

K. The Century of Humiliation, Part 1: The Opium Wars

1. Why, as we learned at the beginning of our history, was China closed off from the world and only began to trade again in 1978?
2. The answer lies in the way Chinese culture struggled to adapt itself to globalization, especially when it was imposed on China by force.
3. Seeking a way to “balance” trade with China—i.e. hoping to receive gold & silver in exchange for selling their products to the Chinese, to balance the flow of money for purchases in the other direction—the British began to promote the consumption of opium (a highly addictive drug) to the Chinese people.
4. When the Chinese emperor tried to prohibit the opium trade and seized British supplies of it, the British viewed this as an illegal act. They decided to punish China, sending a small fleet of advanced steam-powered warships to destroy the Chinese navy and bombard the coast to force China’s submission.
5. The **First Opium War (1839-42)** was an utter defeat for China, because European industrial and military technology had by that point surpassed that of all other cultures.
6. China was forced to pay a large penalty in silver as well as to accept trade with Britain and the rest of Europe at four additional ports along the coast. Also, the island of Hong Kong became British territory.
7. Despite a second attempt to prohibit the opium trade, France joined Britain’s side in the **Second Opium War (1856-60)** and China was again defeated, resulting in further penalties.

L. The Century of Humiliation, Part 2: The Collapse of Traditional Government

1. In between the opium wars, the Chinese government had to put down a rebellion led by a charismatic religious leader named Hong Xiuquan, who claimed to be the Chinese brother of Jesus Christ.
2. This **Taiping Rebellion of 1850-64** showed the imperial family that foreign ideas and beliefs were dangerous, thus when they initiated the so-called “Self-Strengthening Movement” to find a way to deal with foreign powers, they did not want to copy foreign cultures.
3. The half-hearted strengthening initiative that the royal family endorsed was too little compared to what was happening in neighboring Japan. Japan had decided to copy European technology and build a European-style empire. When Japan decided to control Korea and China tried to stop them, the two countries fought the **Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5**, where China was completely defeated by Japan.
4. Following the defeat in the war with Japan, the Chinese people were desperate to restore their national honor. A strange rebellion took place, when a private army, known to foreigners as the “boxers” (because of the martial arts they practiced) initiated the **Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901)**. The Boxers laid siege to the foreign embassies in the hope of show the royal family that they supported them and that they

should work together to expel the foreigners. The imperial family was divided over how to respond, but the foreign powers quickly formed a coalition and attacked the Boxers, bringing the rebellion to an end. Again harsh penalties were imposed on China.

5. The cumulative failures of the royal family were too much to bear. As was always the case when a Chinese dynasty was judged to have failed the people, rebellions grew in intensity until finally, anarchy reigned. When yet another rebellion was sparked, China's leading general Yuan Shikai sided with the rebels, forcing what remained of the royal family, including a child emperor named Puyi, to give up power entirely. This **Chinese Revolution** of **1911** set the scene for the rise of some kind of new government—but what kind would it be?