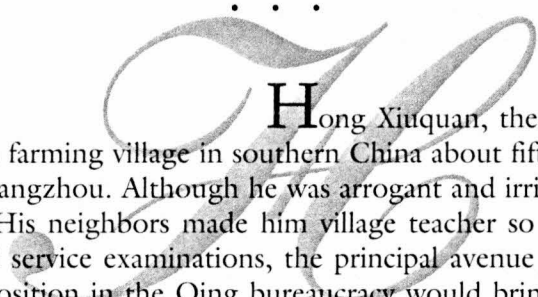


## SOCIETIES AT CROSSROADS


 HONG Xiuquan, the third son of a poor family, grew up in a farming village in southern China about fifty kilometers (thirty-one miles) from Guangzhou. Although he was arrogant and irritable, he showed intellectual promise. His neighbors made him village teacher so he could study and prepare for the civil service examinations, the principal avenue to government employment, since a position in the Qing bureaucracy would bring honor and wealth to both his family and his village. Between 1828 and 1837 Hong took the exams three times but failed to obtain even the lowest degree. This outcome was not surprising, since thousands of candidates competed for a degree, which only a few obtained. Yet the disappointment was too much for Hong. He suffered an emotional collapse, lapsed into a delirium that lasted about forty days, and experienced visions.

Upon recovering from his breakdown, Hong resumed his position as village teacher. After failing the civil service examinations a fourth time in 1843, he began studying the works of a Chinese missionary who explained the basic elements of Christianity. As he pondered the religious tracts, Hong came to believe that during his illness he had visited heaven and learned from God that he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ. He believed further that God had revealed to him that his destiny was to reform China and pave the way for the heavenly kingdom. Inspired by these convictions, Hong baptized himself and worked to build a community of disciples.

Hong's personal religious vision soon evolved into a political program: Hong believed that God had charged him with the establishment of a new order, one that necessitated the destruction of the Qing dynasty that had ruled China since 1644. In 1847 he joined the Society of God Worshipers, a religious group recently founded by disgruntled peasants and miners. Hong soon emerged as the group's guiding force, and in the summer of 1850 he led about ten thousand followers in rebellion against the Qing dynasty. On his thirty-seventh birthday, 11 January 1851, he assumed the title of "Heavenly King" and proclaimed his own dynasty, the *Taiping tianguo* ("Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace"). Hong's followers, known as the Taipings, quickly grew from a ragtag band to a disciplined and zealous army of over one million men and women who pushed the Qing dynasty to the brink of extinction.

China was not the only land that faced serious difficulties in the nineteenth century: the Ottoman empire, the Russian empire, and Tokugawa Japan experienced problems similar to those of China during the late Qing dynasty. One problem

common to the four societies was military weakness that left them vulnerable to foreign threats. The Ottoman, Russian, Qing, and Tokugawa armies all fought war or engaged in military confrontations with the industrial lands of western Europe and the United States, and all discovered suddenly and unexpectedly that they were militarily much weaker than the industrial powers. European lands occasionally seized territories outright and either absorbed them into their own possessions or ruled them as colonies. More often, however, European and U.S. forces used their power to force concessions out of militarily weak societies. They won rights for European and U.S. businesses to seek opportunities on favorable terms and enabled industrial capitalists to realize huge profits from trade and investment in militarily weak societies.

Another problem common to the four societies was internal weakness due to population pressure, declining agricultural productivity, famine, falling government revenue, and corruption at all levels of government. Ottoman, Russian, Chinese and Japanese societies all experienced serious domestic turmoil especially during the second half of the nineteenth century, as peasants mounted rebellions, dissidents struggled for reform, and political factions fought among themselves or conspired to organize coups. Military weakness often left leaders of the four societies unable to respond effectively to domestic strife, which sometimes provided western European powers and the United States with an excuse to intervene in order to protect their business interests.

Thus by the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman empire, the Russian empire, Qing China, and Tokugawa Japan were societies at crossroads. Unless they undertook a program of thoroughgoing political, social, and economic reform, they would continue to experience domestic difficulties and would grow progressively weaker in relation to industrial lands. Reformers in all four societies promoted plans to introduce written constitutions, limit the authority of rulers, make governments responsive to the needs and desires of the people, guarantee equality before the law, restructure educational systems, and begin processes of industrialization. Many reformers had traveled in Europe and the United States, where they experienced constitutional government and industrial society at first hand, and they sought to remodel their own societies along the lines of the industrial lands.

Vigorous reform movements emerged in all four lands, but they had very different results. In the Ottoman empire, the Russian empire, and Qing China, ruling elites and wealthy classes viewed reform warily and opposed any changes that might threaten their status. Reform in these three lands was halting, tentative, and sometimes abortive, and by the early twentieth century, the Ottoman, Romanov, and Qing dynasties were on the verge of collapse. In Japan, however, the Tokugawa dynasty fell and so was unable to resist change. Reform there was much more thorough than in the other lands, and by the early twentieth century, Japan was an emerging industrial power poised to expand its influence in the larger world.



## THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN DECLINE

During the eighteenth century the Ottoman empire experienced military reverses and challenges to its rule. By the early nineteenth century, the Ottoman state could no longer ward off European economic penetration or prevent territorial dismemberment. As Ottoman officials launched reforms to regenerate imperial vigor, Egypt

and other north African provinces declared their independence, and European states seized territories in the northern and western parts of the Ottoman empire. At the same time pressure from ethnic, religious, and nationalist groups threatened to fragment the polyglot empire. The once powerful realm slipped into decline, its sovereignty maintained largely by the same European powers who exploited its economy.

### ***The Nature of Decline***

By the late seventeenth century, the Ottoman empire had reached the limits of its expansion. Ottoman armies suffered humiliating defeats on the battlefield, especially at the hands of Austrian and Russian foes. Ottoman forces lagged behind European armies in strategy, tactics, weaponry, and training. Equally serious was a breakdown in the discipline of the elite Janissary corps, which had served as the backbone of the imperial armed forces since the fifteenth century. The Janissaries neglected their military training and turned a blind eye to advances in weapons technology. As its military capacity declined, the Ottoman realm became vulnerable to its more powerful neighbors.

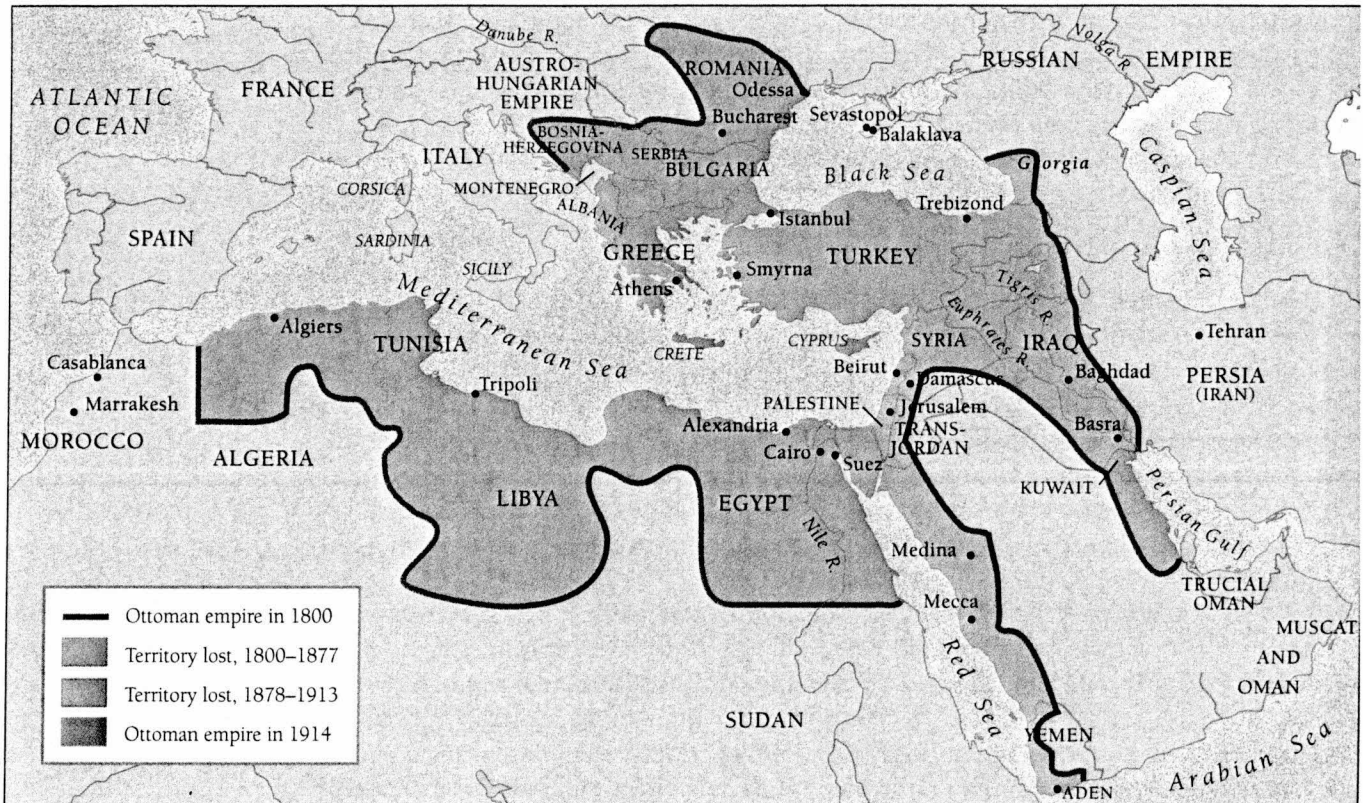
Loss of military power translated into declining effectiveness of the central government, which was losing power in the provinces to its own officials. By the early nineteenth century, semi-independent governors and local notables formed private armies of mercenaries and slaves to support the sultan in Istanbul in return for recognition of autonomy. Increasingly these independent rulers also turned fiscal and administrative institutions to their own interests, collecting taxes for themselves and sending only nominal payments to the imperial treasury, thus depriving the central state of revenue.

