

## Early Modern East Asia: China, Japan and Korea

### CHINA: THE CH'ING DYNASTY TO 1800

The rise and fall of the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1911) was the final turning of the "dynastic circle" that, to many Chinese, seemed to be the pattern of their history. Like many previous dynasties, the Ch'ing dynasty rose vigorously, but eventually entered a period of decline that corresponded with the pressure for concessions from outside powers. The end of the dynasty came not from external invasions as much as from the inability of the Chinese government to hold the loyalty of key segments of Chinese society. But the weakened state of the Ch'ing dynasty in the century before its demise should not cause us to ignore the fact the Ch'ing period was a time of considerable vigor and accomplishment in Chinese political, economic and cultural life.

#### The Rise of Ch'ing

By 1644, the decline of the Ming dynasty had reached an advanced state. This made it relatively easy for Li Tzu-ch'eng's rebel band to take the capital of Peking, causing the suicide (by hanging) of the last Ming emperor. Li had little chance, however, to attempt to set up a dynasty of his own. In the area to the northeast, now known as Manchuria, loose tribal groupings had evolved into a more centralized political and military structure by the early seventeenth century. In 1636, the ruler of the federation, Abahai, took the name Ch'ing for his dynasty. (This was the year after Abahai had adopted the name "Manchu" for his people. The Ch'ing dynasty is sometimes referred to as the Manchu dynasty.) In the 1620s and 1630s the Manchus invaded Korea. They did not take over the government of that peninsular nation as they did in China, but they did force the Koreans to grudgingly accept a position of formal subordination to the Ch'ing state.

**China conquered.** Abahai himself hoped to conquer China, but he died in 1643 before being able to realize his dream. That task fell to his brother, Dorgon. In 1644, as Peking was in chaos due to Li Tzu-ch'eng's rebellion, Dorgon led an attack southward. The Chinese general in charge of border security, We San-kuei, threw in his lot with the Manchus rather than lend legitimacy to a traitorous rebel. Li's fate was thus sealed, and his followers fled. The Manchu army now occupied the capital, and Dorgon installed Abahai's young son as the new emperor.

**Continuity with Ming.** Despite the fact the Manchus ruled China by conquest, they maintained a considerable amount of continuity with the Ming dynasty they had replaced. This was done largely by design. China's Manchu conquerors realized that although they might be militarily superior to China, they were vastly outnumbered by the Chinese. In addition, the Chinese had a centuries old tradition of centralized rule, while the Manchus had relatively little experience on which to draw. It made sense, therefore, to follow established patterns of statecraft that had already been proven both acceptable to the Chinese and effective in administering the affairs of such a vast land.

**The Bureaucracy.** If they were to rule China successfully, the Manchus would have to win the support (if not initially the devotion) of the Confucian-educated elite. These people staffed the Chinese bureaucracy. At the local level, those who did not make it all the way into the central government bureaucracy were the leaders of rural society. One of the ways in which China's new rulers attempted to win the support of this class was to point out they had come to restore order – a cherished objective in Confucian thought. Wu San-Kuei, the general whose acquiescence had facilitated the initial Manchu advance, had been persuaded to side with them, at least in part, because of their promise to punish the usurper Li Tzu-ch'eng and give the deceased emperor a decent Confucian burial. And this they did before entering Peking. It did not change the fact that the Ming dynasty was no more, but it was an important symbolic act which helped calm, though it did not eliminate, continuing Ming loyalism.

The Manchu leaders continued to staff the Ch'ing government with Chinese officials, both as a practical matter and for public relations purposes. Much of the structure of the Ming state was retained. There was no effort to replace Chinese culture with that of Manchuria. In fact, the Manchus continued a process of "sinification" of their own state that had begun even before the conquest of China. Because being "civilized" was traditionally more important in China than the place from which a person came, the Manchu's ability to adopt and continue traditional Chinese practices was a major reason that anti-Manchu sentiment was not a major issue during much of the Ch'ing period.

**Ethnic Distinctions.** This is not to say the Manchus did not recognize differences between themselves and the Chinese. In order to preserve some cultural and ethnic distinctiveness, Chinese emigration to Manchuria was forbidden for most of the Ch'ing period, as was intermarriage between Chinese and Manchus. In addition, at least at the top levels of the government, the Manchus tried to create a balance between Manchu and Chinese officials.

