



# Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)

The Qing Dynasty, also known as the Manchu Dynasty, was the last imperial dynasty of China, ruling from 1644 to 1912. It was preceded by the Ming Dynasty and succeeded by the Republic of China. The Qing Dynasty was founded by the Manchu clan Aisin Gioro 愛新覺羅 in what is today

Northeast China. The dynasty expanded into China, establishing the Qing Empire.

The Qing Dynasty reached its zenith during the High Qing era in the 18th century. During this period, the dynasty experienced economic prosperity, territorial expansion, and population growth. The dynasty also suppressed several rebellions, including the **Revolt of the Three Feudatories** and the **Dzungar–Qing Wars**. The Qing Dynasty's military was very strong, and it was able to defeat many enemies.

The Qing Dynasty began to decline in the 19th century. The dynasty was weakened by internal rebellions, such as the **Taiping Rebellion** and the **Nian Rebellion** and by external pressures from Western powers. The Opium Wars forced China to open its ports to foreign trade, and the dynasty was forced to cede territory to foreign powers. The Qing Dynasty was overthrown in the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, and the Republic of China was established.

## Post Scriptum

The **Revolt of the Three Feudatories** 三藩之亂(1673–1681), was a major rebellion by three autonomous Han Chinese lords against the Manchu-led Qing dynasty in southern China during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor 康熙帝. The suppression of the revolt solidified Qing control over all of China and was a pivotal moment in the dynasty's history.

The **Dzungar–Qing Wars** 準噶爾之戰(1687–1758), were a decades-long series of conflicts between the Dzungar

Khanate, a powerful Oirat Mongol state (Dzungars are an ethnically Mongolian people) and the expansionist Qing dynasty of China and its Mongol allies. The wars, fought over control of Inner Asia (modern-day Mongolia, Tibet, Qinghai, and Xinjiang), ultimately resulted in a decisive Qing victory, the destruction of the Dzungar Khanate, and a **genocide** of the Dzungar people.

**The Opium Trade** in China began in the 18th century, driven by British merchants seeking to balance their trade deficit with China. The British East India Company (EIC) cultivated opium in India and then smuggled it into China, exchanging it for tea, silk, and porcelain. The Chinese government initially attempted to ban the opium trade, but corruption and the vast profits involved made enforcement difficult.

The consequences of the opium trade were devastating for China. Opium addiction became widespread, leading to social and economic disruption. The outflow of silver to pay for opium reversed China's trade surplus and weakened the economy. Growing resentment over the opium trade and the government's inability to stop it eventually led to the Opium Wars.

**The First Opium War** (1839-1842), fought between Britain and China, arose from conflicting viewpoints on diplomatic relations, trade, and the administration of justice for foreign nationals. Fuelled by the British East India Company's opium trade with China, which was illegal and created widespread addiction, the Qing court's attempts to suppress the trade led to armed conflict. British naval and military superiority resulted in a series of defeats for China, culminating in the **Treaty of Nanking in 1842**. This treaty forced China to cede Hong Kong to Britain, open several ports to foreign trade, and pay a large indemnity. The war marked the start of a

period of unequal treaties and foreign influence in China, significantly weakening the Qing dynasty.

**Sassoons arrival (1844-1949)** The arrival of the Sassoon family in China after first opium war forced open China ports for trade during the mid-19th century had profound and lasting implications for the region's economic, social, and political landscape. The Sassoons, a wealthy Jewish family of Baghdadi origin, established a vast trading empire centred on opium, textiles, and finance. Their presence significantly altered the course of Chinese history, contributing to both its modernisation and its exploitation by foreign powers.

**One of the most significant consequences of the Sassoons' involvement in China was the expansion of the opium trade.**

As major importers and distributors of opium, the Sassoons played a key role in fuelling addiction and social disruption. The opium trade had devastating effects on Chinese society, leading to widespread addiction, economic instability, and political corruption.

