibilities.

As part of the Hakka heritage, the Taiping forbade footbinding. That custom had begun centuries earlier when fascination with a ballerina of the court led many young women to desire tiny feet, no more than three inches long, known as "golden lilies." Girls, roughly five to eight years old, had their feet tightly bound with cloth so that the arches were broken and pushed upward. "As the arch [was] gradually broken, the flat of [a girl's] heels and the balls of [her] foot . . . [were] gradually moved from horizontal to perpendicular, facing each other, so that an object like a silver dollar [could] be inserted in the narrow space between them. The result [was] that [she would] never run again and [could] walk [only] on the base of [her] heels . . . with [great] difficulty."⁵ This cruel and curious custom supposedly lent sophistication to its victim, making a good marriage match more likely. The patriarchal family system defined by male domination perpetuated the custom, though, as has been pointed out, "without the cooperation of the women concerned, foot-binding could not have been perpetuated for a millennium." It has been called "a central event in the domestic women's culture," "an exclusively female affair."⁶ Be that as it may, it hobbled women, keeping them from gallivanting. Golden lilies even became used in sex play. Though not all Chinese women in all places bound their feet, footbinding continued into the twentieth century. The Manchus had chosen to differentiate their women from Chinese women through their prohibition of footbinding.

In some areas of social policy, the puritanism of fundamentalist Christianity reinforced a native Chinese puritanism. The use of alcohol, tobacco, and opium was forbidden. Gambling, witchcraft, prostitution, and adultery were taboo. With regard to sexual relations, the Taiping instituted a policy of strict abstinence, even between husbands and wives. If one thought of a universal brotherhood and sisterhood, sexual relations of any sort would be incestuous. It is obvious that the Taiping could not end sexual intercourse permanently, for no newborn Taipings ultimately would mean the end of the movement. But leaders wanted chastity to be the rule in order to preserve order and discipline until after the heavenly kingdom was firmly established. Therefore, men and women lived in strictly segregated housing; having sex brought with it the penalty of execution. Not surprisingly, this policy gave rise to massive morale problems; the policy of sexual segregation was thus abandoned by 1855.

The Taiping Revolution was a potent threat to the traditional Chinese Confucian system. Taipingism provided an all-embracing cosmology, linking the three components of the traditional Chinese universe—Heaven, earth, and humans—in a new way. God in a Christian Heaven replaced the impersonal force of Heaven that endowed the Chinese emperor with his mandate to rule and that reflected events on earth by the forces of nature (e.g., storms, plagues, and earthquakes). Now earth and its resources were to be shared by humans equally in a universal siblinghood—a startlingly different framework for thought and society from the traditional Confucian vision of a social hierarchy, with elites



Footbinding began in the Song dynasty, probably in the late eleventh century. Although the big toe was not bound, the rest of the foot was wrapped in long bindings. A woman's feet therefore became a private body part, to be seen only by herself, her mother, and later her husband.

dominating society and its resources. Further, specific social and political policies undercut traditional Chinese norms. The centrality of the family disappeared into the twenty-five-family grouping, with the power of the father taken by the sergeant and the family losing its economic and social preeminence. As we have seen, the roles and status of women were markedly enhanced. Economic competition was abolished. The new state received a new kind of legitimacy—from the Christian God—and delved deeper into personal lives than ever before: prescribing daily economic, social, and religious roles for people, even forbidding sexual intercourse between husbands and wives. It is little wonder that some Chinese, trained in the glories of traditional Confucianism, might have begun to feel their cultural identity and that of China threatened by the Heavenly Kingdom.

Why the Revolution Failed

Historians speculate on whether the Taiping could have swept the Qing away if they had maintained their remarkable military momentum and marched to the north. But they did not know where to proceed, so Nanjing became their capital. In the end, it became their tomb.

During their eleven-year stint in the city, they tried, generally unsuccessfully, to implement their vision of politics and society even as they wreaked havoc and destruction on forays in all directions but especially in the Lower Yangzi region.

The eventual collapse came for many strategic reasons—probably most important was the disintegration of the central leadership. In the days at Thistle Mountain, six men had emerged as leaders, first called “marshals,” but after reaching Nanjing, “kings.” Two, the South King (Feng) and the West King (Xiao), had been killed in the campaign. That left the powerfully ambitious East King (Yang), the North King (Wei), the Assistant King (Shi), and the Heavenly King (Hong). While egalitarianism was prescribed for the masses by the Taiping kings, the kings themselves had numerous perks and privileges, perhaps the most notable being heavily populated harems, in which they could have sex whenever they wanted. Living luxuriously in palaces that took years to construct, the kings could expect commoners to fall on their faces in a show of obeisance whenever they passed in their sedan chairs. If a commoner did not comply with this expectation, he could become a “celestial lamp,” that is, burned alive; alternatively, he might be torn apart after being tied to five horses.

Because political power was so concentrated at the top, problems that developed among the kings had life-and-death import for the whole movement. Almost from the time of reaching Nanjing, bad blood developed between Hong and Yang, the East King. In a moment of rage, Hong had kicked one of his concubines. Yang, claiming that God the Father spoke through him, demanded that Hong be punished by beatings with a bamboo rod. Later, when Hong agreed to submit, God graciously canceled the sentence. But from that time on, there was bad blood between them. Yang continued to try to one-up Hong, letting it be known that he was not only the voice of God the Father but also the incarnation of the Holy Ghost. In 1856, he (in his voice of God the Father incarnation) demanded that Hong give him the title of “10,000 Years,” the traditional title of the Chinese Son of Heaven. This was too much for Hong, who could see a coup in the making. He enlisted Wei, the North King, to kill Yang. Wei’s actions were like using a bomb to kill a fly: In a bloody massacre, he slaughtered not only Yang and his family but 20,000 followers to boot. Shi, the Assistant King, was horrified and denounced Wei’s actions, but then discovered that he was next on Wei’s list. Though Shi escaped over the city wall, Wei wiped his family out. Hong, now fearing the madman he had unleashed, had Wei and 200 of his supporters killed. Although there was a regime revival of sorts with the appointment of a raft of new kings, “[i]n this arena of carnage, greed, and paranoia perished whatever remnants of its original vision the Taiping movement might have retained.”⁷

Another reason for the failure of the Taiping Revolution was that the land reform and commune-like grouping systems were never really put in place in areas that the Taiping controlled. The Taiping, however visionary, were not skillful administrators. The envisioned revolution faced huge practical obstacles, not the least of which was insufficient time to install so radical a program. Even if there had been time, there was not enough manpower to penetrate to the local level where entrenched social patterns had to be eradicated. Thus, those people who staffed most of the local governments had been there before the Taiping and had little loyalty to the regime or its program.

A basic reason for the failure can be found in the very identity of the Taiping effort. It was a fanatical totalitarian religious movement that promised utopia but delivered nothing beyond hard work, strict discipline, no sex, and a harsh existence. Once the bloodshed

between the kings started, once one's friend became a celestial lamp, once the discrepancy between the lifestyles of the kings and their entourages and those of the masses became known, resentment began to replace the hope that had driven the movement. In short, when promises of future rewards, which had given the movement aim and direction, were not fulfilled, the commitment of people to the regime vanished. In some areas, especially those to which the Taiping came late in the life of its regime, there was not much commitment to the Taiping anyway.

Strategically, the Taipings can be faulted in many ways. Instead of keeping their substantial momentum and moving to the north, where Qing political power lay, they had holed up in Nanjing—where the movement eventually was snuffed out. They were not adept at enlisting possible collaborators who might join in a common drive to overthrow the Manchus. For example, there were two other serious uprisings that occurred concurrently with the Taiping, the Nian in North China and the Red Turbans in South China. There was frequent cooperation with the Nian but never any efforts to pursue the possibility of a long-term strategic alliance, which, in any case, was probably doubtful given the religious nature and claims of the Taiping. Similarly, one can point to the Taiping lack of foresight in trying more directly to curry favor with Western nations. Initially Western missionaries were interested and intrigued by the possibility of a Christian revolutionary movement seizing power. When many of them visited Nanjing, however, they were shocked by the substance of Taiping Christianity. In addition, just as the Chinese in various tracts had alleged that Western missionaries and their converts practiced sodomy, now Western missionaries claimed that Taiping leaders were involved in homosexual activities. Taiping ideology and alleged practices repulsed Western missionaries; they wanted nothing to do with Hong and his followers. Western merchants were put off by the Taiping refusal to allow opium into their realm. Western nations, which initially might have been interested in the Taiping as a regime that could possibly be more open to the West and its demands than the Qing, rallied instead to the Qing. Late in the rebellion, Western-led mercenary troops, the “Ever-Victorious Army,” led first by the American Frederick Townsend Ward and then by Charles “Chinese” Gordon, fought Taiping troops in their efforts to take the treaty port of Shanghai.

Despite the multiple internal faults and weaknesses that help explain the Taiping collapse, the most important reason for the failure of the Taiping Revolution was military defeat at the hands of Chinese civil servants who were deeply committed to traditional Chinese culture and who saw the Taiping as spearheading an attack on their way of life. In 1852, the Xianfeng emperor named some militia commissioners whose job was to bring together gentry-led local militias into federations that could protect local society from the rebels. This was notably an admission that banner and Green Standard forces could not do the job and a decentralization of military authority to the provincial and local levels—a crucial indicator of Manchu military weakness.

The important official Zeng Guofan accepted the appointment as militia commissioner. He was outraged by the Taiping threat to traditional culture. His proclamation against the Taiping in 1854 reads in part: “Scholars may not read the Confucian classics, for they have their so-called teachings of Jesus and the New Testament. In a single day, several thousand years of Chinese ethical principles and proper human relationships, classical books, social institutions and statutes have all been completely swept away. This is not just a crisis

for our Qing dynasty, but the most extraordinary crisis of all time for the Confucian teachings. . . .”⁸ With the permission of the court, Zeng took his appointment and ran with it straight to the formation of his own provincial (Hunan) army, which he recruited from his networks of gentry connections. Throughout the chain of command, Zeng’s army was built on Confucian principles—“duty to one’s neighbors, piety to one’s family, and personal loyalty to one’s commander.”⁹ It was largely funded by a new tax, the *lijin*, collected on shipped commercial goods at customs barriers along key routes. Zeng’s protégé, Li Hongzhang, set up a counterpart provincial army in Anhui province. Both men purchased some foreign cannon and arms for their forces. These armies played the key role in battles leading to the final Taiping collapse. It was Zeng’s Hunan army that was the key in the seizure of Nanjing in July 1864. The Heavenly King had died a few weeks earlier; none of the original leaders of the movement were around at the end.

The destruction wrought by the rebellion was appalling. Population estimates for just the Lower Yangzi macroregion suggest that the population in 1843 had reached 67 million but that a half-century later it had fallen to 45 million.¹⁰ Fully fifty years after Hong’s capital went up in flames, a reporter from a Shanghai newspaper described the great destruction still apparent in the Zhejiang prefectural capital of Yanzhou: “At the southeast corner of the city what are today grazing lands were once the site of a bustling, crowded quarter.”¹¹ Yet the movement had great historical significance apart from the horrific death toll and the destruction. “More than any other rebellion of their day, [the Taiping] addressed themselves directly to the crisis of the times and offered concrete measures for resolving it. Their vision of a new system of property relations, a new mechanism of local control, and a new relationship between the individual and the state was an authentic response to the distinctive problems of the late imperial age.”¹²

GUERRILLA WARFARE: THE NIAN REBELLION (1853–1868)

The Nian Rebellion was the only one of the four major midcentury rebellions that did not have a religious dynamic. It developed in the bleakly poor, sandy Huaibei region of North Central China along the Anhui–Henan–Jiangsu border, an area subject to severe flooding and drought. As in the Taiping, the region was populated with a huge cast of potential rebels. Some were the “human debris of the White Lotus Rebellion”.¹³ White Lotus adherents and perhaps rebels themselves, but, more important, mercenary soldiers who had been recruited in Huaibei to fight the White Lotus rebels farther in the interior and who returned to the area after the rebellion. Other potential elements of the population that might have had a predilection to social violence included peasants propelled toward belligerence by their harsh existence and by the ruffian-like salt smugglers and guards for the salt traffickers. A prized and essential commodity produced along the Jiangsu seacoast, salt was a government monopoly. There were always large numbers of men who attempted to make money by smuggling outside the bounds of the monopoly. Studies have also shown that the rate of female infanticide in the area was higher than in some other areas of China and that as many as 20 percent of marriage-age men remained unmarried. The availability of large numbers of such unattached males (called “bare sticks”), free to participate in social unrest, was also a destabilizing factor.

In this perennially poverty-stricken area, disaffected types joined groups in various predatory practices—banditry, smuggling, theft, plunder, kidnapping, and organized feuds. Some of these groups were Nian bands that began to appear around the turn of the nineteenth century; in the beginning, they were often structured around families and lineages. Although the origins of the word *nian* remain somewhat unclear, the term came to be applied to groups of bandits who took a blatantly Robin Hood approach: a folk song of the time put it this way: “The poor men’s hearts are happy to see him [the Nian leader], and the moneybags’ bones go soft with terror.”¹⁴ By about 1850, Nian bands had become firmly ensconced in villages across the Huaibei area, with whole communities participating in banditry and plunder. Natural disaster helped to weld these bands together in what became known as the Nian Rebellion. Severe floods in 1851 heralded the beginning of the tragic shift of the Yellow River from the south to the north of the Shandong peninsula; though the major collapse of the dikes did not occur until 1855, the years from 1851 on brought famine and economic calamity. In the context of crisis, more and more people joined Nian bands. In guerrilla strikes they plundered for their livelihood as they protected and fortified their home communities.

In 1852, Zhang Luoxing, a local landlord and member of a powerful local lineage involved in salt smuggling, was chosen to lead a federation of Nian communities. When he was elected “Lord of the Alliance” in 1856, the Nian organized themselves in five units under red, yellow, blue, white, and black banners; each may have contained up to 20,000 men, though the total number of Nian is unknown. Later the number of banners was increased, but the organization remained loose. Though Zhang’s leadership never approached the centralized control of Hong Xiuquan, the banner system did bring greater coherence to the movement. As an indicator of the still-haphazard nature of the movement, however, some Nian bands in Henan province did not even join the federation.

The first phase of the rebellion until about 1864 took the form of what one writer has called “seasonal militarization.” Even after the formation of the alliance, the Nian continued to fight in small guerrilla units, notably mobile on horseback. Like any guerrilla force, they were dependent on the local populace for support. Rebels maintained their fortified base communities and tended to be sedentary in the summer and winter months. In the spring and autumn they moved into the military phase of banditry, raiding, and plunder. They utilized the traditional policy the Qing regime had used in fighting the White Lotus Rebellion, “strengthening the walls and clearing the countryside.” This meant keeping rebel communities protected, sometimes with cannon, while gathering all the grain and other food items from the countryside and bringing them into the earth-walled settlements.

This policy created a scorched earth situation in the countryside, which deprived government troops of what they needed to subsist on during their efforts to quell the rebellion. A French missionary who accompanied government troops in the early 1860s described the situation: “Almost everywhere, when we were not strong enough to intimidate the villages we had to go through, we were refused even water for our horses; if we asked if we could buy a measure of millet or a feed of corn, we were invariably told that there was none. It seemed as if we were in a wilderness, while, when the rebels

approached, everyone rushed to entertain them and to procure what they needed." Most of the rebellion's plundering occurred in Shandong, Henan, and northern Jiangsu in an area of about a 100,000 square miles. The Qing regime began to take the movement very seriously when in the mid-1850s Zhang assumed threateningly suggestive titles like "Great Han Prince with the Heavenly Mandate"; when the rebels adopted secret society symbols, oaths, and rituals; and when the rebels cooperated with the Taiping on a number of ad hoc occasions.

The Qing government first utilized troops from the Army of the Green Standard who had difficulty coping with the Nian's guerrilla warfare. When the Mongol prince Senggerinchin, a descendant of Genghis Khan, was appointed imperial commissioner to deal with the Nian in late 1860, he brought with him not only Green Standard troops but also banner cavalry and infantry. Known for his aggressive leadership, he ordered that those he captured have their ears and noses cut off, to be sent to Beijing as war trophies. Under his direction, Zhang Luoxing was captured in 1863. In his confession before his execution, Zhang noted the handful of times he had cooperated with the Taiping in joint military operations and, at age fifty-three, resignedly recognized his fate and the rebellion's rather dire straits: "In these past few years I have plundered too many places to remember all of them clearly. My wife has been chased off by government troops and I do not know where she is. My son and adopted son have both been captured together with me. My brother Zhang Minxing, leading several thousand men, has taken off for the Southwest and I do not know his whereabouts. As for [four other leaders], they have all been killed by the government troops."¹⁵

In 1864 a second, more dangerous phase of the rebellion began—a war that ranged sporadically over the North China plain, fought by an increasingly expert Nian cavalry. This second wind of the Nian may have been fueled in part by erstwhile Taiping troops who survived the defeat at Nanjing. The ambush death of Senggerinchin in May 1865 led the Qing government to appoint Zeng Guofan, the scholar-official hero of the Taiping War, to lead the suppression of the Nian movement. Zeng focused first on the central Nian base. His goal was to establish a water blockade formed by rivers and canals and to establish four major government bases on all sides of the nest area. Having thus isolated the Nian base, government troops invaded it, digging ditches and trenches in order to hamper the Nian use of horses and painstakingly separating each walled village from its neighboring settlements. The goal was to register the population, appoint new village chiefs, and quarantine each "cleansed" village from Nian rebels.

Government forces attempted to turn the tables on the Nian and utilize the strategy that the rebels had used so successfully—scorched earth and fortified settlements. The former denied rebels their resources; the latter protected villages from rebel seizure. In the end, Zeng was less successful than in his struggle against the Taiping. He had trouble getting the cooperation of the governors of the provinces involved; and, having demobilized many of his best Hunan provincial forces, he was dependent on troops from the Anhui army of his protégé, Li Hongzhang, many of whom were not personally loyal to Zeng. In the end, it was simply Nian mobility that allowed many of the rebels who were still in the base area to escape.

Because of these difficulties, the government appointed Li to finish the job in late 1866. The rapid mobility of Nian forces and their effective guerrilla activity still produced two more years of fighting before Li's forces were finally able to wear the rebels down. Eventually victory came through the use of modern British-made guns that Li purchased and the importation of 4,900 experienced and skillful cavalymen from Manchuria and Inner Mongolia. In contrast to the Taiping, the Nian were no challenge to the traditional value system or to traditional cultural identity. The nature of their warfare, diffuse guerrilla attacks, made them very difficult to suppress: Li had reported that they moved "as freely as mercury." Whereas the Taiping had moved in large military campaigns to take new territory, the Nian were embedded in local villages among lineages, intimately linked to local society. Their rebellion was not so much an attack on Qing political and ideological legitimacy as it was an attempt in the Nian nest area to cast off government authority.

MUSLIMS VERSUS CHINESE: CLASHES IN ETHNIC IDENTITY

Muslims had lived in China for many centuries. Since the Tang dynasty (618–907), Muslims had settled in communities at the eastern end of the Silk Road in the northwestern provinces of Gansu and Shaanxi. The other site of great Muslim population concentration was in the far southwestern province of Yunnan, which had been settled first in the thirteenth century. But there were Muslims elsewhere as well. Muslim Arab traders since the Tang period had lived in ports along the Guangdong and Fujian coasts. By the mid-nineteenth century, there were an estimated 1 million Muslims in the region of the Nian rebellion. Han Chinese Muslims were called *Hui*. Although they maintained their own mosques and religious practices, Muslims saw themselves as subjects of Chinese authorities. Muslims could take the civil service examination and receive bureaucratic posts. The early Qing emperors had handled relations with Muslims and their communities with respect.

Beginning in 1762, however, the Qianlong emperor announced a series of anti-Muslim laws; this policy stemmed from Muslim rebellions in the late 1750s, one of which was "the most serious rebellion by . . . Mongols against Qing rule until the end of the dynasty."¹⁶ According to the new laws, penalties for crimes committed by Muslims became harsher than those for Han Chinese who had committed the same crimes. Problems began to develop when Han Chinese started to move into areas where Muslims had been the majority population and controlled the region's resources. Competition between Han Chinese settlers and Hui over land and commercial opportunities led to animosity and heightened tensions. Court cases over disputes relating to these issues usually found the Muslims on the losing side, discriminated against by Han Chinese and Manchu alike.

Panthay Rebellion (1855–1873)

Concurrent with the Taiping and Nian conflagrations were two bloody rebellions waged by Muslims in Southwest and Northwest China. The Panthay rebellion in Yunnan province grew from a mix of ethnic and religious tensions, but the spark that ignited it was

economic rivalry. Yunnan's greatest natural resources were its copper, gold, and silver mines, which had long been controlled by Muslims. Han Chinese settlers had worked some mines, which over the years had become depleted. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, they thus lusted after the Muslim mines, a desire that escalated into feuding and violence. In 1856, at the behest of a Manchu official, between 2,000 and 3,000 Muslims in the provincial capital of Kunming were massacred. Han Chinese in the countryside began to form militias to kill Muslims. Muslims fought back, assassinating Chinese officials and capturing the city of Dali. There an educated devout Hui named Du Wenxiu established the kingdom of Panthay, claiming for himself the title of sultan. Du oversaw a bureaucracy manned primarily by Han Chinese officials and a military with a strong minority of Han Chinese officers. He believed that Islam was compatible with Confucianism; indeed, he proclaimed that all three religions in Yunnan—Islam, Confucianism, and the folk religions of aboriginal tribes—should be revered. Du's forces controlled almost half of Yunnan. He was challenged until 1862 by another Muslim faction that controlled much territory in central and southern Yunnan.

The Qing military response was weak and incompetent. The terrain was rugged and military campaigning rigorous. In the end, the government was able to play opposing Muslim factions off against each other and militarily depend especially on local forces and leaders. The rebellion continued in the western part of the province until 1873, where it was marked by siege warfare of over fifty walled cities that Du controlled. Most of the seizures of the cities resulted in bloody massacres by Qing troops. Du was captured and executed.

Northwest Muslim Rebellion (1862–1873)

The northwest rebellion that spread from near Xi'an in Shaanxi province westward into Gansu province was more serious from a strategic viewpoint than the Panthay rebellion. Located between Mongolia and Tibet, regions crucial, as we have seen, in the Qing empire, and reaching to the Russian border, this area was the main corridor between Beijing and Xinjiang, the vast region won by conquest in the mid-eighteenth century. It was also the main passageway through which Chinese Muslims could have contact with the Islamic world to the west. Thus, it was here, more than in Yunnan, that Islamic currents from the west continually reinvigorated or challenged religious thought and faith.

In the mid-eighteenth century a Chinese Muslim had introduced into the area a practice from the mystical Muslim school of Sufism. Known as the New Teaching, it challenged the traditional method of "ridding the mind of all thinking except that focused on God." In the 1780s it inspired several uprisings against the Qing, who put them down, executing the sect leader and banning the sect, actions that turned the leader into a saint and sowed the seeds of a bitter ill will. It was Muslim networks of supporters of the New Teaching that became the main factor in the rebellion that erupted in 1862. Yet it was not so much the New Teaching that was at the root of the violence, but rather simple Muslim–Han Chinese antagonism.

In that year, a brief Taiping expedition close to Xi'an had set off unrest. It was the pretext for both Han Chinese and Muslim communities to engage in the rapid formation of

militias ostensibly for defense. But the volatile situation quickly led to each side attacking the other, burning villages and murdering their inhabitants. The Qing military was able to suppress the violence in Shaanxi province by early 1864, in part because so many Muslims had fled west to Gansu, carrying the message that the Qing was planning a huge massacre of Muslims. The number of adherents of the New Teaching sect, now led by Ma Hualong, was greater in Gansu. Joined by other rebels not of the New Teaching sect, they quickly mobilized. By 1867 all of Gansu save for a few cities and the provincial capital were in Muslim hands; Qing power had been effectively overthrown.

In the fall of 1866, the Qing court appointed Zuo Zongtang (1812–1885) to be governor-general of Shaanxi and Gansu provinces. A scholar who had failed three times in his attempt to pass the highest-level civil service examination, Zuo was a serious student of geography and agriculture. In the 1840s he had bought a farm to experiment with methods of producing tea and silk. In the first years of the Taiping he became involved in military affairs, rising rapidly in the esteem of fellow officials; and in 1860 he was ordered by the court to raise his own army to fight the Taiping, alongside the armies of Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang. Named governor-general of Zhejiang and Fujian provinces in 1863, he was an excellent administrator and showed his forward-looking approach by experimenting with steamboats and selecting the site for the Fuzhou shipyard (see Chapter 5). On his way to the Northwest to deal with the Muslim uprising, he received orders to help in the final campaigns against the Nian.

Much of the struggle that Zuo faced was siege warfare, attacks on walled urban centers for which his army, most of whom were provincial forces who had had experience fighting the Taiping or the Nian, had large siege guns, including some imported from the German firm of Krupp. In approaching the Muslims, Zuo was guided by the Qing policy: “The only distinction is between the innocent and the rebellious, there is none between Han and Muslim.”¹⁷ Because he likened the New Teaching to the heterodoxy of the White Lotus sect, he refused to grant clemency to any active supporter of the New Teaching. As Zuo and his forces moved west in the campaign, there was great loss of life. His campaign was focused on Ma Hualong’s stronghold of Jinjibao near the border between Gansu and Inner Mongolia, supposedly protected by more than 500 forts. Zuo tightened the noose, slowly starving the walled city; by the time Ma surrendered and the siege was lifted, Jinjibao’s inhabitants had been reduced to eating grass roots and the flesh of the dead. Ma and adult men from his family were executed by slicing, and almost 2,000 of his staff and troops were massacred. Zuo then continued the campaign, the final walled city siege coming in October 1873. The campaign took five years, and it saw widespread slaughter of the inhabitants of the besieged cities. But with this suppression, the country was generally free of rebellion and at peace for the first time in over two decades.