### **Structure of Ch'ing Society**

**The Mandate of Heaven.** Like the Ming, the Ch'ing emperor continued to reign from the capital at Peking. In theory, the emperor had absolute power in China. Confucian theories of statecraft stated that the ruling dynasty, and the reigning emperor in particular, possessed a "Mandate of Heaven" sanctioning their control. This is not to be confused with the idea of "divine right" that buttressed many absolutist monarchs in Europe. The Chinese concept of "heaven" was much more amorphous than the God of Christianity. Nevertheless, as the "Son of Heaven," the Chinese emperor was seen as a crucial link between the affairs of this world and whatever was beyond this world. But despite the fact that the emperor was theoretically absolute, in reality any emperor's ability to exert control depended on how well he was able to control the bureaucracy. There were always elements within the Chinese government anxious to act in the emperor's name if he did not have the personality or the political will to exert his own prerogatives.

**Social Structure.** Ch'ing China was an overwhelmingly agricultural society. Chinese social theory officially held to a social order in which peasants were esteemed just below the scholar-official class and above artisans and merchants. This hierarchy recognized that although the scholars might be the rulers, the peasants were the backbone of the state. The connection between the structure of the state and the actual functioning of local society was personified in the local magistrate, who was the state's representative but had to operate within the framework of local society. Moreover, though the "commoners" (below scholar-official rank) were classified into three broad groupings, none of these groups was homogeneous. Each could be further subdivided into smaller groups enjoying greater or lesser prestige, wielding greater or lesser local influence, and possessing greater or lesser wealth.

**Examination System.** In theory, in China (unlike Japan) almost any male could potentially become a member of the civil service. Government service was still the preferred career objective for ambitious young men. And the examination system did provide for a certain amount of social mobility in China. But in practice, the odds were against a peasant succeeding in the examinations. The incredible amount of study time needed to prepare for the examinations was the luxury of the wealthy, leisured class. For those who did succeed, the rewards could be considerable: prestige, tax exemptions, eligibility for government service and possibly access to the corridors of power in Peking.

### **Pressure from the West**

The end of a period of vigorous imperial rule in China coincided with an increased desire on the part of Westerners to trade with China. Most trade to this point had been one-sided in favor of China. The Chinese had items the Europeans wanted to buy (spices, silk, porcelain, tea), but the Europeans could find nothing the Chinese were willing to buy in large quantities. Consequently, European traders had a sizable trade deficit with China. Nevertheless, the persistent Westerners were determined to stay in China. They wanted not only the goods the Chinese produced, they wanted to penetrate the potentially huge Chinese market as well.

### **The Canton System and British Efforts to Change It**

The Chinese lack of interest in what the West was bringing, combined with a cultural predisposition to look down on commercial activity, led Chinese leaders to place strict limits on the trade that was allowed. Westerners (primarily British and Dutch) could trade only at Canton, in southern China (safely away from Peking). And even in Canton they were subject to restrictions on mobility and lifestyle. This approach to foreign trade has become known as the "Canton System."

**Sir George McCartney.** The British finally lost patience with this system and attempted to change it. In 1793, King George III sent Sir George McCartney at the head of a mission to try to establish "normal" diplomatic relations with China. The British emissary never really had a chance to present his case. The fiasco is an indication of just how far apart the two sides were in their assumptions about dealing between countries. For centuries, the Chinese had considered foreign representatives to bearers of tribute from their home countries. For the Chinese perspective, the payment of tribute was the price willingly paid

for access to the higher civilization that emanated from China. Lord McCartney, also bearing gifts, looked like another tribute-bearing foreign envoy, but he had no such thoughts. As the personal representative of his king, he was not about to perform the ritual of prostrating himself before the emperor three times and knocking his head on the floor as a sign of submission, which was required of all foreign emissaries. McCartney's refusal to conform to these rituals meant he was never able to get to the matters at the heart of his mission. Another mission in 1816, led by Lord Amherst, had a similarly unfruitful ending.

**The Value of Tea.** The main item the British were interested in buying from China was tea. Tea was in many ways a more attractive commodity than were luxury goods because nearly everyone in Britain drank tea; it was affordable by a majority of the population. British traders also supplied Chinese tea to British colonies overseas. The main trader in tea, the East India Company, found tea a lucrative trading item back home, but also a necessary one. The Company's conquest of India in the mid-eighteenth century had been financed by the crown, and profits from the tea trade were used to pay back the debt. And the government had its own interest in the tea trade beyond repayment of loans: it levied a 100 percent duty on imported tea.

