Chapter 31

Civilizations in Crisis:
The Ottoman Empire, the Islamic Heartlands, and Qing China

OUTLINE

I. Introduction

In the Middle Eastern empires and Qing China, problems of internal political decline were accentuated by the menace of Western intrusion. It appeared that China would recover fully under the Manchus and that the forces of Western merchants could be contained at the ports of Macao and Canton. Qing China appeared as safely dominant in East Asia as ever. In contrast, the Ottoman Empire seemed on the verge of collapse in the 18th century. Internal independence movements, European encroachments, and political disarray at Constantinople seemed to be harbingers of imminent disaster. By the beginning of the 19th century, the picture had changed. European military intervention in China exposed the Qing dynasty as weak to external assault. Internal disruptions swept away the imperial system of China, leaving little in its place. Foreign forces competed for dominance in the wreckage of the Qing Empire. The Ottoman Empire recovered from its 18th-century malaise. Although much of the Middle East was lost, Turkish reformers overthrew the sultanate, but quickly reformulated a new government.

II. From Empire to Nation: Ottoman Retreat and the Birth of Turkey

A. Introduction

The Ottoman Empire depended on capable sultans. When the quality of rulers declined, internal disintegration was rapid. Factional struggles within the palace and corruption of provincial officials paralyzed the government. As competition with European imports destroyed the market for Ottoman products, urban artisans rebelled. The Ottomans became progressively more dependent on European goods. External pressures were also severe. First the Habsburg Empire and then the Russians seized territory. Independence movements in the Balkans also challenged and eventually threw off Ottoman rule.

B. Reform and Survival

Britain’s intervention in the Mediterranean to prevent Russian access actually saved the Ottoman Empire from collapse in the later 19th century. Survival came to depend on the abilities of individual sultans to enact reforms. Attempts by Sultan Selim III to enact military and administrative changes angered the Janissaries, who overthrew him in 1807. Fear of Janissary conservatism led Sultan Mahmud II to destroy the corps in 1826. With less to fear from military reaction, Mahmud created a diplomatic corps and westernized the remaining military forces. In the Tanzimiat reforms from 1839 to 1836, Westernization was introduced to other facets of Ottoman society. University education was reorganized, postal and telegraph
systems were introduced, newspapers were established, and legal reforms were mandated. A new constitution along Western lines appeared in 1876 as the culmination of the reforms. Artisans suffered from the opening of the empire to Western trade, and women gained little from the reforms.

C. Repression and Revolt

As the reforms produced a Western-educated elite, many came to view the sultanate itself as archaic. Sultan Abdul Hamid reacted to the perceived threat by nullifying the new constitution and imprisoning many of the Western-oriented elite. Resistance to Abdul Hamid’s reactionism led to his overthrow by the Young Turks in 1908. A group of military officers seized the government, restored the constitution, and promised additional reforms. The sultan was reduced to a powerless religious figurehead. The officers who ran the government proved no more successful than the sultans in maintaining the farther outposts of the Ottoman Empire. Arab portions of the empire became increasingly resistant to the maintenance of Turkish rule. Turkish participation in World War I on the side of the Germans initiated the final dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.

III. Western Intrusions and the Crisis in the Arab Islamic Heartlands

A. Introduction

By the early 19th century, the Ottomans had controlled the Arab peoples of the Middle East for centuries. Arabs were aware of the diminishing capacity of the Turks to defend them from European encroachments.

B. Muhammad Ali and the Failure of Westernization in Egypt

Following the French withdrawal from Egypt in 1801, Muhammad Ali, an Albanian army officer, emerged as the ruler of the region. He introduced Western-style military reforms that enabled him to ignore the Ottoman sultan. Muhammad Ali extended his control to Arab Syria. Attempts to introduce economic reforms based on the production of commercial crops for export were less successful. After his death in 1848, Muhammad Ali’s successors were unable to maintain his military dominance and retreated to Egypt and the Sudan. The successors were referred to as khedives after 1867.