The Ottoman government managed to maintain its authority in Anatolia and Iraq, the heart of the empire, but it suffered serious territorial losses elsewhere. Russian forces took over poorly defended territories in the Caucasus and central Asia, and the Austrian empire nibbled away at the western frontiers. Nationalist uprisings forced Ottoman rulers to recognize the independence of Balkan provinces, notably Greece (1830) and Serbia (1867).

Most significant, however, was the loss of Egypt. In 1798 the ambitious French general Napoleon invaded Egypt in hopes of using it as a springboard for an attack on the British empire in India. His campaign was a miserable failure: Napoleon had to abandon his army and sneak back to France, where he worked to consolidate the French revolution. But the invasion sparked turmoil in Egypt, as local elites battled to seize power after Napoleon's departure. The ultimate victor was the energetic general Muhammad Ali, who built a powerful army modeled on European forces and ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1848. He drafted peasants to serve as infantrymen, and he hired French and Italian officers to train his troops. He also launched a program of industrialization, concentrating on cotton textiles and armaments. Although he remained nominally subordinate to the Ottoman sultan, by 1820 he had established himself as the effective ruler of Egypt, which was the most powerful land in the Muslim world. He even invaded Syria and Anatolia, threatening to capture Istanbul and topple the Ottoman state. Indeed, the Ottoman dynasty survived only because British forces intervened out of fear that Ottoman collapse would result in a sudden and dangerous expansion of Russian influence. Nevertheless, Muhammad Ali made Egypt an essentially autonomous region within the Ottoman empire.

### *Military Decline*

### *Territorial Losses*



MAP [32.1]

Decline of the  
Ottoman empire.

### *Economic Difficulties*

Economic ills aggravated the military and political problems of the Ottoman state. The volume of trade passing through the Ottoman empire declined throughout the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as European merchants increasingly circumvented Ottoman middlemen and traded directly with their counterparts in India and China. By the eighteenth century the focus of European trade had shifted to the Atlantic Ocean basin, where the Ottomans had no presence at all.

Meanwhile, as European producers became more efficient in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their textiles and manufactured goods began to flow into the Ottoman empire. Since they were inexpensive and high-quality products, they placed considerable pressure on Ottoman artisans and craftsmen, who frequently led urban riots to protest foreign imports. Ottoman exports consisted largely of raw materials such as grain, raw cotton, hemp, indigo, and opium, but they did not offset the value of imported European manufactures. Gradually, the Ottoman empire moved toward fiscal insolvency and financial dependency. After the middle of the nineteenth century, economic development in the Ottoman empire depended heavily on foreign loans, as European capital financed the construction of railroads, utilities, and mining enterprises. Interest payments grew to the point that they consumed more than half of the empire's revenues. In 1882 the Ottoman state was unable to pay interest on its loans and had no choice but to accept foreign administration of its debts.

### *The Capitulations*

Nothing symbolized foreign influence more than the capitulations, agreements that exempted European visitors from Ottoman law and provided European powers with extraterritoriality—the right to exercise jurisdiction over their own citizens according to their own laws. The practice dated back to the sixteenth century, when Ottoman sultans signed capitulation treaties to avoid the burden of administering justice for communities of foreign merchants. By the nineteenth century, however,

Ottoman officials regarded the capitulations as humiliating intrusions on their sovereignty. Capitulations also served as instruments of economic penetration by European businessmen who established tax-exempt banks and commercial enterprises in the Ottoman empire, and they permitted foreign governments to levy duties on goods sold in Ottoman ports.

By the early twentieth century, the Ottoman state lacked the resources to maintain its costly bureaucracy. Expenditures exceeded revenues, and the state experienced growing difficulty paying the salaries of its employees in the palace household, the military, and the religious hierarchy. Declining incomes led to reduced morale, recruitment difficulties, and a rise in corruption. Increased taxation designed to offset revenue losses only led to increased exploitation of the peasantry and a decline in agricultural production. The Ottoman empire was ailing, and it needed a major restructuring to survive.

### ***Reform and Reorganization***

In response to recurring and deepening crises, Ottoman leaders launched a series of reforms designed to strengthen and preserve the state. Reform efforts began as early as the seventeenth century, when sultans sought to limit taxation, increase agricultural production, and end official corruption. Reform continued in the eighteenth century, as Sultan Selim III (reigned 1789–1807) embarked on a program to remodel his army along the lines of European forces. But the establishment of a new crack fighting force, trained by European instructors and equipped with modern weapons, threatened the elite Janissary corps, which reacted violently by rising in revolt, killing the new troops, and locking up the sultan. When Selim's successor tried to revive the new military force, rampaging Janissaries killed all male members of the dynasty save one, Selim's cousin Mahmud II, who became sultan (reigned 1808–1839).

The encroachment of European powers and the separatist ambitions of local rulers convinced Mahmud to launch his own reform program. Politically savvy, Mahmud ensured that his reforms were perceived not as dangerous infidel innovations, but rather as a restoration of the traditional Ottoman military. Nevertheless, his proposal for a new European-style army in 1826 brought him into conflict with the Janissaries. When the Janissaries mutinied in protest, Mahmud had them massacred by troops loyal to the sultan. This incident cleared the way for a series of reforms that unfolded during the last thirteen years of Mahmud's reign.

Mahmud's program remodeled Ottoman institutions along western European lines. Highest priority went to the creation of a more effective army. European drill masters dressed Ottoman soldiers in European-style uniforms and instructed them in European weapons and tactics. Before long Ottoman recruits studied at military and engineering schools that taught European curricula. Mahmud's reforms went beyond military affairs. His government created a system of secondary education for boys to facilitate the transition from mosque schools, which provided most primary education, to newly established scientific, technical, and military academies. Mahmud also tried to transfer power from traditional elites to the sultan and his cabinet by taxing rural landlords, abolishing the system of military land grants, and undermining the *ulama*, the Islamic leadership. To make his authority more effective, the sultan established European-style ministries, constructed new roads, built telegraph lines, and inaugurated a postal service. By the time of Mahmud's death in 1839, the Ottoman empire had shrunk in size, but it was also more consolidated and powerful than it had been since the early seventeenth century.

*The Reforms  
of Mahmud II*

### Legal and Educational Reform

Continuing defeats on the battlefield and the rise of separatist movements among subject peoples prompted the ruling classes to undertake more radical restructuring of the Ottoman state. The tempo of reform increased rapidly during the *Tanzimat* (“reorganization”) era (1839–1876). Once again, the army was a principal target of reform efforts, but legal and educational reforms also had wide-ranging implications for Ottoman society. In designing their program, Tanzimat reformers drew considerable inspiration from Enlightenment thought and the constitutional foundations of western European states.

Tanzimat reformers attacked Ottoman law with the aim of making it acceptable to Europeans so they could have the capitulations lifted and recover Ottoman sovereignty. Using the French legal system as a guide, reformers promulgated a commercial code (1850), a penal code (1858), a maritime code (1863), and a new civil code (1870–76). Tanzimat reformers also issued decrees designed to safeguard the rights of subjects. Key among them were measures that guaranteed public trials, rights of privacy, and equality before the law for all Ottoman subjects, whether Muslim or not. Matters pertaining to marriage and divorce still fell under religious law. But because state courts administered the new laws, legal reform undermined the *ulama* and enhanced the authority of the Ottoman state. Educational reforms also undermined the *ulama*, who controlled religious education for Muslims. A comprehensive plan for educational reform, introduced in 1846, provided for a complete system of primary and secondary schools leading to university-level instruction, all under the supervision of the state ministry of education. A still more ambitious plan, inaugurated in 1869, provided for free and compulsory primary education.

### Opposition to the Tanzimat

Although reform and reorganization strengthened Ottoman society, the Tanzimat provoked spirited opposition from several distinct quarters. Harsh criticism came from religious conservatives, who argued that reformers posed a threat to the empire’s Islamic foundation. Many devout Muslims viewed the extension of legal equality to Jews and Christians as an act contrary to the basic principles of Islamic law. Even some minority leaders opposed legal equality, fearing that it would diminish their own position as intermediaries between their communities and the Ottoman state. Criticism arose also from a group known collectively as the Young Ottomans. Although they did not share a common political or religious program—their views ranged from secular revolution to Islamic fundamentalism—Young Ottomans agitated for individual freedom, local autonomy, and political decentralization. Many Young Ottomans desired the establishment of a constitutional government along the lines of the British system. A fourth and perhaps the most dangerous critique of Tanzimat emerged from within the Ottoman bureaucracy itself. In part because of their exclusion from power, high-level bureaucrats were determined to impose checks on the sultan’s power by forcing him to accept a constitution and if necessary even to depose the ruler.

### The Young Turk Era

#### Reform and Repression

In 1876 a group of radical dissidents from the Ottoman bureaucracy seized power in a coup, formed a cabinet that included partisans of reform, and installed Abd al-Hamid II as sultan (reigned 1876–1909). Convinced of the need to check the sultan’s power, reformers persuaded Abd al-Hamid to accept a constitution that limited his authority and established a representative government. Within a year, however, the sultan sus-

pended the constitution, dissolved parliament, exiled many liberals, and executed others. For thirty years he ruled autocratically in an effort to rescue the empire from dismemberment by European powers. He continued to develop the army and administration according to Tanzimat principles, and he oversaw the formation of a police force, educational reforms, economic development, and the construction of railroads.

Abd al-Hamid's despotic rule generated many liberal opposition groups. While intended to strengthen the state, reform and reorganization actually undermined the position of the sultan. As Ottoman bureaucrats and army officers received an education in European curricula, they not only learned modern science and technology but also became acquainted with European political, social, and cultural traditions. Many of them fell out of favor with Abd al-Hamid and spent years in exile, where they experienced European society firsthand. Educated subjects came to believe that the biggest problem of the Ottoman empire was the political structure that vested unchecked power in the sultan. For these dissidents Ottoman society was in dire need of political reform and especially of a written constitution that defined and limited the sultan's power.