**Tea and Cotton.** The difficulty for the British was that they had no item that the Chinese would buy in sufficient quantities to keep the trade going. Initially, the British traded Indian cotton from their plantations there, but British demand for tea was such that the merchants had to supplement Indian cotton with cash payments in silver, creating a negative trade balance. Two developments in the late eighteenth century increased the problems for the British. First, the United States War for Independence ended England's easy access to New World silver. Second, the Chinese began shipping their own raw cotton from the north, along the China coast, to Canton, where it could be sold at a lower price than Indian cotton. More than ever before, the British needed to find a product that could replace not only Indian cotton in the tea trade, but silver as well.

## The Opium Trade

It turned out that India was well suited for the growing and refining of opium, a high addictive drug that had been used medicinally in China for hundreds of years. This seemed like the perfect answer to Britain's trade dilemma. Their Indian colony was put to good use producing opium, there seemed to be a large market for the drug in China (and the practice of giving out free samples did not hurt business), and the East India Company was able to get all the tea they could transport by this means. In fact, so popular did opium use become in China that the balance of trade was quickly reversed. Now silver was flowing out of China in large quantities.

**Opium and the Economy.** Opium smoking was prohibited in China, but this did not prevent the British and their employees from continuing to sell it. In effect, the British craving tea was satisfied by drug smuggling. By the 1830s, the opium trade amounted to millions of silver dollars and hundreds of tons of opium annually. In addition to its debilitating effects on the users themselves, the opium trade had a serious negative impact on the peasant economy, which was the basis of the entire national economy. There were two currencies in China, copper and silver. Farmers used copper for most small transactions, but taxes had to be paid in silver. This meant that a farmer had to exchange copper for silver in order to pay taxes. Currency exchange, like other economic transactions, follows the law of supply and demand. As silver flowed out of China, it became more expensive for farmers to obtain the needed silver to pay their taxes. Because tax rates did not vary with the rate of exchange between copper and silver, the opium trade resulted in sudden, steep tax increases on China's peasants.

The government finally decided that forceful action was necessary. The emperor appointed Lin Tse-hsu to go to Canton and resolve the problem. A capable bureaucrat, Lin was determined to take whatever steps were necessary to put an end to the traffic in opium. He was quite successful, in fact, in shutting down the internal supply network and rounding up Chinese drug dealers, but he wanted to go further and attack the problem at its roots. This meant demanding that the British merchants agree not to continue bringing the drug into the country. Lin's efforts fell short here. Though they did turn over some 21,000 chests of opium (which they had not been able to sell anyway due to Lin's crackdown), the British merchants refused to sign an agreement that they would end the opium trade permanently.

**The Opium War.** At this point, the dispute went beyond words and legal arguments, resulting in what is known as the Opium War (1839-1842). The Chinese were ill prepared to take on the force of British firepower and were plagued by tactical mistakes. After a series of one-sided battles, the Chinese were forced to accept British surrender terms. The Treaty of Nanking, signed in 1842, was supplemented and elaborated on by later treaties. Key provisions included the opening of several Chinese ports to foreign

trade, the ceding of Hong Kong to the British, the establishment of a low tariff on Western goods, the right of foreign nationals to be tried by courts of their own country rather than by Chinese courts ( a practice known as “extraterritoriality”), and most-favored-nation rights for Western nations (guaranteeing that China could not grant a concession to one country without granting it to all). All of these terms had the effect of limiting Chinese sovereignty. For this reason, the treaties have become known as the “unequal treaties.” They were not so much negotiated as they were dictated by the victors. The Opium War settlement set the pattern for Chinese foreign relations through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