C. Bankruptcy, European Intervention, and Strategies of Resistance

Muhammad Ali’s successors continued his general plans with disastrous results. Cotton production expanded at the expense of food products. As a single export commodity, Egyptian cotton was vulnerable to price and demand swings in the world market. Educational reforms were limited to the elite. The general population barely profited from the reforms. By the middle of the 19th century, the khedives were heavily in debt to European creditors. Europeans were attracted to Egyptian cotton and the plan to construct the Suez Canal, completed in 1869. Islamic intellectuals met in Egypt to discuss means of expelling the European threat. Some argued for strict Islamic religious observance, others for greater Westernization in science and technology. The two groups were unable to reconcile their different approaches. French and British investors, who held the majority of shares in the Suez Canal, urged their governments to intervene directly in Egypt. An Egyptian army rebellion under Ahmad Orabi induced the British to send military units to Egypt in 1882. Thereafter the administration of Egypt was in the hands of British consuls.
D. Jihad: The Mahdist Revolt in the Sudan

Egyptian forces had long been engaged in attempts to extend control down the Nile River into the Sudan. The khedives enjoyed little success, and their control was limited to towns, such as Khartoum. Attempts in the 1870s to eliminate the slave trade added to the discontent with Egyptian overlordship in the Sudan. Resistance to Egyptian and British influence was focused by Muhammad Achmad, head of a Sufi brotherhood in the Sudan. Taking the title of Mahdi, Muhammad Achmad claimed descent from Muhammad and declared a jihad. He offered to purge Islam of foreign influences and restore purity. The military forces of the Mahdi enjoyed military success against the Egyptians until his death from disease. His role as leader of the Sudan insurgence was taken by Khalifa Abdallahi. A British expeditionary force led by General Kitchener finally defeated the Mahdist army in a campaign from 1896 to 1898. The British thus extended their power along the Nile. Much Islamic territory passed under the control of Western forces during the 19th century. Neither reformers and religious revolutionaries were able to slow the process but not halt it entirely. Islamic civilization became increasingly anxious over its fate.

IV. The Last Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the Qing Empire in China

A. Introduction

Nurhaci was able to unite the Manchu nomads under eight banner armies and to introduce Chinese administrative reforms into Manchu government. After a local Chinese official invited the Manchus within the Great Wall, the nomads advanced and captured the Ming capital at Beijing in 1644. As a result, the Manchus, whose elite had adopted many Chinese ways, were able to establish a new dynasty, the Qing. The Qing incorporated much of the former Ming state, including the scholar-gentry, but assumed a more direct role in the appointment of local officials. Ethnic Chinese continued to be admitted into the imperial government. The Manchus, unlike the Mongols, retained the civil-service examination system.

B. Economy and Society in the Early Centuries of Qing Rule

The Manchus preserved the integrity of the Confucian social hierarchy. Women continued to be subject to patriarchal authority in the household, although they might hope to gain some control over household activities. The Qing attempted to relieve distress among the Chinese peasantry, but population pressures made their efforts virtually useless. As the value of labor fell, rural landlords gained a stranglehold over the rural economy. Commercial and urban expansion continued under the Qing. Profits from overseas exports produced a new group of merchants, the compradors, who specialized in silk exports.

C. Rot from Within: Bureaucratic Breakdown and Social Disintegration

By the late 18th century, corruption riddled the civil-service examination system. Posts became hereditary or available for purchase. Wealthy families used the bureaucracy as a means of establishing local authority. Revenues were diverted from state projects to enrich local bureaucrats. Spending on the military and public works projects declined. Floods wiped out some of China’s most productive farmland. Food shortages produced widespread peasant migrations and banditry. Problems were of such scale that the normal cycle of dynastic decline and replacement was threatened.
D. Barbarians at the Southern Gates: The Opium War and After

By the 19th century, a new type of barbarian, the Europeans, threatened China. Initial confrontations arose over the British plan to export opium from India to China in order to improve the European balance of trade. The Qing government recognized the threat to both its economy and its society posed by unlimited importation of opium. In the 1830s, the Qing emperor appointed Lin Zexu, a renowned bureaucrat, to stamp out the opium trade. Lin blockaded Canton and confiscated European opium supplies. British merchants demanded that their government intervene to protect investments. In 1839, the British routed the Chinese junks in the first stages of the Opium War. When the British sent a military force ashore, the Qing emperor sued for peace. By the 1890s, 90 Chinese ports were open to European, Japanese, and American merchants. Britain, France, Germany, and Russia actually leased certain ports and their hinterlands. Trade passed increasingly into the hands of the non-Chinese, and the Qing court was forced to accept European diplomats.