All in all, the four midcentury rebellions created vast devastation in six macroregions, killed tens of millions of people, and destroyed hundreds of towns and cities. They all reflected the ballooning crisis that China faced. Three of the rebellions raised issues of identity. The Taiping championed a completely new identity for China that would have constituted a revolution had it been successful. The Muslim rebellions brought to the fore issues of ethnic identity, a crucial fact in the Qing multiethnic empire and an extremely

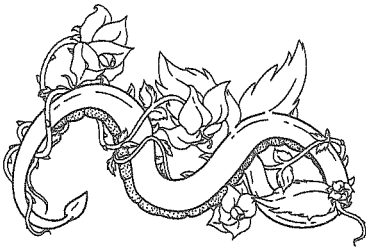
volatile factor with potential not only to rip the fabric of society but also to gut state control. Two of the rebellions openly challenged the Qing dynasty with calls for a new dynasty: the Taiping's Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace and the Nian's guerrilla campaigns against the government. With the exception of the Panthay rebellion, the midcentury rebellions were suppressed not by Qing generals but by scholar-officials, civilians who had advanced degrees in the civil service system. They were military generalists, not professionals, who applied Confucian moral and political principles, insisted on serious training for and discipline among their troops, and used some Western technology, particularly guns and ships. They looked both to the Chinese past, trying to save their culture from the Taiping version of Christianity, the Nian plunderers, and the Muslim crusaders, and to the Chinese future, taking the first gingerly steps toward what became known as "self-strengthening," that is, using Western technology to bolster the Chinese defense. In one sense, the military actions of the scholar-officials were cases of ethnic Chinese saving Manchu overlords; but more accurately, they were efforts of scholar-administrators imbued with Chinese culture aiding their rulers also committed to that culture.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Atwill, David. *The Chinese Sultanate: Islam, Ethnicity, and the Panthay Rebellion in Southwest China, 1856–1873* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005). This revisionist study focuses on ethnic identities and the complexity of reality in the Panthay rebellion.
- Kuhn, Philip. *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796–1864* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970). A pathbreaking study that showed how patterns of local military organization "were related to long-term political and social trends in modern China."
- Lipman, Jonathan. *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998). A richly detailed history of the Muslims, including the 1862–1873 rebellion, this work explores the identity of a people whom the author sees as "Sino-Muslims."
- Perry, Elizabeth J. *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845–1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980). This excellent study analyzes rebellions ranging from the Nian rebellion to the Red Spears of the early twentieth century in their ecological context of North Central China's Huaibei region.
- Spence, Jonathan. *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996). In the words of one reviewer, this is "[a] spellbinding narrative, [and] a masterpiece of careful and creative historical scholarship" on the leader of the Taiping movement and the movement itself.

5

The Power of Traditional Cultural Identity: Chinese Reactions to Continuing Threats



For a culture so deeply rooted in the glories of the past, the bloody and violent nightmares of the mid-nineteenth century were wrenching, for they seemed such a cataclysmic rupture from that past. Chinese culture had always focused on the past. Even for Confucius the golden age had been in that past, a time when society was harmonious and the country was peaceful. The goal of statesmen throughout the centuries was to restore something of that splendid past, even though no one thought that it could ever really be done. The past framed the present, so any change in state and society had to be rationalized in terms of that past, whether the particularly relevant past was the policies of a recent emperor or one's family traditions.

Previous foreign invaders had come to China on horseback, wielding bows and arrows. To a greater or lesser degree, China had been able to rein them in, incorporating them into the Chinese cultural world, even as those cultural forces often served to modify or supplement Chinese culture in turn. But these foreign invaders had come by sea with big ships and powerful cannon. They offered no indication that they would ever accept the Chinese cultural tradition. The break with the past was dramatically clear. The Central Country was being buffeted by radical challenges that it could not control; humiliation seemed to grow by the day. The crises of the nineteenth century therefore presented Chinese leaders with a life-and-death decision: how to overcome their military and strategic

impotence so that they could begin to compete with these foreigners on a more equal playing field.

Scholar-officials varied considerably in their reactions and in their prescriptions about what should be done. Yet no one believed that the Chinese political system or its institutions might somehow be too weak or ill arranged or at fault. All reactions were defensive. Even the most liberal reaction, to move to self-strengthening, was based on the premise that the system and its institutions must be saved.

UNWILLING TO CHANGE (OR HOLDING TO THAT OLD-TIME IDENTITY)

Some argued that China's only road to restored strength was revitalization of its incomparably great culture, which had given rise to the glories of the past. Above all, these culturalists argued, barbarian weapons and machines were not the answer. Use of such implements of war would contaminate the Chinese hands that wielded them. If tools of war were to be part of the answer to China's problems, then Chinese should use those from the Chinese repertoire of warfare from the past.

One of these archconservatives and a famous teacher, official, and man of letters, Yu Yue (1821–1907), looked at China in the late nineteenth century and wrote about his three fears. His first fear brings us face to face with the issue of China's identity: If the current involvement of Western nations in China continued, Yu was afraid that "it will not be long before she loses her identity as the 'Central Nation.'"¹ Second, if scholars began to study Western things, "Confucianism will be undermined and eventually destroyed." Third, with technology beginning to use up natural resources, "the universe as we know it may end soon." The common denominator in these fears was *fear of change* and the impact it might have on the world that Yu, holder of the highest civil service degree and member of the Hanlin Academy, had come to know.

Yu was not alone in his fears. A host of influential men in the Beijing bureaucracy and in positions of power came to oppose any compromise in dealing with the West or adopting Western things. Perhaps the most influential in the 1860s was the famous Mongol official Woren. Like Yu Yue, he held the highest degree and served in the Hanlin Academy. In addition, he held a variety of high official posts—Grand Secretary and president and vice president of several boards (or ministries), where he established connections with and enjoyed considerable influence over key figures in the capital. He has also been called "one of the two or three great transmitters" of Neo-Confucian thought during the nineteenth century.² And he was probably the staunchest opponent of any dealing with the West. He is said to have wept when he was appointed to serve in a new governmental body, the Zongli Yamen, set up to deal with the West. When his attempt to resign was not permitted, he intentionally threw himself from his horse on the first day on the job, injuring himself. He then used the injury as an excuse that he could not walk and thus could not serve on the Yamen; although he received several sick leaves, he did not recover until he was allowed to resign.

Woren (and others) advanced arguments like the following. “The foundation of a nation lies in the virtues she possesses” rather than in technology; no nation, he claimed, “has ever become strong by relying on achievement in technology.”³ At the heart of the answer for the crisis facing China was dependence on Confucian moral principles and unfailingly continuing to exhort the people to follow these principles. Anathema to Woren was dealing with the West, which he described as treacherous, as consisting of mere technicians—“foreigners have always been our enemies.” If we have to be taught this science, math, and technology, Woren asserted, find Chinese experts to do the job: “Why do we have to employ foreigners? Why do we have to honor them as our teachers?” Foreigners were devoid of civilization—simply put, barbarians; many archconservatives even saw them as closer to beasts—dogs and sheep—than to men.

But, the arguments on technology went on, we should not have to borrow at all. China had never borrowed from the West; why begin now? Just because technology was good for the West did not mean that it would have the same meaning in China, for China had different values and realities. The West, for example, might need machines to make up for a labor shortage; but move the machines to China, with its vast population, and the machines would only make unemployment a greater problem.⁴ Even if China could be convinced that it must borrow technology from the West, would not the West, for military reasons, sell China only obsolete guns and cannon? In that case, China would be cheated as well as humiliated. A number of officials claimed that the benefits of technology had clearly been exaggerated. Further, they argued that the use of technology would deplete the natural resources that were used to power and feed machines. Finally, they worried that introduction of Western technology and Western things in general would interfere with and wreck the existing cosmic order. Since the cosmic and human worlds were intimately connected and mutually reflective, Western imports like railroads and telegraph poles, for example, would by their nature make the “spirits of wind and water” (*fengshui*) go awry, with negative and perhaps catastrophic results.

SELF-STRENGTHENING

Rationale and Fallacy

The so-called self-strengtheners, those who wanted to strengthen China with a view to fending off Western imperialists, had a far different line on technology. Li Hongzhang, the commander of the anti-Taiping Anhui army, minced no words: “I firmly believe that to strengthen herself as a nation, China must learn Western technology.”⁵ Although self-strengthening involved a multipronged effort in the spheres of diplomacy, education, technology, and the military, advances in military technology—guns, ships, and armaments—were usually taken as a yardstick of successful self-strengthening, for they were most clearly related to defense.

But how to rationalize these changes that to archconservatives only raised fears? Self-strengtheners started with the premise that Western weapons and ships were simply inanimate machines, culture neutral, as it were. They argued that foreign weapons and

ships could therefore be bought or manufactured without cultural pollution. Indeed, they argued that in the extreme crisis facing China, foreign military implements were the *means* (*yong*) by which the crucial *end*—protecting traditional Chinese culture or essence (*ti*)—could be achieved. In other words, Western guns and ships were the techniques by which the substance of Chinese civilization could be protected and maintained. By this formula, self-strengtheners rationalized change as the only way to protect the culture of the past and to realize some restoration of that past. Even for these “reformers,” the past was the lens making possible appropriate views of the present.

Simply stated, this formula seemed tame enough, but it contained a serious logical fallacy. Foreign machines might look culture neutral (i.e., anyone can turn a switch, pull a trigger, or pilot a ship), but they came with a host of culture-specific scientific views and worldviews. To build ships and weapons at the new Jiangnan arsenal or the recently constructed Fuzhou shipyard would require the study of engineering and technology. Reading these scientific texts would take the student into a new world where old assumptions about the natural world would almost certainly be challenged. If a Chinese entered that world and then returned to the Chinese classics, he would again almost certainly see those classics in a broader context and ask new questions of them. For that student, their meaning and indeed the substance of Chinese culture would have been changed. In short, means do affect ends.

Or, taking up more practical issues, if arsenal and shipyard schools were established with engineering and foreign-language courses, how could they attract able young men to study these barbarian things? After all, the ladder to success in imperial China remained the civil service examination. Li Hongzhang had an answer: “One of the measures we can take is to introduce a new category in the civil service examination, namely the category of technology.” But that strategy would mean that a traditional degree that had always been based on the classical humanities tradition could now be based at least in part on something from outside that tradition. Clearly, if this were the case, the practical requirements for successful self-strengthening revealed that means had an immense impact on ends. Borrowing Western technology had a way of undercutting traditional Chinese cultural substance. The logical fallacy of the self-strengtheners was one that would begin to open China up to new, often unpredictable forces. It was also one that would appear again more than a century later, when China opened itself up to computers and high technology in the 1980s and 1990s.

The Self-Strengtheners

In the bureaucracy at Beijing, the key supporters of self-strengthening were the Manchu leaders Prince Gong and Wenxiang. Prince Gong was the sixth son of the Daoguang emperor. He negotiated, at age twenty-five, the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin and the 1860 Convention of Beijing; his conduct of foreign affairs from the 1860s to the 1880s was known for its conciliation. In 1861, after the death of his brother, the Xianfeng emperor, he played a key role in the coming to power of the late emperor’s concubine, Cixi, who emerged in a coup d’état as regent for her young son, the Tongzhi emperor. Though considered spoiled and not averse to seeking bribes from office seekers, Prince Gong was

especially close to Wenxiang, one of the most talented, conscientious, and respected Manchu metropolitan officials. A *jinshi* degreeholder, Wenxiang became a member of the Grand Council, the most important policy and personnel body in the central government.

Among Chinese officials, the triumvirate that had been instrumental in suppressing the midcentury rebellions—Zeng Guofan, Li Hongzhang, and Zuo Zongtang—were important leaders in the self-strengthening effort. Zeng was a model of the Confucian official, the most important Chinese official at midcentury. A *jinshi* degreeholder and member of the Hanlin Academy, he served with distinction in various capacities. His Hunan army, which he formed in the conscientious way that was his hallmark, was the chief agent of the Qing victory over the Taiping. He became a Grand Secretary in 1867 and governor-general of Zhili province in 1868. Known for his foresight, incorruptibility, and great perseverance, he was an excellent judge of men: Many of the more than eighty men who served on his personal staff later became famous in their own right.

Li Hongzhang was a protégé of Zeng, though in many ways Li was as flashy as Zeng was gray in his stolidity. A *jinshi* degreeholder, Li became the most powerful official in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century and was involved in many of the major events and developments of the times, including every important international issue. His most important official post was governor-general of Zhili province (the capital province) from 1872 until his death in 1901. He amassed great power and wealth; in the process, he was often awash in an aura of corruption. (A brief biographical vignette of Zuo Zongtang, the central hero in the suppression of the northwest Muslim rebellion,

The able Prince Gong in his early dealings with Westerners treated them with “disdain mingled with hatred and fear.” But after negotiating with them following the Arrow War, he began to approach them with some respect.

Source: Wikimedia Commons



is presented in Chapter 4.) There was a host of second-tier reformers, but one other should be mentioned: Feng Guifen, a Hanlin Academy scholar and local administrator, who might be called the best publicist for self-strengthening. In 1860 he published a collection of about fifty essays discussing the political, social, and economic issues facing China and calling for reform. He noted especially the rationale for self-strengthening—that Western learning was useful in a framework of Chinese values. Feng had considerable influence in the self-strengthening thinking and proposals of Li Hongzhang.

Reforms

Though self-strengthening did not call for institutional change, emphasizing instead already existing institutions and policies, an important new institution was created in 1861. Established principally at the initiative of Prince Gong and opposed by the conservatives, the Zongli Yamen (Office for General Management) was the general coordinating bureau for all “Western affairs” (*yangwu*). These included diplomacy and trade, missionary problems, and, most important in the context of reform, overseeing and managing all projects and programs that involved Western matters or technology. Prince Gong headed the Zongli Yamen for twenty-seven years (1861–1884, 1894–1898). Indicative of its centrality in governmental decision making was the fact that from 1861 to 1884, it functioned in reality as a committee of the Grand Council, with Grand Councilors serving concurrently on the Yamen.

In the sphere of diplomacy, the Zongli Yamen sponsored the establishment of a school to train diplomats to handle relations in the new international order China had to face. The Tongwenguan (Interpreters College) was formed in 1862 to offer foreign-language instruction. When Prince Gong and Wenxiang undertook an initiative to seek out Western science teachers for the school in 1866, conservatives shot down the trial balloon. However, in 1869, the school developed an eight-year course of study with a curriculum focused on languages and science. Most of China’s diplomats were trained there. It was headed by the American missionary W. A. P. Martin, who also cotranslated a major work on international law, Henry Wheaton’s *Elements of International Law*. Published under the auspices of the Zongli Yamen, translations like this began to acquaint diplomats and the Zongli Yamen’s members with Western concepts and practices of international relations. Robert Hart, the longtime inspector-general of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, served as the leading foreign adviser to the Yamen.

The major diplomatic step managed by the Zongli Yamen was the sending of diplomats abroad, not a small accomplishment given the shame and contamination that many Chinese associated with dealing with Western barbarians. Zongli Yamen members were frequently referred to as “devil’s slaves.” The first “Chinese” ambassador abroad was actually an American, Anson Burlingame, who had been serving as the U.S. minister in China. He was sent in 1868, on the advice of Robert Hart. Burlingame’s mission was to dissuade Western nations from being too insistent in upcoming treaty revision talks. Traveling to the U.S. and European capitals with Chinese and Manchu coenvoys, Burlingame was able to achieve the mission’s objective: Countries were at least temporarily moderate in their approach to treaty revision. Burlingame himself was not so fortunate; he

died of pneumonia in Russia. His coenvoys made it back to China in late 1870, but they were treated as if the trip had contaminated them. Both were sent far away from Beijing, almost as if in exile—one to a position in Mongolia and the other to a remote post in Western China.

That treatment paled in contrast to the treatment received by Guo Songtao, the first Chinese ambassador, sent abroad in 1877. Guo had been a Hanlin Academy scholar who had thought long and hard about China's dealings with the West. He became an adviser to Li Hongzhang in the early 1860s. In the self-strengthening camp, he wanted to discover the secrets of Western wealth and power. He was also persuaded that a successful policy toward the West could only come when Western realities were understood; he firmly believed that the application of long-held Chinese principles in any crisis would end negatively if they were used without reference to the specific circumstances of the crisis. When he accepted an appointment to serve as minister to Great Britain, he was roundly condemned for his decision by conservative officials. One wrote in his diary, "Guo Songtao stands out for his learning and literary talents, but he should not have accepted the mission to the West! I am truly regretful for him."⁶ He was leaving the world of Confucian sages to serve the devils. In Guo's hometown in Hunan province, people felt that he had brought such shame on his native place that they attempted to demolish his house.

During his two-year stay in London, Guo was awed by the British system of governance and especially by the modernization begun by the Industrial Revolution. In letters back to China, he extolled the virtues of railroads, telegraphs, machines, and electricity. Guo talked of Great Britain's Great Leap Forward in a letter to Li Hongzhang: "From the beginning of England's rise [following the Industrial Revolution], it has been only several decades; while China was weak and declining, they covered a distance of 70,000 li in the wink of an eye. . . . Chinese scholars and officials are presumptuous in their sanctuary and are trying to obstruct the changes of the universe; they can never succeed."⁷ The vituperation and threats that Guo received led him to cut short his service as ambassador. Although he had intended to publish his diary under the auspices of the Zongli Yamen, the court, under great pressure from the ultraconservatives, ordered the seizure and destruction of the printing blocks. Fearful for his life, Guo retired—and might as well have been in exile for all the impact he had on Chinese developments. Permanent diplomatic missions were sent to the United States, Japan, Russia, Germany, and France for the first time in 1879, fully eighteen years after Western ambassadors had begun to live in Beijing, a time gap that underscores the difficulty, acrimony, and sense of shame that underlay China's movement into the international arena. It was a question of identity: China's identity as the Central Kingdom had been lost forever. China had been decentered and was now simply one in a large family of nations.

In his arguments about self-strengthening, Feng Guifen had asserted, certainly with tongue in cheek: "what we then have to learn from the barbarians is only the one thing, solid ships and effective guns."⁸ Certainly weapons for defense were first on China's borrowing priority list. The first steps toward attaining military technology were through the Zongli Yamen with the establishment of arsenals, shipyards, and machine shops. Key here were also the scholar-administrator heroes of rebellion suppression. In 1865 at Shanghai, Zeng and Li established the Jiangnan Arsenal, which produced ships, gunboats,

muskets, howitzers, shrapnel, ammunition, tools, and machinery. The following year Zuo built the Fuzhou Shipyard, at which 2,000 Chinese craftsmen, 900 laborers, and an administrative staff of 150 labored to produce larger ships than did the Jiangnan Arsenal. Fifteen were produced from 1869 to 1874.

Educational programs were established at both the shipyard and the arsenal. The shipyard school was established in 1867, having enrolled over 100 pupils under thirteen years of age. For the sake of political correctness, they had to take a Chinese curriculum and enter either a French or an English division. In the English division, cadets took courses in nautical astronomy, plane and spherical trigonometry, geography, and English, all under a three-year "major" of theoretical navigation. Then they went on board a training ship. The French division focused on naval construction and design, with courses in analytical geometry, calculus, physics, mechanics, and French. After five or six years the students took on major responsibilities at the shipyard. The arsenal had a more varied educational program. A translation department published manuals, textbooks, and treatises on science and technology; at least fifty-four volumes were published by 1877. There were various courses of study, including Chinese studies, English, French, math and science, but the study was more haphazard and was not directed to specific ends as the program at Fuzhou.

Finally, part of the self-strengthening educational program involved sending students abroad for training so that they could return and assist in China's modernizing effort. The most famous of these was the mission of Yung Wing, a Cantonese who had been educated at Yale with the support of missionaries. Between 1872 and 1875, with the approval of Zeng, Li, and the Zongli Yamen, four groups of thirty boys, ages twelve to sixteen, went to the Connecticut Valley. Originally they were to stay for fifteen years, attending school, living with local families, and spending two weeks every three months at Hartford being tutored in a Chinese curriculum. The last did little to prevent the boys from becoming thoroughly Americanized. The program was ended in 1881 for many reasons, including the growing anti-Chinese movement in the United States. On their return, many of the students, then adults, made contributions in the technological and business sectors.

For the technological, diplomatic, and educational progress made under the leadership of the self-strengtheners from the early 1860s to the 1880s, the speed of progress and the possibility of bolder initiatives were greatly hampered by the ultraconservatives. Many officials on all levels dragged their feet in carrying out policies. Conservatives attacked the famous self-strengthening proponents and secondary figures as traitors. As we have seen, just dealing with foreigners could bring the wrath of the conservatives. Cultural inertia held back change. Feng Guifen's collection of essays on reform, published in 1860, was not presented to the emperor for his reading until 1889. Another key early work explaining the West, Wei Yuan's 1843 *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*, was not presented to the court until 1858.

If one needs further evidence of the negative and destructive impact of the ultraconservative culturalists, one need only look at the course of railroad development. In 1876, a less-than-20-mile line from Shanghai to Wusong was started by Westerners. In 1877 Chinese officials purchased the line and ripped up the tracks. Railroad construction

from Beijing to the town of Qingjiangpu planned by the official Ding Richang, who worked closely with both Zeng and Li, was aborted because of conservative opposition. Likewise, a plan as late as 1889 to run a line from Tianjin to Tongzhou, about 10 miles east of Beijing, was forcibly discarded. Guo Songtao rightly predicted the outcome of such outmoded thinking: "After several decades foreigners will arrive and then they will gradually build railroads and develop (natural resources) for us. . . . Then both the ownership and the profits will fall into the hands of foreigners and China will have nothing to depend upon."⁹

THE LOSS OF TRIBUTARY STATES: RYŌKYŌ, KOREA, AND VIETNAM

In the twenty-one years from 1874 to 1895, China lost its three most important tributary states: the Ryōkyō Islands (Liuqiu in Chinese), Vietnam, and Korea. Aggressive actions by Japan in the first and third and by France in the second pointed to a new wave of imperialism in the closing quarter of the nineteenth century. All three cases underscore how deeply the tributary mentality continued even though on paper it had been dead since 1860 and even though in Korea, China melded it with imperialism. It is most likely the case that for the Chinese the treaty system and the tributary system coexisted, relating to each other in various ways in different places and situations.

The Loss of the Ryōkyō (Liuqiu) Islands

For China the Ryōkyōs were an important tributary state; since 1372, China had regularly received tribute missions from the islands. But China was completely unaware of the islands' relationship to Japan. In 1609 the feudal lord of the Japanese domain of Satsuma on Kyushu's southeast coast had conquered the islands. From that point—even before the establishment of the Qing dynasty—Japan ruled the northern part of the islands directly, with the rest indirectly under the titular control of the Ryōkyōan king. The islands thus paid tribute to Satsuma and even to the shogun in Edo. Since Satsuma wanted to participate in trade with China, however, it ordered the Ryōkyōs to continue to participate in the tribute system with China.

Late in 1871, over fifty shipwrecked sailors from the Ryōkyō Islands were killed by aborigines in eastern Taiwan. In 1873, the Japanese claimed that they had the sole right to speak for the islands and in 1874 undertook a naval expedition to Taiwan to punish the aborigines. China responded in amazement, declaring that both Taiwan and the Ryōkyōs were Chinese. The Japanese asserted that they had had to act because the aborigines' action clearly revealed that the Chinese did not in fact exercise sovereignty over the island. When face-to-face diplomacy did not achieve a solution to the dispute, the British minister served as arbiter. In the end, China paid 500,000 taels for the victims of the killings, and for some Japanese barracks built in Taiwan, and also promised not to condemn the Japanese expedition. Both actions pointed to diplomatic obtuseness: Going along with the expedition was basically a recognition of Japan's sovereignty over the Ryōkyōs, and

the payment to Japan, in the words of the British ambassador to Japan, amounted to a "willingness to pay for being invaded."¹⁰ In 1879, Japan annexed the islands, and they became Okinawa prefecture.

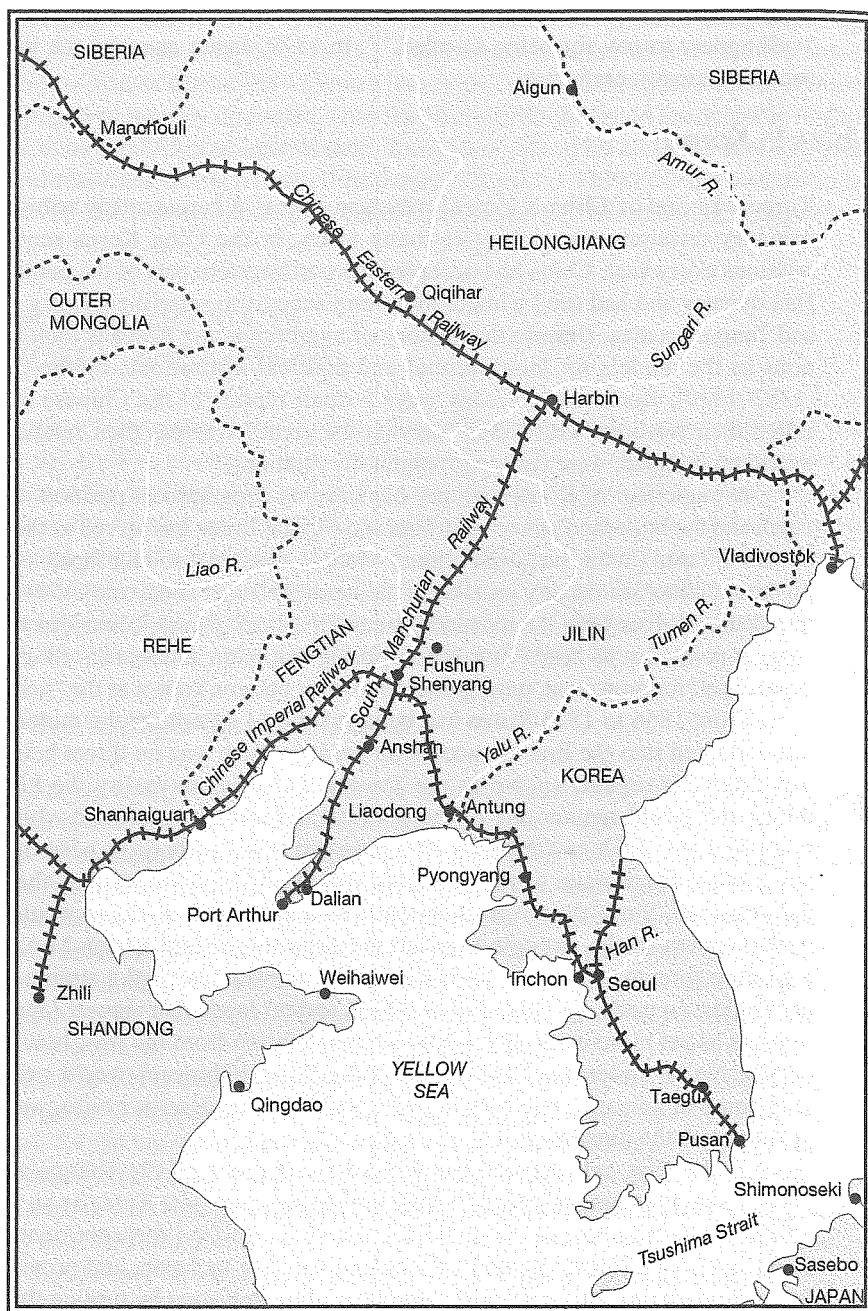
Troubles in Korea

Korea was one of China's closest tributary states. Whereas many tributary states sent tributary missions once every so many years, in the Qing Korea sent four tributary missions every year. China had occupied the northwestern part of the peninsula during the Han dynasty and had tried without long-term success to seize the country again in the Sui and Tang dynasties. Despite that history of aggression, the Koreans took Chinese institutions as the models for their cultural and political institutions; by the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), Korea was in many ways a small replica of the Chinese system. Koreans called their relations with China "serving the great," whereas their relations with others, for example Japan, were denoted "neighborly relations."