**The Opium War as a Clash of Cultures.** The Opium War (and another round of fighting and treaties in the years between 1856 and 1860) was as much a clash of cultures as it was a clash of arms. The Chinese, content with what their culture and economy had to offer them and comfortable in centuries-old patterns of foreign relations that kept them at the center of their world, were not prepared to change their assumptions about how the world operated just because the Westerners wanted them to. England, on the other hand, was building an overseas empire in an age when political and economic competition would not allow them to back down – both for reasons of national pride and for fear that some other country would replace them in the China market. The Chinese were accustomed to dealing with other states as tributaries; the British were unwilling to accept their inferior status, insisting instead on having their diplomats accepted as the equals of Chinese officials and their sovereign as the equal of the Chinese emperor, the Son of Heaven. Finally, the Opium War dramatically demonstrated some of the early effects of the Industrial Revolution on the history of the world. Europeans could now forcefully project their power around the globe, enabling them to build political and commercial empires unheard of before. Despite China’s millennia-old tradition of cultural brilliance and technological sophistication, it was not prepared to deal with this new threat from the West. Much of China’s history during the 150 years following the Opium War is a story of struggle to shake off the yoke of imperialism and regain its position at the forefront of the world’s civilizations.

## **The Fall of the Ch’ing**

The final seventy years of Manchu rule in China were marked by continued Western pressure, internal rebellion and efforts at reform and strengthening. Following the signing of treaties opening Chinese ports to foreign trade and later treaties that specifically included the right of missionaries to propagate their faith, Westerners were much more of a presence in China than ever before. The British were the predominate presence, but they were joined by the French and other foreigners. The Opium War had not ended the Opium trade. Foreigners continued to export tea and silk from China and to import opium and other goods. By the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese tea had declined in importance as a trade item with the increase in production of Indian tea.

**The Taiping Rebellion.** In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Chinese government had to face a threat more immediate and serious than Western pressure. The Taiping rebellion was the most serious rebellion of the Ch’ing period and came close to toppling the dynasty. A frustrated civil service aspirant named Hung Hsiu-Ch’uan had gathered around himself a band of followers, initially from disadvantaged or marginal elements of Chinese society. They were originally a religious group, called the Society of God Worshipers. Claiming to have received visions from God, Hung fashioned a theology and social ideology that combined elements of Christianity with classical Chinese ideas. By 1850, the Ch’ing government saw Hung’s burgeoning group as a threat, with its call for ousting the Manchus and establishing a “Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace” (*T’ai-p’ing t’ien-kuo*, from which is derived the name “Taiping Rebellion”). Imperial forces were dispatched to suppress the movement, but they were unable to defeat the tenacious Taiping rebels. The central government finally had to call on regional commanders to organize armies to fight the rebels. In the process, the government was forced to grant numerous concessions to the regional armies. But it was these forces that finally defeated the Taiping Rebellion in 1864, at great cost. Estimates of loss of life over the course of the rebellion range as high as 40 million. In addition, much of the important lower Yangtze River valley, where the Taipings held out in the city of Nanking beginning in 1853, was devastated. The Ch’ing dynasty was saved, but at the expense of a considerable amount of central government authority. The balance of power now shifted to the provinces, the domains of the regional commanders who defeated the rebellions.

**Impact of Foreign Imperialism.** The last decade or so of the nineteenth century was the heyday of imperialism in China, as in many parts of the world. China was involved in disputes with one foreign power after another during these years. A territorial dispute with Russia ended with the signing of a treaty in 1881, but this was a case of a potential conflict being settled by negotiation. There was a different

outcome in Indochina (Vietnam). In 1884 and 1885, China and France went to war over the issue of French dominance in the area that had traditionally been part of China hegemony. The French won the war, winning reparations, greater commercial rights, and recognition of their position in Indochina.

The conflict that really demonstrated the weakness of China was not against a Western power, but against Japan. China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 not only demonstrated the power of an invigorated Japan, but also undermined any confidence the Western powers had in China as a result of earlier reform efforts. The foreigners thus began to divide China up into spheres of influence.

**Sun Yat-sen.** By 1911, the Ch'ing dynasty was weak, life was getting harder in the countryside, radical ideas were becoming more widespread (i.e. the Boxer Rebellion), and China's semicolonial status was as apparent as ever. Sun Yat-sen, a farmer's son who was educated in Hawaii and Hong Kong, made several unsuccessful attempts to lead revolts that would overthrow the government, but he was more successful at fund raising and organizing than at revolution. Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century the number of adherents to Sun's "Revolutionary Alliance" grew to around 10,000.

**The Dynasty Topped.** Though Sun is often credited with being the "father" of the movement that finally toppled the Ch'ing government, the dynasty's fall is not attributable solely to Sun's organization, personality or ideas. A combination of radical youths, disaffected soldiers, angry peasants, and indifferent officials, united less by common objectives than by the accident of timing, proved too much for the weakened dynasty to bear. This was demonstrated convincingly by a provincial rebellion that began in Wuhan in October 1911. In February 1912, the last Manchu emperor, the young boy Pu-yi, abdicated, clearing the way for the establishment of a republican government.