The most active dissident organization was the Ottoman Society for Union and Progress, better known as the Young Turk Party, although many of its members were neither young nor Turkish. Founded in 1889 by exiled Ottoman subjects living in Paris, the Young Turk Party vigorously promoted reform, and its members made effective use of recently established newspapers to spread their message. Young Turks called for universal suffrage, equality before the law, freedom of religion, free public education, secularization of the state, and the emancipation of women. In 1908 the Young Turks inspired an army coup that forced Abd al-Hamid to restore parliament and the constitution of 1876. In 1909 they dethroned him and established Mehmed V Rashid (reigned 1909–1918) as a puppet sultan. Throughout the Young Turk era (1908–1918), Ottoman sultans reigned but no longer ruled.



Sultan Abd al-Hamid II ruled the Ottoman empire from 1876 to 1909, when the Young Turks deposed him and sent him into exile. • Hulton Getty/Liaison Agency

*The Young Turk.*

## PROCLAMATION OF THE YOUNG TURKS

. . .

*Beginning in the 1890s the Ottoman Society for Union and Progress, better known as the Young Turk Party, started agitating for the resignation of the Ottoman sultan Abd al-Hamid and the restoration of the constitution of 1876. After years of underground activity, the Young Turks forced the sultan to reestablish a parliamentary government and reinstate the constitution in 1908. Shortly thereafter the Young Turks outlined their plans for a new Turkish state.*

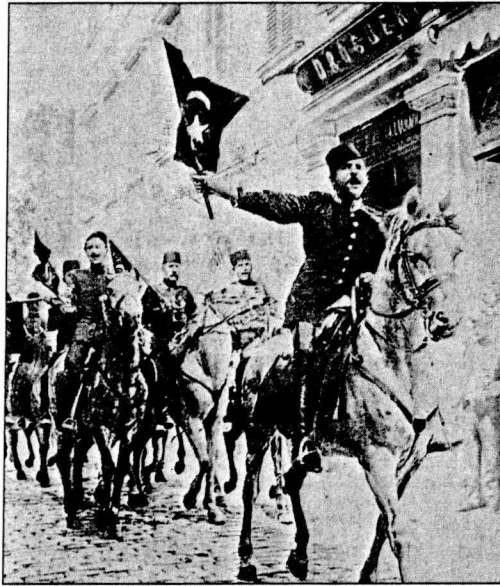
1. The basis for the Constitution will be respect for the predominance of the national will. One of the consequences of this principle will be to require without delay the responsibility of the minister before the Chamber, and, consequently, to consider the minister as having resigned, when he does not have a majority of the votes of the Chamber.
2. Provided that the number of senators does not exceed one third the number of deputies, the Senate will be named (which is not provided for in article 62 of the Constitution) as follows: one third by the Sultan and two thirds by the nation, and the term of senators will be of limited duration.
3. It will be demanded that all Ottoman subjects having completed their twentieth year, regardless of whether they possess property or fortune, shall have the right to vote. Those who have lost their civil rights will naturally be deprived of this right.
4. It will be demanded that the right freely to constitute political groups be inserted in a precise fashion in the constitutional charter, in order that article I of the Constitution of 1293 (1876) be respected. . . .
7. The Turkish tongue will remain the official state language. Official correspondence and discussion will take place in Turk. . . .
9. Every citizen will enjoy complete liberty and equality, regardless of nationality or religion, and be submitted to the same obligations. All Ottomans, being equal before the law as regards rights and duties relative to the State, are eligible for government posts, according to their individual capacity and their education. Non-Muslims will be equally liable to the military law.
10. The free exercise of the religious privileges which have been accorded to different nationalities will remain intact. . . .
14. Provided that the property rights of landholders are not infringed upon (for such rights must be respected and must remain intact, according to the law), it will be proposed that peasants be permitted to acquire land, and they will be accorded means to borrow money at a moderate rate. . . .
16. Education will be free. Every Ottoman citizen, within the limits of the prescriptions of the Constitution, may operate a private school in accordance with the special laws.
17. All schools will operate under the surveillance of the state. In order to obtain for Ottoman citizens an education of a homogeneous and uniform character, the official schools will be open, their instruction will be free, and all nationalities will be admitted. Instruction in Turk will be obligatory in public schools. In official schools, public instruction will be free.
 

Secondary and higher education will be given in the public and official schools indicated above; it will use the Turkish tongue as a basis. . . . Schools of commerce, agriculture and industry will be opened with the goal of developing the resources of the country.

SOURCE: Rondo Cameron, ed. *Civilization Since Waterloo: A Book of Source Readings* (Itasca, Ill.: F. E. Peacock, 1971), pp. 245-246.



While pursuing reform within Ottoman society, the Young Turks sought to maintain Turkish hegemony in the larger empire. They worked to make Turkish the official language of the empire, even though many subjects spoke Arabic or a Slavic language as their native tongue. Thus Young Turk policies aggravated tensions between Turkish rulers and subject peoples outside the Anatolian heartland of the Ottoman empire. Syria and Iraq were especially active regions of Arab resistance to Ottoman rule. In spite of their efforts to shore up the ailing empire, reformers could not turn the tide of decline: Ottoman armies continued to lose wars, and subject peoples continued to seek autonomy or independence. By the early twentieth century, the Ottoman empire survived principally because European diplomats could not agree on how to dispose of the empire without upsetting the European balance of power.



Young Turks celebrate the success of their coup, which forced the sultan to establish a constitutional government in 1908.

• Culver Pictures

## THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE UNDER PRESSURE

Like the Ottoman empire, the Russian empire experienced battlefield reverses that laid bare the economic and technological disparity between Russia and western European powers. Determined to preserve Russia's status as a great land power, the tsarist government embarked on a program of reform. The keystone of these efforts was the emancipation of the serfs. Social reform paved the way for government-sponsored industrialization, which began to transform Russian society during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Political liberalization did not accompany social and economic reform, as the tsars refused to yield their autocratic powers. The oppressive political environment sparked opposition movements that turned increasingly radical in the late nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, domestic discontent reached crisis proportions and exploded in revolution.

### *Military Defeat and Social Reform*

The nineteenth-century tsars ruled a multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural empire that stretched from Poland to the Pacific Ocean. Only about half the population spoke the Russian language or observed the Russian Orthodox faith. The Romanov tsars ruled their diverse and sprawling realm through an autocratic regime in which all initiative came from the central administration. The tsars enjoyed the support of the Russian Orthodox church and a powerful class of nobles who owned most of the land and were exempt from taxes and military duty. Peasants made up the vast majority of the population, and most of them were serfs bound to the lands that they cultivated. Serfdom was little more than slavery, but most landowners, including the state, considered it as a guarantee of social stability.

*The Crimean War*

A respected and feared military power, Russia maintained its tradition of conquest and expansion. During the nineteenth century the Russian empire expanded in three directions: east into Manchuria, south into the Caucasus and central Asia, and southwest toward the Mediterranean. This last thrust led to interference in the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman empire. After defeating Turkish forces in a war of 1828 to 1829, Russia tried to establish a unilateral protectorate over the weakening Ottoman empire. This expansive effort threatened to upset the balance of power in Europe, which led to military conflict between Russia and a coalition including Britain, France, the Kingdom of Sardinia, and the Ottoman empire. The Crimean War (1853-1856) clearly revealed the weakness of the Russian empire, which could hold its own against Ottoman and Qing forces, but not against the industrial powers of western Europe. Unable to mobilize, equip, and transport troops to defeat European forces that operated under a mediocre command, Russian armies suffered devastating defeat. Russia's economy could not support the tsars' expansionist ambitions, and the Crimean War clearly demonstrated the weakness of an agrarian economy based on unfree labor. Military defeat compelled the tsarist autocracy to reevaluate the Russian social order and undertake an extensive restructuring program.



MAP [32.2]

The Russian empire in the nineteenth century.

The key to social reform in Russia was emancipation of the serfs. Opposition to serfdom had grown steadily since the eighteenth century, not only among radicals but also among high officials. While some objected to serfdom on moral grounds, most believed that it had become an obstacle to economic development and a viable state. Besides being economically inefficient, serfdom also was a source of rural instability and peasant revolt: hundreds of insurrections broke out during the first four decades of the nineteenth century. As Tsar Alexander II (reigned 1855–1881) succinctly suggested to the nobility of

Moscow, “it is better to abolish serfdom from above than to wait until the serfs begin to liberate themselves from below.” Accordingly, in 1861 the tsar abolished the institution of serfdom.

The government sought to balance the interests of lords and serfs, but on balance the terms of emancipation were unfavorable to most peasants. The government compensated landowners for the loss of their land and the serfs who had worked it. Serfs won their freedom, had their labor obligations gradually canceled, and gained opportunities to become landowners. But the peasants won few political rights, and they had to pay a redemption tax for most of the lands they received. Many disappointed peasants believed that their rulers forced them to pay for land that was theirs by right. A few peasants prospered and improved their position as the result of emancipation, but most remained desperately poor. Emancipation resulted in little if any increase in agricultural production.

Other important reforms came in the wake of the serfs’ emancipation. To deal with local issues of health, education, and welfare, the government created elected district assemblies, or *zemstvos*, in 1864. Although all classes, including peasants, elected representatives to these assemblies, the *zemstvos* remained subordinate to the tsarist autocracy, which retained exclusive authority over national issues, and the landowning nobility, which possessed a disproportionately large share of both votes and seats. Legal reform was more fruitful than experimentation with representative government. The revision of the judiciary system in 1864 created a system of law courts based on western European models, replete with independent judges and a system of appellate courts. Legal reforms also instituted trial by jury for criminal offenses and elected justices of the peace who dealt with minor offenses. These reforms encouraged the emergence of attorneys and other legal experts, whose professional standards contributed to a decline in judicial corruption.