A tragic fact of Korea's history has been its geographical position. Caught between Japan and the huge land powers of China and Russia, Korea has served as the bridge for land powers to Japan (in the thirteenth-century Mongol invasions) and for Japan to the land powers (in the late sixteenth-century invasion of the Japanese leader Hideyoshi). Viewed in the context of potential threats from the mainland, Japan, in a stock phrase, contended that Korea was a "dagger pointed at its heart." It is not surprising that in the nineteenth century Korea tried to isolate itself for protection, turning itself into what became known as the "hermit nation."

From 1866 to 1873 Korea had been ruled by a regent for the minor king, who had been adopted into the line of succession because there was no direct heir of the preceding king. The regent, known as the Taewon'gun, was in reality the king's biological father and would remain one of the political lightning rods around which many would rally from the 1860s to the 1880s. The king had in his early teens been married off to an ambitious older woman of the powerful Min family who emerged as the other political lightning rod. Since the rivalry between China and Japan in Korea would be played out in the context of the struggle between the Taewon'gun and Queen Min, their positions regarding foreign affairs are important. "The Taewon'gun had a simple foreign policy: no treaties, no trade, no Catholics, no West, and no Japan. He viewed Japan's progressive reforms as yet more evidence of how far it had fallen from the way, how little the island people really understood the virtues of a Sinic [Chinese] world order."¹¹ But the king came of age and took over in 1873, and, with his assertive wife, was more open to dealing with the outside world.

In the first half-decade following the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1868, some government leaders in the new Meiji regime saw Korea as an opportunity. By military action in Korea, Japan could establish itself on the continent, prevent other countries from gaining territory or a colony so close to Japan, and provide a chance for former samurai to get the fighting blood out of their system by turning them on Korea as retaliation for a Korean rebuff to Japanese vessels. Though that plan came to naught, Korea, located only a 100 miles across the Tsushima Strait, began to become important in Japan's conception of its role in Northeast Asia.



Northeast Asia, Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

In 1875, after Japanese gunboats had already leveled a Korean fort on Kanghwa Island near Inchon, and well aware of the tributary relationship between China and Korea, Japan sent emissaries to sound out China about its reactions to greater Japanese involvement in Korea. Li Hongzhang's tributary-framed answer was that "though Korea is a dependent country of China, it is not a territorial possession; hence in its domestic and foreign affairs, it is self-governing." Emboldened by China's implicit permission to talk to Korea about opening trade, the Meiji government proceeded to "open" the hermit nation by signing a treaty in 1876. As to Korea's status, the treaty stated, "Korea, being an independent state, enjoys the same sovereign rights as does Japan." China interpreted "independent" as "autonomous," but it is clear from subsequent events that Japan saw things differently.

When Japan annexed the Ryōkyō Islands in 1879, China seemed to suddenly become aware of the threat that an unchallenged Japan posed in Korea. In 1880 Korean relations were taken away from the Board of Rites, which oversaw the tributary system, and given to Li Hongzhang. Li encouraged the Korean government to sign treaties with Western powers and thereby to encourage a foreign policy of using barbarians to control barbarians. Indeed, when there was some hesitance on the Korean part, Li negotiated the U.S.-Korean treaty and presented it to the Koreans to sign: Thus the tributary elder brother acted to pull the younger brother into the international community. Another way to see this is that Li Hongzhang had simply taken over the making of Korean foreign policy, a view underscored by the fact that he followed up the American treaty with two more, with the British and the Germans. It was a role that went beyond the "elder-brotherliness" of the tributary system, coloring it with a shade of imperialism. Indeed, in their dealings with Korea, China used some tactics that reflected those of Western nineteenth century imperialists, using treaties and international law, a customs service under Chinese control, and the technology of empire—gunboats, steamships, and the telegraph. Essentially China worked imperialistically to set up a multilateral imperialist system to protect its own interests in Korea.¹²

Because of China's continuing interests in Korea and Japan's new interests, the period of the 1880s and 1890s saw increasing tensions between China and Japan on the Korean peninsula; with both keeping some nationals in the country, the situation was always ripe for problems. Firmly in power, Queen Min supported reform, specifically hiring Japanese military officers to train the nucleus of a modern Korean military. The Taewon'gun was determined to break her power. In 1882 he reportedly incited a Korean army mutiny over the better provisions that the Japanese-trained unit received. The mutineers attacked the palace (with Queen Min barely escaping) and burned the Japanese legation. The Taewon'gun again took the reins of government. Both China and Japan sent forces "to restore peace."

The Chinese then performed the big brother act once again. Informed of the Taewon'gun's complicity in the mutiny, the Chinese arrested him and threw him in jail in China because he had moved against the queen, whom the Chinese had recognized as the proper authority. This act, the arrest of a Korean leader by Chinese diplomats and his incarceration in China, trumpeted the tributary mentality for the world to hear, but also had strains of imperialistic action. Clearly not dead, the tributary system continued to function through the cultural inertia that was so much of the response to reform or, more accurately,

to change. The upshot of the crisis was that the Japanese maintained a permanent guard at their legation in Seoul; the Chinese kept 3,000 soldiers in the country, sent arms and Chinese instructors to the Korean military, and posted advisors to the Korean government. These actions too were those of the elder brother.

In the mid-1880s, different Koreans looked in different directions for the path that their country should follow, some to China, some to the United States, some to Japan. A number of youthful Koreans had gone to Japan to study and had become passionately enthusiastic about the course of Meiji reforms. In 1884, they attempted a coup against a Korean regime that now seemed clearly in the Chinese camp. The Japanese ambassador participated in the conspiracy, readying Japanese legation guards for action. The plan: take advantage of a large public gathering—a dinner attended by foreign diplomats and key Korean officials in celebration of the opening of the new post office—to assassinate important leaders. The reformer-conspirators were successful in murdering seven people. They then set fire to the city; Japanese guards rushed the palace and seized the king and queen. But at Queen Min's urgent appeal, the Chinese military leader Yuan Shikai advanced on the palace, freed the monarch and his spouse, and suppressed the coup. But Japan sent forces and demands for both an indemnity and an apology over damage to the Japanese legation (which had, in fact, been torched by the fleeing Japanese ambassador). The Japanese leader Itō Hirobumi was sent to China to negotiate an end to the crisis with Li Hongzhang. Each country withdrew its forces and promised to notify the other if it was planning to send forces in the future. Presumably if that happened, joint consultations would mean that cooler heads would prevail and another crisis could be averted. This Li–Itō convention brought another decade of peace, in which the new Chinese Resident General, Yuan Shikai, sought to preserve the forms of Chinese suzerainty. But the agreement also made Korea a virtual coprotectorate of China and Japan. The trouble was not over.

French Imperialism in Vietnam

Vietnam, the northern part of which China had controlled directly from the Han through the Tang dynasties, was a close tributary in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Though it fought off Chinese political control, it continued in the Chinese cultural orbit, like Korea, borrowing its most important political and cultural institutions. From the Chinese perspective, the tributary relationship with Vietnam was a crucial reality. China established Vietnamese emperors in office and sent troops to help its tributary younger brother put down unrest. Certainly by the 1880s, after China's experience with foreign invasion and pressures, in addition to its tributary concerns, China was also aware of the strategic importance of Vietnam for its own security. In the words of one official, "The border provinces are China's gates; the tributary states are China's walls. We build the walls to protect the gates, and protect the gates to secure the house. If the walls fall, the gates are endangered; if the gates are endangered, the house is shaken."¹³

French interest in Vietnam began with Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century, but the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars put East Asian involvement on hold.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the French became briefly involved, offering crucial support for Nguyen Anh in the establishment of the Nguyen dynasty (1802–1945). The Nguyen emperors championed and emphasized Chinese cultural models and forbade trade and intercourse with the West and the spread of Christianity. In the late 1850s the French began to take more concerted action to extend their interests, beginning with a military campaign in southern Vietnam as revenge against antimissionary riots. By 1862, they had taken Cochin China, the three southernmost provinces of the country, and forced the Vietnamese government to cede it to them.

A treaty in 1874 further extended French influence, permitting French shipping on the Red River in the country's northernmost section, Tonkin, and seizing control of Vietnamese foreign relations. Part of France's intention in this treaty was to try to



Southeast China and Vietnam

establish the independence of Vietnam from China, an obvious precondition if France was taking control of Vietnam's foreign affairs. Thus, the treaty recognized "the sovereignty of the King of Annam [Vietnam] and his complete independence of all foreign powers."¹⁴ The Chinese responded to this treaty by saying that Vietnam had been a tributary state of China for centuries and that China would look into the matter, but it did not do so. Even worse, when the Chinese response was translated into French, "had been a tributary" was translated into the past perfect tense, which implied that the tributary relationship was completely over. Therefore, the French took this as Chinese tacit acceptance of what was essentially a French protectorate. Feeling free to act forcefully, the French stepped up their aggressive actions in northern Vietnam, whereupon the Vietnamese government, in the role of tributary younger brother, sent a tributary mission to China and asked the Chinese for help. With the situation "as precarious as piled eggs," the Chinese sent in irregulars known as the Black Flags, groups of former Taiping and Panthay rebels, who began to skirmish with French troops in 1882.¹⁵ The next year the Chinese, without fanfare, dispatched regular troops.

THE WAR WITH FRANCE AND THE IMPACT OF SELF-STRENGTHENING

As war clouds thickened, Chinese policy was halting and uncertain. A rancorous policy dispute over the proper reaction to the Vietnamese crisis had broken out. On one side were so-called realists like Li Hongzhang, who contended that Chinese self-strengthening, specifically coastal defenses and the naval program, had not yet reached the point where China could realistically repel France. This group called for negotiations since, they argued, China could not annul the treaties France had signed with Vietnam, nor could it force France from Vietnam. Open war would only end in certain Chinese defeat and French demands on China itself. Though Li had the support of the Zongli Yamen's Prince Gong, the opposition was shrill and vociferous. Offering *qingyi*, literally meaning "public opinion" but having the strong sense of "moral censure," this group emerged as a pro-war faction and attacked Li's position as appeasement. This faction, made up of men mostly born at about the time of the Opium War, was carrying on the tradition and positions of men who had called for a strong anti-British stand in the 1830s and 1840s and who had opposed the conciliatory stand of the Manchu negotiators during treaty negotiations in the 1850s. All except one of the faction's nucleus held the *jinshi* degree and had been members of the Hanlin Academy; most of the group had no experience either in foreign policy or in military affairs. In essence their argument was "enough is enough": If China made one great effort, then all of China's foreign policy humiliations would come to a halt. In practical terms, this meant that if China made a huge concerted effort to fight the French until they were defeated, that action would so deter other foreign nations that they would cease bullying China. The faction's arguments often stressed the special morality of China, the bravery of the Chinese, and that "battles are determined even more by men's hearts than by weapons."¹⁶

It seems clear that the Empress Dowager was to some degree immobilized by the clashing policy lines of the realists and the pro-war faction. The court let the skirmishing in Vietnam continue even as it ordered Li Hongzhang to negotiate. In the next few months two potential peace treaties were scuttled, the first by the French and the second by the French and the pro-war faction, which flooded the court with almost fifty calls for Li's removal. On the reception of a French ultimatum that Chinese forces withdraw from Vietnam and with the threat of a French attack on China, the Empress Dowager went over to the side of the pro-war faction, appointing two of its leaders to key positions in South China, one to the command of the Fujian fleet based at the city of Fuzhou.

In August 1884, the skirmishing between the Chinese and French became a war. French ships sailed up the Min River 20 miles to Fuzhou, homeport of one-quarter of the Chinese navy and site of the Fuzhou Shipyard. All the ships, including their largest vessel in Chinese waters, sailed past numerous Chinese batteries with modern guns and cannon purchased from European firms, all exhibits of the self-strengthening program, but none of which fired a shot. Early on the afternoon of August 23, the French fleet made target practice not only of the Chinese fleet but also, disastrously, of the shipyard itself. In a quarter of an hour, all but two of the twenty-three Chinese war junks and men-of-war were sunk or were burning; the shipyard was demolished. Approximately 3,000 Chinese were killed. The pro-war faction commander of the Fujian fleet was one of the first to flee and watched the conflagration from hills overlooking the port. For that debacle he was exiled.

That summer afternoon had revealed the emptiness of the self-strengthening efforts: Without organization, coordination, and leadership, all the modern machines and weapons that might be manufactured or bought were ineffectual. The presence of the French fleet at Fuzhou at a time of an increasing likelihood of war in the area should have alerted Chinese authorities to the imminent danger. Garrisons along the riverbank should have been prepared to prevent the ships from sailing upstream. The tragic irony was that the court had attempted to force two of its other fleets to participate in actions against the French, but their leaders, one of whom was Li Hongzhang, refused. Li's refusal can be seen as a statement of displeasure at having the Empress Dowager side with the pro-war faction or, more certainly, as a desire to keep his fleet out of a battle that he believed would almost certainly be a defeat and intact so that it might be ready if necessary in Korean waters.

The disaster at Fuzhou brought the Empress Dowager more solidly into the pro-war faction's camp. But when, three months later, there were no gains and fears began to spread that Japan would take advantage of the situation by wreaking havoc in Korea, the Empress Dowager went back to the negotiating route. The end of the war came with an agreement in mid-1885 in which China ended its centuries-long tributary relationship by recognizing French control over Vietnam. Part of the blame for the loss had to be placed on the pro-war faction and its naiveté; only one of its proponents, Zhang Zhidong, survived to play any important public role in the years following the war.

The self-strengthening movement had been an ignominious failure to this point: China seemed not in the least capable of fighting off aggressors. Political decision makers had not been able or willing to make the institutional and personnel decisions that could have provided the appropriate context for self-strengthening success. Moreover, they did

not take the necessity for institutional and personnel changes as the main lessons of the war. The incorrect lesson they learned instead was that there had simply not yet been enough self-strengthening.

Therefore, the decade following the loss of Vietnam saw an expanded menu of self-strengthening. A key figure in the effort was none other than the pro-war faction leader Zhang Zhidong, who, antforeign as he continued to be, was converted by the war into a forceful self-strengthenener. He wrote, "If we wish to make China strong and preserve Chinese learning, we must promote Western learning. But unless we use Chinese learning to consolidate the foundation and to give our purpose a right direction, the strong will become rebellious leaders and the weak, slaves. The consequence will be worse than not being versed in Western learning . . ." ¹⁷ In Zhang's thinking, China had to emphasize both the old and the new: Only if Chinese maintained a firm grounding in Chinese traditional thought would self-strengthening using Western technology and science not eradicate Chinese identity.

Although Zhang established an arsenal and a mint in Canton, his main base was the metropolis of Wuhan (made up of the three cities of *Wuchang*, *Hankou*, and *Hanyang*) in the Middle Yangzi, where he served as governor-general of Hunan and Hubei provinces from 1889 to 1894 and from 1896 to 1907. At Wuhan he set up an iron foundry, and he founded two schools of Western studies, one focusing on the sciences and international law, the other on commerce and Western languages. In keeping with his conviction that the old must be studied as well as the new, he established a traditional academy that became involved in publishing over 175 volumes written during the Qing period.

One institutional innovation that especially portended greater changes was the establishment of military academies. Li Hongzhang had set up a naval academy at Tianjin in 1880 and 1881 modeled on the school that functioned at the Fuzhou shipyard. Its first dean was Yan Fu, a graduate of the Fuzhou school and soon to become China's most important translator of major Western works. Apparently prompted largely by the Sino-French War, Li in 1885 established the Tianjin Military Academy, where men selected from his Anhui army were trained in military affairs. Li hired German officers as teachers in the two-year curriculum that included science, mathematics, surveying, fortifications, and military drilling; classes were conducted mostly in German. Approximately 1,500 men received training from 1885 to 1900. Li added a special five-year officers' training program in 1887. In 1885, Zhang Zhidong also established a military training school, the Guangdong Naval and Military Officers' Academy. Whereas the military innovations in midcentury, the founding of the personal provincial armies of Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang, had been established under a Confucian ethos, these institutional changes were the first steps toward the establishment of a modern Chinese military, setting up curricula focusing on military science. Significantly, many important military leaders in the early twentieth century were trained at these academies.

In the wake of the naval disaster at Fuzhou, the government established a Board of Admiralty to centralize navy functioning and build naval power. But this board was soon moribund because of the system of personal connections and corruption that sank any efforts to reform. Efforts to centralize the fleets foundered on the desires of men in charge of specific fleets to maintain their own control; Li created the strongest fleet, the Beiyang or northern fleet. The naval self-strengthening program was also undercut by lack of funds, a problem made worse by actions of the Empress Dowager. In a story that has become

classic in its disturbing irony, much of the appropriation earmarked for naval expansion was used by the Empress Dowager for rebuilding the Summer Palace, which had been destroyed during the Arrow War. Apparently, part of that naval appropriation was used to fund the renovation of the infamous Marble Barge on which the Empress Dowager liked to picnic: At a time when no ships whatsoever were added to the main Chinese fleet, she poured money into one that would not float.

IDENTITY AND PERCEPTION: THE ROLES OF THE EMPRESS DOWAGER

From her emergence in 1861 to her death in 1908, the Empress Dowager, Cixi, was the most powerful figure in China. She is also perhaps the most controversial figure in modern Chinese history. Certainly part of her reputation comes from the traditional Chinese negative attitude toward female rulers. Women should not rule: "The hen does not herald the coming of the morning." Female rulers in the past, like the Tang dynasty's Empress Wu, have been morally tarred with salacious stories about their sexual appetites and promiscuity. There have been sexual whisperings about Cixi as well. Another part of her negative reputation comes from her unscrupulous political manipulation (and worse) of the two emperors for whom she served as regent and her unwillingness to relinquish power. Yet another part of her reputation comes from the disastrous problems that China experienced on her watch. Domestic turmoil, state bankruptcy, humiliation by foreign powers, and war have been blamed to a greater or lesser degree on her narrow-mindedness, authoritarian nature, and corruption. Certainly others in addition to Cixi were to blame. To take the wretched state of China's finances as an example: Already by 1850, over a decade before she took power, the Qing government was taking in only about 10 percent of what it was spending. In the end, all the criticisms and rumors about her indeed make it difficult to disentangle her actual identity from her perceived or attributed identity.

In 1861, she became regent for her son, the Tongzhi emperor, who ascended the throne at the age of five. For twelve years she ruled outright for him, and after he began to rule for himself she constantly interfered in matters of state and in his private life. He apparently resented her actions and in turn enraged her by choosing for his bride someone other than her own choice. Rumor had it that she or at least eunuchs close to her encouraged the young emperor to visit brothels and adopt a dissolute lifestyle. Some accounts have suggested that he may have contracted venereal disease. In November 1874, however, he became ill with smallpox, which may have been the cause of his death in January 1875. Without either a son or a brother, the Tongzhi emperor's demise left Cixi again in the driver's seat.

She chose her nephew, who was four years old at the time and who was indeed her closest male relative, to become the Guangxu emperor. This choice infuriated some conservatives at the court because it violated the precedents and tradition of dynastic succession, particularly that the next emperor come from a generation younger than the deceased emperor. The ideal of filial piety necessitated such a choice. The new emperor was, however, from the same generation as the Tongzhi emperor. Cixi was able to survive the criticism, and she achieved her main goal—to serve as regent once again, in effect to serve as the sole ruler.

One of the most powerful figures in modern Chinese history, the Empress Dowager Cixi began her rule as a thoroughgoing conservative traditionalist but ended her career embracing progressive reforms.



When the Guangxu emperor achieved his majority in 1889, Cixi officially retired to the Summer Palace, where she could loll away her afternoons on her Marble Barge. But she had held power too long to give it up. She insisted, for example, that all memorials be sent to her for her perusal; she retained decision-making power in key appointments to the six boards and to the Grand Council. Reportedly, at moments of crisis she held court with the emperor. Just like the earlier relationship between mother and son (the Tongzhi emperor), the relationship between aunt and nephew became very strained. The Guangxu emperor's ideas about China and the West began to diverge sharply from Cixi's, and feelings of suspicion and mistrust grew between them.

What were the sources of Cixi's power over the emperor and her continued centrality at the court? First, as the Empress Dowager, she was the emperor's official mother even if not his biological mother. Therefore, the emperor had to treat her with the proper respect and filial piety; certainly he could never show her open hostility. Further, the emperor was not the natural heir; Cixi had selected him. Beholden to her for his position, he could not rid the court of her presence or do away with her efforts to control him. Any such actions would only incense many of the high court officials who were also beholden to Cixi for their positions; their connections to her made most of them personally loyal to her. The emperor could not have taken any bold action in his relationship

with the Empress Dowager because he would have alienated the very people he needed in order to rule. Since the court was filled with her supporters, it made her continued involvement all the easier. As one other indication of Cixi's stranglehold, it was traditional for a new emperor to make his own appointments to the Grand Council. But for four years after the Guangxu emperor took power, only Cixi's appointees staffed the Council; and even after that, those who were appointed to the Council had started their careers with her patronage.

Thus, as China entered the 1890s, a decade that would come to take on the terrifying aura of a nightmare, at the top of the government there was an ominous split. The fifty-five-year-old Empress Dowager, who was used to being in control, was now trying to hold on to as much power as possible and was continuing to cultivate ties to those at the court and in the top ranks of the bureaucracy. The nineteen-year-old emperor, on the other hand, had, as a child, been so fearful and timid (perhaps because of Cixi's overbearing qualities) that, on hearing the sound of thunder, he reportedly hid his head in his tutor's lap. Now, however, he had begun to try to assert himself, to take up the responsibilities of the Son of Heaven, and to stake out his own intellectual and political positions. The troubles of the 1890s would only make their mutual resentment and distrust more intense.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Chu, Samuel C., and Kwang-ching Liu, eds. *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994). The most complete work on this important Chinese official; its various essays detail his roles as self-strengtheners and diplomat.
- Cumings, Bruce. *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997). This insightful and vibrantly written history puts the Chinese interests and actions in Korea in essential perspective.
- Eastman, Lloyd. *Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy during the Sino-French Controversy, 1880-1885* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). This book is essential in analyzing the struggle between China and France over Vietnam.
- Gardella, Robert. *Harvesting Mountains: Fujian and China Tea Trade, 1757-1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994). This interesting work focuses on the effects of increasing international trade in the middle to late nineteenth century in the tea industry.
- Larsen, Kirk. *Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850-1910* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008). This revisionist work sees China's adoption of imperialist strategies in Korea to accompany a lingering tributary mentality.

6

The Devastating Nineties: Destroying Traditional Identities



Bookends of a tragic decade.

In 1891, a brilliant thirty-three-year-old *jinshi* degreeholder, Kang Youwei, dropped the intellectual equivalent of a bomb on the Chinese intellectual community. He argued in a book that the version of the Confucian classics that had been considered the philosophical canon and used for centuries as the basis for the civil service examination was a forgery. The fallout was the same as if a Western scholar were to prove that the Bible as the West has known it is a forgery. Kang had shattered the Chinese intellectual identity; how was it to be re-formed?

In 1900, a scene in Tianjin. "On this day someone saw a corpse on the slope. . . . It was a man who had been killed by the [Boxer] bandit chief Cao Futian. His testicles had been cut off and his head severed and placed between his thighs, facing upward stiff and motionless. These people regard life as a trifling matter. When they kill a person, they rarely dispatch him with a clean blow of the sword; more often they slash indiscriminately with their swords and chop the body into pieces. The horror of the slaughter they perpetrate is even worse than that of the punishment of death by dismemberment."¹

In many ways, the 1890s saw the bitter culmination of challenges to traditional Chinese identities and self-perceptions. From the intellectual shocks brought by Kang and others to the bloody terror of the Boxers, the question that kept coming was "What does

it mean to be Chinese?" In between there were other shocks—a startling military defeat, Western nations coming to carve up the "Chinese melon," and an aborted political reform effort that ended with the Empress Dowager putting the Guangxu emperor under permanent house arrest. It was a decade that at last proved to most Chinese that for China to survive, radical changes had to occur.

IDEOLOGY FOR CHANGE: KANG YOUWEI'S INTELLECTUAL BOMB

Rationalizing change in the name of the past was the quintessential Chinese way of looking to the future. The self-strengtheners were out to protect the past by using modern Western technology. In addition to the ideas of the self-strengtheners, there were other, more mechanical ways of using the past to validate change. One argument, based on patterns of cyclical change, asserted that it had been 2,000 years between the time of the ancient sage kings of Yao and Shun and the establishment of the empire in 221 B.C.E. Because the late nineteenth century was about 2,000 years after that axial event, it was thus cyclically appropriate for a new momentous change to occur. Another argument proposed that Western science and technology could be legitimately borrowed from the West because mathematical and chemical ideas current in the West had first appeared in early Chinese history. This approach brought up the question of why and how, if this knowledge was so critical for the development of modern science, China had somehow lost it.

A key motive force in the modern Western world, emerging in the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century, was the idea of progress. Humans, using their brains and the realities of modern technology and science, had the power to make progress inevitable. It was a view of history that was ever onward, ever upward, a strong contrast with the Chinese view of history, which envisioned a trend cyclically downward from a past golden age. Above all, the Chinese worldview was marked by an acceptance of fate—not, as in the modern West, by the potentiality of human action. In the 1890s, the scholar Kang Youwei gave the Chinese intellectual world its own idea of progress, building a rationale, as always *based upon the past*, for radical institutional change. Notably, his prescribed changes went far beyond self-strengthening. They were no longer to preserve traditional Chinese culture (as the self-strengtheners wanted to do) but, most basically, to preserve China. Put another way, Kang moved beyond what is often called "culturalism" (loyalty to a particular culture) to the borders of a modern "nationalism" (loyalty to a particular geographic entity).