E. A Civilization at Risk: Rebellion and Failed Reforms

Defeat at the hands of the Europeans helped to set off a series of rebellions against the Qing. In the 1850s and 1860s, the Taiping rebellion, a semi-Christian movement under a prophetic leader, called for land redistribution, the liberation of women, and the destruction of the Confucian scholar-gentry. When the local gentry became sufficiently alarmed, provincial forces finally defeated the rebellion. Honest officials at the provincial level began to carry out much needed reforms, including railway construction and military modernization. Resources moved from the central court to the provinces, until the provincial leaders posed a real threat to the Qing government. The Manchus continued to obstruct almost all programs of reform, despite repeated defeats at the hands of the Europeans and the Japanese. The last decades of the dynasty were dominated by Cixi, the dowager empress. Cixi refused all attempts at reform. The dowager empress clandestinely supported the Boxer Rebellion from 1898 to 1901 as a means of ousting foreign influence.

F. The Fall of the Qing: The End of a Civilization?

Resistance to the Qing at the end of the 19th century was centered in secret societies, which sponsored local uprisings against the central government. The involvement of Western-educated compradors and some of the scholar-gentry gave these scattered movements more focus. Although they drew on Western ideas for a reformed government, the revolutionaries wanted to restore Chinese territorial integrity and expel foreigners from their soil. In 1911, widespread uprisings throughout China could not be put down by provincial officials. In 1912, the last Qing emperor, Puyi, a boy of 12, abdicated. Even prior to their abdication, the Qing had abandoned the Confucian examination system as inappropriate to the problems of the government. Abandonment of the examinations signaled the end of patterns of civilization in China first established almost two and one half millennia before.

V. Global Connections: Muslim and Chinese Decline and a Shifting Global Balance

The Muslims were long accustomed to the military threat posed by the West. In China, the West’s military dominance in the 19th century came as a rude surprise. The Muslims could justify some borrowing from the West on the basis of a shared cultural foundation--the Judaeo-Christian and Greek heritage from which both civilizations drew. China had remained
intentionally culturally isolated from the West. They regarded Western culture as barbaric. More politically fragmented than the Chinese, the Muslims had time to learn from early mistakes. The Chinese equated the survival of the civilization with the maintenance of the Qing dynasty. When the dynasty collapsed, Chinese civilization was destroyed. Muslims could always fall back on religious faith as a last resort. The Chinese had no great religious tradition with which to counter European belief in its inherent superiority. China and the Ottoman Muslim lands differed from Africa in that they were only partially colonized, from Latin America, with its deeper ties to the West, and from Russia and Japan, which maintained more independence.
TIMELINE

*Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.*

- Boxer rebellion begins in China
- Ottoman Janissary corps destroyed
- British occupation of Egypt
- Tanzimat reforms in Ottoman Empire
- Opium War begins in China
- Taiping rebellion begins in China

1826
1839
1839
1850
1882
1898

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

*The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.*

- Sultan Selim III
- Sultan Abdul Hamid
- Muhammad Ali
- al-Afghani
- Khartoum
- Khalifa Abdallahi
- compradors
- Taiping rebellion
- Boxer rebellion

- Sultan Mahmud II
- Society for Union and Progress
- Khedives
- Muhammad Abduh
- General Kitchener
- banner armies
- Lin Zexu
- Hong Xiuquan
- Puyi

- Tanzimat reforms
- Murad
- Suez Canal
- Ahmad Orabi
- Mahdi
- Kangxi
- Opium War
- Cixi
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