Tsar Alexander II of Russia. After signing the Treaty of Paris in 1856, ending the Crimean War, Alexander abolished serfdom in the Russian empire. • Library of Congress

### *Emancipation of the Serfs*

### *Political and Leg Reform*

### *Industrialization*

Social and political reform coincided with industrialization in nineteenth-century Russia. Tsar Alexander II emancipated the serfs partly with the intention of creating a mobile labor force for emerging industries, and the tsarist government encouraged industrialization as a way of strengthening the Russian empire. Thus although Russian industrialization took place within a framework of capitalism, it differed from western European industrialization in that the motivation for development was political and military and the driving force was government policy rather than entrepreneurial initiative. Industrialization proceeded slowly at first, but it surged during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

#### *The Witte System*

The prime mover behind Russian industrialization was Count Sergei Witte, minister of finance from 1892 to 1903. His first budget, submitted to the government in 1893, outlined his aims as “removing the unfavorable conditions which hamper the economic development of the country” and “kindling a healthy spirit of enterprise.” Availing himself of the full power of the state, Witte implemented policies designed to stimulate economic development. The centerpiece of his industrial policy was a massive program of railway construction, which linked the far-flung regions of the Russian empire and also stimulated the development of other industries. Most important of the new lines was the trans-Siberian railway, which opened Siberia to large-scale settlement, exploitation, and industrialization. To raise domestic capital for industry, Witte remodeled the state bank and encouraged the establishment of savings banks. Witte supported infant industries with high protective tariffs while also securing large foreign loans from western Europe to finance industrialization. His plan worked. French and Belgian capital played a key role in developing the steel and coal industries, and British funds supported the booming petroleum industry in the Caucasus.



Russian merchants in nineteenth-century Novgorod wear both western European and traditional Russian dress while taking tea. • Hulton Getty/Liaison Agency

For a decade the Witte system played a crucial role in the industrialization of Russia, but peasant rebellions and strikes by industrial workers indicated that large segments of the population were unwilling to tolerate the low standard of living that Witte's policy entailed. Recently freed serfs often did not appreciate factory work, which forced them to follow new routines and adapt to the rhythms of industrial machinery. Industrial growth began to generate an urban working class, which endured conditions similar to those experienced by workers in other societies during the early stages of industrialization. Employers kept wages of overworked and poorly housed workers at the barest minimum. The industrial sections of St. Petersburg and Moscow became notorious for the miserable working and living conditions of factory laborers. In 1897 the government limited the maximum working day to 11.5 hours, but this measure did little to alleviate the plight of workers. The government prohibited the formation of trade unions and outlawed strikes, which continued to occur in spite of the restrictions. Economic exploitation and the lack of political freedom made workers increasingly receptive to revolutionary propaganda, and underground movements soon developed among them.

*Industrial  
Discontent*

Not everyone was dissatisfied with the results of intensified industrialization. Besides foreign investors, a growing Russian business class benefited from government policy that protected domestic industries and its profits. Russian entrepreneurs reaped rich rewards for their roles in economic development, and they had little complaint with the political system. In contrast to western European capitalists who had both material and ideological reasons to challenge the power of absolute monarchs and the nobility, Russian businessmen generally did not challenge the tsarist autocracy.

### ***Repression and Revolution***

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, antigovernment protest and revolutionary activity increased. Hopes aroused by government reforms gave impetus to reform movements, and social tensions arising from industrialization fueled protest by groups whose aims became increasingly radical. Peasants seethed with discontent because they had little or no land, and increasingly mobile dissidents spread rebellious ideas between industrial cities. At the center of opposition were university students and a class of intellectuals collectively known as *intelligentsia*. Their goals and methods varied, but they generally sought substantial political reform and thorough social change. Most dissidents drew inspiration from western European socialism, but they despised the individualism, materialism, and unbridled capitalism of western Europe and thus worked toward a socialist system more in keeping with Russian cultural traditions. Many revolutionaries were anarchists, who refused to work on behalf of any formal government but simply sought to destroy existing institutions that they considered oppressive. Insofar as they had a positive political program, the anarchists wanted to vest all authority in local governing councils elected by universal suffrage.

*Protest*

Some activists saw the main potential for revolutionary action in the countryside, and between 1873 and 1876 hundreds of anarchists and other radicals traveled to rural areas to enlighten and rouse the peasantry. The peasants did not understand their impassioned speeches, but the police did and soon arrested the idealists. Tsarist authorities sentenced some to prison and banished others to the remote provinces of Siberia. Frightened by manifestations of radicalism, tsarist authorities resorted to repression:

*Repression*

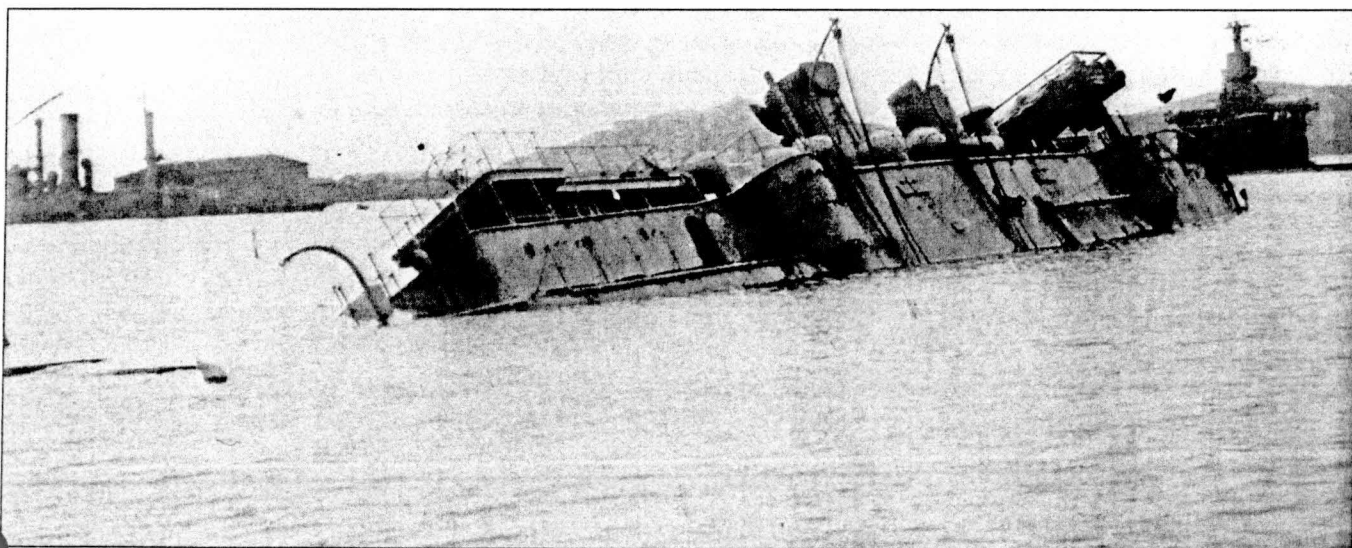
they censored publications and sent secret police to infiltrate and break up dissident organizations. Repression, however, only radicalized revolutionaries further and encouraged them to conspiratorial activities.

In the Baltic provinces, Poland, the Ukraine, Georgia, and central Asia, dissident opposed the tsarist autocracy on ethnic as well as political and social grounds. In those lands subject peoples speaking their own languages often used schools and political groups as foundations for separatist movements as they sought autonomy or independence from the Russian empire. Tsarist officials responded with a heavy-handed program of Russification to repress the use of languages other than Russian and to restrict educational opportunities to those loyal to the tsarist state. Throughout the Russian empire, Jews also were targets of suspicion, and tsarist authorities tolerated frequent pogroms (anti-Jewish riots) by subjects jealous of their Jewish neighbors' success in business affairs. To escape this violence, Jews migrated by the hundreds of thousands to western Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth century.

### *Terrorism*

In 1876 a recently formed group called the Land and Freedom Party began to promote the assassination of prominent officials as a means to pressure the government into political reform. In 1879 a terrorist faction of the party resolved to assassinate Alexander II, who had emancipated the serfs and launched a program of political and social reform. After several unsuccessful attempts, an assassin exploded a bomb under Alexander's carriage in 1881. The first blast did little damage, but as Alexander inspected his carriage, a second and more powerful explosion killed the reforming tsar. The attack brought the era of reform to an end and prompted the tsarist autocracy to adopt an uncompromising policy of repression.

In 1894 Nicholas II (reigned 1894-1917) ascended the throne. A well-intentioned but weak ruler, Nicholas championed oppression and police control. To deflect attention from domestic issues and neutralize revolutionary movements, the tsar's government embarked on expansionist ventures in east Asia. Russian designs on Korea and Manchuria clashed with similar Japanese intentions, leading to a rivalry that ended in war. The Russo-Japanese war began with a Japanese surprise attack on the Russian naval squadron at Port Arthur in February 1904 and ended in May 1905 with the destruction of the Russian navy.



Damaged Russian naval vessel in Port Arthur, a casualty of the Japanese attack on the Russian fleet in 1904. • UPI/Corbis-Bettmann

Russian military defeats brought to a head simmering political and social discontent and triggered widespread disturbances. In January 1905 a group of workers marched on the tsar's Winter Palace in St. Petersburg to petition Nicholas for a popularly elected assembly and other political concessions. Government troops met the petitioners with rifle fire, killing 130. The news of this Bloody Sunday massacre caused an angry uproar throughout the empire that culminated in labor unrest, peasant insurrections, student demonstrations, and mutinies in both the army and navy. Organizing themselves at the village level, peasants discussed seizing the property of their landlords. Urban workers created new councils known as *soviets* to organize strikes and negotiate with employers and government authorities. Elected delegates from factories and workshops served as members of these soviets.