In order to build new ideological structures, Kang first had to destroy the old edifices. The shocking forgery thesis in his 1891 book was a major part of that demolition. Kang claimed, based on textual criticism, that the true Confucian teachings were not found in the texts that had been the basis for the School of Han Learning since the seventeenth century. Rather, they were found in the so-called New Texts from the earlier Han dynasty. Kang's purpose was to undermine the School of Han Learning, whose textual and philological focus he believed had taken serious thinkers away from the central point of Confucianism, which should be political concern and institutional reform. Though today Kang's interpretation is not seen as credible, the impact on the intellectual world

of the 1890s, already buffeted by realities of imperialism and rebellion, was shattering. If the traditional canon was shown to be false, there was no firm intellectual ground on which to stand; indeed, there was not even a firm past on which to rationalize.

A second major ideological contribution was Kang's 1897 book *Confucius as a Reformer*, which he began in 1886. It contributed both to the demolition of the old and to the construction of something new. During his lifetime, Confucius himself had claimed that he was not a creator but simply a "transmitter" from the past. This idea Kang tried to demolish. In its place, he structured a new Confucius as a great innovator, "a messianic, forward-looking 'sage king,' " a man who used the past to call for major institutional change in the present. Kang was not only proposing a new Chinese identity; he was questioning the meaning of China's traditional identity. In another work, he then set forth his rationale for progress, using primarily ideas from the West but placing them in categories that he found in the "real" Confucian New Texts.² His ideas set forth a unilinear view of history similar to that in the post-Enlightenment West. He found three axial ages through which history moved: the Age of Disorder, the Age of Approaching Peace, and the Age of Universal Peace. He argued that the world had been stuck in the Age of Disorder but that it could move to the next axial age, that of Approaching Peace, if his reform ideas were adopted. In essence, Kang was using the past to break away from the past. His reform proposals advocated basic institutional change, which included a state constitution and assemblies where rule by the people might be exercised.

Although many in the intellectual and political worlds judged him a heretic from Confucian orthodoxy, his proposals for institutions based on and infused with Western ideas began to excite, as nothing had before, an interest in Western things beyond simply guns and ships. Kang's works thus began to prime the pump for greater change. Perhaps even more significant, Kang's reinterpretation of Confucianism had a major impact, the shock waves of which would continue for decades. The reason? Kang's treatment of Confucius and his thought essentially changed Confucianism from "what so far had been the unquestioned centre of faith into an ideology, the basic character of which was problematic and debatable."³ Once Confucianism became an ideology, for example, it could be interpreted as a tool that elevated certain social types (fathers, husbands, parents, elder brothers) and degraded other social types (sons, wives, children, younger brothers). Kang's work in essence was the revolutionary first step, however little he intended it, in deposing Confucius and his thought as the foundation of Chinese culture, the first step in dismantling the traditional Chinese identities.

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL EARTHQUAKE: DEFEAT BY THE "DWARF PEOPLE"

From the mid-1880s an uneasy calm between China and Japan existed on the Korean peninsula. Their agreement in 1885 to abstain from sending troops without notification to the other had held into the 1890s. Chinese Resident General Yuan Shikai had developed close relations with powerful Queen Min. But Japanese determination to act decisively in any future crisis had become firmer.

Beginning in the 1860s, an eclectic religion called *Tonghak* (Eastern Learning) had begun to grow in southwest Korea. In many ways, especially in its promise of a utopian regime, it was reminiscent of the Taiping movement. In the early 1890s, it gave rise to a rebellion that grew out of an array of political, social, and economic problems besetting the Korean countryside. In the summer of 1894, with the rebellion spreading, the Korean government, still operating under its tributary mentality, asked the Chinese government to send troops to help quell the disturbance. Following the guidelines of the Li-Itō convention, the Chinese government notified Japan of its plan to send 1,500 troops but to withdraw them as soon as the rebellion was suppressed. The Japanese answered by sending around 8,000 troops. Li Hongzhang desperately tried to negotiate a settlement; he was well aware that any war would be fought with his Anhui army and Beiyang navy. But when his efforts to use Britain and the United States as mediators went nowhere, he decided that reinforcements had to be sent. On July 25, the Japanese sank a British steamer that had been chartered by the Chinese, drowning 950 Chinese soldiers. Both countries declared war on August 1.

The war was the first test for the Chinese military after ten years of what might be called “accelerated self-strengthening.” In the climactic naval battle off the Yalu River on September 17, of the twelve Chinese ships involved, four were sunk, four were crippled beyond repair, and four fled. All twelve of the more up-to-date Japanese ships survived without major damage. The results, in short, were the same as those in the war with France a decade earlier: complete and humiliating defeat on both land and sea. A nation comprised of what earlier Chinese had contemptuously dismissed as “dwarf people” had smashed the Central Country. Many nations were astonished by the outcome, having assumed that the land giant would overwhelm the tiny island nation. But the result should not have been surprising. Japan had been rapidly modernizing since the 1870s, and its war effort was driven by national fervor. China’s efforts at modernizing had been fitful, eroded by counterproductive policies. When war came, it was indeed fought mostly by Li Hongzhang’s Beiyang fleet and his provincial army. “China had no clear demarcation of authority, no unity of command, and no nationwide mobilization. Conflicting advice from the Tsungli [Zongli] Yamen, provincial authorities, and irresponsible [pro-war] officials rendered the court indecisive.”⁴ The same postmortem could have been written about the Sino-French War.

The settlement might have been even worse from the Chinese perspective had two events not occurred. First, peace envoy Li Hongzhang was shot in the head by a Japanese terrorist. Though he survived, the Japanese were horrified and most of all frightened that this insane act might jeopardize their spoils of victory. They thus withdrew some of their most overweening and expansive demands, specifically that they be given control of three cities in the Beijing area. The second unexpected development came after the conclusion of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which ceded Taiwan and the Liaodong peninsula in southern Manchuria to Japan. Russia, Germany, and France joined in what became known as the Triple Intervention to force Japan to return the Liaodong peninsula to China. In spite of that return, China lost Taiwan and had to give up forever any tributary-related claims to Korea.

With the Sino–Japanese War, imperialism entered a far more perilous phase. The cession of Taiwan was the first major loss of Chinese territory. Japan acquired the right to build and operate factories in the treaty ports, a right that was soon taken by all the Western nations. More ominously, Japan successfully imposed a huge indemnity (200 to 230 million taels) on China to defray the costs of the war—an action that deepened China’s financial crisis (its annual revenue was only about 89 million taels) and thereby further eroded the government’s chances to undertake any needed policy initiatives. It also meant the necessity of borrowing money from foreign firms. From 1895 to 1898, loans were arranged from Russia, a French–Russian consortium, and an Anglo–German consortium; they were secured against customs revenues. From this point until the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, China was continuously deep in debt to foreign countries.

No event to this point in the nineteenth century had created such widespread shock and such deep humiliation as the loss of this war to a people whom many Chinese had traditionally scorned. Any critically thinking Chinese could no longer believe that things could go on as they had or that business as usual would somehow allow them to muddle through. Had there been protest demonstrators carrying signs emblazoned “The end is near,” they would likely have captured the despair felt by many Chinese. As it was, there was a protest in Beijing following the signing of the treaty. Because it was the time for the metropolitan examination for the highest degree in the civil service system, large numbers of candidates thronged the capital. Kang Youwei and his closest disciple, Liang Qichao, drew up a long memorial calling on the government to repudiate the treaty, to continue the war and move the capital farther into the interior, and to institute reforms. Thirteen hundred examination candidates signed the petition. But the government did not respond. The country apparently had to be abased even further before the government would act to redress the situation.

A NEW PHASE OF IMPERIALISM: CARVING THE MELON

In the aftermath of one foreign policy disaster came another crisis between China and the foreign powers. It initially involved Germany and Russia. Since it was Russian interest in Manchuria and Korea that in part drove Japan to fight China for predominant rights in Korea, and since it was Russia that spearheaded the Triple Intervention, a look at the Russian role and interests with regard to China is essential. The Sino–Russian relationship seems most atypical when it is compared to China’s other international relationships.

Russia had been active in East Asia since the seventeenth century, a logical extension of its interests in Siberia. Treaties in 1689 and 1727 had established the border between China and Russia and essentially regularized their relations. From the beginning, China treated Russia differently from other Western nations. The treaties were signed as between equals; the tributary system did not seem to come into play. Although Chinese documents indicate that Russian ministers kowtowed to the Chinese emperor, Qing records never officially named Russia as a tributary state. Russia “was the only foreign country with

which China maintained treaty relations, the only 'Western' state to which China sent diplomatic missions, and the only foreign power granted religious, commercial, and educational privileges" in Beijing.⁵ From 1693 on, Russian merchants were permitted to come to Beijing every three years. In addition, the Chinese government authorized and paid for the travel of Russian priests to Beijing every ten years in order to minister to Russians in the capital; the government also picked up the cost of living expenses for the priests. Following the treaty in 1727, Russia was allowed to send students to learn Chinese and Manchu at a language school in Beijing; the Chinese government helped pay the costs of travel and, once in the capital for decade-long stays, it subsidized living expenses, including providing clothing and food at no charge. Although the Qing bestowed these special concessions and considerations in order to ensure Russian neutrality as Beijing tried to strengthen its hold on the North and Northwest frontiers, the special grants continued long after those frontiers had been stabilized. Russia monopolized this special status in Beijing until the Treaty of Tianjin in 1860 opened the capital to general diplomatic residence.

In that treaty, in fact, the Russian ambassador helped mediate disputes between Prince Gong and British and French representatives. He also had his own goals to further the Russian agenda in Central and Northeast Asia. From the early 1850s, the Chinese had allowed Russians to trade, build storage facilities, and set up consulates in northern Xinjiang. The Russians had also been pushing into eastern Siberia, building garrisons along the Amur River. In a treaty concluded in 1860, Russians showed themselves as aggressive as the Western Europeans, demanding and receiving land north of the Amur River and all land east of the Ussuri River, the latter comprising what became known as the Maritime Province. Altogether these territorial gains totaled between 300,000 and 400,000 square miles. In addition, more cities in Xinjiang were opened to Russians: These chickens came home to roost when the Russians seized the northern part of Xinjiang in 1878, but negotiations led in 1881 to their withdrawal and a reduction in the number of their consulates in the region.

But Russian interests in Northeast Asia did not diminish. The terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railway, begun in 1891, was to be Vladivostok on the Sea of Japan. The Russians could have chosen a route totally in Russian territory, that is, running along the north bank of the Amur River. But that route was about 350 miles farther and with much rougher terrain than a route that would cut across Manchuria in a straight line from Chita. For the less expensive route, the Russians obviously needed Chinese permission. This they received in negotiations with Li Hongzhang, sent to St. Petersburg in 1896 as China's imperial commissioner at the coronation festivities of Nicholas II. With their railroad, the Chinese Eastern Railway, cutting through Manchuria, Russian interests in the area were substantially enhanced.

It was at about this same time that other European powers in their late-nineteenth-century race for empire around the world also began to enhance their own standing in China. It was Germany that put into motion what has been called the "scramble for concessions" or the establishment of "spheres of influence" or, more graphically, "carving up the Chinese melon." Germany had been interested in establishing a Chinese naval base for some time; by 1896, it had focused its lustful eyes on Jiaozhou Bay on the southern coast of Shandong both because of its excellent deep-water port and because of its location generally near Shandong's mineral

resources. All it needed was a pretext to act with demands and, if need be, force. This came in November 1897, when two German missionaries of a particularly aggressive Catholic order were hacked to death by a band of Chinese while visiting a third missionary. In response, Germany occupied the bay and its city, Qingdao. In March 1898, it forced the Chinese government to lease the port and its surrounding area for ninety-nine years; the leasehold included Germany's right to build two railroads and hold mining rights.

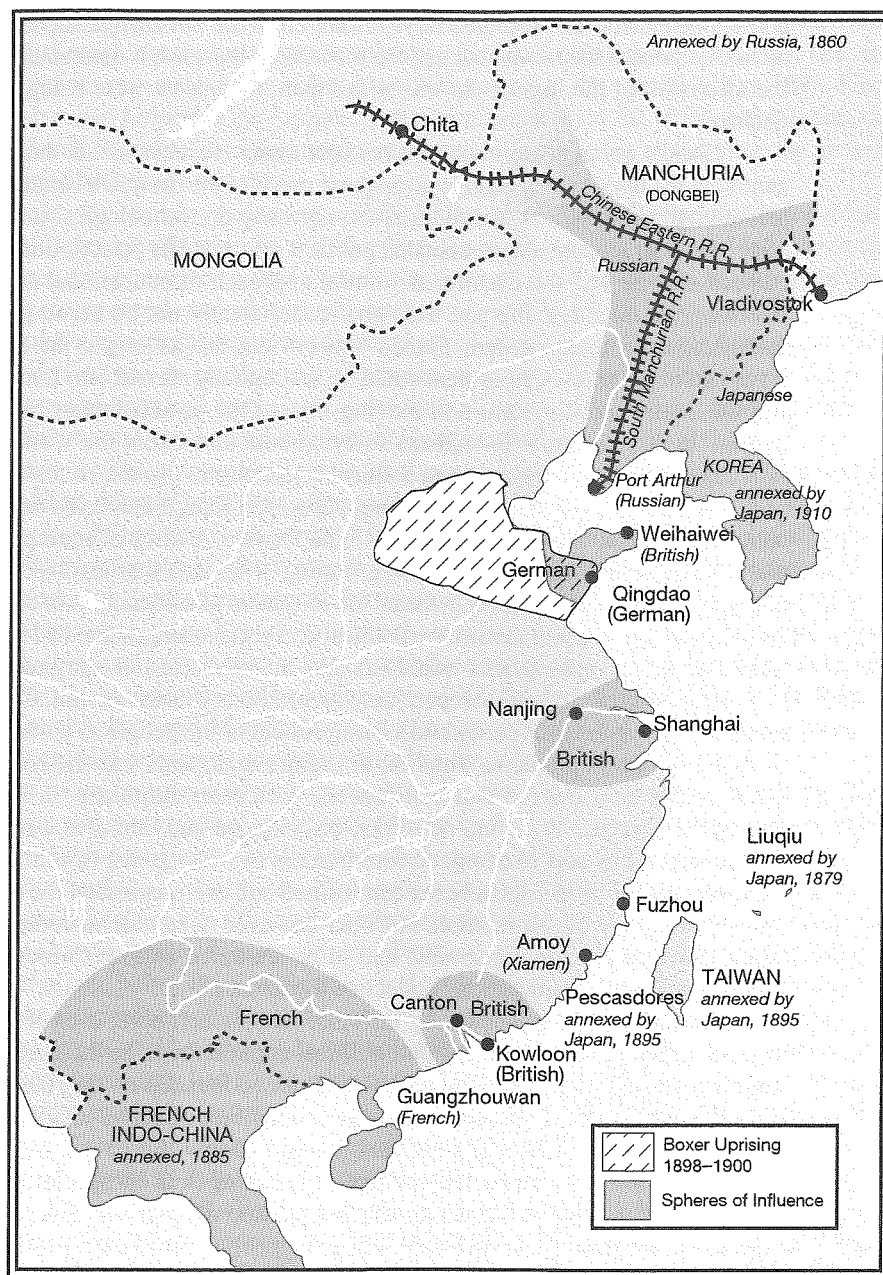
Driven by imperialist rivalry, the other nations followed suit. Russia used the pretext of protecting China from Germany to occupy Port Arthur and Dalian on the tip of the Liaodong peninsula in December 1897 and signed a twenty-five-year lease in March 1898. As part of the leasehold, Russia also acquired the right to build a railroad from these two ports up to the Chinese Eastern Railway; it would come to be called the South Manchurian Railway and would play a crucial role in China's subsequent history. To check the Russians, Britain countered with a twenty-five-year lease of the port of Weihaiwei directly across the Bohai Straits from Port Arthur and Dalian; in June 1898, it also leased the so-called New Territories of Hong Kong for ninety-nine years. France forced a lease of Guangzhou Bay for ninety-nine years in April 1898, thus setting up its sphere of influence in Lingnan and Southwest China. Italy, the United States, and Japan were frozen out of the carving competition: Italy's late demands were refused; the United States was interested in a particular site but was occupied with its war with Spain; Japan was focusing on its role in Korea.

In the aftermath of the scramble and with no sphere of influence of its own, the U.S. government issued the Open Door notes, statements by which it hoped to ensure continuing and equal commercial opportunity. Not an altruistic policy, it was obviously intended to ensure that countries with spheres would not freeze the United States out of treaty ports or areas of natural resources that were within those spheres. Though no country obligated itself to the notes, U.S. Secretary of State Hay asserted that they all had. In any case, the fact that the land grab had stopped did not develop from this policy but rather "because the imperialists feared rivalry and conflict among themselves. The resultant equilibrium saved the [Qing] empire from immediate collapse."⁶

At the time, of course, the Chinese were not aware that the Westerners would cease their carving competition. The establishment of treaty ports had thus escalated to the seizure of considerable territory with substantial economic rights. In this scramble for more and more of China and its resources following so closely the disastrous war with Japan, imperialism had thus reached a more virulent level that boded greater danger for China's future. It is not surprising that alarm about the incipient demise of the Chinese nation spread among elites all over China.

THE REFORM MOVEMENT AND THE HUNDRED DAYS: CLASHING IDENTITIES

The scramble for concessions formed the backdrop for one of the compelling dramas of the late nineteenth century—the Hundred Days from June to September 1898, when breakneck, breathtaking reforms promised a new China but instead delivered beheadings, forced flight,



Foreign Spheres of Influence and the Boxer Uprising

and imprisonment. The Hundred Days reform effort did not emerge suddenly full blown. The ideas that infused the movement and the institutions that gave it momentum had developed in the aftermath of the loss of the war with Japan. Its leaders were Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao.

Liang's writings are important because many elements of his thought would remain central in the discourse of change throughout much of the twentieth century. He believed that self-strengthening efforts had focused too narrowly on technological innovations at a time when the essential agenda necessitated political reforms. His prescription for the foundation of such change was the traditional cultural approach of educational reform, specifically fostering the spread of literacy. This goal could clearly not be accomplished through the traditional examination system. Since it was obvious that as long as the examination system remained in place no other system could be successfully carried out, Liang favored abolishing the examination system and moving toward the establishment of a national school system. In that system, with students studying both ideas from the West and Chinese traditions, intellectual development and political consciousness would be fostered.

Beyond educational reform, Liang supported Kang's emphasis on the essentiality of significant institutional change to move China forward. A cardinal concept in Liang's thought about what China needed to do was "grouping"—an idea that involved several aspects of change.⁷ At its most basic level, it meant the formation of associations of concerned elites who would meet to study and discuss the political and social changes that had to be undertaken; in a real sense, such associations would *mobilize* the intellects and energies of China's leaders.

But the concept had a deeper, more revolutionary thrust as well. China's predicament necessitated national solidarity and a commitment of the people as a whole to solving their desperately urgent problems. Implicit in Liang's arguments was the belief that traditional Chinese political culture and institutions, with their emphasis on individual identity and personal connections and networks, discouraged and inhibited a more general social solidarity and any sort of energetic commitment to wider goals. In addition, the traditional state was authoritarian: Its policies constrained and even repressed the people and prohibited the free flow of information. If China was ever to be able to compete with the West, Liang contended, such constraints had to be shattered so that Chinese political culture could develop an all-important "collective dynamism."

Certainly there was a strong flavor of nationalism here, even if he did not use the word. Further, Liang called for a new political community to be the center of a reconceived and restructured state. This new state would not be founded on the rule of a monarch over his subjects but would feature a shared participation of rulers and ruled in a system of popular sovereignty. For the first time, Liang brought the language of democracy into Chinese political discourse. The concept of grouping thus encapsulated in a fundamental way ideas of political community, the nation, and democracy. Liang's radical political discourse, which championed mobilizing the people, the collective and the community, and installation of a system of popular sovereignty, would become the watchwords of subsequent Chinese reformers and revolutionaries from Sun Yat-sen to Mao Zedong.

The practical efforts of institutional reformers, led by Kang and Liang, began with the establishment of groupings in particular study associations. The ultimate goal was to remake China by giving it a new national identity. As a first step, the study associations

were to facilitate greater contact and social integration among official and nonofficial elites and, through the study process, to educate elites and mobilize their energies. The first study societies were established in Beijing and Shanghai in the second half of 1895. Since the Manchus had forbidden the formation of private societies in the 1650s and this ban still held, the study societies' establishment was illegal; indeed, by the next spring, the government banned both study societies.

But it was Hunan province in central China that became the incubator for reform that would come to fruition in the Hundred Days. There a reform-minded provincial administration sponsored in mid-decade the formation of a number of important new industrial, commercial, and educational institutions. In the provincial capital of Changsha, for example, electric lights were installed and paved (macadamized) roads became a reality. A telegraph line was erected between Changsha and the important Yangzi port of Hankou. With encouragement and sometimes loans from the government, local elites established a match factory and a steamship line to link Hunan and Hubei.

A fervent champion of reform in Hunan was Huang Zunxian, a leading expert on foreign affairs. Huang prompted administrative, judicial, and prison reforms, as well as setting up in 1897 a School of Current Affairs. Sponsored jointly by the provincial government and elites, the school had a mixed curriculum of Western studies (sciences, history, and politics) and Confucian classics. Its teaching staff were advocates of radical reform. Liang Qichao was named head lecturer; three other young disciples of Kang Youwei became his assistants. The study of seventeenth-century texts condemning despotism and describing the Manchu massacre at the city of Yangzhou during the Manchu conquest helped plant seeds of anti-Manchu thought. It is not surprising that the Qing state tolerated such a potentially dangerous situation for only a few months.

The most famous study association in Hunan was the Southern Study Society, founded by the more radical reformist gentry; it was the largest of the fourteen study societies founded in Hunan in 1897 and 1898. At its height it had over 1,200 members, both official and nonofficial elites. Nominally a private voluntary organization, it escaped being banned because the Changsha government had supported its formation and even participated in its functioning. Provincial officials received proposals from its members on matters of public policy for consideration and possible implementation; and in researching current issues, members could petition the government to see public records. Commenting on the Society after it had closed, Liang noted that "though nominally a study society, the Southern Study Society had all the makings of a local legislature."⁸

Another crucial aspect of the reform activity was the publication of newspapers, the beginnings of what would in the coming decades become an explosion in the number of newspapers, most short lived but almost all focusing on questions relating to the identity of the new China. The early Beijing, Shanghai, and Hunan study societies published their own newspapers, which became crucial vehicles for publicizing and propagandizing reformist and radical thought. Most of Liang Qichao's essays appeared in the Hunan newspapers. They were distributed mostly free of charge, not only in Hunan but along the Southeast Coast as well.

In early 1898, the teachings of Liang Qichao and various writings in newspapers linked to the Southern Study Society became notably radical, taking staunchly nationalistic

positions with a considerable anti-Manchu slant. Conservatives and even moderate reformers who had been involved in provincial reform activities became apprehensive. A struggle erupted between reformers and more conservative forces. The question at issue was “What is the Chinese identity?” Whereas for the reformers the answer was increasingly becoming Han Chinese nationalists subordinated to a depraved and ineffective Manchu minority, for the conservatives the answer was simple: the supporters of traditional Chinese cultural values—which they felt duty bound to protect against the heterodox views of the reformers. The abrasive staying power of the past was at work, eroding the possibilities of institutional change.

A bitter ideological attack on Kang and Liang spread as a stream of accusations poured into the court, condemning both their ideology and their reform agenda as heresy from the Confucian orthodoxy. Kang and Liang were condemned for their open criticism of Chinese political culture and tradition and for their negative treatment of the Manchus. Kang’s reinterpretation of Confucius and the classics was especially upsetting. The call in the writings of Liang and others for people’s rights and equality clashed head-on with the traditional Confucian bonds and the Confucian ideas of social hierarchy. For those in the camp of the antireformers, the reformers were as much cultural enemies of Chinese traditions as the Taiping had been forty years earlier. By the summer, most reformers had been expelled from Hunan, with the majority of Hunanese gentry mobilized not for the construction of a new state and society but against the reformers. By late summer, the governor of Hunan petitioned the court in Beijing to destroy the printing blocks for Kang’s *Confucius as a Reformer* and to ban its publication.

At the very time that Kang and company were bearing the attacks in and being hounded out of Hunan, he was to come closest to wielding substantial national power. The surprising development was that Kang had found a powerful supporter in the Forbidden City—the Guangxu emperor himself. The twenty-seven-year-old emperor had been won over to the cause of reform through his long-time tutor, Weng Tonghe. In 1889, Weng had encouraged the emperor to read Feng Guifen’s 1860 collection of essays on reform. The emperor was so impressed with the possibilities of using Western learning for Chinese benefit that in the early 1890s he studied English in the Forbidden City with teachers from the Interpreters College. He was especially interested in the contemporaneous writings of advocates of reform. In 1895, the Empress Dowager, well aware of the emperor’s burgeoning interests in Western things, halted his language study and allowed him to have tutorials only on traditional Chinese materials.

Weng Tonghe’s interests in reform had naturally led him to Kang as the leader in calls for institutional change. Kang had sent memorials to the court as early as 1888 pointing out the need for reform. When Kang formed the eventually banned study society in Beijing in 1895, Weng Tonghe had been a member. Weng was not an advocate of radical reform, but the radical nature of Kang’s ideas came to be known only gradually: Many of Kang’s most extreme views and positions were set forth only in 1898. In any event, Weng recommended Kang to the emperor, who established direct communications with the reformer. On January 24, 1898, the emperor arranged an open meeting at the Zongli Yamen between Kang and high officials at the court, including Weng, Li Hongzhang, and Ronglu, one of the Empress Dowager’s trusted confidants. An exchange revealed Kang’s goal of remaking the Chinese identity.

Ronglu: "The institutions of the ancestors cannot be changed."

Kang Youwei: "We cannot preserve the realm of the ancestors; what is the use of their institutions?"

