

## **Civilization in Crisis: Qing China**

- The parts of Asia still independent from European dominance after 1750 suffered from political decline and from the reactions to new challenges.
- They also faced the threat of Western imperialism and the West's industrial lead.

### **The Last Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the Qing Empire in China**

- The Manchu seized advantage of the weakness of the Ming dynasty to enter China and seize control of Beijing in 1644. Within two decades, the Manchu were masters of China.
- As the Qing dynasty, they ruled an area larger than any previous dynasty had, except the Tang.
- The Manchu retained much of the political system of the Ming, although they assumed a more direct role in appointing local officials and reduced their tax exemptions.

### **Economy and Society in the Early Centuries of Qing Rule**

- The Manchu also maintained the social system of the Ming:
  - The values of respect for rank and acceptance of hierarchy were emphasized.
  - The extended family remained the core unit among the elite.
  - Women continued under the dominance of elder men. Their lives centered on the household. Daughters were less wanted than sons, and female infanticide probably rose during this period.
- The Manchu attempted to alleviate rural distress and unrest through decreasing tax and labor burdens; repairing roads, dikes, and irrigation systems; and limiting land accumulation by the elite. Population growth and the lack of available land checked the success of the reform efforts.
- Commercial and urban expansion increased under the peaceful conditions of the first 150 years of Manchu rule.
- Until the end of the eighteenth century, the influx of silver in payment for exports created a favorable balance of payments. European traders came to Canton, and Chinese merchants traveled overseas.

### **Rot from Within: Bureaucratic Breakdown and Social Disintegration**

- By the late eighteenth century, the Qing were in decline:
  - The exam system, which provided able bureaucrats, was riddled by cheating and favoritism. Positions in government service were seen as a method of gaining influence and building family fortunes.
  - The resulting revenue loss caused a weakening of the military and deterioration of the dikes confining the Yellow River.
- By the middle of the nineteenth century, flooding left millions of peasants without resources. Throughout the empire mass migrations and banditry increased social unrest.
- The existing Chinese social and economic systems could not cope with the changes stemming from the greatly increased population resulting from the introduction of American crops.

### **Barbarians at the Southern Gates: The Opium War and After**

- The Manchus continued to treat Europeans as just another type of barbarian, although the advances by Europeans in science and industry made them dangerous rivals to the empire.
- Confrontation occurred over the importation of opium from India into China:
  - The British had lacked commodities, apart from silver, to exchange for Chinese goods. Opium reversed the trade balance in their favor, but the Chinese saw the trade as a threat to their economy and social order.

- Silver left the country and opium addiction became rampant.
- Government efforts to check the problem failed until the 1830s, when an important official, Lin Zexu, came to end the trade at Canton and nearby. He blockaded European trading areas and destroyed opium.
- The British merchants demanded and received military intervention.
- War began in 1839; the Chinese were defeated on sea and land and sued for peace. Another conflict ended similarly in the 1850s.
- The settlement after the first war awarded Hong Kong to the British and opened other ports to European trade and residence. By the 1890s, ninety ports were open and foreigners had gained long-term leases over ports and surrounding territory. Opium continued to pour into China.
- By the middle of the century, British officials managed China's foreign trade and customs, and the court had to accept European ambassadors.

### **A Civilization at Risk: Rebellion and Failed Reforms**

- The dislocations caused by the European incursions spawned a massive rebellion in southern China during the 1850s and 1860s → the Taiping Rebellion:
  - The dissidents offered programs of social reform, land redistribution, and liberation of women. They attacked the traditional Chinese elite.
  - The provincial gentry rallied to the Qing and assisted in the defeat of the rebellion.
- In the last decades of the century, dynamic provincial leaders led a "self-strengthening" movement aimed at countering the challenge of the West. They encouraged foreign investment in railways and factories and military modernization. They wanted only to preserve the existing order, not to transform it. Although they professed loyalty to the dynasty, the Manchu increasingly were unable to control the provinces.
- Despite a defeat by Japan in 1894-1895, the Manchu and their allies among the scholar-gentry resisted reform. The last decades of the dynasty were dominated by the dowager empress, Cixi; in 1898 she crushed a serious reform effort. The involvement of members of the royal household in the Boxer Rebellion further weakened China.

### **The Fall of the Qing: The End of a Civilization?**

- After the defeat of the Taipings, resistance to the dynasty centered in secret societies. The revolts they inspired failed, but they were a training ground for more serious resistance.
- By the end of the century, sons of the scholar-gentry became involved in plots to overthrow the regime and to create a government modeled on that of the West. The revolutions were deeply hostile to European involvement in Chinese affairs.
- Sporadic outbursts failed until 1911. A spreading rebellion forced the abdication of the last Manchu in 1912 and led to the establishment of a republican government.
- The ending of the civil service exams in 1905 was as important a watershed for Chinese civilization as the fall of the Qing in 1912. This step signified the ending of the use of Confucian values as a base for governing society. The era of the scholar-gentry had closed.

### **Global Connections: Chinese Decline and a Shifting Global Balance**

- The Chinese civilization did not survive. Why?
  - The Chinese had to face a sudden and brutal challenge from the West.
  - The Chinese regarded Westerners as barbarians without a culture.
  - To the Chinese, defense of their civilization meant survival of the Qing. Once the dynasty failed, the Chinese had little to fall back on.
  - The Chinese did not have a great indigenous religious tradition to fall back on.