Revolutionary turmoil paralyzed Russian cities and forced the government to make concessions. Sergei Witte, whom Nicholas had appointed to conduct peace negotiations with Japan, urged the tsar to create an elected legislative assembly. The tsar reluctantly consented and permitted the establishment of the Duma, Russia's first parliamentary institution. Although the Duma lacked the power to create or bring down governments, from the Romanov perspective this act was a major concession. Still, the creation of the Duma did not end unrest. Between 1905 and 1907 disorder continued, and violence flared especially in the Baltic provinces, Poland, the Ukraine, Georgia, and central Asia, where ethnic tensions added to revolutionary sentiments. Through bloody reprisals the government eventually restored order, but the hour was late for the Romanov dynasty.

*The Revolution  
of 1905*

## THE CHINESE EMPIRE UNDER SIEGE



The Chinese empire and the Qing dynasty experienced even more difficulties than did the Ottoman and Russian empires during the nineteenth century. European powers inflicted military defeats on Qing forces and compelled China's leaders to accept a series of humiliating treaties. The provisions of these treaties undermined Chinese sovereignty, carved China into spheres of influences that set the stage for economic exploitation, and handicapped the Qing dynasty's ability to deal with domestic disorder. As the government tried to cope with foreign challenges, it also faced dangerous internal upheavals, the most important of which was the Taiping rebellion. Caught between aggressive foreigners and insurgent rebels, China's ruling elites developed reform programs to maintain social order, strengthen the state, and preserve the Qing dynasty. The reforms had limited effect, however, and by the early twentieth century, China was in seriously weakened condition.

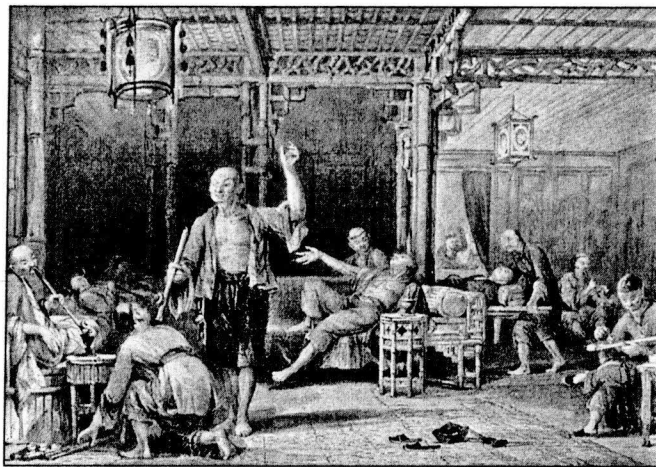
### *The Opium War and the Unequal Treaties*

In 1759 the emperor Qianlong restricted the European commercial presence in China to the waterfront at Guangzhou, where European merchants could establish warehouses. There Chinese authorities not only controlled European merchants but also the terms of trade. Foreign merchants could deal only with specially licensed Chinese firms known as *cobongs*, which bought and sold goods at set prices and operated under strict regulations established by the government. Besides the expense and inconvenience of the *cobong* system, European merchants had to cope with a market that had little demand for European products. As a result, European merchants paid for Chinese silk, porcelain, lacquerware, and tea largely with silver bullion.

*The Opium Trade*

Seeking increased profits in the late eighteenth century, officials of the British East India Company sought alternatives to bullion to exchange for Chinese goods. They gradually turned to trade in a product that was as profitable as it was criminal—opium. Using Turkish and Persian expertise, the East India Company grew opium in India and shipped it to China, where company officials exchanged it for Chinese silver coin. The silver then flowed back to British-controlled Calcutta and London, where company merchants used it to buy Chinese products in Guangzhou. The opium trade expanded rapidly: annual imports of opium in the early nineteenth century amounted to about 4,500 chests, each weighing 60 kilograms (133 pounds), but by 1839 some 40,000 chests of opium entered China annually to satisfy the habits of drug addicts. With the help of this new commodity, the East India Company easily paid for luxury Chinese products.

Trade in opium was illegal, but it continued unabated for decades because Chinese authorities made little effort to enforce the law. Indeed, corrupt officials often benefited personally by allowing the illegal trade to go on. By the late 1830s, however,



Chinese opium smokers. Chinese efforts to stop opium imports led to humiliating defeat in the Opium War. • Historical Picture Archive/Corbis

government officials had become aware that China had a trade problem and a drug problem as well. The opium trade not only drained large quantities of silver bullion from China but also created serious social problems in southern China. When government authorities took steps in 1838 to halt the illicit trade, British merchants started losing money. In 1839 the Chinese government stepped up its campaign by charging the incorruptible Lin Zexu with the task of destroying the opium trade. Commissioner

Lin acted quickly, confiscating and destroying some twenty thousand chests of opium. His uncompromising policy ignited a war that ended with humiliating defeat for China.

*The Opium War*

Outraged by the Chinese action against opium, British commercial agents pressed their government into a military retaliation designed to reopen the opium trade. The ensuing conflict, known as the Opium War (1839–1842), made plain the military power differential between Europe and China. In the initial stages of the conflict, British naval vessels easily demonstrated their superiority on the seas. Meanwhile, equipped only with swords, knives, spears, and occasionally muskets, the defenders of Chinese coastal towns were no match for the controlled firing power of well-drilled British infantry armed with rifles. But neither the destruction of Chinese war fleets nor the capture of coastal forts and towns persuaded the Chinese to sue for peace.



## LETTER OF LIN ZEXU TO QUEEN VICTORIA

*In 1838 Qing Emperor Daoguang sent Lin Zexu to Guangzhou to put an end to imports of opium into China. A leading Confucian scholar, Lin worked to persuade Chinese and foreigners alike that opium was a harmful and evil drug. In 1839 he composed a letter to Great Britain's Queen Victoria seeking her support in halting the flow of opium. Although never delivered, the letter illustrates Lin's efforts to stem the flow of opium by reason and negotiation before he resorted to sterner measures.*

You have traded in China for almost 200 years, and as a result, your country has become wealthy and prosperous.

As this trade has lasted for a long time, there are bound to be unscrupulous as well as honest traders. Among the unscrupulous are those who bring opium to China to harm the Chinese; they succeed so well that this poison has spread far and wide in all the provinces. You, I hope, will certainly agree that people who pursue material gains to the great detriment of the welfare of others can be neither tolerated by Heaven nor endured by men. . . .

I have heard that the areas under your direct jurisdiction such as London, Scotland, and Ireland do not produce opium; it is produced instead in your Indian possessions such as Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Patna, and Malwa. In these possessions the English people not only plant opium poppies that stretch from one mountain to another but also open factories to manufacture this terrible drug. As months accumulate and years pass by, the poison they have produced increases in its wicked intensity, and its repugnant odor reaches as high as the sky. Heaven is furious with anger, and all the gods are moaning with pain! It is hereby suggested that you destroy and plow under all of these opium plants and grow food crops instead, while issuing an order to punish severely anyone who dares to plant opium poppies again. If you adopt this policy of love so as to produce good and exterminate evil, Heaven will protect

you, and gods will bring you good fortune. Moreover, you will enjoy a long life and be rewarded with a multitude of children and grandchildren! . . .

The present law calls for the imposition of the death sentence on any Chinese who has peddled or smoked opium. Since a Chinese could not peddle or smoke opium if foreigners had not brought it to China, it is clear that the true culprits of a Chinese's death as a result of an opium conviction are the opium traders from foreign countries. Being the cause of other people's death, why should they themselves be spared from capital punishment? A murderer of one person is subject to the death sentence; just imagine how many people opium has killed! This is the rationale behind the new law which says that any foreigner who brings opium to China will be sentenced to death by hanging or beheading. Our purpose is to eliminate this poison once and for all and to the benefit of all mankind. . . .

Our Celestial Empire towers over all other countries in virtue and possesses a power great and awesome enough to carry out its wishes. But we will not prosecute a person without warning him in advance; that is why we have made our law explicit and clear. If the merchants of your honorable country wish to enjoy trade with us on a permanent basis, they must fearfully observe our law by cutting off, once and for all, the supply of opium. Under no circumstance should they test our intention to enforce the law by deliberately violating it.

SOURCE: Dun J. Li, *China in Transition* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1969), pp. 64–67.

British forces broke the military stalemate when they decided to strike at China's jugular vein—the Grand Canal, which linked the Yangzi and Yellow River valleys—with the aid of steam-powered gunboats. Armed, shallow-draft steamers could travel speedily up and down rivers, projecting the military advantage that European ships enjoyed on the high seas deep into interior regions. In May 1842 a British armada of seventy ships—led by the gunboat *Nemesis*—advanced up the Yangzi River. The British fleet encountered little resistance, and by the time it reached the intersection of the river and the Grand Canal, the Chinese government sued for peace. China experienced similar military setbacks throughout the second half of the nineteenth century in conflicts with Britain and France (1856–1858), France (1884–1885), and Japan (1894–1895).