Li Hongzhang: "Shall we abolish all the Six Boards and throw away all the existing institutions and rules?"

Kang: "The laws and governmental system . . . have made China weak and will ruin her. Undoubtedly they should be done away with."⁹

After the meeting, Kang sent three memorials to the emperor detailing his plan of action. They included following the reform models of Meiji Japan and Russia under Peter the Great and establishing a constitution and a national assembly. To facilitate change, the emperor should announce openly that reform was the order of the day and he should establish new bodies to work to that end, thereby avoiding working through the cumbersome and conservative government bureaucracy. On June 11, the emperor showed whose camp he was in, announcing, as Kang had suggested, that reform had become state policy. Five days later, Kang had his first audience, a five-hour marathon, with the emperor. The emperor appointed Kang to the Zongli Yamen and permitted Kang to submit memorials directly to him instead of through the regular bureaucratic channels. From June 11 to September 21, in what has come to be known as the Hundred Days, the emperor, with Kang providing the agenda, issued over a hundred decrees calling for institutional reforms in almost every policy arena. It is certainly the case that the national context in early 1898—the Western scramble for concessions through the new approach of "leasing" territory—created in the minds of many the sense that some kind of substantial change was necessary to keep the country from being eaten alive.

Taken as a whole, the political, economic, military, and educational reforms called for in the wave of reform edicts would have drastically restructured the Chinese polity. They included revamping the examination system and establishing a national school system; restructuring the government and abolishing sinecure positions; modernizing the military, police, and postal systems; setting up new institutions to promote agriculture, commerce, and industry; and establishing rewards for inventions. Significantly, the emperor did not decree the centerpieces of Kang's plan—a constitution and a national assembly—presumably because he saw them as too radical for the current political context.

But even so, the reforms threatened the entire status quo, specifically the world of the Empress Dowager and her supporters. Changing the examination system was unsettling to all those already in the examination pipeline. Suggestions that Buddhist temple complex buildings might be used as schools stepped on the toes of Buddhists. Restructuring the government threatened those in current positions, as did abolishing those posts for which men were paid yet for which they did no or little work. Military reforms meant changing or perhaps abolishing existing armies. It also did not help the cause with Manchus that the only Manchu involved in the effort was the emperor. The Empress Dowager's continuing power at the court was the crucial reality that would end the efforts at reform.

From the opening of the Hundred Days, the Empress Dowager revealed her opposition to the emperor and the reform group. Already on June 15, she had dismissed Weng

Tonghe. She then bided her time, let antireform bitterness fester, and made certain of her support. Then on September 21, with the help of the military under Yuan Shikai, she staged a coup d'état, seizing all power from the emperor and putting him under house arrest. She then began her third regency, one that would last to her death a decade later. Five days after the coup, all the reform edicts were revoked. Although Kang was able to escape to Hong Kong and Liang to Japan, six young reformers, including Tan Sitong, were executed. Tan, a brilliant thirty-three-year-old intellectual, had been a leader of the reform efforts in Hunan. He was assigned to be a secretary to the Grand Council in order to facilitate the reforms only on September 5. When the Empress Dowager's coup came, he had been on the job for less than three weeks. He refused to flee, saying, "I wanted to kill the robbers, but lacked the strength to transform the world. This is the place where I should die. Rejoice, rejoice!"¹⁰ He was beheaded for treason on September 27.

The reform effort was put down quite easily, a fact that is often used to argue that in China change at this time could not likely come from the top. Chinese political leaders seemed unable to change the system in order to deal effectively with the crises; perhaps they were not yet able to realize the state's dire peril. And yet, despite the coup against it, the reform movement had considerable historical import. It did, as one historian argues, "usher in a new phase of Chinese culture—the era of ideologies." The ideas of Kang and Liang, which took Western thought seriously and dethroned Confucianism from a way of life to an ideology, "raised the curtain on the cultural crises of the twentieth century."¹¹ Elites began to join together in associations, debating issues and starting to deal with problems in new contexts; since many involved political activity, the amount of political participation on the part of elites increased. Newspapers sprouted up and proliferated, in the stock Chinese phrase, "like bamboo shoots after a spring rain"; perhaps their most outstanding feature was evidence of a growing sense of nationalism. The discourse they began was essentially the beginning of modern Chinese public opinion. Elites placed educational reform at the center of the public agenda, and that reform would come to fruition in the next decade. Finally, the reform era gave rise to the birth of the modern intelligentsia; unlike the old scholar-gentry, the new intelligentsia were "free-floating intellectuals,"¹² not tied to localities and lacking the traditional symbiotic relationship with the government. Further, the new intelligentsia, unlike the old scholar elites, struggled with problems of alienation from the government and above all of cultural identity, caught between the old and the new, East and West.

THE BOXER CATASTROPHE: WHICH IDENTITY NOW?

The collapse of traditional state and civilization was punctuated at century's end by an outrageous constellation of events in North China. From a culture of poverty in Shandong province came a social explosion. Led by so-called Boxers, a name taken from the martial art rituals, or boxing, that they performed, the movement was composed of mostly young farmers, laborers, and out-of-work drifters. The roving Boxer groups also included women's groups (called Red Lanterns).

Natural disasters—flood and drought—formed the context for the rise and spread of the Boxer movement. In August 1898, a month before the Empress Dowager's coup against

the reformers, a flood broke the Yellow River dikes in three places, sending torrents of water into 34 counties, covering over 2,000 villages, and making at least temporary refugees out of millions. Crops were ruined, and in some places the devastation wrought by the flood was so severe that crops could not even be planted the next spring. Government corruption in the dispersal of relief grain meant that large numbers of people, even those living relatively close to cities, did not receive any aid. "Many peasants were still huddled on the dikes [where they had taken refuge] eating leaves, bark, or weeds fully three months after the flooding began."¹³ In such cases, antigovernment or antiofficial feelings began to rise quickly. Drought was a factor in expanding the Boxer movement, as we will see.

Anti-Christian hostility was a crucial cause of the uprising. In the area where the Boxer movement began, German Catholic missionaries of a stridently militant order had been very active. The killing of the two missionaries that had served as Germany's pretext to seize Jiaozhou occurred in this area. A missionary named Georg Stenz, whom they were visiting at the time of their murders, escaped death—ironically, since he was the likely object of the armed attack. A word about him reveals some dynamics behind the anti-Christian hostility. Stenz revealed the aggressive nature of the missionizing approach of his order in his autobiography: He described his "mission cross which was to be at once weapon and banner in [his] fight for the Kingdom of God." His contempt for the Chinese drips from his description of Shanghai: "An entirely new world now opened before us. Crowds of slit-eyed Chinese swarmed about the harbor—prominent merchants in their rustling silks and poor coolies in ragged clothes that did not hide their filthy bodies. . . . Cunning, pride, and scorn flashed from the eyes that met our inquiring looks."¹⁴

But more upsetting to Chinese than attitudes of superiority, arrogance, and contempt for those they were trying to save were the actions of missionaries with regard to their converts. They were particularly active in interfering in their converts' lawsuits, frequently pressuring magistrates. They also demanded that magistrates punish people for alleged offenses against the church or church property. They forbade converts from participating in or contributing to village festivals, which often featured processions following a statue of the local god; such participation the missionaries called idolatry. In the name of preventing that evil, they were rupturing the Chinese community by asserting their own values and in the process in effect taking away at least a part of the Chinese identity of their converts. Nonconverted Chinese were offended and embittered by this action.

Therefore, from their start in 1898 and 1899, Boxers attacked the property and persons of Christian converts and missionaries. Most pockets of Boxer activity in the beginning were in Shandong. But the governor of the province, Yuxian, was able generally to settle the unrest in southern Shandong by the spring of 1899. Growing Boxer activity in the province's northwest, along with Western pressure on the government, got him cashiered in late 1899. Yuan Shikai succeeded him in Shandong and was able to crush the Boxers there.

In the winter of 1899–1900 the movement began to spread and grow—into Zhili, Henan, Shanxi, and even Inner Mongolia and Manchuria. There was no central leadership; Boxer bands coalesced, attacked Christian converts, then faded away. One historian

has argued that in part the movement spread quickly because of the dynamic of spirit possession. “The empowerment possession conferred made it enormously attractive to those at the bottom of the Chinese social scale, regardless of locale. Also, the possession ritual [which involved boxing, incantations, breathing through clenched teeth, and foaming at the mouth], by placing individuals in direct communication with their gods and enabling them, when in a possessed state, to in effect become gods, placed a major barrier in the way of the creation of a more centralized, structured, and perhaps durable movement.”¹⁵ The expansion of the movement also depended on the attitude of the officials. Yuan Shikai’s no-nonsense approach in suppressing the northwest Shandong Boxers contrasted sharply with Yuxian’s encouragement of the Boxers in Shanxi in the summer of 1900.

But perhaps the most important dynamic in the Boxer growth was the drought that began after the Yellow River floods in late 1898. It freed up many young men who ordinarily would have been working in the fields to join the Boxers. An attraction of the Boxers as food became scarce was that they usually had good supplies of grain, gained in their pillaging of Christian households and sometimes their extortion from the wealthy. Psychologically the drought created a problem of hunger anxiety, of growing nervousness, restlessness, and hopelessness. And the drought became linked in many Chinese minds with the presence of the Westerners, particularly the missionaries. “In one placard after another, the Chinese people are enjoined to kill off all foreigners and native Chinese contaminated by foreigner or foreign influence. Only after this process of physical elimination of every trace of the foreign from China has been completed will the gods be appeased and permit the rains once again to fall.”¹⁶ It is little wonder that missionary anxiety moved in the direction of panic over the continuation of the drought.

Western nations, frightened by the continuing attacks on and murder of missionaries, as well as property losses, demanded that the Qing court act to suppress the uprising. Since the Boxers had championed a slogan supporting the Qing (“Revive the Qing; destroy the foreigner”), the Empress Dowager was reluctant to undertake such suppression. Wall posters hung up in villages and towns shouted the Boxer goal:

When at last all the Foreign Devils
Are expelled to the very last man,
The Great Qing, united, together,
Will bring peace to this our land.¹⁷

The Empress Dowager echoed the Confucian line, “Heaven sees as the people see; Heaven hears as the people hear,” alluding to the Mandate of Heaven. The whole situation had turned her into something of a populist; in that vein, she argued that “China is weak; the only thing we can depend upon is the hearts of the people. If we lose them, how can we maintain our country?”¹⁸ With Western pressure on the court becoming stronger, the Empress Dowager quite incredibly threw her support behind the Boxers—slowly at first, in January 1900, ordering local authorities to distinguish between lawful local militia

formation and bandit activity. Westerners thought that the purpose of that decree was to give the Boxers some cover. The Qing did send military forces against the Boxers, but there was no concerted or sustained action that might have halted the unrest. Nearing Beijing in late spring, Boxers attacked railroad lines, ripping out the track and burning stations, and tore down telegraph lines. The political and policy bankruptcy of the Qing, in permitting and even condoning this action, was clear.

Western nations and Japan determined that they would have to act to save missionaries and stop the bloodshed. On June 10, 1900, Boxers beat back a British relief force, marching from Tianjin; they were eventually joined by Qing imperial troops. On June 17, pro-Boxer Manchus told the Empress Dowager that the foreign nations were demanding that she retire and that the Guangxu emperor be returned to the throne. If there had been any question about her siding with the Boxers before, there was not anymore. On June 20, the German minister, on his way to a meeting with the Zongli Yamen, was shot dead on the street. The next day, in a scene that conjures up the theater of the absurd, the Empress Dowager declared war on the eight foreign powers. Having been repeatedly defeated by one country at a time, the Qing had now decided to battle eight at once. The Manchus, who throughout their dynasty had identified themselves with Chinese and Chinese culture, were now identifying themselves and putting their fate in the hands of adolescent warriors. Two of the emperor's brothers were reportedly seen leading Boxer forces in their attacks.



German soldiers with spiked helmets enter the Forbidden City during the eight-nation expedition to lift the Boxer sieges. Because the German minister had been killed on the streets of Beijing in June 1900, Germany had a heightened interest in how the Chinese would be treated.

The ambassadorial legation quarters in Beijing and the Northern Cathedral 2 miles northwest of the legations had become the havens to which missionaries and converts fled. In late June, the Boxers besieged the legation quarters and cathedral, acts that gave rise in the Western press to the phrase “yellow peril.” The worst Boxer violence occurred in Shanxi province, where Governor Yuxian, having lost his Shandong governorship due to Western pressure, encouraged Boxer attacks on Westerners. In early July he called forty-four missionaries and their families—men, women, and children—to Taiyuan, the provincial capital, for their protection. On July 9, under his personal supervision, he had them executed. Other missionaries in the province suffered similar fates, along with some 2,000 Christian converts.

The war was localized in the North because of the actions of key central and southern governors-general and Yuan Shikai serving as Shandong governor. They simply ignored the declaration of war. An 8-nation force of about 20,000 men arrived in the capital on August 14 to lift the siege. Most Boxers disappeared into the North China countryside. The Empress Dowager fled to the southwest, deciding as well that the emperor had to be taken. When the emperor’s favorite consort suggested that he be allowed to remain in Beijing in order to negotiate peace, the Empress Dowager had her thrown down a well for her presumptuousness. Disguised and under armed guard, the Empress Dowager and the emperor took flight in a cart. En route, edicts were issued in the emperor’s name in which he took full blame for the disaster. In late October they reached the ancient capital of Xi’an in Shaanxi province, some 800 miles from Beijing. They would remain there until January 1902.

Over the next six months, Western troops joined missionaries in making raids on surrounding cities and towns, pillaging Chinese property. The missionaries were quite enthusiastic about revenge. One missionary, D. Z. Sheffield, wished that more American troops would be sent: “It is not bloodthirstiness in missionaries to desire to see further shedding of [Chinese] blood, but an understanding of Chinese character and conditions, and a realization that the policy of general forgiveness means the loss of many valuable native [Christian] and foreign lives.”¹⁹ Sheffield’s remarks were par for the missionary course. But for sheer outrageousness, the essay “The Ethics of Loot,” written by the missionary Gilbert Reid for *Forum* magazine in 1901, takes the cake. Reid argued, “To confiscate the property of those who were enemies in war may be theoretically wrong, but precedent had established the right. For those who have known the facts and have passed through a war of awful memory, the matter of loot is one of high ethics.” He even said he was sorry that he had not looted more himself. In his capacity as a conspicuous Christian, he had the audacity to ponder the question of “whether the sacking and burning of the entire city of [Beijing] might not ‘have been the greatest good for the greatest number.’”²⁰

By late 1900, 45,000 foreign troops were in North China. They spent their time on search-and-destroy missions, trying to ferret out Boxers and kill them. But, as in any guerrilla-type action, how does one identify the enemy? The upshot was many innocent persons killed. One American commander noted, “it is safe to say that where one real Boxer has been killed since the capture of [Beijing], fifty harmless coolies or laborers on the farms, including not a few women and children, have been slain.”²¹ Troops staged “punitive picnics,” affairs that featured menus of arson, rape, and looting.



Foreign troops stand in rather blasé fashion among bodies and heads of decapitated Boxer prisoners. Note the Japanese soldier wiping blood off his sword.

Source: Wellcome Library, London

The signing of the Boxer Protocol in September 1901 brought the lowest point of the Qing court in its relations with the West. The West, like its missionaries, was out for revenge: They called for the execution and punishment of officials who had participated in the war; the Manchu Yuxian, who had egged the Boxers on in Shanxi, was executed; and five others were allowed to commit suicide. The foreign nations punished the whole elite class of would-be officials by suspending the civil service examinations for five years in forty-five cities. They ordered over two dozen forts destroyed and a dozen railroad posts occupied so that Western troops could have ready access to Beijing. They expanded the legation quarters and ordered it permanently fortified. They put a two-year prohibition on China's importation of arms.

But most disastrous was an indemnity that was staggering in its immensity.²² For damage to foreign property and lives, the Chinese were forced to pay 450 millions taels (about \$333 million in 1901), a sum truly *staggering* since, by this time, the complete annual Qing income was only 88,200,000 taels. The indemnity was to be paid annually in thirty-nine installments in gold, with interest rates that by the date of the full payment of the debt (the end of 1940) would total about 1 billion taels. For a government that could not

move with any certainty into the modern world in part because of lack of money, the indemnity was a crushing burden.

The extremely harsh nature of the protocol, the miserable showing of the Chinese military, the insane policy of attempting to use the Boxers as instruments of policy, and the mortifying overland flight of the country's sovereigns were on view for the whole world to see. The apex of Qing wealth and power under the Qianlong emperor had been just a century earlier, yet the state now entered the twentieth century in degradation, poverty, and humiliation.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Chang, Hao. *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890–1907* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). This is a meticulous study of the thought of a key intellectual whose impact was felt in Chinese politics and society for much of the twentieth century.

Cohen, Paul. *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). This prize-winning meditation focuses on the Boxer movement to explore the nature of history, memory, and myth.

Esherick, Joseph W. *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). This revisionist study of the Boxer movement explores its cultural and ecological bases.

Karl, Rebecca, and Peter Zarrow, eds. *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002). This book of wide-ranging essays sees the period 1895–1898 as laying the groundwork for the New Policy reforms of 1901–1911.

Kwong, Luke S. K. *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). A revisionist interpretation of the reform movement, this book deemphasizes the role of Kang Youwei and reexamines the motives of the Guangxu emperor and the Empress Dowager.

Revolutionaries: Manchu and Anti-Manchu



During their exile in Xi'an, the Empress Dowager reported, "We [the emperor and I] were both clad in the meanest of garments, and to relieve our hunger we were scarcely able to obtain a dish of beans or porridge. Few of our poorest subjects have suffered greater hardships of cold and hunger than befell us in our pitiful plight."¹ Despite its laughable exaggeration, Cixi's description was probably reflecting much of what she felt. Taken together, her Xi'an experience of over a year and the memory of the Boxer nightmare and subsequent Western revenge had awakened her to China's danger with all the subtlety of a bucket of icy water thrown in her face. The total experience changed Cixi from what appeared an obstructionist conservative into a leading reformer, initiating change in all the areas that the reformers of the Hundred Days had dreamed about.² The reforms focused openly and without apology on adopting the strong points of foreign countries in order to make up for China's weaknesses. In substance they varied from mildly reformist to quite radical, even revolutionary. When the Manchus' world ended with the emperor's abdication in early 1912, it was after a decade-long bang of activity rather than the whimper of those who, resigned to the forces of history, did nothing.

THE STIRRINGS OF A NEW CHINA IN MACROREGIONAL CORES

During the course of the reforms up to the 1911 revolution, the first signs of a new China began to be seen—from modern economic developments to outbursts of nationalism to the appearance of new social forces. Certainly, if the Manchu reform effort was stimulated by China's plight vis-à-vis the outside world, it was also prompted by the increasing evidence of marked internal developments and change.

From the start, it should be noted that the stirrings of a new China were spatially uneven. Macroregional core areas of greater urbanization and higher levels of economic development, often situated along the coasts or on important river systems, exhibited the greatest degree of modern change; peripheral backwaters, the least. The rate of change tended to create different experiences, attitudes, and worldviews among the people in areas of varying development. Cities were always the sites of greatest change. They were now being paved, lighted, and policed. They were the homes of wide-ranging reformist voluntary associations dealing with social problems like footbinding and vices like opium smoking and gambling. Newspapers and magazines were being produced in greater number, focusing on current issues and developments. With regard to social change during these years, it has been estimated that the number of letters, newspapers, and magazines sent and received in 1910 was twenty-five times that in 1901.³ Such an increase came primarily in the macroregional cores.

Increasingly common in the cores during these years was evidence of nationalism, expressed often as fears of national dismemberment and even of the obliteration of the Chinese people. Public meetings and demonstrations dotted the political landscape—about British threats to Tibet and, by extension, even the province of Sichuan; Russian influence in Mongolia and Manchuria; and French pressure in the Southwest. School songs and plays urged the government to stand up to all foreign pressure. Nationalism as resistance to foreign powers perhaps reached its high point in the 1905–1907 anti-U.S. boycott for its immigration restriction law and its mistreatment of Chinese who attended the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis.

Nationalism was also expressed against Western intrusion into matters within China. A growing number of rancorous treaty port incidents exploded from cases of Westerners' right of extraterritoriality. Though some provinces had eliminated the cultivation of opium, the British argued that until the drug was completely eradicated from the country at large, it still could import it. In an angry response, there was talk in some Chinese circles of another opium war. A dramatic "rights recovery" movement developed to win control over mines that were foreign-owned and railroads that were foreign-built and foreign-controlled. Recovering the railroads seems to have captured the attention of core society as a whole. People from all social classes in pertinent core zones—from gentry and rich merchants to students and shopkeepers to coolies and even beggars—pledged and contributed money to recover China's railroad rights. Key railroads targeted included the Canton–Hankou line, the Shanghai–Ningbo line, and lines in Sichuan province. Some contributors, increasingly upset by foreign control, even threatened to commit suicide in front of foreign embassies in Beijing. Their patriotic shout: "To die for one's country is glorious."

Another important group in the recovery movement, and in Chinese politics and economics in general, was overseas Chinese, particularly those in Southeast Asia (but also in the United States and Europe), who came to be seen by elites in China as a source of considerable financial and moral support for reformist and revolutionary causes. One feature of the Chinese diaspora had always been the continuing interest of those abroad in their homeland and especially their desire to be buried in their ancestral native place. The early twentieth century saw the birth among overseas Chinese communities of a more committed political interest in developments in the "home country," which would remain a reality throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

In these public displays of nationalism, new social groups for the first time were finding public voices, joining the old leaders of society, the scholar gentry, and a new group that appeared in the last years of the nineteenth century: the gentry-merchants. Youth emerged as a vocal and enthusiastic force, specifically the students who went to Japan, Southeast Asia, the United States, and Europe. China had sent students to Japan beginning in the late 1890s, many on provincial government scholarships: in 1899 there were 200; by 1903, about 1,000; and by 1906, some 13,000. In Japan, students formed associations, many of them based on common provincial origin; there were, for example, associations for students from Jiangsu, Hubei, and Zhejiang that published their own newspapers. Seeing rapidly modernizing Japan, already a growing world power, these students naturally asked what was wrong with China. One student newspaper noted, "Japanese schools are as numerous as our opium dens, Japanese students as numerous as our opium addicts."⁴ Those who studied in Japan and Southeast Asia became enamored of Western liberal and radical ideas and returned to China ready to reshape the world. Those who studied in Europe and the United States tended to concentrate on more technical subjects; although they might not have reentered the Chinese scene with the political commitment that others evidenced, they were still affected by life in more modern states.

Another traditionally subordinated social group, women, stepped into the world of public affairs in the cores as never before. They joined in nationalistic demonstrations, organized patriotic societies, contributed jewelry for the revolutionary cause, and joined Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary organization, the Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmenghui*). They ran the gamut from the upper crust (court women read *Peking Woman*, which talked about the equality of all human beings) to the masses (Canton boatwomen went to the revolutionary front line in 1911 to serve as the first nurses ministering to combat troops). Female spokespersons advocated the feminist and revolutionary ideas they saw in the model feminist-revolutionary Qiu Jin, executed in July 1907 for her role in antigovernment plotting. In urban cores, the practice of footbinding began to decrease. Newspapers reported on the suicides of women whose mothers-in-law forbade them to unbind their feet.

The caveat in all this is that these sweeping revolutionary-sounding changes were largely restricted to macroregional cores. There was a huge gap between the cores and peripheries in the extent of political, social, and economic change; that gap would continue to have a substantial impact on the life of the populace in each zone and on the rate and nature of change in the future.

THE MANCHU REFORM MOVEMENT: EDUCATION

As the Empress Dowager took the Qing into the reform arenas, this flurry of activity in cities and core zones must have been part of the reality prompting her to act. Reform was necessary to build Chinese strength to fend off the West and to maintain leadership in China. In its reformist efforts, the government turned first to education, at the heart of any change that Confucian China might try to undertake.

Examination Reform

It is clear that the Empress Dowager and her officials meant business. Traditionally, the function of education had been to train future officials, inculcating them with Confucian values. The proof was in the examination, which had varied considerably over the years in the coverage of questions (sometimes more relevant to current issues, other times not). A hallmark of the examinations since the Ming period, however, was that the essays had to be written in a formulaic format known as the “eight-legged essay,” a structure that strait-jacketed the writer’s presentation and creativity. From Xi’an in August 1901 came Cixi’s edict banning the eight-legged essay and calling for examinations that would in part test knowledge of foreign governments and sciences. Note that this was less than three years from the end of the Hundred Days reform attempt. The reformers—some dead, some in exile, with their emperor-supporter under house arrest—may ultimately have had much more impact on subsequent political thinking and developments than the events of September 1898 might at first suggest.

One Chinese historian has described the significance of these changes as “epoch-making.” Indeed, the following questions and topics asked on the “foreign” portion of the 1903–1904 civil service examination for the *jinshi*, or highest degree, tend to show that the thought and actions of Kang, Liang, and others had substantially altered the thinking of conservative Qing officials.

Topic 1: “Western countries attach great importance to foreign study tours. How can we define the purpose and contain the time span [of such tours] in order to obtain the maximum benefits with the least costs?”

Topic 2: “Japan Westernized its system of learning with great rapidity. In its initial rush to change, Japan invariably encountered problems from deliberately skipping over normal steps. Yet Japan can still be called a Confucian country. What are suitable goals [for Japan] that preserve strengths while rejecting weaknesses?”

Topic 3: “Chambers of commerce and modern banks are the main features of a modern fiscal system for which budgeting and balancing accounts are fixed practices. In order to put [modern fiscal practices] into effect, the[se] fundamental components are necessary.”

Topic 4: “A modern police system is closely linked to a modern political system. We should obtain foreign police codes and proceed to implement their practice.”

Topic 5: “Industry, modern shipping, and railways augment military strength. All countries that have achieved wealth and power have done so using these means. Should we therefore adopt these things? What about the foundational values of a nation?”⁵

It is likely that the bodies of archconservatives like Woren were spinning in their graves with the reality that Western institutions and values had become such an integral part of the highest-level civil service examination.

A National School System

Whether Kang's and Liang's reformist ideas of popular education had hit their mark or whether the Empress Dowager was influenced from elsewhere, in October 1901 she championed the establishment of a national school system. It would be structured as a hierarchy of schools located at each territorial level of government administration: county, prefecture, province, and capital. It would run alongside and feed into traditional examinations, in essence becoming another route to traditional degrees. The hope was that the new school system would supersede the examination system within perhaps a decade. But this approach did not work. There was no incentive for men to choose this new route to examination success. Private tutoring for the old examination was cheaper and more familiar than untried schools. Even more serious, there were no provisions for financing the new schools or for obtaining teachers and textbooks.

