

## Transitional Civilizations: The Islamic Empires and Qing China Summary.

**From Empire to Nation: Ottoman Retreat and the Birth of Turkey.** By the early eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was in decline. The weak rulers of the empire left the way open for power struggles among officials, religious experts, and Janissary commanders. Provincial administrators and landholders colluded to drain revenue from the central treasury. The general economy suffered from competition with the West as imported goods ruined local industry. European rivals took advantage of Ottoman weakness. The Austrians pushed the Ottomans from Hungary and the northern Balkans. The strengthened Russian state expanded into the Caucasus and Crimea. The subject Christian peoples of the Balkans challenged their rulers: the Greeks won independence 1830, and Serbia won independence in 1867.

**In Depth: Western Dominance and the Decline of Civilization.** Some general patterns have been associated with the decline of civilizations: internal weakness and external pressures; slow and vulnerable communications systems; ethnic, religious, and regional differences; corruption and the pursuit of pleasure. Nomads took advantage of such weaknesses, but rarely did a neighboring civilization play a major role in the demise of another. The European rise to world dominance from the eighteenth century fundamentally changed the patterns of the rise and fall of civilizations. In the Americas, European military assaults and diseases destroyed existing civilizations. African and Asian civilizations were able to withstand the early European arrival, but the latter's continuing development by the end of the eighteenth century made them dominant. The subordinate civilizations reacted differently. Some retreated into an idealized past; others absorbed ideas from their rulers. The various efforts at resistance did not all succeed. Some civilizations survived; others collapsed.

**Reform and Survival.** The Ottomans survived the continuing defeats partly because the European powers feared the consequences of territorial division among the victors. The British propped up the Ottomans during the latter nineteenth century to prevent the Russians from reaching the Mediterranean. The weakened empire was preserved by internal reform. Selim III's modest military and administrative reform attempts angered officials and the Janissaries; he was deposed and killed in 1807. Mahmud II was more successful. With the help of European advisors, he built a professional army that destroyed the Janissaries in 1826. Mahmud II then launched far-reaching reforms patterned on Western models. Between 1839 and 1876, the period of the Tanzimat reforms, university education was reorganized on Western lines, postal and telegraph systems were introduced, and railways were constructed. Newspapers were established, and in 1876 a European-type constitution was promulgated. The many changes opened the empire to Europeans and threatened some groups. Artisans lost out to the foreign competition. Women gained little from the reforms as Islamic patterns continued.

**Repression and Revolt.** The reforms strengthened the state, but they threatened the dynasty. Western-oriented officials, military officers, and professionals viewed the sultanate as a barrier to more reform. They also clashed with the conservative ulama and ayan. Sultan Abdul Hamid (1878-1908) responded by trying to return to despotic absolutism. He nullified the constitution and

restricted civil liberties, but he continued military and educational reform and railway and telegraph construction. Abdul Hamid's harsh rule ended in 1908 when he was removed by the Young Turks, reformers, including military officers, who wanted to continue Western-style reforms. The constitution and civil liberties were restored in a regime directed by a figurehead sultan. Factional fights among the reformers hampered their efforts, while wars in the Balkans and North Africa lost territory. The Arabs under Ottoman rule began to seek their independence. The empire survived, but in a very weakened condition, until Turkish entry into World War I resulted in its dissolution.

**Western Intrusions and the Crisis in the Arab Islamic Heartlands.** The leaders and thinkers of the Islamic world were divided about how to reverse decline and drive back Europeans. They argued over a spectrum ranging from a return to the past to the adoption of Western ways. By the nineteenth century, the Arabs under the weakened Ottoman Empire were exposed to the danger of European conquest. The loss of Islamic territory to the Europeans engendered a sense of crisis in the Middle East.

**Muhammad Ali and the Failure of Westernization in Egypt.** Napoleon's victory over the Ottoman Mamluk vassals in Egypt destroyed the existing local power balance. The easy victory of the French demonstrated the vulnerability of Muslim regions before European power. When the British forced French withdrawal, an Albanian Ottoman officer, Muhammad Ali, emerged as Egypt's ruler by 1811. He introduced European military reforms and created a powerful army and navy that freed him from dependence on his nominal Ottoman overlord. Muhammad Ali also attempted, with limited success, to modernize Egypt's economy through reforms in agriculture, infrastructure, education, and industry. To keep Egypt secure, Muhammad Ali allied with the powerful rural landlords to control the peasantry. The landlords resisted his reform efforts and remained a hereditary, entrenched class. The peasants were impoverished by the state's continuing demands. The limited scope of Muhammad Ali's reforms checked his plans for territorial expansion and left Egypt exposed to European threats. His successors confined their energies to Egypt and the Sudan.