### *Unequal Treaties*

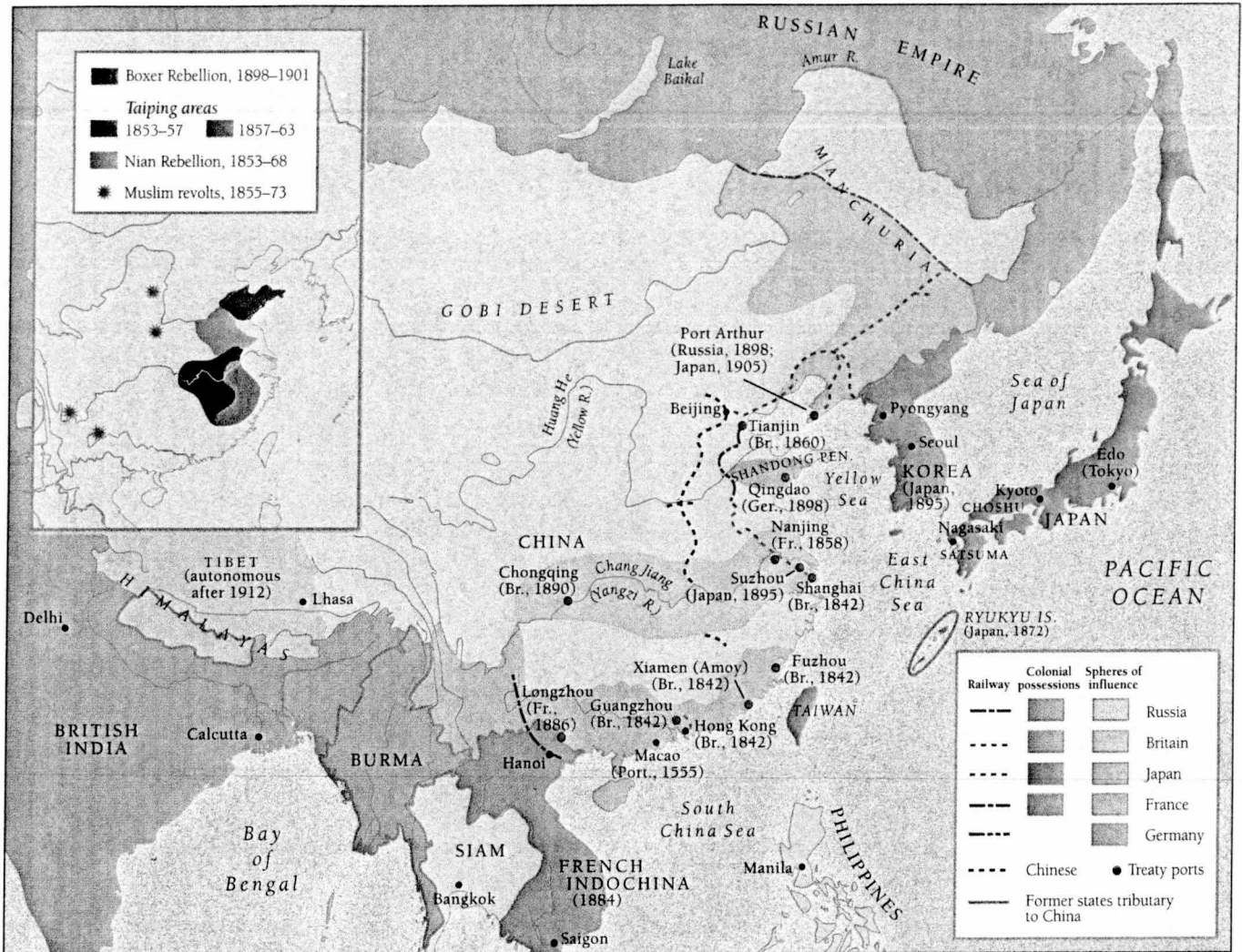
In the wake of these confrontations came a series of pacts collectively known as the *unequal treaties*. Beginning with the Treaty of Nanjing, which Britain forced China to accept at the conclusion of the Opium War in 1842, these agreements guided Chinese relations with foreign states until 1943. The Treaty of Nanjing released Korea, Vietnam, and Burma (now known as Myanmar) from Chinese authority and thereby dismantled the Chinese system of tributary states. Other provisions placed Hong Kong under British authority, opened Chinese ports to commerce, legalized the opium trade, permitted the establishment of Christian missions throughout China, compelled the Qing government to extend most-favored-nation status to Britain, and granted extraterritoriality to British visitors in China. To facilitate sales of foreign goods, the treaty also prevented the Qing government from levying tariffs on imports. The Treaty of Nanjing governed relations only between Britain and China, but France, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, Austria-Hungary, the United States, and Japan later concluded similar unequal treaties with China. By 1900 ninety Chinese ports were under the effective control of foreign powers, foreign merchants controlled much of the Chinese economy, Christian missionaries sought converts throughout China, and foreign gunboats patrolled Chinese waters.

### *The Taiping Rebellion*

The debilitation of the Chinese empire at the end of the nineteenth century was as much a result of internal turmoil as it was a consequence of foreign intrusion. Large-scale rebellions in the later nineteenth century reflected the increasing poverty and discontent of the Chinese peasantry. Between 1800 and 1900 China's population rose by more than 50 percent from 330 million to 475 million. The amount of land under cultivation increased only slowly during the same period, so population growth strained Chinese resources. The concentration of land in the hands of wealthy elites aggravated peasant discontent, as did widespread corruption of government officials and increasing drug addiction. After 1850 rebellions erupted throughout China: the Nian rebellion (1851–1868) in the northeast, the Muslim rebellion (1855–1873) in the southwest, and the Tungan rebellion (1862–1878) in the northwest. Most dangerous of all was the Taiping rebellion (1850–1864), which raged throughout most of China and brought the Qing dynasty to the brink of collapse.

### *The Taiping Program*

The village schoolteacher Hong Xiuquan provided both inspiration and leadership for the Taiping rebellion. His call for the destruction of the Qing dynasty and his program for the radical transformation of Chinese society appealed to millions of men and women. The Qing dynasty had ruled China since 1644, and Qing elites had adapted to Chinese ways, but many native Chinese subjects despised the



MAP [ 32.3 ]

East Asia in the nineteenth century.

Manchu ruling class as foreigners. The Taiping reform program contained many radical features that appealed to discontented subjects, including the abolition of private property, the creation of communal wealth to be shared according to needs, the prohibition of footbinding and concubinage, free public education, simplification of the written language, and literacy for the masses. Some Taiping leaders also called for the establishment of democratic political institutions and the building of an industrial society. Although they divided their army into separate divisions of men and women soldiers, the Taipings decreed the equality of men and women. Taiping regulations prohibited sexual intercourse among their followers, including married couples, but Hong and other high leaders maintained large harems.

After sweeping through southeastern China, Hong and his followers in the Society of God Worshipers took Nanjing in 1853 and made it the capital of their Taiping (“Great Peace”) kingdom. From Nanjing they campaigned throughout China, and as the rebels passed through the countryside whole towns and villages joined them—often voluntarily, but sometimes under coercion. By 1855 a million Taipings were poised to attack Beijing. Qing forces repelled them, but five years later, firmly entrenched in the Yangzi River valley, the Taipings threatened Shanghai.



final assault on the Taipings at Nanjing by Qing forces in 1864, an operation that caught common people and their livestock in  
 sfire. • © Collection Viollet

### *Taiping Defeat*

The radical nature of the Taiping program ensured that the Chinese gentry would side with the Qing government to support a regime dedicated to the preservation of the established order. After imperial forces consisting of Manchu soldiers failed to defeat the Taipings, the Qing government created regional armies staffed by Chinese instead of Manchu soldiers and commanded by members of the scholar-gentry class. With the aid of European advisors and weapons, these regional armies gradually overcame the Taipings. By 1862 Hong Xiuquan had largely withdrawn from public affairs, as he sought solace in religious reflection and diversion in his harem. After a lingering illness, he committed suicide in June 1864. In the following months Nanjing fell, and government forces slaughtered some one hundred thousand Taipings. By the end of the year, the rebellion was over. But the Taiping rebellion had taken a costly toll. It claimed twenty million to thirty million lives, and it caused such massive declines in agricultural production that populations in war-torn regions frequently resorted to eating grass, leather, hemp, and even human flesh.

### *Reform Frustrated*

The Taiping rebellion altered the course of Chinese history. Contending with aggressive foreign powers and lands ravaged by domestic rebellion, Qing rulers recognized that changes were necessary for the empire to survive. From 1860 to 1895

Qing authorities tried to fashion an efficient and benevolent Confucian government to solve social and economic problems while also adopting foreign technology to strengthen state power.

Most imaginative of the reform programs was the Self-Strengthening Movement (1860–1895), which flourished especially in the 1860s and 1870s. Empowered with imperial grants of authority that permitted them to raise troops, levy taxes, and run bureaucracies, several local leaders promoted military and economic reform. Adopting the slogan “Chinese learning at the base, Western learning for use,” leaders of the Self-Strengthening Movement sought to blend Chinese cultural traditions with European industrial technology. While holding to Confucian values and seeking to reestablish a stable agrarian society, movement leaders built modern shipyards, constructed railroads, established weapons industries, opened steel foundries with blast furnaces, and founded academies to develop scientific expertise.

### *The Self-Strengthening Movement*



Empress Dowager Cixi diverted government funds intended for the construction of modern warships to the building of a huge marble vessel to decorate a lake in the gardens of the Summer Palace near Beijing. • MacQuitty International Collection

Although it laid a foundation for industrialization, the Self-Strengthening Movement brought only superficial change to Chinese economy and society. It did not introduce enough industry to bring real military and economic strength to China. It also encountered obstacles in the imperial government: the empress dowager Cixi (1835–1908)—a former imperial concubine who established herself as effective ruler of China during the last fifty years of the Qing dynasty—diverted funds intended for the navy to build a magnificent marble boat to

grace a lake in the imperial gardens. Furthermore, the movement foundered on a contradiction: industrialization would bring fundamental social change to an agrarian land, and education in European curricula would undermine the commitment to Confucian values.

In any case the Self-Strengthening Movement also did not prevent continuing foreign intrusion into Chinese affairs. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, foreign powers began to dismantle the Chinese system of tributary states. In 1885 France incorporated Vietnam into its colonial empire, and in 1886 Great Britain detached Burma from Chinese control. In 1895 Japan forced China to recognize the independence of Korea and cede the island of Taiwan and the Liaodong Peninsula in southern Manchuria. By 1898 foreign powers had carved China itself into spheres of economic influence. Powerless to resist foreign demands, the Qing government granted exclusive rights for railway and mineral development to Germany in Shandong Province, to France in the southern border provinces, to Great Britain in the Yangzi River valley, to Japan in the southeastern coastal provinces, and to Russia in Manchuria. Only distrust among the foreign powers prevented the total dismemberment of the Middle Kingdom.