In 1904, a more detailed plan for a national school system was laid out. It specified, for example, how many kindergartens and primary schools should be established per number of families in a community, where middle schools and high schools should be established, and what should be taught. But the plan still allowed the civil service examination to continue for three more years. Therefore, even with the greater details of the 1904 plan, the new government schools died on the vine while the examination system continued to flourish.

The Most Revolutionary Act of the Century

The year 1905 was crucial in what became the program of Qing reforms. That year Japan, with a goal of bringing at least southern Manchuria into its sphere of influence, defeated Russia in war, the first victory ever of an Asian country over a European country. Japan's great success in its entrance into the modern world and its roles on the world stage, in contrast to China's pitiful performance, spurred a more widespread reform effort. Another forceful impetus was the organization of anti-Qing revolutionary groups in Japan. In Tokyo in 1905, Sun Yat-sen formed his Revolutionary Alliance with the specific goals of overthrowing the dynasty and establishing a republic. From the Manchu perspective, leading the reforms might be the only way to save the dynasty from its antagonists.

In August 1905 the most powerful provincial officials, led by Yuan Shikai, urged the abolition of the civil service examination system. In an act that should be heralded with trumpet fanfares to mark its extraordinary significance, the Empress Dowager accepted the advice and ordered the examination cast into the dustbin of history. *It was the most revolutionary act of the twentieth century.* Why? The examination had been at the heart of traditional culture: It had been the chief vehicle of orthodox state and social ideology; it had given birth to the political elites who took the posts at all levels of the imperial bureaucracy; it had given birth to the social elites, the scholar-gentry, who provided essential leadership at local levels of society.

Now, with the abolition of the examination, there was no way to convey an official ideology. Indeed, there was no longer an official ideology of state. What were left were

questions without answers. From now on, what would give state and society its direction and its values? From now on, how would political and social leaders be produced? From now on, what would hold China together? Indeed, once the civil service examination was gone, there was no way to stop, divert, or even slow the tides of change.

From 1906, then, education had to succeed or fail with the new government school system. The problems—insufficient school buildings, inadequate funding, and paucity of able teachers and textbooks—had not disappeared. Likely because of the great traditional stress placed on education, local elites took it upon themselves to open and teach in schools. The school system in any particular locality was hostage to two factors—the degree of local economic development and the presence of interested elites. The system, as it developed, tended to remain weak at its base: Local elites could achieve greater prestige by setting up a high school rather than an elementary school, so some communities had no elementary schools. Similarly, kindergartens and elementary schools lacked teachers because most potential instructors preferred the greater prestige (and salary) of teaching at a higher-level school. Despite the immense problems, however, the education system was quickly, if very haphazardly, revolutionized. Perhaps most revolutionary was the curriculum, with both Chinese and Western studies replacing the classics, and the social impact, as students now met daily in the classroom with other students as peers instead of studying with a personal tutor. Studies have shown that core zone counties tended to have fairly well-developed school systems, whereas poorer peripheral counties had fewer schools and students; nevertheless, even in wealthier areas, conservative traditional outlooks sometimes retarded school construction and development.⁶

THE MANCHU REFORM MOVEMENT: MILITARY CHANGE

A well-known Chinese proverb says, “Good iron is not beaten into nails; good men are not made into soldiers.” Chinese civilization throughout the centuries had hailed and stressed the virtues of civilian rule and civil values. The empire could be won on horseback, the platitude went, but it had to be ruled with the writing brush. There was an imperial military examination that theoretically paralleled the civil service examination, but it had little prestige. By late imperial times, it consisted mostly of contests of strength and physical prowess and knowledge of centuries-old manuals. A man of ability and ambition simply did not route his future into the military. However, one of the major changes wrought by China’s nineteenth- and twentieth-century history is, as we will see, the revaluation of the military amid the increasing militarization of Chinese politics and society.

At the opening of the twentieth century there were several types of military organizations. The oldest were the weak and useless banner and Green Standard forces. Not much better by the end of the nineteenth century were the regional armies formed during the Taiping, now mainly serving the vested interests of their leaders. In these armies there was no set number of troops; ranks were often peopled with vagrants; and officers, who had no knowledge of or interest in modern weapons, did not train their troops and embezzled the money that was to have been paid to those troops.

Li Hongzhang's Anhui army had done the fighting against Japan in 1894–1895; at the time, about 60 percent of the troops had guns; the other 40 percent used swords, spears, and pikes.

There were also two “new armies,” established in the mid-1890s to be used against Japan; but the war had ended before these armies, trained by German military officers and equipped with modern weapons, could be deployed. In 1895, Zhang Zhidong established the Self-Strengthening Army in Nanjing, and Yuan Shikai formed the Newly-Established Army near Tianjin. Both men tried to avoid the situations existing in the foundering provincial armies. Zhang, for example, recruited men between the ages of sixteen and twenty from peasant families in the vicinity of Nanjing; he required that their character be vouched for by neighbors and that they undergo a physical examination by a foreign doctor before being accepted. Yuan established similar procedures. Both new armies paid their men well, and Yuan insisted that part of the salary be sent to the men's families. In July 1901, the Manchus transferred control of Zhang's new army to Yuan, making him the key army builder in the country and, until his transfer to Beijing in 1907, the head of what came to be called the New Army.

In late 1903 a Commission for Army Reorganization was appointed to modernize all the country's military institutions. It mandated troop regulations like those Zhang and Yuan had initiated and ordered that each province establish a modern force manned by residents of that province. The Commission set up a system whereby New Army divisions were stationed at crucial locations across the country. Despite these reforms, central direction of the army remained fragmented. Military centralization in a real sense was made impossible because of political realities—China was fragmented into regional and provincial political interests and domains. In addition, funding for a fully modernized force was completely inadequate.

New military academies were established beginning in 1904 in Beijing and in the provinces of Shaanxi, Zhili, Jiangsu, and Hubei; they joined the ranks of the modern Baoding Academy founded by Yuan Shikai after the Boxer uprising. All the academies came to use Japanese instructors instead of the more expensive Germans. They began to produce cadets inculcated with patriotic ideas, who brought together modern military expertise with a sense of acting for the good of the country. Increasing numbers of graduates of these academies began to travel for further study at Japanese military academies, including the future leader Chiang Kai-shek. There, like students in other Japanese schools, they began to talk about the nature of China's problems. By the time they returned to China to be assigned to their posts, many of them were filled with the anti-Manchu revolutionary ideas of Sun Yat-sen and others.

More able men began to choose military careers after the abolition of the civil service examination system. The army seemed to present a new ladder that they could climb to social prestige and considerable power. Studies have shown that peripheral (but not the most peripheral) regions tended to produce the highest proportion of young men attending new military academies, like that at Baoding.⁷ These were regions that traditionally did not produce many civil service degreeholders. Thus, in these areas there seemed likely a conscious awareness of the new and prestigious career possibilities in the military.

Because of the power of connections in Chinese society and the importance of the teacher-student relationship, the men at Baoding Military Academy became personally

connected to Yuan Shikai through his leadership. His command came to be known as the Beiyang (Northern) Army. As a mark of the changed roles of military men in the early twentieth century, among his Beiyang officers, ten would become military provincial governors after 1912 and five would become presidents or premiers of the Republic of China. The military had become a legitimate and even determinative factor in Chinese society and politics.

THE MANCHU REFORM MOVEMENT: CONSTITUTIONALISM

The Chinese did not see the victory of Japan over Russia in 1905 as simply a triumph of Asia over Europe, but more significantly as an indicator of what its path to political modernization should be: Japan, a constitutional power, had decisively defeated Russia, an authoritarian country. In thinking about the source of Western wealth and power—and now seeing Japanese success in emulating the West—it was not farfetched to believe that somehow one of the sources might be constitutionalism. In addition, Qing policymakers saw a very practical reason for wanting to move in that direction: Constitutional forms might well be a vehicle for strengthening their control over localities and their elites, tying provinces and localities more closely to the central government.

What the court saw as it looked back over the previous half century was a country whose regions, provinces, and localities were spinning out of the control of the center in centrifugal fashion. Much of the problem came from the political and military weakness and economic bankruptcy of the central government. Thus, when the Taiping war had begun to wreak its destruction, the Center had to ask civilian officials to form provincial armies to save the center. Power flowed out to the provinces—and those armies were still around almost fifty years later. Then, when it was time for reconstruction following the rebellions, the center had no money for the immense task, so it had to rely on local elites to take the lead. Studies have shown that during and after the rebellions, local elites emerged as significant leaders in establishing and managing local militia, rebuilding public works, sponsoring charitable undertakings, underwriting educational expenses, and contributing to and superintending the renovation of water control facilities. Power had devolved from the center to the local arenas. From the Qing perspective, constitutional bodies, directed and controlled ultimately by the throne, might be vehicles to bring local and provincial elites back into a firmer relationship with the Center.

With this in mind, in 1905 the Empress Dowager decided to send missions abroad to study constitutional systems in Europe, the United States, and Japan. These missions lasted from late 1905 to late summer 1906 (one wonders whether the first “foreign” topic on the 1903–1904 civil service examination was asked with such a mission in mind). On their return, the clear choice was the Japanese model—retaining the monarchy, which itself would bestow the constitution; the court sensed that this model would actually strengthen the throne’s power. On September 1, 1906, the Empress Dowager proclaimed:

The wealth and strength of other countries are due to their practice of constitutional government, in which public questions are determined by consultation with the people.

The ruler and his people are as one body animated by one spirit, as a result of which comprehensive consideration is given to the general welfare and the limits of authority are clearly defined. . . . Under these circumstances, we can . . . adopt a constitutional polity in which the supreme authority shall be vested in the crown, but all questions of government shall be considered by a popular assembly.⁸

Celebrations broke out in cities around the country following the Empress Dowager's proclamation.

The edict of September 1 had also called for the complete revamping of the central government structures. Though this reform ignited considerable resistance among conservative officials, by November the new forms were on the books, if not yet fully implemented. The traditional Six Boards that had existed since the Tang dynasty (618–907) were to be abolished and in their place new ministries established. The Board of Revenue became the Ministry of Finance; the Board of Punishments, the Ministry of Justice; the Board of Works joined with the Board of Commerce (established in 1903) to become the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce—and so on. One can be skeptical and wonder whether these were simply name changes without any substance; but it is important to understand that these name changes involved shucking off forms that had been around for over a millennium, and that in China forms can ultimately be as important as substance—forms indeed can transform into substance. The establishment of the new ministries was followed by a massive reshuffling of official posts and by a move to restructure provincial governments.

In the fall of 1907 the Empress Dowager announced that a national deliberative assembly and provincial deliberative assemblies would be established. Local assemblies were also to come into being. In August 1908 the Empress Dowager set forth a nine-year calendar of tutelage during which specific constitutional forms would be established. For example, provisional provincial assemblies would be set up in 1909, with a provisional national assembly in 1910; each year the state would take a new step toward the full realization of a constitutional system in 1917.

Had she lived, the Empress Dowager might have been able to lead China into that new system, but she died in November 1908. The Guangxu emperor, age thirty-seven and under house arrest since the 1898 coup, died the day before she did. Though one report suggests that he suffered from Bright's disease, most historians believe that Cixi had him poisoned. She had already decided on his successor, the three-year-old grandson of her closest Manchu official (and some say her lover), Ronglu. Since the new Xuantong emperor was only three years old, his father ruled as regent. Although he and other Manchu princes, whom he allowed to have considerable power, did not undo the constitutional schedule, many of their actions in ruling were ignorant and inept. Their chief goal seemed to be maintaining and enhancing their own power. One wonders why the politically adept Empress Dowager left power in such unfit hands.

Strong officials who had served the Empress Dowager well were dismissed on flimsy pretexts. The most able Manchu official, Duan Fang, was sent packing in late 1909 "for taking photographs on the way [of Cixi's state funeral], for moving about in his sedan chair with undue freedom and for making use of the trees at the Mausolea for

telegraph poles.”⁹ This followed the dismissal early in the year of the most able Chinese official, Yuan Shikai, who suddenly found from the official edict dismissing him that he was ill: “Unexpectedly [Yuan] is suffering from leg disease and walks only with difficulty. He is, therefore, incapacitated for office. Let him vacate his post and return to his native place for treatment.”¹⁰ Unexpectedly indeed! With the absence of the Empress Dowager and the main officials who had propelled the reforms, the reforms seemed to languish.

Local Self-Government

The “local” in local self-government was relative; everything not national was considered local; thus, local self-government included the arenas of the province, the county, and the township. Elections for the provisional provincial assemblies were held from February to June 1909, the first Chinese elections ever for representative bodies. Many Chinese, suspicious and not completely understanding what was happening or its significance, were apathetic; bribery in the elections was common. Because of educational or economic requirements for both candidates and voters, the number of people voting relative to the entire population was very small, averaging about 0.42 percent, barely over 4 people per 1,000. Yet, given the fact that this was the first election in a country where elections were unknown, the elections were markedly significant events. The elected 21 assemblies, averaging 78 representatives each, were generally bodies of provincial notables, with the vast majority being civil service degreeholders. In the fifteen provincial assemblies on which there is complete data, 89.1 percent of assemblymen held degrees.¹¹ But the backgrounds of the elected chairmen of the assemblies showed that the bodies were a mix of the old and the new forces in Chinese society. There were 63 speakers and deputy speakers in the 21 assemblies: 51 were upper degreeholders and 7 held lower degrees; 6 had studied abroad. Indeed, of the 1,643 assemblymen, 167 (10.2 percent) had attended modern schools or gone abroad; 105, or 6.4 percent, had studied in Japan. The average age of all assemblymen was in their early forties.¹²

When the assemblies met, they discussed among other things education, local self-government, trade and industry, and police affairs. They were not cowed by provincial officials and quickly became bold and demanding. The chairman of the Jiangsu assembly called a meeting of representatives from the provincial assemblies in Shanghai in November 1909; fifty-one representatives from sixteen provinces met to draw up a petition calling for the immediate convening of the national assembly. Three times in 1910 similar petitions were presented, with the number having signed the petition increasing with each attempt—reportedly 200,000 signed the first, 300,000 the second, and 25 million the third. As one historian says, almost underplaying the stunning nature of this development, “This ‘mass movement’ was an unprecedented event.”¹³ The regent refused to grant the petition, stating that the establishment of the National Assembly should not be rushed.

The preliminary steps to establish county-level self-government bodies also began in 1909 with the setting up of offices to oversee the formation of county seat, town, and township councils. In Zhejiang province, for example, they were elected by the third lunar month of 1911 for two-year terms. County seat and town councils had twenty to fifty

men; township councils, six to eight. These councils, in turn, chose the executive boards of the county seat and town (generally six members) and the township manager and his assistant. County seat, market town, and township councils and boards were meeting in the core zones and in most counties of the periphery by the late summer of 1911. On the whole, the revolutionary quality of these political changes, initiated by the Manchus, is nothing short of astonishing. If the Manchus saw these changes as a way to reestablish tighter control over the localities and their elites, local elites saw the new institutions as a way to solidify and enhance their own political leadership positions that had grown in the aftermath of the nineteenth-century rebellions.

In addition to the self-government bodies, the Qing mandated the establishment of other elite associations to be established in counties to assist in the modernization process. Many of them were based on foreign models. In 1903 came edicts calling for the formation of chambers of commerce "to perform various managerial and mediational functions in the local economy 'in addition to the duties discharged by the chambers of commerce in foreign countries.'"¹⁴ These were joined by mandated education associations (1906), agriculture associations (1907), lawyers' associations (1912), and bankers' associations (1915). In all matters they were under government control. The government saw these associations, like self-government bodies, at least in part as control mechanisms over local elites. Unlike self-government bodies, the actual dates of the establishment of these associations were more dependent on local conditions and the degree of economic development. It is clear that counties in the peripheries did not have enough commercial activity to warrant the early establishment of chambers of commerce. Whereas the average date for the establishment of chambers of commerce in Zhejiang's most developed core area, the inner core, was 1906, in the outer core the average date came a year later, in 1907. In the more developed areas of the periphery the average date was 1909, but in the least developed areas they did not appear on average until 1917 or later. Similar patterns are evident with education and agriculture associations. Other less developed areas lagged behind these dates. Location and the relationship to economic development thus played a major role in a locality's timing and experience of revolutionary change.

National Self-Government

The provisional national assembly met in Beijing on October 1, 1910 (thirty-nine years later to the day would see the establishment of the People's Republic of China). Composed of 200 members, 100 elected by the provincial assemblies and 100 chosen by the Throne, the assembly's mandate was to discuss such issues as the national budget, taxes, industrial development, and insurance and transportation regulations. They were initially barred from discussing the adoption of the constitution. But the assembly, like provincial assemblies a year earlier, threw caution to the winds and first debated, then voted on October 24 to telescope the nine-year constitutional schedule. Two days later, as part of a bitter factional struggle between the regent and the new Empress Dowager, the government's finance minister came out in favor of an immediate, full-fledged national assembly. On November 2, the provincial assembly representatives again tried to present their petition for an immediate national assembly, with some men showing the depth of their determination by cutting off

a finger to write their petitions in blood. A sense of urgency, of the necessity of a “great leap” ahead, of the imperative of “seizing the hour, seizing the day” seemed to sweep over Chinese in the drive to realize the institutions of a modern state.¹⁵

And then it happened. The Throne caved in on November 4 and promised a full-fledged national assembly by 1913. In little more than a month, the provisional national assembly had shown itself to be the master of the court. But 1913 was not soon enough. “Now” was the cry. In December, street demonstrations broke out: Over 2,000 students in Tianjin paraded to government offices calling for the immediate establishment of a national assembly. The appearance of court weakness encouraged more demands. In November the assembly condemned the chief government executive organ, the Grand Council, for granting a government loan without the approval of the assembly; assemblymen argued that the Council should be subject to the assembly or a Cabinet. In the context of increasingly persistent political interests and demands on the part of the assemblies, the Throne looked totally politically inept when in May 1911 it announced the formation of a cabinet of thirteen comprised of eight Manchus, one Mongol bannerman, and only four Chinese. Many Chinese perceived such makeup as a slap in the face.

By the summer of 1911, many Chinese elites and students were riding a political roller coaster, with hopes for rapid realization of constitutional bodies and rights zooming high and then plummeting with the caution and ineptitude of the court. When these developments were placed in the context of rising anti-Manchu bitterness (see following paragraphs), the situation was volatile and dangerous. The assemblies emerged as revolutionary organs on the provincial and national scene. From their perspective, the pace of Qing reforms was too slow.

And yet, analysis of the last decade of the Qing also suggests that the court actually reformed itself out of existence. Every reform that it initiated and oversaw hastened its own end. Ending the civil service examination opened the floodgates, leaving major ideological, political, and social questions without answers. Educational reforms sending students abroad placed the students together with their peers to question the legitimacy of Manchu rule. Military reform produced a new kind of soldier, trained in military academies and inculcated with nationalism. Administrative reform brought the reconstruction of centuries-old government institutions and raised questions about state ends. Finally, constitutionalism opened the political door to the citizens at the local, provincial, and national levels, giving the people forums in which to debate, legislate, maneuver, and vociferously demand. In these arenas it is surely not an exaggeration to call the Manchus “revolutionary.”¹⁶

THE ANTI-MANCHU REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

While the Manchus were undertaking revolutionary reforms, anti-Manchu sentiment had grown both in China and abroad among Chinese who believed that the day for reform, particularly Manchu reform, had passed and that revolution was the only way to save China. Nationalism was emerging as a strong force in core areas and among students in Japan; in any discussions about the nation or nationalism, Manchus often ended up being lumped with foreigners as the Other.

The first decade of the twentieth century was dotted with small-scale attempts at local rebellion, with the rationale that a single spark might set off a raging conflagration. Many of these were initiated by Sun Yat-sen and his Revolutionary Alliance. The son of a poor farmer in Guangdong province, Sun (1867–1925) as a teenager had studied in Honolulu, where his brother had emigrated. Though trained in medicine in Hong Kong, he quickly tired of medical practice and began to devote his time and thought to reverse China's plight. In 1894, he formed the Revive China Society with the ostensible goal of undertaking reforms to revitalize China but with the actual aim of organizing a revolt against the Manchu government. In the fall of 1895, he attempted to launch the first of what, extending to 1911, would become ten revolts. This one, like all the others, seemed almost tragicomic—failing from various combinations of inadequate planning, confusion, bad timing, weapons not arriving, or the discovery of the plot before it could begin.

When he was not planning revolts, Sun spent his time focusing on two things. The first was raising money for the revolutionary cause in overseas Chinese communities around the world—an effort in which a major competitor was no less than the former reformer Kang Youwei, who was raising money for his Protect the Emperor Society, aimed at getting rid of the Empress Dowager. The second was putting ideological flesh on the skeleton of political aims set forth in the rationale for the founding of the Revolutionary Alliance. Sun's essential points became known as the Three Principles of the People (*Sanmin zhuyi*) and would become the guiding principles of the later incarnation of the Revolutionary Alliance, the Nationalist Party (*Guomindang*). The three principles were “nationalism,” which meant ending both the rule of the Manchus and the presence of the foreign imperialists; “democracy,” which, according to Sun, especially focused on elections, initiatives, referenda, and recalls; and “socialism,” or, as Sun expressed it, “people's livelihood,” the least fleshed-out principle, which focused primarily on equalizing land ownership and controlling capital.

Sun's Revolutionary Alliance was not the only organization established for revolution against the Manchus. In 1903, Huang Xing, a *shengyuan* degreeholder from Hunan who studied briefly in Japan, established the Society for the Revival of China (*Huaxinghui*); also strong in the organization was his fellow Hunanese, twenty-one-year-old Song Jiaoren. The next year, Zhejiang scholar Cai Yuanpei, who had attained the *jinshi* degree at the remarkably young age of twenty-two and had served in the Hanlin Academy in the 1890s, formed the Restoration Society (*Guangfuhui*). Huang's and Song's society merged with the Revolutionary Alliance at its formation in 1905, whereas the Restoration Society maintained its own integrity—though individuals did choose to become members of both groups.

In addition to the formation of revolutionary associations, individuals emerged to voice their strong protests against the Manchus in various ways. Eighteen-year-old Zou Rong, who had studied in Japan, wrote *The Revolutionary Army* in 1903. Zou argued that the Chinese were slaves to the Manchu “bandits”; that Zeng Guofan, Zuo Zongtang, and Li Hongzhang, who had helped the Qing crush the mid-nineteenth-century rebellions, were “Chinese traitors”; and that a revolution must sweep the Manchus out and usher in a republic with a constitution modeled on the American constitution.¹⁷ Tens of thousands of copies of the tract were distributed across China and in overseas Chinese communities; it was the most influential and widely circulated revolutionary piece of the decade. Zou was imprisoned in Shanghai's International Settlement for distributing inflammatory literature; he died of natural causes in prison at age nineteen.

Other protests were more violent. In 1907, Qiu Jin, the revolutionary feminist, joined with fellow native placer and fellow student in Japan, Xu Xilin, a knight-errant type, in a plot to assassinate the Manchu governor of Anhui province. Both were members of the Restoration Society, and both had been involved in heading a school that functioned as a front for revolutionary planning and activity. Xu and two accomplices were able to assassinate the governor, though they were seized and executed immediately. When Qiu's involvement came to light, troops from the provincial capital stormed her school, seized her, and beheaded her. Today Qiu is seen as a national heroine, the earliest feminist, and a great poet; her most famous line was allegedly written just before her execution: "The autumn wind and the autumn rain will make me die of sorrow."

Other revolutionary efforts hit closer to the home of the Manchu national leadership. Wang Jingwei had won both the *juren* degree at age twenty and a government scholarship to study in Japan. He became a member of the Revolutionary Alliance and was a frequent contributor to the alliance's newspaper. In early 1910, he went to Beijing with the intent of assassinating the prince regent in hopes of stirring the Chinese to revolt. The plot: to set off a bomb placed under a bridge on the prince regent's route. But a mistake by his fellow conspirators tipped the police off. Wang was arrested and imprisoned. Saved from execution by Manchu hopes that, amid their growing weakness, treating such political criminals gently might take some of the heat off themselves, Wang was released when the revolution broke out in the fall of 1911. His courage to act and to freely tell his captors what he was about made him at least temporarily, in the words of an historian, "the golden boy of Chinese nationalism."¹⁸

It is noteworthy how Japan served as the incubator of revolution. Not only was the key revolutionary organization formed there, but, more important, young Chinese men and women coming to Japan to study at both civilian and military schools, often on government scholarships, were turned into antigovernment revolutionaries. They saw the immense difference in the degree of modernization in Japan, and it contrasted in humiliating ways with what they saw in China. Japan gave them a milieu in which their revolutionary fervor could openly grow and in which they could increase their mutual revolutionary ardor. It is little wonder that they then returned home to China to become the Zou Rongs, Qiu Jins, and Wang Jingweis.

THE 1911 REVOLUTION

The climactic act of the decade-long revolutionary drama was the revolution itself. Like many events in history that shatter the status quo, the revolution was shaped by timing and contingency as much as by planning. The setting for the beginning of the drama was the city of Wuchang on the Yangzi River in the Middle Yangzi macroregion; it was the site not only of an important New Army garrison but also of the yamen of the governor-general of Hunan-Hubei. The first contingency was that the military garrison had been weakened with the transfer of three battalions of New Army troops to deal with fighting that had erupted between military forces and citizens in Sichuan province over the issue of railroad rights recovery. If the garrison had been at full strength, the revolution might not have succeeded.

The actors in this first act were not members of the Revolutionary Alliance, but were active in two organizations that had had contact with it; they had been at work enlisting the support of New Army troops for a planned revolt. In late September, they sent messages to Huang Xing and Song Jiaoren, asking them to participate in their planned uprising. Neither complied. Sun Yat-sen was on a fund-raising trip in the United States. He read about the revolution he had tried to ignite for so many years in a newspaper on a train outside of Denver. Thus, no recognized revolutionary leaders were present. Then, on October 9, while the revolutionaries were putting gunpowder into shells, one was careless enough to allow ashes from a lighted cigarette to fall into the powder, creating an explosion. Police came running and found revolutionary insignia and membership lists, including the names of large numbers of New Army troops. The Manchu governor-general and the commanders of the Eighth Division and the cavalry battalion (Li Yuanhong) began an intensive effort to halt any possible revolt by arresting and imprisoning the people on the lists.