## THE TOKUGAWA PERIOD IN JAPAN (1600-1868)

The two and a half centuries during which the Tokugawa family ruled Japan was a time of general peace, but below the surface there were important social, political and economic changes at work. These changes came to the surface in the nineteenth century, just as the West began to pay renewed attention to Japan.

### The Tokugawa Settlement

When Tokugawa Ieyasu defeated his foes at the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, he emerged as the preeminent military figure in Japan. He was awarded the title of shogun in 1603. The shogun was the man who, in the name of the emperor, was responsible for running the affairs of the state. His government, generally known as the shogunate or *bakufu* (military government), was the actual center of political power, while the emperor reigned above the political fray in his traditional capital of Kyoto. Tokugawa Ieyasu's base of operations in Edo (now called Tokyo) became the seat of his government and the de facto political capital of Japan. But because the victory at Sekigahara had not resulted in the complete extinction of their enemies, the Tokugawa family had to find ways to control potential threats to their position.

**Problems.** Tokugawa Ieyasu's most immediate problem was how to control the *daimyo*, lords of large domains that covered the majority of the country. All of them officially pledged loyalty to the Tokugawa family, but the family's position was not so unassailable that they could rely simply on pledges. The Tokugawa even classified daimyo according to their supposed loyalty, distinguishing between those who had been allies prior to 1600 and those who pledged their loyalty only after Sekigahara. There was also a small group of daimyo who were related to the Tokugawa family. Some of the so-called "outer" (*tozama*) daimyo – those whose loyalty was the most suspect – happened to possess some of the largest domains.

**Control Measures.** The Tokugawa instituted various measures designed to control the daimyo and thus maintain stable rule for their family. The most important was the "alternate-attendance" system. Each daimyo was required to spend half his time in Edo and half in his domain. This served several purposes. The most obvious is that it gave the Tokugawa a chance to keep close watch on the daimyo while they were in Edo (normally every other year, though the specific arrangements could vary.) But there were other aspects to this system as well. When the daimyo left Edo to return to his domain, he had to leave his wife and his heir behind, in effect hostages to the shogun to ensure the daimyo's good behavior. In addition, the expense of maintaining large households both in Edo and in their domains and in making the regular trips between the two places was a serious drain on daimyo finances. This was part of the

intention of the system, since a daimyo spending large sums of time and money traveling to and from Edo would have less of both to devote to building an army or plotting against the government.

Other control measures included government inspection of castle repairs and regulations on marriages between daimyo families; the Tokugawa also retained the right to move daimyo from one domain to another in order to make Japan's strategic layout more pleasing to them.

## Structure of Tokugawa Japan

**Foreign Policy.** The Tokugawa government also instituted an official "closed country" foreign policy. This policy was adopted in part to prevent coastal daimyo from benefiting by foreign contact, but the government was also worried that Christianity might undermine social order. The first half of the seventeenth century was a time of severe persecution of Christians, with tens of thousands losing their lives.

Foreign travel was outlawed, and foreign trade was severely curtailed. Although trade with China and Korea continued, Western trade was cut off with the exception of the Dutch. The Tokugawa concluded that of all Europeans, the Dutch were least interested in spreading Christianity. They were therefore allowed limited trading privileges at the island of Deshima, off Nagasaki. Because these Dutch traders were the only regular contact between Japan and Europe for centuries, so-called "Dutch scholars" (*rangakusha*) became an important source for the limited knowledge of the Western world that entered Japan.

**Standard of Living.** Though economic development was uneven, there was a general rise in the standard of living during the Tokugawa period. There were a number of reasons for this. One was the fact that more land was being brought under cultivation through reclamation and assarting. Because peasants knew that taxation was regular and predictable, they had an incentive to produce a surplus to keep for themselves or sell. In addition, technical improvements (tools, fertilizers and draft animals), better water control, and new crops all resulted in an overall increase in agricultural production during the Tokugawa period. During the first half of the period, cultivated land may have doubled in productivity. Population also increased in the early Tokugawa period, but it apparently leveled off sometime in the eighteenth century and may have been on the decline by the end of the period.