### *Spheres of Influence*

### *The Hundred Days Reforms*

These setbacks sparked the ambitious but abortive Hundred Days reforms of 1898. The leading figures of the reform movement were the scholars Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and Liang Qichao (1873–1929), who published a series of treatises reinterpreting Confucian thought in a way that justified radical changes in the imperial system. Kang and Liang did not seek to preserve an agrarian society and its cultural traditions so much as to remake China and turn it into a powerful modern industrial society. Impressed by their ideas, the young and open-minded Emperor Guangxu launched a sweeping program to transform China into a constitutional monarchy, guarantee civil liberties, root out corruption, remodel the educational system, encourage foreign influence in China, modernize military forces, and stimulate economic development. The broad range of reform edicts produced a violent reaction from members of the imperial household, their allies in the gentry, and the young emperor's aunt, the ruthless and powerful Empress Dowager Cixi. After a period of 103 days, Cixi nullified the reform decrees, imprisoned the emperor in the Forbidden City, and executed six leading reformers. Kang and Liang, the spiritual guides of the reform movement, escaped to Japan.

### *The Boxer Rebellion*

Believing that foreign powers were pushing for her retirement, Cixi threw her support behind an antiforeign uprising known as the Boxer rebellion, a violent movement spearheaded by militia units calling themselves the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists. The foreign press referred to the rebels as Boxers. In 1899 the Boxers organized to rid China of “foreign devils” and their influences. With the empress dowager's encouragement, the Boxers went on a rampage in northern China, killing foreigners and Chinese Christians as well as Chinese who had ties to foreigners. Confident that foreign weapons could not harm them, some 140,000 Boxers besieged foreign embassies in Beijing in the summer of 1900. A heavily armed force of British, French, Russian, U.S., German, and Japanese troops quickly crushed the Boxer movement in bloody retaliation for the assault. The Chinese government had to pay a punitive indemnity and allow foreign powers to station troops in Beijing at their embassies and along the route to the sea.

Because Cixi had instigated the Boxers' attacks on foreigners, many Chinese regarded the Qing dynasty as bankrupt. Revolutionary uprisings gained widespread public support throughout the country, even among conservative Chinese gentry. Cixi died in November 1908, one day after the sudden, unexpected, and mysterious death of the emperor himself. In her last act of state, the empress dowager appointed the two-year-old boy Puyi to the imperial throne. But Puyi never had a chance to rule: revolution broke out in the autumn of 1911, and by early 1912 the last emperor of the Qing dynasty had abdicated his throne.



## THE TRANSFORMATION OF JAPAN

In 1853 a fleet of U.S. warships steamed into Tokyo Bay and demanded permission to establish trade and diplomatic relations with Japan. Representatives of European lands soon joined U.S. agents in Japan. Heavily armed foreign powers intimidated the Tokugawa shogun and his government, the *bakufu*, into signing unequal treaties providing political and economic privileges similar to those obtained earlier from the Qing dynasty in China. Opposition forces in Japan used the humiliating intrusion of foreigners as an excuse to overthrow the discredited shogun and the Tokugawa bakufu. After restoring the emperor to power in 1868, Japan's new rulers worked for the transformation of Japanese society to achieve political and economic equality

with foreign powers. The changes initiated during the Meiji period turned Japan into the political, military, and economic powerhouse of east Asia.

### ***From Tokugawa to Meiji***

By the early nineteenth century, Japanese society was in turmoil. Declining agricultural productivity, periodic crop failures and famines, and harsh taxation contributed to economic hardship and sometimes even led to starvation among the rural population. A few cultivators prospered during this period, but many had to sell their land and become tenant farmers. Economic conditions in towns and cities, where many peasants migrated in search of a better life, were hardly better than those in the countryside. As the price of rice and other commodities rose, the urban poor experienced destitution and hunger. Even samurai and daimyo faced hardship because they fell in debt to a growing merchant class. Under these conditions Japan experienced increasing peasant protest and rebellion during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The Tokugawa bakufu responded with conservative reforms. Between 1841 and 1843 the shogun's chief advisor, Mizuno Tadakuni, initiated measures to stem growing social and economic decline and to shore up the Tokugawa government. Mizuno canceled debts that samurai and daimyo owed to merchants, abolished several merchant guilds, and compelled peasants residing in cities to return to the land and cultivate rice. Most of his reforms were ineffective, and they provoked strong opposition that ultimately drove him from office.

Another problem facing the Tokugawa bakufu was the insistence on the establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations by foreign lands. Beginning in 1844, British, French, and U.S. ships visited Japan seeking to establish relations. The United States in particular sought ports where its Pacific merchant and whaling fleets could stop for fuel and provisions. Tokugawa officials refused all these requests and stuck to the policy of excluding all European and Euro-American visitors to Japan except for a small number of Dutch merchants, who carried on a carefully controlled trade in Nagasaki. In the later 1840s the bakufu began to make military preparations to resist potential attacks.

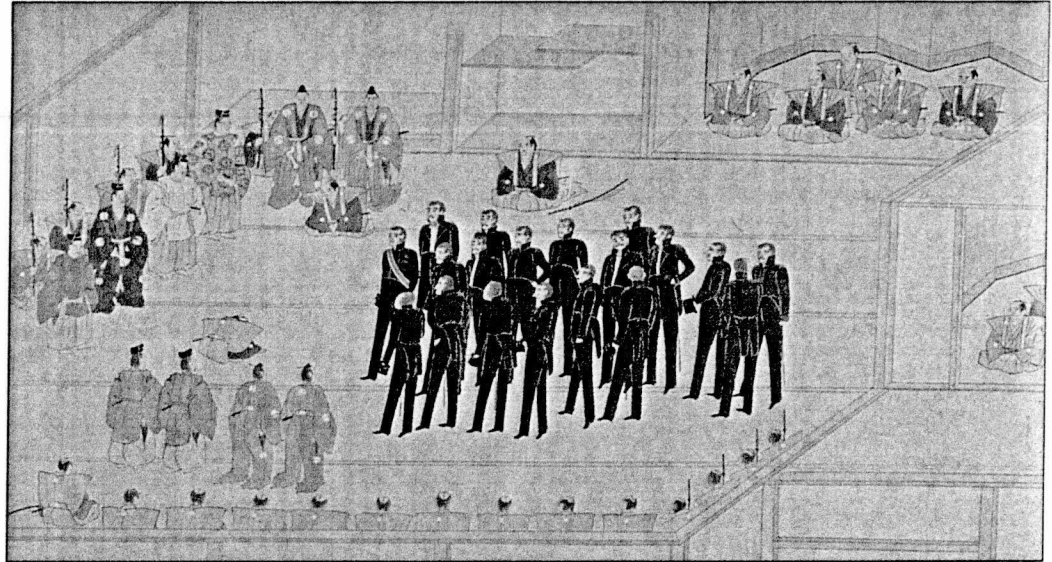
The arrival of a U.S. naval squadron in Tokyo Bay in 1853 abruptly changed the situation. The American commander, Commodore Matthew C. Perry, trained his guns on the bakufu capital of Edo (modern Tokyo) and demanded that the shogun open Japan to diplomatic and commercial relations and sign a treaty of friendship. The shogun had no good alternative and so quickly acquiesced to Perry's demands. Representatives of Britain, the Netherlands, and Russia soon won similar rights. Like Qing diplomats a few years earlier, Tokugawa officials agreed to a series of unequal treaties that opened Japanese ports to foreign commerce, deprived the government of control over tariffs, and granted foreigners extraterritorial rights.

The sudden intrusion of foreign powers precipitated a domestic crisis in Japan that resulted in the collapse of the Tokugawa bakufu and the restoration of imperial rule. When the shogun complied with the demands of U.S. and European representatives, he aroused the opposition of conservative daimyo and the emperor, who resented the humiliating terms of the unequal treaties and questioned the shogun's right to rule Japan as "subduer of barbarians." Opposition to Tokugawa authority spread rapidly, and the southern domains of Choshu and Satsuma became centers of discontented samurai. By 1858 the imperial court in Kyoto—long excluded from playing an active role in politics—had become the focal point for opposition. Dissidents there rallied around the slogan: "Revere the emperor, expel the barbarians."

*Crisis and Reform*

*Foreign Pressure*

*The End of  
Tokugawa Rule*



A Japanese view of an audience of the first U.S. Consul, Townsend Harris, with the Tokugawa shogun and his officials in 1859. • Laurie Platt Winfrey, Inc.

### *The Meiji Restoration*

Tokugawa officials did not yield power quietly. Instead, they vigorously responded to their opponents by forcibly retiring dissident daimyo and executing or imprisoning samurai critics. In a brief civil war, however, bakufu armies suffered repeated defeats by dissident militia units trained by foreign experts and armed with imported weapons. With the Tokugawa cause doomed, the shogun resigned his office. On 3 January 1868 the boy emperor Mutsuhito—subsequently known by his regnal name Meiji (“Enlightened Rule”)—took the reins of power. Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) reigned during a most eventful period in Japan’s history.

### *Meiji Reforms*

The Meiji restoration returned authority to the Japanese emperor and brought an end to the series of military governments that had dominated Japan since 1185. It also marked the birth of a new Japan. Determined to gain parity with foreign powers, a conservative coalition of daimyo, imperial princes, court nobles, and samurai formed a new government dedicated to the twin goals of prosperity and strength: “rich country, strong army.” The Meiji government looked to the industrial lands of Europe and the United States to obtain the knowledge and expertise to strengthen Japan and win revisions of the unequal treaties. The Meiji government sent many students and officials abroad to study everything from technology to constitutions, and it also hired foreign experts to facilitate economic development and the creation of indigenous expertise.

