Name: _____

Date: _____

ANCIENT CHINA
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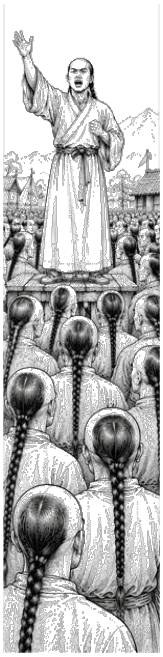
A Century of Humiliation

The Opium Wars marked the start of what historians call China's "Century of Humiliation." By the 1860s, the foreign Manchu minority still ruled a deeply resentful Han majority, even as Western powers aggressively chipped away at the empire. The worst was yet to come.

For nearly two thousand years, China had been one of the world's richest and most powerful civilizations. By the late 1800s, Britain, France, Germany, and Russia were dividing China into "spheres of influence." Here, these outside nations controlled trade, dominated the economy, and dictated local laws.

The Taiping Rebellion

As foreign powers tightened their grip on China, a rebellion led by desperate peasants grew into one of the deadliest civil wars in human history. In southern China, a brilliant but troubled man named Hong Xiuquan (pronounced SHEE-oh chwen) turned this misery into a massive movement. He had failed his Confucian exams several times and, during a severe mental and physical collapse, began obsessively reading Christian pamphlets. Hong convinced himself he was the younger brother of Jesus and preached a radical message across southern China.



He promised to divide farmland fairly, cut taxes, and build a completely equal society. To millions of peasants crushed by poverty, official corruption, and high costs, Hong offered hope.

His followers, called the Taiping (meaning "Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace"), captured Nanjing in 1853 and made it their capital. They controlled much of southern China for over a decade until Hong died in 1864 during a bitter siege. With Western help, Qing armies finally crushed the rebellion. However, the cost was staggering: at least 20 million people died, making it the deadliest civil war in human history. To put that in perspective, it killed nearly thirty times as many people as the American Civil War.

Unequal Treaties

As the Qing struggled to restore order after the civil war, European powers saw a dynasty too weak to resist. They forced China to sign a series of "unequal treaties," demanding control of major ports, railroad lines, and territories. American businesses soon followed, opening banks and factories to profit from China's vast market. To many Chinese, it seemed their country was being carved up before their eyes.

The Rise of the Boxers

It was common for young men in northern China to gather to practice martial arts and community self-defense. By the late 1890s, their world was disappearing. With foreigners controlling the economy, jobs were scarce and opportunities were few. The weak Qing government could do nothing to stop the humiliation.

As resentment spread, many of these local martial arts groups became part of a growing movement known as the Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fists. Westerners nicknamed them the "Boxers" because they spent hours practicing martial arts, which reminded Europeans of prizefighters.

Under Siege

By 1900, Boxer anger boiled over into violence. Across northern China, mobs tore up foreign-built railroads, cut telegraph lines, and burned Christian churches. Anyone tied to the outside world—foreign diplomats, merchants, and Chinese Christians alike—became a target. In Beijing, foreign families and Chinese Christians barricaded themselves inside the diplomatic quarter, holding out under siege for two months until an international rescue force finally arrived.

The Eight-Nation Alliance

In 1900, an allied army of eight nations—including the United States, Britain, and Japan—

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smashed through Boxer defenses to rescue the trapped foreigners. These troops captured Beijing, crushed the uprising, and plundered the capital as the emperor and his government fled in disguise.

To regain their power and convince the foreign armies to leave, the Qing had to sign the brutal Boxer Protocol, forcing China to pay more silver than the empire earned in a year. Foreign fortresses and troops were permanently stationed right in the capital. This final humiliation shattered the dynasty's authority beyond repair.

The Fall of the Qing Dynasty

For the next eleven years, the Qing Dynasty limped forward as a ghost of its former self. Desperate to stay in power, the government scrambled to pass reforms including an end to the ancient Confucian exams. In 1908, the throne passed to a two-year-old boy, leaving a weak leadership that could not stop the brewing anger. Finally, a third rebellion in 1911 swept the emperors from power, ending two thousand years of imperial rule.

Fill in the Blanks

The O__i__m Wars began China's C__n__u__y of H__m__l__a__i__n. Western powers gained "s__h__r__s of i__f__u__n__e" while the M__n__h__s ruled the Han m__j__r__ty. Hong Xiuquan led the T__i__i__g Rebellion, promising e__u__l__ty and hope to poor p__a__a__ts. His followers captured Nanjing, but Q__ng armies crushed the r__b__l__i__n after more than _____ million died. U__e__u__l treaties gave f__r__i__n__rs control of ports, r__i__r__a__s, and trade. Angry young men joined M__r__i__l arts groups and became known as Bo__e__s. These young men attacked foreigners, c__u__c__es, railroads, and t__l__g__a__h lines. An eight-nation a__l__a__ce of *f__r__i__n nations freed people c__p__u__ed ny the B__xe__s in B__i__i__g. The Boxer P__o__o__ol weakened the Qing, and the 1911 r__v__l__t__on ended two t__o__s__nd years of i__p__ri__l rule..

Answer in Complete Sentence

*1. What caused many Chinese people to join both the Taiping Rebellion and the Boxer Rebellions

2. Why were many people interested in Hong Xiuquan's message?

*3. Why did the Boxers tear up foreign-built railroads, cut telegraph lines, and burn Christian churches.

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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