**The New Merchant Class and Urban Culture.** The increasing diversification and specialization of the Japanese economy led to the growth of a merchant class that moved goods from one part of the country to another and sold them. Looked down upon in the official Confucian ideology, merchants were a vital part of the Tokugawa economy, and with the increasing commercialization of the economy, many merchants became very wealthy, but they had few opportunities to use this wealth. They were effectively cut off from direct political influence and the government passed many sumptuary laws that limited other ways in which they might spend their money. As a result, concurrent with the rise of cities as commercial centers, there was the development of a rich urban culture, fueled by the money of the merchants. Beginning in the late seventeenth century there was an explosion of art, literature, theatre, and pleasure seeking, drawing themes from what the Japanese referred to as the "floating world" (*ukiyo*) – a world that was as much psychological and emotional as physical. "Eat, drink and be merry" might have been the watchwords of the new urban culture.

## The Decline of the Tokugawa

The very changes that led to commercial and cultural growth during the Tokugawa also led to problems. In spite of economic development, the shogunate and many daimyo found that there were in economic difficulty. They were spending more than what they brought in. There were few options for solving this problem, none of them especially attractive. They could raise taxes, but they then ran the risk of inciting peasant protests. The growing merchant economy was not taxed as rapidly as it grew, which left more money available for merchants to spend on the pursuit of pleasure, but also added to their frustration with a system that left them wealthy but lacking in power and prestige. The government tried to deal with its shortfall through such methods as cutting the stipends of bureaucrats and acquiring loans from the wealthy merchant houses, but there was a limit to how far such measures could be taken.

**Social Problems.** There were also social problems in the late Tokugawa period, including the growth and rearrangement of class distinctions. The gap between the wealthy peasants and the rest of the farming population grew, and despite an official social ideology that placed the warriors (samurai) at the top of the social order and the merchants at the bottom, the merchants with their great wealth slowly began to encroach on some areas of samurai privilege. This was demoralizing to many samurai (who, as a group,

had already been reduced from actual fighting warriors to bureaucrats in Japan's peacetime government), who saw in this an indication that the system that had supported them for centuries was breaking down. There were many peasant uprisings during the Tokugawa period for a variety of reasons, but their number increased in the nineteenth century. As strains in the old social and political system increased, the major groups in Japanese society – samurai, peasants and merchants – found they had less of a stake in the continuation of that system

**Commodore Perry.** In July 1853, an American naval officer, Commodore Matthew C. Perry, sailed into Tokyo Bay at the head of a small squadron of ships. He bore a letter from President Millard Fillmore requesting trade and diplomatic relations with Japan. It is important to note that this expedition was headed by a military officer; Perry was prepared to back up his demands with force, if necessary.

**Response to the West.** The arrival of Perry, though expected, caused a crisis in Japan. Many wished to continue the traditional policy of seclusion, but the Japanese knew of the Chinese experience with the British and did not have to experience Western military might firsthand to know they were up against a formidable force. The Chinese experience also showed what defeat would mean for Japan: the same kind of humiliation that China had suffered at the hands of a Western power. The Tokugawa government finally gave into Perry's demands; in 1858 a treaty was signed with the United States, the first in a series of treaties with Western nations. These treaties contained many of the provisions that were part of the "unequal treaties" signed with China, including the opening of ports and extraterritoriality.

Resentment toward the government increased after the signing of these treaties. The shogunate proved incapable of making a strong stand one way or another in the face of the foreign crisis. With the shogunate no longer able to command the loyalty of the daimyo, the emperor reemerged as the only symbol capable of uniting the country.

**Satsuma-Choshu Alliance.** Disaffection from the government was especially potent in the two domains of Satsuma and Chosu. Traditionally antagonistic toward the Tokugawa, these two domains were also among the largest, strongest and most financially healthy of all the domains in Japan. When they formed an alliance against the Tokugawa government and were joined by samurai activists from other domains, the days of Tokugawa rule were numbered.

**The Emperor Restored.** In January 1868, the leading anti-shogunate daimyo, now in control of the imperial palace in Kyoto, issued a declaration in the name of the young emperor stating that Tokugawa rule was at an end. In theory, at least, the Meiji emperor (as he came to be known) was restored to a position of both reigning and ruling in Japan. This event, the "Meiji restoration," was symbolized by the emperor moving from Kyoto to Edo – renamed Tokyo – taking up residence in the shogun's former palace, and Japan moved closer to developing an industrial economy based largely on models from the West.