### *Foreign Influences*

Among the most prominent of the Meiji-era travelers were Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) and Ito Hirobumi (1841–1909). Fukuzawa began to study English soon after Perry’s arrival in Japan, and in 1860 he was a member of the first Japanese mission to the United States. Later he traveled also in Europe, and he reported his observations of foreign lands in a series of popular publications. He lauded the



constitutional government and modern educational systems that he found in the United States and western Europe, and he argued strongly for equality before the law in Japan. Hirobumi ventured abroad on four occasions. His most important journey came in 1882 and 1883, when he traveled to Europe to study foreign constitutions and administrative systems, as Meiji leaders prepared to fashion a new government. He was especially impressed with recently united Germany, and he drew inspiration from the German constitution in drafting a governing document for Japan.

The first goal of the Meiji leaders was to centralize political power, a ticklish task that required destruction of the old feudal order. After convincing daimyo to yield their lands to the throne in exchange for patents of nobility, reformers replaced the old domains with prefectures and metropolitan districts controlled by the central government. Reformers then appointed new prefectural governors to prevent the revival of old domain loyalties. As a result, most daimyo found themselves effectively removed from power. The government also abolished the samurai class and the stipends that supported it. Gone as well were the rights of daimyo and samurai to carry swords and wear their hair in the distinctive topknot that signified their military status. When Meiji leaders raised a conscript army, they deprived the samurai of the military monopoly they had held for centuries. Many samurai felt betrayed by these actions, and Meiji officials sought to ease their discontent by awarding them government bonds. As the bonds diminished in value because of inflation, former warriors had to seek employment or else suffer impoverishment. Frustrated by these new circumstances, some samurai rose in rebellion, but the recently created national army crushed all opposition. By 1878 the national government no longer feared military challenges to its rule.

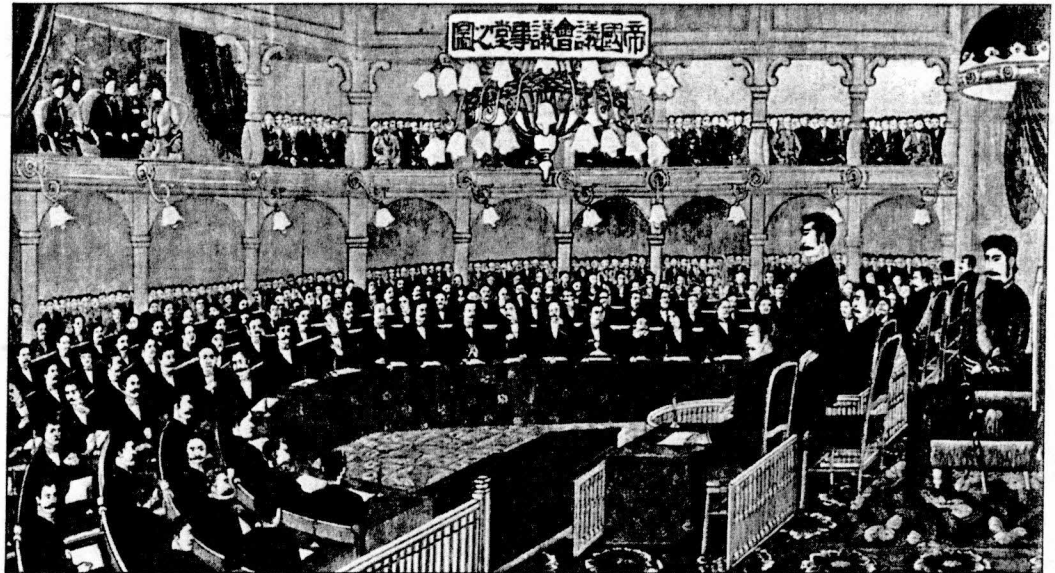
Japan's new leaders next put the regime on secure financial footing by revamping the tax system. Peasants traditionally paid taxes in grain, but because the value of grain fluctuated with the price of rice, so did government revenue. In 1873 the Meiji government converted the grain tax into a fixed-money tax, which provided the government with predictable revenues and left peasants to deal with market fluctuations in grain prices. The state also began to assess taxes on the potential productivity of arable land, no matter how much a cultivator actually produced. This measure virtually guaranteed that only those who maximized production could afford to hold on to their land. Others had to sell their land to more efficient producers.

The reconstruction of Japanese society continued in the 1880s under mounting domestic pressure for a constitution and representative government. These demands coincided with the rulers' belief that constitutions gave foreign powers their strength and unity. Accordingly, in 1889 the emperor promulgated the Meiji constitution as "a voluntary gift" to his people. Drafted under the guidance of Ito Hirobumi, this document established a constitutional monarchy with a legislature, known as the Diet, composed of a house of nobles and an elected lower house. The constitution limited the authority of the Diet and reserved considerable power to the executive branch of government. The "sacred and inviolable" emperor commanded the armed forces, named the prime minister, and appointed the cabinet. Both the prime minister and the cabinet were responsible to the emperor rather than the lower house, as in European parliamentary systems. The emperor also had the right to dissolve parliament, and whenever the Diet was not in session he had the prerogative of issuing ordinances. Effective power thus lay with the emperor, whom the parliament could

*Abolition of the Feudal Order*

*Revamping the Tax System*

*Constitutional Government*



The opening of the Japanese parliament in 1891 by the Meiji emperor, seated at the right. The assembly's main chamber, shown here, followed the design of European parliament buildings.

• Hulton Getty/Liaison Agency

advise but never control. The Meiji constitution recognized individual rights, but it provided that laws could limit those rights in the interests of the state, and it established property restrictions on the franchise ensuring that delegates elected to the lower house represented the most prosperous social classes. In the elections of 1890 less than 5 percent of the adult male population was eligible to cast ballots. Despite its conservative features, the Meiji constitution provided greater opportunity for debate and dissent than ever before in Japanese society.

### *Remodeling the Economy*

Economic initiatives matched efforts at political reconstruction. Convinced that a powerful economy was the foundation of national strength, the Meiji government created a modern transportation, communications, and educational infrastructure. The establishment of telegraph, railroad, and steamship lines tied local and regional markets into a national economic network. The government also removed barriers to commerce and trade by abolishing guild restrictions and internal tariffs. Aiming to improve literacy rates—40 percent for males and 15 percent for females in the nineteenth century—the government introduced a system of universal primary and secondary education. Universities provided advanced instruction for the best students, especially in scientific and technical fields. This infrastructure supported rapid industrialization and economic growth. While most economic enterprises were privately owned, the government controlled military industries and established pilot programs to stimulate industrial development. During the 1880s the government sold most of its enterprises to private investors who had close ties to governmental officials. The result was a concentration of enormous economic power in the hands of a small group of men, collectively known as *zaibatsu*, or financial cliques. By the early twentieth century, Japan had joined the ranks of the major industrial powers.

Economic development came at a price, as the Japanese people bore the social and political costs of rapid industrialization. Japanese peasants, for example, supplied much of the domestic capital that supported the Meiji program of industrialization. The land tax of 1873, which cost peasants 40 to 50 percent of their crop yields, produced almost 90 percent of government revenue during the early years of Meiji development. Foreign exchange to purchase industrial equipment came chiefly from the export of textiles produced in a labor-intensive industry staffed by poorly paid workers.

*Costs of Economic Development*

The difficult lot of peasants came to the fore in 1883 and 1884 with a series of peasant uprisings aimed at money lenders and government offices holding records of loans. The Meiji government deployed military police and army units to put down these uprisings, and authorities imprisoned or executed many leaders of the rebellions. Thereafter, the government did virtually nothing to alleviate the suffering of the rural population. Hundreds of thousands of families lived in destitution, haunted by malnutrition, starvation, and infanticide. Those who escaped rural society to take up work in the burgeoning industries learned that the state did not tolerate labor organizations that promoted the welfare of workers: Meiji law treated the formation of unions and the organization of strikes as criminal activities, and the government crushed a growing labor movement in 1901.

Nevertheless, in a single generation Meiji leaders transformed Japan into a powerful industrial society poised to play a major role in world affairs. Achieving political and economic equality with western European lands and the United States was the prime goal of Meiji leaders who sought an end to humiliating treaty provisions. Serving as symbols of Japan's remarkable development were the ending of extraterritoriality in 1899, the conclusion of an alliance with Britain as an equal power in 1902, and convincing displays of military prowess in victories over the Chinese empire (1894–1895) and the Russian empire (1904–1905).

**D**uring the nineteenth century Ottoman, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese societies faced severe challenges on both foreign and domestic fronts. Confrontations with western European and U.S. forces showed that the agrarian societies were militarily much weaker than industrializing lands. Ottoman, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese societies suffered also from domestic weaknesses brought on by growing populations, the slowing of agricultural productivity, official corruption, and declining imperial revenues. All these societies embarked on ambitious reform programs that drew inspiration from western European and U.S. models to solve the crises caused by domestic discontent and foreign intrusions on their sovereignty. But reform programs had very different results in different lands. In the Ottoman, Russian, and Chinese empires, conservative ruling elites were able to limit the scope of reform: while they generally supported industrialization and military reform, they stifled political and social reforms that might threaten their positions in society. In Japan, however, dissent led to the collapse of the Tokugawa bakufu, and reformers had the opportunity to undertake a much more thorough program of reform than did their counterparts in Ottoman, Russian, and Chinese societies. By the early twentieth century, on the basis of reforms implemented by Meiji leaders, Japan was becoming a political, military, and economic powerhouse.

## C H R O N O L O G Y

1805-1848	Reign of Muhammad Ali in Egypt
1808-1839	Reign of Sultan Mahmud II
1814-1864	Life of Taiping leader Hong Xiuquan
1839-1842	Opium War
1839-1876	Tanzimat era
1850-1864	Taiping rebellion
1853	Arrival of Commodore Perry in Japan
1853-1856	Crimean War
1855-1881	Reign of Tsar Alexander II
1860-1895	Self-Strengthening Movement
1861	Emancipation of the Russian serfs
1868	Meiji restoration
1876	Promulgation of the Ottoman constitution
1889	Promulgation of the Meiji constitution
1894-1917	Reign of Tsar Nicholas II
1898	Hundred Days reforms
1905	Revolution of 1905 in Russia
1908-1918	Young Turk era

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