**Bankruptcy, European Intervention, and Strategies of Resistance.** Muhammad Ali's less talented successors abandoned reform and allowed the ayan to profit at the expense of the peasantry. Egypt became dependent on the export of a single crop, cotton. State revenues were spent on extravagant pastimes and military campaigns in the Sudan. The regime and the elite became indebted to European creditors. The Europeans invested in the building of the Suez Canal, which opened in 1869. Muslim intellectuals and political activists looked for ways to protect Egypt from its inept rulers. The ancient University of al-Azhar became a focal center for Muslims from many lands. Some of the thinkers looked to the past, but others, such as al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, stressed the need for Muslims to adopt Western science and technology. They emphasized the importance of the tradition of rational inquiry in Islamic history and contested conservative views that the single source of truth was found in a literally interpreted Quran. The persisting difference between the rival interpretations damaged Muslim ability to meet the European threat. The growing Egyptian foreign debt and the strategic importance of the Suez Canal stimulated British and French thoughts of intervention. When army officer Ahmad Orabi led a revolt against the khedive in 1882, the British intervened to save the ruler. British consuls thereafter

directed the Egyptian government through puppet khedives.

**Jihad: The Mahdist Revolt in the Sudan.** The British were drawn into the disorder in the Sudan. Egyptian efforts at conquests from the 1820s had won only an insecure hold over fertile lands along the Nile and towns such as Khartoum. Camel nomads resisted their authority. The corrupt Egyptian regime oppressed sedentary farmers and alienated all classes by trying in the 1870s under British influence to end the slave trade. The Muslims of the Northern Sudan found a leader in Muhammad Achmad, a religious figure known as the Mahdi. He proclaimed a jihad against the Egyptians and British that would return Islam to its original purity. The Mahdi won control of the Sudan. After his death, the movement continued under the capable Khalifa Abdallahi. The Mahdists built a strong state with a society closely regulated by strict Islamic norms. The British ended this threat to European domination when General Kitchener crushed the Mahdist forces at Omdurman in 1896. Abdallahi was killed and the state disintegrated. The world of Islam suffered serious reverses during the nineteenth century. All efforts, from reform to resistance, did not halt the European advance. Local economies became dependent on European products and demands. As the century closed, Islam, still divided over the explanation for its decline, was seriously threatened by the European rulers of most of the world.

**The Last Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the Qing Empire in China.** The Manchu leader Nurhaci (1559-1626) united the tribes of his region into a formidable fighting force that conquered much of Manchuria and drove back the Chinese living to the north of the Great Wall. The Manchu elite increasingly adopted Chinese ways in bureaucracy and court ceremonies. Many of the Chinese scholar-gentry entered Manchu service. 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. Chinese and Manchu officials were paired at the highest posts. The examination system continued. The rulers were generous patrons of the arts and employed scholars to compile great encyclopedias of Chinese learning.

**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. Lower-class women continued to work in fields and markets. 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. Landlords increased their holdings and widened the gap between rural classes. Commercial and urban expansion increased under the peaceful conditions of the first century and during half 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. A new group of merchants, the compradors, who specialized in the

import-export trade along the southern coast, were a major link between China and the outside world.

**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. A semi-Christian prophet, Hong Xiuquan, began 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 and compradors became involved in plots to overthrow the regime and to create a government modeled on that of the West. Sun Yat-sen was one of their most articulate leaders. 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. Nonetheless, many Confucian attitudes survived to influence developments in the newly emerging China.

**Global Connections: Muslim and Chinese Decline and a Shifting Global Balance.** Both the seriously weakened civilizations of China and Islam were thrown into prolonged crisis by the challenge posed by the West. A shaken Islam survived, but Chinese civilization did not. Why? The Muslims had faced the threat of the West since the Middle Ages. The Chinese had to face a sudden and brutal challenge. Muslims shared many aspects of culture with Judeo-Christian and Greek tradition; their civilization had contributed to the rise of the West. The Chinese regarded Westerners as barbarians without a culture. The Muslims had many centers to defend; the fall of one dynasty did not mean the end of Islamic independence. They had time to learn during the long Western advance. To the Chinese, defense of their civilization meant survival of the Qing. Once the dynasty failed, the Chinese had little to fall back on. Muslims could cling to the truths of Islam, but the Chinese did not have a great indigenous religious tradition.