## KOREA

Korea is a peninsular nation tucked between China and Japan. Though independent for many centuries, it has traditionally served as a bridge between the mainland and Japan for the transmission of culture, ideas, and soldiers. Especially at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Korea became a hotbed of international power politics because of its strategic location, which was of interest to China, Japan, Russia, the United States and various European powers. In the end, Korea was made a victim of imperialism in a more direct sense than either China or Japan, as it was absorbed into the Japanese empire in the early twentieth century. The country's geopolitical position had led Koreans to sometimes refer to their country as "a shrimp among whales."

### The Korean State

**The King and the Bureaucracy.** Korea was a Confucian state, with power concentrated in the hands of a king and bureaucracy. In accordance with Confucian theory, the king was absolute. In reality he had to share power with an entrenched aristocracy that owed its position not just to royal favor but to a combination of landed wealth, traditional family prestige, and a pedigree dotted with people who held positions of importance in the government. This elite group controlled the bureaucracy and used it as a check on royal authority.

**Farmers.** As in China and Japan, Korea's population was predominately farmers. They provided not only the food on which everyone lived, but also the taxes that kept the machinery of government in operation. They were dominated by the same large landholding class that had a monopoly on high bureaucratic positions.

**Korea and China.** For centuries, Korea was a “tribute state” of the Chinese empire. In other words, the Koreans agreed to send regular missions to China, bearing gifts for the emperor and trade goods to exchange along the way. The Chinese emperor, in turn, invested the Korean king with his seal of authority. The relationship was one of overt inequality, but it was acceptable to both sides. The prestige of the Chinese emperor was enhanced, the Chinese were confirmed of their China-centered worldview, and they gained an acquiescent state on their border. The Korean king gained an added measure of legitimation and the tribute system kept the avenues of trade open. In addition, accepting tributary status was better than worrying about the possibility of Chinese invasion to enforce its terms on Korea, and it made for good foreign policy as well. As long as the Koreans kept the forms of the tribute relationship, the Chinese were content to leave them alone.

### **Korea in Nineteenth Century International Politics.**

**Treaty of Kanghwa.** In 1876, Japan, having learned about “gunboat diplomacy” from its experience with the United States two decades earlier, forced the signing of the Treaty of Kanghwa, Korea’s first modern treaty. Among other results, the signing of this treaty brought Korea out of the exclusive sphere of Chinese influence. The establishment of a Japanese legation in their traditional sphere of influence disturbed the Chinese and they dispatched their own representatives to Seoul as well.

**International Conflict in Korea.** Beginning in 1882, a series of treaties were signed between Korea and Western states. The United States was the first of the Western powers to establish treaty relations with Korea, but other nations quickly followed suit. The increased visibility of foreign interests inevitably led to international competition. The rivalry between Russia and Japan was particularly intense. These two states – both neighbors to Korea – saw their influence on the peninsula as vital to their national security. In 1884, an attempted coup d’etat by a group of young reformers, many of them inspired by Japanese reforms, nearly led to a war between Japan and China. Fighting was averted, and each side agreed that neither would introduce troops into Korea without notifying the other.

**The Tonghak Rebellion.** A test of this agreement was not long in coming. Poor social conditions had combined with increasing foreign influence to create a great deal of popular unrest. In 1894, this anger exploded into the Tonghak Rebellion. The Korean court asked for help in quelling the rebellion from its traditional ally China, which sent a contingent of troops. Japan also sent troops, but the rebels had dispersed before the foreign troops were in a position to deal with the. Instead, Japanese and Chinese soldiers ended up fighting each other instead, sparking the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895.

**Korea Extinguished and Japan Takes Over.** With Japan’s victory and the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, Korea was officially declared an independent, sovereign state. What this meant, of course, was that anyone was free to establish any kind of relationship the Koreans would allow. Japan’s defeat of Russia in 1905 eliminated Japan’s major rival for dominance in East Asia. Agreements with the United States that same year acknowledged Japan’s special interests in Korea (in exchange for Japanese recognition of America’s special interest in the Philippines). Japan wasted no time in taking advantage of these agreements. In 1905, it established a “protectorate” in Korea. Five years later, Japan annexed Korea outright, extinguishing its status as an independent, sovereign state and absorbing it into the Japanese empire.