Facing arrest and certain execution, the revolutionaries decided that their only choice was to proceed with the revolt. It began on the rainy and windswept evening of October 10. If the governor-general and the commander of the Eighth Division had steeled themselves to the task and not fled, it is possible that the revolt would have failed. But they did flee, along with most of the city's civil and military officials. By the morning of October 11, the revolutionaries were in charge of the city. But they had no leader. Someone mentioned the possibility of enlisting Li Yuanhong, the New Army leader. He was certainly no revolutionary or friend of one; indeed, in the first burst of fighting, he was approached by a man dispatched from the rebels asking him to throw his lot and his battalion in with the rebels. He promptly took out a knife and stabbed the man to death. When the fighting took a turn for the worse for the government, Li, fearful of what rebels might demand of him, went to hide at the home of one of his staff. Eventually found, he was asked to be their leader. When he refused, they threatened him, at least figuratively putting a gun to his head. "I am your leader," he replied. Li would go on to become the only man ever to serve twice as president of the republican government at Beijing.

The Qing responded by ordering the minister of war to plan and oversee an attack on the rebel forces at Wuchang. The logical person to lead these Beiyang forces was their old leader, Yuan Shikai, who had been rudely dismissed for a fictitious leg illness. They decided to appoint Yuan as the governor-general of Hunan-Hubei. His response: "Unfortunately my leg disease has still not healed, so I can't help you." Obviously, two could play the sorry game concocted two years earlier by the regent. Yuan was biding his time to see which way the winds would blow. The battle results showed strong anti-Qing winds, with defeat following defeat. With their backs against the wall, the Qing court was eager to learn Yuan's terms for stepping in to deal with the situation. He still did not respond when the court appointed him imperial commissioner in complete charge of the army and navy. He agreed to lead the campaign against the revolutionaries only when, on November 1, they consented to appoint him premier of the government with the right to name his own cabinet. In essence, the Manchus were steering China in the direction of a constitutional monarchy.

But that was not to be; revolutionary events were spiraling out of control. In coups in provincial and prefectural capitals and in county seats across China, mostly in cores but

also in some more developed peripheries, New Army troops were joining the old scholar-gentry, rich merchants, and returned students from Japan to declare the beginning of the republic. By late November, fifteen provinces had seceded from the Qing dynasty. Yuan emerged as the key power broker in the struggle. As Yuan whittled down the power of the court, forcing the regent's retirement in early December, he tried to get peace talks going with the revolutionaries in order to determine what he might be able to gain from negotiations with them. Battles played key roles in determining the political situations. The revolutionaries would not talk with Yuan's emissaries until after he defeated them decisively at Hanyang in late November. But, in turn, the court's cause was dealt a deathblow by the defeat of its forces in Nanjing in early December after weeks of brutal fighting.

In early December the revolutionaries, in the person of Huang Xing, offered Yuan the presidency of the republic if he would support that political system and bring about the abdication of the Qing emperor. Yuan leaped at the opportunity. It was a decision that the revolutionaries would come to regret. In his career, Yuan had been a powerful and capable dynastic official serving effectively in many capacities. Yet he had had no experience with republicanism. Why did the revolutionaries hand him the republic on a silver platter? Most historians believe that the revolutionaries agreed to this in order to stop the fighting as quickly as possible to forestall the possibility that foreign powers in their treaty ports and concession areas might take advantage of the unrest to increase various kinds of imperialistic pressures and demands.

Signs of ever more threatening foreign imperialism were everywhere. In October 1911 the Chinese government defaulted on its Boxer indemnity payments. The British Foreign Office, meeting with representatives from the powerful Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, agreed that in order to secure their loans, they would likely have to take control of crucial institutions in the Chinese government. Here was the specter of Western nations seizing part of the Chinese government. Or, perhaps even worse: "It did not seem to matter how great the Chinese interest [was] in a given case; every treaty right was once again supreme." Thus a provincial governor could not stop the export of beans at a time of famine because a 1902 agreement had stipulated that China "had no right to interfere in the bean trade."¹⁹ Because of such a foreign presence and threat, the Chinese were very skittish about any actions that might incur foreign wrath and retaliation. In their fighting, they were careful not to damage foreign property lest foreigners use this as a pretext to take more. Thus, fighting in the Yangzi port of Hankou had to be carefully controlled so that foreign warehouses were not hit. And in the crucial fighting in the area between Nanjing and Shanghai, revolutionary troops felt that they had to walk alongside the Shanghai and Nanjing Railroad tracks rather than ride the train or, much bolder, seize the train for their use—because Great Britain owned the line and the revolutionaries did not dare risk damaging British property. With such realities, it is not surprising that the revolutionaries turned to Yuan.

Sun Yat-sen returned to China on December 25. Though the representatives of sixteen provincial assemblies elected him provisional president of the Republic of China (an act that angered Yuan), Sun supported the earlier deal that had left Yuan in charge. The only remaining task for Yuan was bringing the dynasty to an end, a task helped in late January by a telegram sent to Yuan's cabinet from over forty commanders in the Beiyang army asking for the establishment of a republic. The abdication of the Manchus came on

February 12, 1912, with the announcement that the six-year-old Xuantong emperor (Puyi) and his family could continue to live in the Forbidden City, receive a payment of 4 million dollars each year, and own the treasures of the imperial palace.

In localities, the contours and the meaning of the revolution varied according to the particular location. In most areas the revolutionary acts were like coups d'état, with local civilian leaders and/or military units seizing control. In some areas, reformist scholar-gentry and other elites who had been involved in reforms, like recovering railroad rights or serving in chambers of commerce and local self-government bodies, simply stepped in to lead and staff temporary military governments. New Army men were often in the forefront of directing revolutionary action. In some areas revolutionary organizations, like the Restoration Society or the Revolutionary Alliance, sometimes joined by secret societies and even underworld figures linked to criminal activity, were pivotal. In yet other areas usually more peripheral than core, political and social disorder was the order of the day. People in many areas, core and periphery, hung white flags in memory of the Ming, the last Chinese dynasty, and declared what was happening "restoration," that is, the return of rule from Manchu to Han Chinese. The date of the beginning of the revolution—the tenth day of the tenth month, or Double Ten—has since been celebrated as National Day by the Republic of China on the mainland until 1949 and afterward on Taiwan.

Cutting the queue became a sign of the revolution against the Manchus, but there had been talk about ending the custom even before the revolution. Some Chinese thought queues looked outlandish to foreigners and were safety risks if they might get caught in machinery.

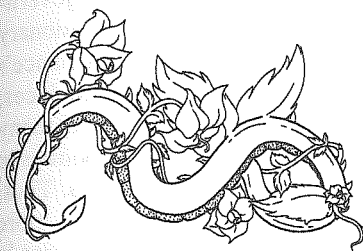


The meaning of the events from October 1911 to February 1912 was extraordinarily revolutionary. The abolition of the civil service examination had begun the process of destroying traditional China by demolishing the recruitment structure for political and social elites. Now the abolition of the monarchy demolished the whole political structure. In place for over 2,000 years, the Son of Heaven and the empire were gone, along with all the traditional political principles, laws, customs, and morality. In their place was an untried republic, as yet only a name without substance, to be led by a man who had never supported such a system. As China entered the spring of 1912, it was beginning the process of constructing a new Chinese identity, of building a new state and nation—the new China—in a completely uncharted, unmarked future.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Esherick, Joseph W. *Reform and Revolution in China: The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). The author suggests that an “urban reformist elite” were the main actors in both reform and revolution.
- Rankin, Mary Backus. *Early Chinese Revolutionaries: Radical Intellectuals in Shanghai and Chekiang, 1902–1911* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). This social-political study examines the secret society roots of many revolutionaries and the close links between their activity in Shanghai and the province of Chekiang (Zhejiang).
- Rhoads, Edward J. M. *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861–1928* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000). This prize-winning book analyzes the revolution not from the perspective of revolutionaries but from that of the Manchu court; the author’s interpretation of the identity of the Manchus contributes to an ongoing debate on the issue.
- Schoppa, R. Keith. *Chinese Elites and Political Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). Using a macroregional approach, the author categorizes Zhejiang province into four zones of economic development and analyzes each zone for the nature of its social and political elites and their actions.
- Zou Rong. *The Revolutionary Army: A Chinese Nationalist Tract of 1903*, trans. John Lust (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1968). The most important revolutionary tract of the late Qing, it was written by a teenager and marked by a strong anti-Manchu fervor.

Selecting Identities: The Early Republic



If there is one figure from modern Chinese history that has drawn almost universal condemnation, that person is Yuan Shikai. A leading Communist spokesman, Chen Boda, in 1946 published a book, *Yuan Shikai, The Great Thief Who Stole the Nation*; a Chinese historian based in the West subtitled his study of Yuan *Brutus Assumes the Purple*. Yuan has been tarred with the charge that he betrayed the Republic, and almost universally he has been saddled with the title “father of the warlords.” Yet at the time, he received considerable praise. The American ambassador to China, Paul Reinsch, reported, “The President is very cordial and genial in his manner. He speaks fluently and to the point and loves to give a humorous turn to his thought. . . . Nothing escapes his eye [;] . . . he evidently has a grasp and mastery of details.”¹ No less a person than Liang Qichao said that because of his affable personality, being with Yuan was “like drinking champagne.”² It is obvious that the problem was not Yuan’s personality or ability but his policies. Whatever the historical judgment, his record should be seen in the context of the times.

LEGACIES OF THE REVOLUTION

Yuan assumed power at a time when almost everything in the political realm seemed up for grabs. There were no how-to manuals that could answer the difficult basic questions raised by the collapse of the two-millennia-long traditional civilization. What did republicanism mean in the Chinese context, and how was it to be implemented? In the new China, what constituted the legitimacy of a government or its elites?

In addition, the revolution and its aftermath left a serious and basic question: “Who had won?” Certainly the revolutionaries did not rake in many of the spoils of victory. Their demand to have the capital relocated to Nanjing, closer to their power base and as a graphic symbol of change from the centuries-long imperial capital, was not satisfied; Yuan would not leave Beijing. The official positions meted out to revolutionaries were few and did not include crucially powerful posts like minister of finance or minister of the army. Sun Yat-sen was named national director of railroad development.

In the provinces, though there were fourteen provincial revolutionary governments, only three had military governors who were former members of the Revolutionary Alliance. In part this reflected the prerevolutionary situation when the Alliance’s national leaders were not “in the know” about what was going on in the provinces. Organizationally the Alliance had been loose, lacking solidarity throughout its many geographical arenas. Further, in many areas, old elites who had been active in politics in the self-government movement or other public bodies took the political plums. Thus, though the revolutionaries came out on top in overthrowing the monarch, a more accurate answer to the question of who won would be Yuan Shikai and the already ensconced elites.

Another legacy of the revolution and its aftermath was the rise of a potent provincialism, a development especially troubling to Yuan and his goal of a stronger centralized government. The revolution had taken the shape of individual provinces declaring their independence from the Qing dynasty. When the Republic was established, a strong sense of loyalty to the province continued. Listen to the words of Zhejiang’s pro-Yuan military governor, Zhu Rui, in speaking of the province: “Protecting our local area [is] a heaven-ordained duty”; therefore, he vowed that troops from other provinces would not be allowed to enter the province.³ It is not that this provincialism was necessarily antithetical to nationalism; they could coexist: One could show allegiance to both province and nation. But for many at a time of considerable political uncertainty and lack of clarity, one’s native province, and that all-important sense of native place, was a closer-to-home way of thinking about political loyalty. In addition, some provinces were led by men who were suspicious of Yuan and were reluctant to be drawn into closer relationships with Beijing. As one historian has said, the political reality of the early Republic was a “de facto confederation of provinces.”⁴ Sun Yat-sen meant his depiction of China as a “sheet of loose sand” to describe the political coherence of the masses, but it could also have been an apt description of the lack of political coherence of the nation in these years.



Yuan Shikai strode into the presidency amid the optimism and hope of many that he was a strong leader who could help establish a republic and strengthen the nation. But he was a man still caught in traditional attitudes and approaches and he rather quickly snuffed out the hopes of many.

THE PRESIDENCY OF YUAN SHIKAI

Yuan had built his reputation as a military reformer, though in his stints as Shandong governor and Zhili governor-general, he had also initiated reforms in education, commerce, and industry. Though he had never traveled beyond Korea (for his post as resident general) and did not know any foreign languages, he recruited men who had foreign education or experience, and he nurtured connections to foreigners. In his policies he sought to blend old and new, though in his personal life he was a thoroughly traditional Chinese man, having more than twelve wives and at least thirty children. Despite his geniality, he could be cold-bloodedly ruthless, willing to kill for political purposes almost at the drop of a hat. Thus a Western description of his appearance at his inauguration as provisional president marks his short, plump build but not the reality of his political determination: Yuan “came in wobbling like a duck, looking fat and unhealthy, in Marshal’s uniform, the loose flesh of his neck hanging over his collar.”⁵

His political ideals were order, control, and rigid devotion to regulations. In his presidency, he worked continually to realize these ideals as part of his efforts to centralize in order to modernize the country. To his mind, the political world that he inherited—a republic

with political parties and representative bodies at the county, provincial, and national levels—was too messy, too disorderly, too spontaneous, and so completely unpredictable that it could not in reality serve as a solid base on which to build the reforms that would make a new China. If assemblies at whatever level went off and did their own thing, there could not be the careful planning and directing that a strong head of state (assisted by focused bureaucrats) needed in order to build a modern nation-state. Yuan and those who had turned the Republic over to him were thus on a collision course from day one.

Sun Yat-sen turned his Revolutionary Alliance into a political party, the Nationalist Party (Guomindang), to field and support candidates in the December 1912 National Assembly elections. He also named thirty-year-old Song Jiaoren, longtime member of the Alliance, to manage the party organization; Song hoped that if the Guomindang gained the majority seats in the Assembly he could emerge as prime minister. Three other parties (one led by the 1898 reformer Liang Qichao) were also formed to compete in the elections, which were also held for provincial and county assemblies. As in the late Qing assemblies, there were gender, age, educational, and economic qualifications for voting and serving: men, twenty-one and over, graduates of elementary school, who owned \$500 in property and paid at least \$2 in taxes. Women did not get the right to vote. While National Assembly elections were marked by some corruption, they were remarkable for the relative smoothness with which they were carried out. They were the high point of electoral democracy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries on the Chinese mainland and in Taiwan until the late 1980s. The Guomindang won approximately 43 percent of the vote, a plurality among the multiple parties; they took 269 of the 596 House of Representative seats and 123 of the 274 Senate seats: they would control 45 percent of the seats in each house.

But the euphoria was short lived. In March 1913, as he was leaving for Beijing to form the new government, party leader Song Jiaoren was shot and killed at the Shanghai train station. Yuan was implicated in the assassination: The man who hired the killer had been in communication with the secretary of Yuan's prime minister. Shock and outrage swept the country. A Wuchang newspaper offered bitter condemnation: "Yuan Shikai! The measure of your iniquity is full, and the time has come to answer for it."⁶ To add insult to tragedy, Yuan on his own, without even a nod to the National Assembly's constitutional involvement, negotiated a huge loan of about \$100 million from a foreign consortium. In May he proceeded to remove from their posts the major military governors who were supporters of the Nationalist Party. By the summer, an open revolt of pro-Guomindang forces began against Yuan's regime. This so-called second revolution ended in the military rout of the revolutionaries and the flight of Sun and others to Japan.

Yuan then set to work to construct what historians have seen as his dictatorship. In October, he first forced the National Assembly to ratify his election as president for a five-year term. In November, he brazenly outlawed the Guomindang, evicting its members from the Assembly. Then in February 1914, he simply abolished all the assemblies—national, provincial, and county. He had made short shrift of China's democratic experiment. There is little wonder that subsequently Chinese have seen him as a thief and a betrayer. A contemporary historian has noted: "What an affront to the educated and propertied classes who had participated in building this structure of representation!"⁷

In addition to these actions, after the second revolution, Yuan militarily occupied the provinces from which his troops had been kept out. He also attempted to silence some of the expressions of provincial autonomy by dismissing independent-minded provincial officials and reasserting Beijing's authority to make provincial appointments. A 1914 law tightened general press censorship. Chamber of commerce regulations were also tightened so that the government had more control over these organizations. In steps that smacked of a police state, police could open the mails and search luggage at train stations. With a heavy hand, Yuan was trying to combat "the consequences of a new, participatory, radicalizing nationalism."⁸

In domestic policies under his dictatorship, Yuan carried on some of the initiatives from the last decade of Qing reforms. He called for "universal education" for all men—meaning at the time four years of free primary school; in the area of mass education he encouraged literacy campaigns using alphabetized Chinese. He was very successful in suppressing the domestic cultivation of opium. In many ways he appeared much the self-strengthener, adopting economic policies that would build Chinese wealth and development. He put some government resources, for example, into agricultural experimentation in such areas as cotton growing, forestation, and livestock breeding. He worked toward an independent judiciary to help create a legal system that the West would see as more enlightened and thus might move to end extraterritoriality.

One hallmark of Yuan's domestic reforms was his efforts to blend old and new. He restored some imperial symbols and ceremonies. He reinstituted tradition in the form of Confucianism as a state religion. In primary school textbooks, *Mencius* and the *Analects* replaced pictures and accounts of Sun Yat-sen and Huang Xing. In short, Yuan, like the self-strengtheners, was a reformer firmly rooted in traditional ways. But the context had changed from the days of Zeng Guofan, for then the traditional culture had been very much alive. With all the changes of the early years of the twentieth century, Yuan's attempts to put old wine into new bottles seemed inappropriate.

One historian has suggested that when Yuan looked at the problems of his presidency, he diagnosed them as "imperial under-nourishment: the emperor was missing."⁹ To remedy that situation, in August 1915 Yuan helped launch a campaign to have himself declared emperor; he would take the throne on the first day of 1916 as the "Grand Constitutional Emperor." In his mind must have been the thought: what better way to rebuild the centralized state and handle society's messy new forces than with the institution of the monarchy with its time-honored traditions and ethos? But it was a mistake. Even though the monarchy had been gone for barely three years, reactions showed that the Chinese political culture had already left it far behind in their memories.

A National Protection Army directed against Yuan was launched by military forces in Southwest China in late December 1915. It effectively used guerrilla attacks against Beiyang forces in Sichuan, while from the coast came attacks by Sun Yat-sen and his allies. In the meantime, many of Yuan's Beiyang forces were ambivalent at best about Yuan's imperial initiative. Foreign nations were not supportive; Japan, especially aware of the great unpopularity of Yuan's actions among Chinese elites, even helped fund the rebels. Very quickly Yuan realized that his power was collapsing. By March 22, he backpedaled to his fallback position as president, but with more provinces declaring themselves independent, he could not stanch the bloodletting. His June 6 death from uremia in the midst of rebellion

was undoubtedly, from a personal standpoint, a merciful ending. But for the country it was the moment of collapse into a national nightmare of bloodletting that would extend for more than a decade.

CAPITALISTS TO THE FORE

The first years of the Republic were also the first years of what one historian has called “the golden age of the Chinese bourgeoisie,” by which she meant modern-style businessmen, financiers, and industrialists—in short, capitalists.¹⁰ Aspects of two early republican buildings suggest cardinal elements in the world of the bourgeoisie. The first was located in Shanghai. Completed in 1917 by an entrepreneur who made millions in medicine, the Great World was a huge amusement palace, described as “a kind of Crystal Palace and Coney Island” rolled into one. “The third floor,” for example, “had jugglers, herb medicines, ice cream parlors, photographers, a new bevy of girls, their high-collared gowns slit to reveal their hips . . . and under the heading of novelty, rows of exposed toilets, their impresarios instructing the amused patrons not to squat but to assume a position more in keeping with the imported plumbing. . . .”¹¹ The other building was one of the most imposing edifices in the city of Shaoxing on the southern coast of Hangzhou Bay, southwest of Shanghai. Built from 1915 to 1917, it was the headquarters of the city’s chamber of commerce and served as an unofficial political-social-economic center for the city. It had a huge hall, offices, meeting rooms, and garden; organizations from all over the city rented meeting rooms there.

The first thing to note is the location of the Great World in Shanghai, the largest and most important of the treaty ports set up along the coast and inland rivers in the nineteenth century. Established to facilitate trade, treaty ports served as transit points between foreigners on China’s coast and Chinese in the interior; these cities experienced increasing trade in the second half of the nineteenth century, with exports primarily of tea and silk and imports of textiles, kerosene, and sugar. By the early twentieth century that trade, as the description of the Great World shows, had even come to include Western-style toilets. Since foreigners knew neither Chinese nor local customs, Chinese merchants played key roles, managing most transactions while financing them through native Chinese banks.

Modern industrial development did not begin in Chinese cities until near the end of the nineteenth century. The Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) gave the Japanese the right to establish factories in the treaty ports. Other foreign nations leaped at the chance to establish textile mills in these cities, where cheap Chinese labor and local raw materials made manufacturing more profitable than in the home country. Competition from Chinese businessmen in this industry was practically nil. Despite the development of factories in cities, interior parts of the country were not affected to any appreciable degree. It is likely that the Lower Yangzi macroregion was the only region where economic changes had progressed far enough at this time to support even an incipient capitalist class.

Chinese had begun to establish their own modern firms during the early days of self-strengthening. They are noteworthy because they reveal the close relationship between business and government that became a hallmark of economic development both under



The Great World Pleasure Palace, with its mix of things East and West, shown here with its large “Chrysler” sign, stood as a symbol of modernizing China in Shanghai, China’s capital of modernization.
Source: National Archives at College Park.

the Nationalist government of the 1920s through the 1940s and the Communist government. In 1872 Li Hongzhang established the China Merchant Steamship Navigation Company to end the foreign domination of coastal shipping. It operated according to the formula of “government supervision, merchant management,” getting much of its income from the government contract for the transport of tax grain.

In many ways, this model of business organization was similar to the centuries old imperial salt monopoly in which the government monopolized salt production and sales but farmed out to merchants the roles of managing production and distribution. These new enterprises were not government monopolies, but in Li’s company and others—the Kaiping Mining Company in Zhili province (1877) and the Shanghai Cotton Cloth Mill (1890), to name two—government support in the form of loans, tax breaks, and/or a production monopoly played a crucial role in getting the firms started. Private merchants were slow to invest in these companies, which merchants managed generally without intrusion from the government. By the end of the dynasty, the Chinese bourgeoisie was composed of merchants, bankers, compradors, a few industrialists, and overseas Chinese. Politically they played increasingly important roles as major participants in antiforeign boycotts. In the 1911 revolutionary period their roles varied, depending on local circumstances, but they were generally not pivotal players in the local coups that made up the revolution.

World War I and the peace that followed served as catalysts for a prosperous period for Chinese business and industry. During the war from 1914 to 1918, Western eyes were temporarily averted from China to the horrors of the Western Front. That relative Western

absence first gave Chinese entrepreneurs an opportunity to become involved in the flourishing wartime trade. Imports from the West dropped dramatically; the value of imports from Britain, for example, fell from 96 million taels in 1913 to 49 million in 1918. On the China side, silk exports increased by more than 50 percent. It is little wonder that China's trade deficit fell from 166 million taels in 1913 to only 16 million in 1919.

Second, the war years gave Chinese entrepreneurs the opportunity to more assertively begin to develop modern business and industry that did not use the government supervision, merchant management model. During the last years of the war and into the early 1920s, coastal cities, especially Shanghai, experienced the rapid growth of modern light industries—spinning, flour and oil mills, and cigarette factories—that was not equaled again until the 1950s. The number of textile mills grew from 22 in 1911 to 109 in 1921; the number of flour mills increased from 67 in 1916 to 86 at the end of the war. Tonnage of coal produced increased from about 13 million in 1913 to over 20 million in 1919; iron production almost doubled during the war. The development of modern Chinese banks also dates from this period; whereas there were only 7 at the time of the establishment of the Republic, the number soared to 131 in 1923.

Two examples of famous industrialists point to the economic boom and the kind of men who became leaders. As in the Great World, Zhang Jian, from Jiangsu province in the Lower Yangzi, merged the old and the new. He was an old-style *jinsshi* degreeholder who served as minister of industry under Yuan Shikai. In his home of Nantong, about 60 miles northwest of Shanghai, he established the Dasheng Cotton Mills in 1899. Reflecting the early republican boom, he was able to double the number of spindles at the mill from 1914 to 1922. The cotton mills were part of Zhang's efforts to make Nantong a national model that involved not only the establishment of industry but educational, philanthropic, and conservation reforms as well. The other industrialists were two brothers, Rong Zongjing and Rong Desheng, who came from a family of merchants and minor officials in the Yangzi delta city of Wuxi. In Shanghai they built the Maoxin Flour Mills and the Fuxin Flour Mills in 1901 and 1913, respectively. As a mark of the rising tide of prosperity amid China's capitalists, between 1914 and 1920 they opened eight new factories and broadened their interests into textiles, opening the Shenxin Spinning Mill.

The flurry of mostly treaty port business and industry led to a new business culture in the cities. New businessmen's associations sprang up, such as the Chinese Cotton Millowners Association (1918) and the National Bankers Association (1920). They provided arenas for joint discussions about the economic situation, industrial problems, relations with foreigners (since many businesses and industries lay within foreign settlements), and relations with the government. In addition, many of these associations began to publish their own magazines to discuss these same issues. Indeed, the claim that, at least until the 1990s, the years 1917–1923 were the “golden age of Chinese capitalism” seems well taken.¹²

The rising power of merchants was a development not only in treaty ports, but in the macroregional cores as well. Powerful entrepreneurs or groups of them were active in establishing textile mills, paper mills, and telephone and electric companies in core zone provincial capitals, county seats, and even larger market towns. As an example of the range of entrepreneurial undertakings, a powerful merchant named Jin in 1919 petitioned

the Zhejiang Industry Ministry for the right to build an industrial complex at the market town and river port of Linpu, 15 miles southeast of Hangzhou. Included would be factories producing paper, textiles, bamboo and wood products, brushes, and tiles.¹³

Local businessmen increasingly depended on chambers of commerce to facilitate their business enterprises, to mediate between businesses and businessmen, and to serve as a conduit between business and government. Here the second building of the Chinese entree into the world of capitalism, the Shaoxing Chamber of Commerce, comes into play. Chamber of commerce activity becomes an index of the power of merchants and entrepreneurs on the local scene. The government in 1917 limited the number of chambers per county to two, recognizing their potential power on the local scene. But by the early 1920s, chambers had begun to get around the restrictions by establishing branch chapters. In what may be a particularly egregious example, by 1924, Jiaying county in Zhejiang province had no fewer than thirteen branch chambers.