- boundaries of the Ottoman Empire
- boundaries of the Qing Empire

Look at the map from Chapter 28. Which of the two declining empires was closest to the European imperial interests in the Asian trade network? Does this help explain the more direct incursion of European nations in one civilization than in the other? Does this help to explain the significance of the Suez Canal?
MAKING CONNECTIONS

The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. What was the nature of the 18th-century crisis in the Ottoman Empire? Why was it not fatal?
2. What reforms were introduced in the Ottoman Empire between the reign of Mahmud II and 1876?
3. What led to the overthrow of the Ottoman Sultanate in 1908?
4. How did Muhammad Ali come to power? What reforms did he introduce?
5. How did the British gain control of Egypt?
6. What reforms did the Manchus introduce? How successful were they?
7. What problems did the Manchu dynasty encounter in the 19th century?
8. How did Europeans gain entry into China?
9. What led to the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty?

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

The following questions test your ability to summarize the major conclusions of the chapter.

1. How did Islamic and Chinese responses to the challenge of the West differ? Which society was best able to retain aspects of its traditional civilization?
2. Compare and contrast the incursion of the European nations into the Islamic heartlands and China with their entry into Africa.
SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. In the 18th century, unlike the Manchu dynasty of China, the Ottoman Empire
   a. was being revived through significant reform introduced by the sultans.
   b. was in full retreat.
   c. was conquering new territories in the Balkans.
   d. restored Islamic unity and successfully retained isolation from the West.

2. Which of the following statements concerning the impact of the West on other civilizations is most accurate?
   a. By the end of the 19th century, the West was the primary cause of the destruction of other global civilizations.
   b. The West, dating back to the ancient world, had always been the primary cause of destruction of other civilizations.
   c. Nomadic peoples continued to be the primary destroyer of civilizations in the nineteenth century.
   d. The West only had an impact on China and the Middle East, not other civilizations.

3. Which of the following European powers seized territories of the Ottoman Empire in the early decades of the 18th century?
   a. Austria-Hungary
   b. Britain
   c. France
   d. Italy

4. The Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II
   a. attempted to rid the Ottoman Empire of Western influences.
   b. successfully eliminated the Janissary corps.
   c. attempted to restore absolutism and destroy the Western-style constitution of the Turks.
   d. was toppled from the throne by a Janissary rebellion.

5. In what year was the revised constitution introduced as part of the Tanzimat reforms?
   a. 1839
   b. 1848
   c. 1876
   d. 1898

6. By 1811, what ruler had succeeded in establishing his dominance over Egypt?
   a. Murad, commander of the Mamluks
   b. Napoleon, the French emperor
   c. Muhammad Ali, an Albanian officer in the Ottoman army
   d. Nurhaci, the Almoravid military commander
7. Ahmad Orabi was
   a. a Turkish commander in the Ottoman army that conquered Egypt.
   b. the Egyptian army officer who led a revolt against the Khedival government in 1882.
   c. the Sufi mystic who claimed to be a direct descendant of the Prophet.
   d. the Khedive responsible for the construction of the Suez Canal.

8. Which of the following statements concerning the Manchu government is most accurate?
   a. It destroyed the scholar-gentry in order to consolidate its grip on the government.
   b. The civil service examination system was eliminated as a means of entering the government.
   c. Though Manchus occupied a disproportionate number of the highest political positions, there
      were few limits on Chinese promotions within the imperial bureaucracy.
   d. Chinese officials were eliminated at the local administrative levels in order to prevent the
      extreme regionalization that had led to the downfall of previous dynasties.

9. What was the impact of the British opium trade on China?
   a. Its use was restricted to the peasantry of northern China, where production of food rapidly
      decreased.
   b. The government was quickly able to halt the importation of opium so that it did not have the
      disastrous impact on the Chinese population that was anticipated.
   c. Within years, China’s favorable balance of trade was reversed and silver began to flow out of
      the country.
   d. Due to the addiction of the imperial court, the British were welcomed as a valuable trade partner of China.

10. Which of the following rebellions was clandestinely supported by the Qing imperial court under Cixi?
    a. the Boxer rebellion
    b. the Taiping rebellion
    c. the Shandong rebellion
    d. the Kangxi rebellion