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Qing - China's Last Dynasty

Looking back in history, there were only two times that a foreign ethnic tribe ruled the *whole* of China. The first was the Mongols, whose leader Kublai Khan established the Yuan dynasty in 1271 A.D. Kublai Khan and his successors' oppressive, authoritarian governing style didn't sit well with the Chinese, triggering numerous bouts of civil unrest. In 1368 A.D., Zhu Yuanzhang (a Chinese) orchestrated a revolution and toppled the Mongols. His Ming dynasty fell into turmoil in 1644 A.D., giving the Manchu, a nomadic tribe living in the northeast of present-day China, an opportunity to step up their effort of conquest. The Manchu (plural: Manchus or Manchu) succeeded and became the second foreign ethnic tribe to rule the whole of China. Its Qing dynasty (1644 A.D. - 1911 A.D.) also happens to be China's last dynasty.



As foreign rulers, the Manchus appreciated and embraced the Chinese culture. Their willingness to assimilate was a sharp contrast from the Mongols' flat-out refusal to integrate. But despite their numerous efforts in consolidation, the Manchus remained skeptical toward the Chinese. As a show of asserting authority, they forced all Chinese men to adopt the Manchus' traditional hairstyle. They mandated them to shave the front of their heads and braid the hair in the back into long queues. Any man who dared to resist was considered disloyal and would have his head cut off!

Though the Qing Emperors were autocrats, they carried out many popular reforms to stabilize the society and to stimulate the economy. The three earlier ones (Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong) in particular were credited with creating a time of peace and prosperity for China. They sent troops to quash the neighboring states and laid the foundation for modern China's territorial boundaries. Altogether, the three Emperors reigned 133 years, from 1662 A.D. to 1795 A.D.

The mighty Qing dynasty started to show signs of weakness as the 19th century rolled in. Widespread corruption and trade conflicts with European countries (especially the U.K.) plagued the once glorious empire. When the Qing dynasty fought and lost the First Opium War to the U.K. in 1840, it signed the Treaty of Nanking. The treaty was, by all means, the beginning of the nightmare for the Qing dynasty. The government ceded the control of Hong Kong to the U.K., paid the U.K. a large sum of money for indemnity, and opened five ports for free trade. Seeing the benefits the U.K. reaped from the treaty, other countries (such as the U.S., France, and Portugal) followed suit and demanded similar treatment. Afraid of yet another military defeat, the Qing dynasty signed a series of unreasonable treaties, giving away money and land. Deeming the government weak and useless, anti-Manchu sentiment began to spread quickly among the Chinese and eventually led to the eruption of the Taiping Rebellion (1851 A.D. - 1864 A.D.)

The Qing dynasty wasn't able to fend off the rebels on its own, so it sought help from the countries to whom it

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had ceded territories. Three years before the Taiping Rebellion was finally put off, Emperor Xiangfeng died. His young son became the new emperor. Emperor Tongzhi was only five years old when he ascended the throne. His mother, Empress Dowager Cixi, became the regent and held the actual power. When Emperor Tongzhi died suddenly at the age of nineteen without an heir, Empress Dowager Cixi named her 4-year-old nephew the new emperor (Guangxu) and continued to be the regent. Empress Dowager Cixi, by all accounts, was a horrible ruler. Under her leadership, China lost more wars to other countries and signed more unreasonable treaties. She resented the idea of modernizing the country and refused to let go of the power. When Emperor Guangxu was in his early twenties, he tried to carry out a series of social and institutional changes. His reform in 1898 was quickly quashed by Empress Dowager Cixi who staged a coup and put him under house arrest. Historians called this short-lived reform "The Hundred Days' Reform" because it lasted only 103 days, from June 11 to September 21, 1898. Empress Dowager Cixi didn't depose Emperor Guangxu. She kept him as the ruler in name only.

Empress Dowager Cixi's ignorance eventually caught up with her. She believed an insurgent group's claim of being impervious to knives and guns and decided to use them to drive away foreigners. With blessings from the empress herself, the insurgents (called the Boxers) rebelled in 1900. They ransacked Christian missions, killed foreign missionaries, and slaughtered Chinese converts. The foreign governments demanded that the Qing dynasty eradicate the rebels to no avail, so they decided to take the matter into their own hands. The international troops of eight nations (Japan, the U.K., the U.S., France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Italy) quickly captured Beijing (the capital of the Qing dynasty) and annihilated the Boxers. Empress Dowager Cixi and Emperor Guangxu fled to Xi'an in a hurry, leaving the capital without a ruler for several months. While they were away, the international troops looted Beijing. Many innocent people lost their lives. On September 7, 1901, the Qing dynasty signed the Boxer's Protocol and paid war reparations totaling hundreds of millions of dollars!

Empress Dowager Cixi felt gravely ill in November 1908 and handpicked yet another relative, Puyi, as the successor. Puyi ascended the throne at the age of two and became known as Emperor Xuantong. Empress Dowager Cixi died on November 15, 1908, only a day after the mysterious death of Emperor Guangxu.

Emperor Xuantong was the last Emperor in China. He lost the empire after Dr. Sun Yat-sen's uprising on October 10, 1911.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Where did the Manchu live before they ruled the whole of China?
- A. the southeast of present-day China
 - B. the southwest of present-day China
 - C. the northwest of present-day China
 - D. the northeast of present-day China

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- _____ 2. Genghis Khan established the Yuan dynasty in 1271 A.D.
A. true
B. false
- _____ 3. Which of the following is **NOT** one of the three earlier Qing emperors who were credited with creating a time of peace and prosperity for China?
A. Tongzhi
B. Kangxi
C. Yongzheng
D. Qianlong
- _____ 4. With which country did the Qing dynasty sign the Treaty of Nanking?
A. France
B. The U.K.
C. The U.S.
D. Russia
- _____ 5. Which territory did the Qing dynasty give up after it lost the First Opium War?
A. Macao
B. Beijing
C. Hong Kong
D. Taiwan
- _____ 6. Which of the following was China's last emperor?
A. Emperor Xuantong
B. Emperor Xiangfeng
C. Emperor Guangxu
D. Emperor Tongzhi
- _____ 7. Empress Dowager Cixi was the one holding the actual power during the reigns of Emperor Tongzhi and Emperor Guangxu.
A. true
B. false
- _____ 8. Which of the following countries did **NOT** play a role in annihilating the Boxers?
A. Spain
B. Germany
C. Austria-Hungary
D. France
- _____ 9. Which of the following emperors was the youngest when he ascended the throne?
A. Emperor Tongzhi
B. Emperor Qianlong
C. Emperor Guangxu
D. Emperor Xuantong
- _____ 10. Which of the following about the Qing dynasty is correct?
A. All Chinese women were required to shave the front of their heads and braid the hair in the back into long queues.
B. Empress Dowager Cixi was already in power when the Qing dynasty signed the Treaty of Nanking.
C. The Boxer Rebellion happened before the Taiping Rebellion.
D. The Taiping Rebellion happened after the Qing dynasty lost the First Opium War.

☐ Suppose you are a biographer. What would you say about Empress Dowager Cixi?

☐ In your opinion, why was the Mongol's Yuan dynasty so short-lived? Suppose you were Kublai Khan. You just conquered China. What would you do differently to rule the Chinese?

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