On the local scene, economic muscle was often easily translated into political clout. A foreign observer noted, "With the downfall of the Manchu regime . . . the government of almost every city in China was for months virtually carried on by the chambers of commerce and associated guilds."¹⁴ On the agenda of one of the branch chambers in Jiaying county much later, in 1924, for example, were items in regard to education, sanitation, and the town's winter defense. The fact that people in Shaoxing saw the chamber of commerce building as *the* place in the city to hold their various meetings suggests the importance of this organization in local minds. In some cases, in the 1920s chambers became unofficially the main local decision makers, taking power from local assemblies and other bodies. Indeed, the flexing of capitalist muscles during the early Republic puts the economic expansion of China in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century into important historical perspective.

THE POWER OF THE GUN

If the merchant, businessman, banker, and financier were beginning to play more than bit parts on the Chinese stage during the early Republic, the stars of the show were military commanders with their supporting casts of thousands of soldiers. As long as Yuan Shikai was alive and maintained the power that he had taken, he was able to control the generals who had been trained under his command in the New Army; he had been their patron and they, his students. With his overplaying the imperial hand and the sudden erosion of his power in the spring of 1916, however, China began to collapse in confusion. Yuan's opponents were not united. There were only clusters or groupings of military men tied together by various connections. When Yuan died, the destructive genie of military competition was freed to wreak havoc over the land. The goal of this warring competition was to seize Beijing and its government institutions, for whoever took that political prize would be recognized as president of the Republic. This struggle among what became known as "warlords" produced one of the most tragic and chaotic periods in twentieth-century China. Although it technically ended in 1928 when the country was again nominally unified, what has been called "residual warlordism" actually persisted into the 1940s.

Before the warlord situation became bleakest in the early and mid-1920s, there was one last attempt to restore the monarchy. The effort points with exclamation points to the clashing public identities on the Chinese political scene at this time of substantial change. Zhang Xun had been a senior military officer under Yuan since the formation of the New Army. Even though he served Yuan, his ultimate loyalty was to Chinese traditions and the monarchy. As for traditions, he was one of the most outspoken supporters of maintaining the official cult of Confucius. As a visible symbol of his loyalty to the monarchy, he insisted on keeping his queue and ordered that his troops maintain theirs as well. Foreigners dubbed him the “pigtailed general.” (For purposes of graphically visualizing the clashing identities of the early Republic, imagine Zhang Xun at the Great World with the Rong brothers.)

In early July 1917, Zhang restored Aisin Gioro Puyi, the last Qing emperor, then eleven years old, to the Dragon Throne. He used the opportunity of being asked by the president of the Republic, Li Yuanhong, to intervene in a dispute between the current government premier, military leader Duan Qirui, on the one side, and Li and the National Assembly, which had been reestablished after Yuan’s death, on the other. Zhang badly misjudged the likely reactions of the Beiyang commanders, who sent troops to storm the capital and end the less-than-two-week reign. Never again would anyone attempt to restore the monarchy, though the chaos and destruction of the period as late as 1922 led people at least in some localities to express the opinion, as Yuan had and as Zhang surely would, “that the emergence of the rightful Son of Heaven would solve local and national problems.”¹⁵ The aborted 1917 restoration episode did reveal that the governmental institutions in the capital—the bureaucracy and the National Assembly—were not really the main players on the political stage. Those roles increasingly belonged to the military. Zhang, using military forces, had restored the emperor, but opposing military forces had ousted him (and Zhang to boot). Within the less than six years since Double Ten, struggles between military forces had four times determined the identity of the Chinese government (1911–1912, 1913, and twice in 1917).

It is apparent that in the 1920s governmental institutions became pawns in the warlords’ struggle for military control of the capital and by extension the country. The concerns of civilian politicians and bureaucrats focused more and more on keeping their positions and maintaining their own political power, often through cultivating connections with warlords. In this context, corruption tended to become the crucial dynamic and often decided elections and policies. In perhaps the most infamous case, Cao Kun, a Beiyang army general who led one of the major military cliques (the Zhili clique) from 1920 to 1923, won the presidency of the Republic in 1923 by spending Mex. \$13,560,000 to bribe National Assemblymen to vote for him (at \$5,000 per vote). As one scholar has noted about the affair, “in the act of purchase, the presidency was devalued.”¹⁶ The sorry spectacle was that from mid-1916 until the spring of 1926, China had six different presidents and twenty-five cabinets. The high hopes of a productively functioning Republic lay in shambles: the Republic indeed had become an empty shell.

In the shaping of political culture, a republican ethos—carrying the voice of the people into the halls of government—had been aborted; in its place flourished the ethos of the military. In these years, militarization began to emerge as a major dynamic in twentieth-century

China. Although all warlords were military men and held territory of varying size, the name "warlord" covered many different military types with differing goals. Some warlords perhaps actually had the abilities, character, and potential to unite the Chinese nation and become a head of state. Central China's Wu Peifu, who emerged to head the Zhili clique, one of the central warlord coalitions, for example, was a man who had received the lowest-level civil service degree. He was also a graduate of Yuan Shikai's Baoding Military Academy. A writer who had a deep love for traditional Chinese culture, he was a student of the Buddhist canon and the Confucian classics. Another example was North China's Feng Yuxiang, a self-taught Christian convert who indoctrinated his troops with Christian and traditional Chinese values and was said to baptize his troops with a fire hose. He was a committed social and educational reformer, establishing, for example, orphanages, rehabilitation centers for drug addicts, and public education facilities. Yan Xishan of Shanxi province was a third potential candidate for heading the nation. He had briefly studied the classics, graduated from a Japanese military school, joined Sun's Revolutionary Alliance, and risen to the position of military governor in the 1911 revolution. His reforms, his careful attention to rule, and his concern for promoting public morality contributed to his being called the "Model Governor."

Warlords like Wu, Feng, and Yan vied for the top; others had lesser goals, some regional, others local. Some warlords were simply thuggish. One of the more notorious was Zhang Zongchang, the "Dog-Meat General." A famous journalist described him as having "the physique of an elephant, the brain of a pig, and the temperament of a tiger." As a measure of the man, it is said that Zhang had his "'three don't knows': he did not know how much money he had, how many troops he had, or how many women he had in his harem."¹⁷ His Shandong military troops, which included 4,000 White Russians (dubbed "soldiers of misfortune") and a unit of several thousand boys whose average age was ten, were notorious for their practice of "opening melons," that is, splitting skulls, and for hanging strings of human heads on telegraph poles to elicit respect for their power.

Warlords striving for national power often put together coalitions in order to have greater troop strength and a broader availability of resources. Such coalitions were by nature unstable, for most often they were formed as part of a strategy to accomplish short-term or intermediate goals. Among the warlord players at the national level, coalitions did not have ideological bases. Nor were they usually based on close personal connections; a frequent pattern, in fact, was that today's ally often became tomorrow's enemy. All coalition building, as well as the shaping of policies, was driven by mercenary and power considerations. Coalitions would therefore collapse if one or more coalition member(s) were lured away for a better deal from a rival warlord; the lure of money or position to bring about the defection of a militarist or military commander was known as "silver bullets." Their use made any sort of long-range planning difficult and caused at least one militarist to predict, "We shall undoubtedly win. It is simply a matter of waiting for treason."¹⁸ One other method to destroy coalitions was by assassinating coalition members. Reportedly a common approach was to invite the proposed victim to a banquet, where he was then murdered—a practice that one presumes would have led anyone invited to a banquet to have second thoughts about accepting.

The Beiyang militarists were separated into two main cliques that formed around Yuan Shikai's two chief lieutenants, the Anfu clique led by Duan Qirui and the Zhili clique led by Feng Guozhang. The other main player was the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin.

To simplify a confusing history, four major wars were fought between 1920 and 1926. The first was between the two main cliques, with Zhang joining the victorious Zhili clique. The other three wars came between victors in the first: Zhang versus the Zhili clique. Keep in mind that these were only the major wars. One historian has counted more than 140 wars fought between 1916 and 1928.

These were bloody affairs that grew bloodier over the years. Though many of the officers were graduates of military academies and could be seen as professional military men, the soldiers themselves were in many cases recruited from rural areas. Each army was tied together by the typical social bonds—linkages through family, marriage, friendship, and teacher–student and patron–protégé ties. Recruits enlisted to make a living and were in the army for an indefinite period; though national regulations specified that they were to be nineteen to twenty-six years old, commanders frequently took them at all ages, as the case of Zhang Zongchang indicates. Fatalities in battle were high, a situation made worse by the lack of medical care, where even light wounds could end in death.

Among the populace the warlord scourge included loss of life; rapes by military victors and losers; destruction of crops, cropland, and agricultural infrastructure; and widespread economic dislocation and property destruction. Troops lived off the areas they occupied or moved through, looting and pillaging. One warlord reported, “My men would surround a village before dawn and fire several shots to intimidate the people. We told them to come out and give up. This was the classic way of raiding a village. Sometimes we killed and carried away little pigs. . . . We took corn, rice, potatoes, taro.” Peasant carts and labor were regularly commandeered. Cities were special targets for looting. A British official reported on the 1920 looting of Yuzhou in Hunan, “I have never seen more thorough work. Every shop, every house in this beautiful and prosperous city has been literally stripped. There is not a vestige of any usable commodity from one end of the city to the other. . . .”¹⁹

But there was more. Warlord armies needed weapons and supplies, necessities that demanded money. Two sources of money that emerged as critical to the warlord campaigns were opium and taxes. In the late Qing, the cultivation of opium had been practically eradicated in most areas. Its capacity to bring in huge profits, however, made it attractive to warlords, who forced farmers in many areas to plant opium instead of food crops. In some places, warlords forced opium cultivation by placing the land tax so high that opium was the only feasible crop to plant. Whereas the acreage of cultivated land devoted to opium production lay at 3 percent in the years from 1914 to 1919, it shot up to 20 percent in the period 1929 to 1933.

The other source of money was taxation. Extraordinarily high taxes were placed on every conceivable item, from consumer goods to licenses to lifetime situations (getting married, owning a pig, going to a brothel). Land taxes were collected far in advance (perhaps as many as ten years). Taxes on commodities in transit were exorbitant: A Hankou newspaper reported, for example, that “a shipment of paper worth \$1,350 when landed at Shanghai was shipped up the Yangzi to Chengdu. It passed through eleven tax stations . . . and the illegal taxation collected on it by regional authorities totaled \$2,150.”²⁰ With taxes reaching confiscatory levels and without recourse, the economy of affected communities was wrecked; the people’s livelihood was, as it were, left for dead. Finally,

like typhoons spawning tornadoes, warlord wars gave rise to wide-scale banditry. In many cases, what warlords did not succeed in destroying or taking, the bandits did.

One of the tragedies of the warlord struggles was that many battles were made possible and certainly more destructive because various Western nations supplied ammunition and guns, "by the gun and by the shipload," to warlords. An American suggestion in 1919 that nations join in an embargo of weapons sales to China in order to put a halt to the fighting led to an Arms Embargo Agreement, but it was so conspicuously violated that it was abrogated within ten years. Some countries, especially Japan and Russia, were interested in aiding those warlords whom they thought were most likely to seize state power. Obviously, if their pet warlord then did become president, the likelihood that they would receive privileges from his regime would be increased. The Japanese provided continual monetary and material support to Manchuria's Zhang Zuolin. Likewise, the Russians gave Feng Yuxiang money, military instructors, and arms and materiel. Great Britain maintained exceptionally close relations with Wu Peifu but did not reportedly offer government support of his rule, though British firms did offer Wu loans. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, British and American diplomats applied some pressure on the Beijing government to bring a halt to the warlord struggles so that military disruptions of trade would cease.

Though some warlords aspired to unite the nation, warlordism was the very antithesis of nationalism. Warlord actions radically fragmented a state whose modern identity had not yet had time to develop. Their reliance on foreign arms and aid put the lie to any image of a new nation standing on its own and was in fact retrogressive when seen against the backdrop of the late Qing rights' recovery movement. Their actions and policies seriously damaged the economy and inhibited national economic progress. Warlords contributed to the growing militarization of Chinese society; and their actions gave rise to a demoralized and devastated populace, undercutting potential patriotism that might have inspired commitment to build a new China.

Finally, warlords and their actions were at odds with new forces in Chinese society, clashes that all too frequently produced bloodshed and tragedy. An example was the massacre of students near the Gate of Heavenly Peace on March 18, 1926. In the 1925–1926 warlord struggle between Feng Yuxiang and Zhang Zuolin, Feng's forces had mined the sea approaches to Tianjin to keep Zhang from landing there. The Japanese, Zhang's main patrons, who saw the Tianjin area as their sphere of influence, protested the mining because of its impact on their trade; they ordered the mines removed. Beijing students protested the Japanese ultimatum as interference in Chinese domestic affairs. Though government troops dispersed them on March 17, on the next day more students came out to demonstrate. When they tried to march to the head of state's office, police opened fire and killed forty-seven students. Sidney Gamble, an American social scientist doing social research for the YMCA, was an eyewitness:

The shooting of the students on March 18th was a terrible tragedy. . . . Just how much the students threatened to use force at the Cabinet office we do not know, but once the guards started firing they kept it up for fifteen or twenty minutes. The soldiers used their bayonets on the wounded and robbed the bodies of the dead. Even glasses were snatched from one of the girls as she was getting out through a back gate.²¹

Zhu Ziqing, on the faculty at Qinghua University, participated in the march and left a much more personal description of his actions upon hearing the gunshots:

One or two minutes later, the red-hot blood of the person on top of me streamed down the back of my hand and onto my jacket. I understood immediately that the massacre had begun. The only thing I knew was that I did not want to die; I only wanted to live. . . . I rolled down a hill of corpses. Later, when I realized that I had walked on corpses, I shuddered with fear for a long time.²²

Warlord wars had thus precipitated a crisis that, because of foreign interests in China, had brought Japanese intrusion into Chinese affairs and the nationalistic student demonstration. Tragic as the loss of student lives on the Beijing streets was, their numbers paled in comparison to the deaths of the thousands of Chinese who died in the warlord struggles. Lu Xun, China's most important twentieth-century writer, summed up the despair and sense of futility created by the age of the warlords with specific reference to the March 18 tragedy:

Time flows eternally on: the streets are peaceful again, for a few lives count for nothing in China. . . . As for any deeper significance, I think there is very little; for this was only an unarmed demonstration. The history of mankind's battle forward through bloodshed is like the formation of coal, where a great deal of wood is needed to produce a small amount of coal.²³

CHINA TOTTERS ON THE WORLD STAGE

The outbreak of World War I placed China in imminent danger of becoming a battleground for European powers that had spheres of influence on Chinese soil. To forestall that possibility, China hastily declared its neutrality. That action did not stop Japan from invading the German leasehold in Shandong province in response to ally England's request to seize German properties in China. The war took imperialist Western nations out of competition with Japan in China. Japan set out to make imperial hay while the sun of World War I shone, expanding the former German holdings almost as soon as it had taken them.

Then in January 1915, as the European powers were preoccupied with the war, Japan acted to strengthen its hand in China, presenting Yuan's government with the Twenty-One Demands. This was a list of five categories of demands, mostly economic rights and privileges in Shandong, Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, the Yangzi Valley, and Fujian province. But the fifth group of demands cut more deeply into Chinese sovereignty: It required that the Chinese attach Japanese advisers to the key governmental executive, military, financial, and police bodies, making China in effect a protectorate of Japan. This group of demands also specified that China had to purchase at least half of its munitions from Japan. The spring of 1915 saw a wave of anti-Japanese protests and rallies sweep

the country. When the Japanese eventually modified the demands by dropping the ominous fifth group and then issued an ultimatum to accept the rest, Yuan acceded. The day of agreement to the demands, May 7, was commemorated in subsequent years as National Humiliation Day.

In 1917, China did give up its neutrality (which had done nothing to safeguard its security) and declared war against Germany. For its part in the war effort, China sent almost 100,000 workers to northern France where they labored along the trenches, in construction, and in transport. Apart from performing valuable service near the Western front, these men went back to China with a changed worldview and (for some at least) bundles of saved cash. Their experience entitled the Chinese to participate in the Versailles Conference after the war ended.

The Shandong Issue

People all over the world had been affected by the wartime rhetoric of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. The “war to make the world safe for democracy” and the “war to end all wars” had also been one that was supposed to bring the “self-determination” of peoples to control their own destiny inside their chosen homelands. For many colonized peoples, the message, infused with high idealism, also brought high hopes that they might once again be able to control their lives and their countries. The Chinese delegation to the 1919 Versailles Conference shared those hopes—specifically, to recover Shandong province and to eliminate the unequal treaty system. However, since the conference had convened only to deal with issues that were resulting from the war, the disposition of the unequal treaties was not included on the conference agenda.

The Chinese argued that Shandong, the home province of Confucius, and therefore a very special area for all Chinese, should be returned. They pointed to the original agreement of the German leasehold from 1898, which specified that there could be no “subletting” of the leasehold; therefore, Japan could not lay claim to the territory. They pointed out further that Chinese agreement to the Twenty-One Demands had been coerced and had not been ratified by the National Assembly. If the self-determination principle had held sway, there would have been no question that Shandong would be returned to China.

But the deck was stacked. After Japan had seized Shandong in 1914, its government proceeded to gain through secret treaty from each Allied power—Russia, Britain, France, Italy, and the United States—recognition of Japan’s position and predominant interests in Shandong. When the matter would come before the Versailles Conference at the end of the war, Japan would thus be certain of Western support for its remaining in Shandong. These secret treaties underscore the flagrant nature of imperialist control and decision making: Outsiders were deciding China’s future with no consultation with Chinese leaders. The disdain with which the imperialist powers dealt with the world’s colonies and (in China’s case) its semicolonies did not bode well for the postwar world.

But there was more: The Chinese themselves contributed to the stacked deck. In 1918, Chinese leaders on their own volition signed a secret treaty with the Japanese. In exchange for a 20 million yen loan, the Beijing government gave Japan rights in Shandong: to build two railroads, to station troops there, and to train and oversee Chinese train guards.

China could thus not point to the Twenty-One Demands as being forced on them, for in this agreement the government had recognized Japan's special role in Shandong of its own free will—and all for 20 million yen.

Japan was also determined to have its way completely in Shandong. It had come to the conference with two objectives—holding on to Shandong and former German Pacific islands and getting a racial equality clause written into the Covenant of the League of Nations. The defeat of the racial equality clause was engineered mostly by countries in the British Empire, fearful of an international body's becoming involved in domestic issues of immigration and citizenship. Whatever the reason, it was a defeat for Japan, and the Japanese delegation began to make noises indicating that it just might walk out of the conference—as Italy had done a few days earlier. Faced with the specter of the collapse of the conference and believing that the Shandong issue could be taken up in a functioning League of Nations, Wilson caved in to Japanese pressure. But it is obvious that Japan had all the legal arguments and the political turns at the conference going its way. In China the reaction was swift and fierce, igniting a major political firestorm, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The Washington Conference

In late 1921 and early 1922, nine world powers met in Washington, D.C.: the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, China, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Portugal. The main goal of the Western nations, in light of predictions that war with Japan was looming in the future, was to try to limit Japan's freedom of action in military matters, specifically making efforts to halt a naval race and to limit fortifications of territory in the Pacific, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Also included on the agenda were China and the permanent disposition of Shandong. The Chinese delegation basically called on the other nations to begin respecting China's rights, specifically its political independence and its territorial integrity; they also called for a review of the unequal treaty system.

The conference produced three treaties, the most important of which for China was the Nine-Power Treaty. It said all the right things: The nations "agreed to respect China's territorial integrity and political independence, to renounce further attempts to seek spheres of influence, to respect its neutrality in time of war, and to honor equal commercial opportunity for all."²⁴ But it was toothless; there was no way to enforce the agreement or to take action against a country that violated its terms. An agreement, mediated by Great Britain and the United States, was reached regarding Shandong. Japan would return Shandong but it would continue to keep economic interests, including maintaining property for use by Japanese living in the area, having Japanese serve as advisors in various businesses and industries, and having Japanese hold key leadership positions for five more years in the railroad that the Japanese had built from Qingdao to Jinan. According to the treaty, the Chinese would buy that railway from the Japanese using a Japanese loan. In short, though China received the lion's share of what it wanted, the Japanese could keep their fingers in the pie.

China did make other small, but in the historical context of its relationship with the West not insignificant, gains at the conference. Great Britain agreed to give up its leasehold

of Weihaiwei, due to expire in any case in 1923. The powers allowed the Chinese to raise the customs tariff from 3.5 percent of the value of the goods to 5 percent; in addition, there was a stipulation that China would eventually gain complete control over the tariff and that extraterritoriality would be abolished. But no specifics were offered on how this would be accomplished and, even more important, when it would occur. Two years after the conference, Russia on its own gave up the right of extraterritoriality and Boxer indemnity payments even as it also allowed the return to China of its concessions in two cities.

Continuing Evidence of Imperialist Power

Despite these gains, the imperialist powers continued to appoint men to serve in Chinese governmental structures, specifically the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, the Salt Revenue, and the Chinese Postal Service. Foreign settlements in treaty ports, as well as concessions and leaseholds, still dotted the Chinese landscape, with foreigners continuing to make demands. Great Britain maintained its grip on Hong Kong, through which it had commanding control over trade throughout Southern China. Japan was becoming increasingly predominant in Manchuria, controlling the South Manchurian railway and its environs.

Three episodes point to the humiliating power that imperialists maintained, a threat that created, in the words of the inaugural address of President Xu Shichang on Double Ten in 1918, “a crisis of national existence.”²⁵ After the 1911 revolution, foreign involvement in the Maritime Customs Service expanded from assessment and accounting to the very collection of the revenue. Furthermore, after collection, the revenue was deposited in foreign banks before it was disbursed for payment of Chinese debts; thus, foreigners were able to earn interest on what was really Chinese money. In addition, the foreign diplomatic corps in Beijing had been made “trustee” of the money before it was disbursed from foreign banks. Customs revenue was earmarked for interest payments on loans that had been secured on the basis of that customs revenue. During World War I with the growth of Chinese trade, the customs revenue collected was more than needed for the interest payments. The diplomatic corps began to control that surplus. In 1917, it let the surplus go to the Chinese government for general administrative expenses. But in 1918, it tightened the control noose around the Chinese government, telling the government specifically how the surplus could be spent. In other words, foreigners were telling the Chinese government how it must spend its own money.

In 1922 the French government, having seen the value of its Boxer indemnity decline because of depreciating French paper currency, demanded that the indemnity be paid in gold. Such a policy, if adopted, would be to the strong disadvantage to China, creating huge financial losses. In December the government referred the case to Wang Kemin, the governor of the Bank of China and former Chinese director of the Sino-French joint venture, the Banque Industrielle de Chine. After the French government tried to sweeten the deal by reopening the Banque, which had been closed a year earlier, Chinese financiers who had had deposits in the Banque lobbied the Chinese government to accept. With such pressure and with Wang’s own past involvement with

the bank, Wang's advice to the government—to pay the indemnity in gold—looked corrupt and antinationalistic: It was advice that was profitable for Wang and investors but harmful to China. It looked, in short, like evidence of the unholy alliance that existed between imperialist powers and the warlord governments. There was a huge public outcry. In Wang's home city of Hangzhou, a crowd attacked and destroyed his family's ancestral shrine, hacked the shrine's ancestral tablets into seven pieces, and threw them into West Lake, where they disappeared. Such was the depth of hatred for the warlord and imperialist collaboration.

In May 1923, bandits stopped an express train at Lincheng in Shandong province; they held up and kidnapped many on the train. Among the 200 taken captive were some two dozen foreigners, who were held for ransom for over a month. Foreigners and the foreign press in China reacted with outrage. A Shanghai paper noted that “[f]ailure of the government to check banditry has made possible an occurrence which cannot but cause a feeling of deep humiliation to the people of a government that has a shadow of self-respect. That which is called a government in China . . . has not and is not functioning in a manner and to a degree worthy of the name.”²⁶ But words of condemnation were not enough for the foreign population. A note from the diplomatic corps of all the powers demanded not only penalties and indemnities, but that “Chinese railways [be put] under the powers’ joint supervision in order to reform railway fiscal and management policies.”²⁷ Such foreign oversight supposedly would prevent any future act of banditry or warlordism that would result in the seizure of money slotted to pay foreign debts. Imperialist powers saw a weak and divided China with an ineffectual government; in response, they insisted in a host of arenas that they knew what was best for China. In a frankly racist book, *What's Wrong with China?*, written in 1926, the author, Rodney Gilbert, gives his opinion: “What is really wrong with China and will continue to be wrong with her is that the Chinese are children, that their world is a child's make-believe.”²⁸ What Gilbert and the powers did not know was that forces were underway, even as they spoke their imperialist and paternalistic platitudes, that would not only put the lie to Gilbert's opinion but would begin the eviction of imperialists from China altogether.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Cochran, Sherman, ed. *Inventing Nanjing Road: Commercial Culture in Shanghai, 1900–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asian Program, 2000). Seven essays look at a variety of aspects of commercial culture in the metropolis, including business, entertainment, industry (film and milk), advertising, and the housing market.

Koll, Elisabeth. *From Cotton Mill to Business Empire: The Emergence of Regional Enterprises in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

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2003). This history of the Dasheng Cotton Mill in the Lower Yangzi region opens a discussion of the evolution of business practices shaping the Chinese corporation to the present.

McCord, Edward A. *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). A revisionist study that examines the process by which local military forces became political players in larger theaters of action as civilian politicians and bureaucrats relied on them to settle political disputes.

Schoppa, R. Keith. *Song Full of Tears* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002). This study of a lake and its surrounding society over many centuries reveals the effects of the "golden age" of capitalism from the 1910s to the late 1930s on the lake, with its plague of "developers."

Young, Ernest P. *The Presidency of Yuan Shih-k'ai: Liberalism and Dictatorship in Early Republican China* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1977). The best biographical treatment of the frequently castigated first president of the Republic of China.