The Qing Court's efforts to suppress the opium trade ultimately led to the second Opium Wars, which resulted in further concessions to foreign powers and the erosion of Chinese sovereignty. While the Sassoons profited immensely from the opium trade, their activities contributed to the weakening of China and the undermining of its traditional social fabric.

Beyond the opium trade, the Sassoons significantly shaped Shanghai by investing in real estate, infrastructure, and various ventures, transforming it into a vibrant metropolis. However, their presence also ushered in increased foreign

influence and control over crucial sectors of the Chinese economy. Consequently, the Sassoons' legacy in China remains complex, characterised by economic and social exploitation.

**The Taiping Rebellion 太平天國起義 (1850 - 1864)**, (the MAGA Model) was a large-scale revolt against the Qing dynasty. It was led by Hong Xiuquan, who claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ. Hong had converted to **Christianity** after reading a missionary pamphlet and developed his own unique interpretation of the religion, blending it with Chinese folk beliefs and social ideals. He established the **Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in 1851** in the city of Nanking, which became the capital of the rebel state.

The Taiping Rebellion was fuelled by widespread discontent with the Qing dynasty, which was seen as weak and ineffective in dealing with both internal problems and foreign interference. The population was suffering from poverty, famine, and corruption, and **many people were drawn to the Taipings' promises of social reform and equality**. The Taipings implemented policies such as land redistribution, the abolition of private property, and the promotion of gender equality. They also banned foot binding, opium smoking, and other practices they considered immoral.

The rebellion was ultimately suppressed by the Qing court, with the **help of foreign powers such as Britain and France**. The conflict resulted in an estimated 20 to 30 million deaths, making it one of the deadliest wars in China history at the time. Although the Taiping Rebellion failed to overthrow the Qing dynasty, it had a significant impact on China. It weakened the Qing government, contributed to the rise of

regional warlords, and paved the way for future revolutionary movements. The rebellion also highlighted the social and economic problems that plagued China in the 19th century and the need for reform.

**The Nian Rebellion 捻亂**(1851 – 1868), was an armed uprising against the Qing dynasty. The rebellion emerged from the northern Anhui province and was fuelled by widespread poverty, famine, and government corruption. The Nian rebels, who were primarily peasants and bandits, employed guerrilla tactics and raided villages and towns, causing widespread disruption and instability. Although the Nian rebels were eventually defeated by Qing forces, the rebellion weakened the Qing dynasty and contributed to the overall decline of imperial authority in China during the 19th century.

Both Taiping and Nian rebellions share characteristics reminiscent of early communism.

**The Second Opium War** (1856 – 1860) also known as the Arrow War or the Anglo-French War in China. It was a conflict between the British Empire and the French Empire against the Qing dynasty of China. It was a continuation of the First Opium War and was driven by British and French desires to expand their trade and influence in China. The war resulted in another defeat for China, leading to *the treaties of Tientsin in 1858*, which granted further concessions to foreign powers, including the opening of more ports to trade, the right for foreign legations to be established in Beijing, and the legalisation of opium trade. However, disputes over the implementation of these treaties led to renewed conflict, culminating in the Anglo-French forces capturing Beijing and the destruction of the Old Summer Palace in 1860, which

further weakened the Qing dynasty and deepened China's subjugation to foreign powers. In 1861, the Xianfeng Emperor passed away at the age of 30 while in exile at the summer palace. According to official record: from tuberculosis, exacerbated by heavy drinking, opium use, and the stress of losing wars (the Second Opium War)

**The death of Emperor Xianfeng 咸豐** in 1861 at the age of 30 marked a significant turning point in the Qing Dynasty. His reign was marred by internal rebellions, including the Taiping Rebellion, and external pressures from Western powers, such as the Second Opium War.

The immediate aftermath of Xianfeng's death saw the rise of the Empress Dowager Cixi. As the mother of the new child emperor, she orchestrated a coup with Prince Gong (Xianfeng's brother), to seize power from the regency council appointed by the late emperor. This power grab positioned her as the de facto ruler of China for the next four decades.

Empress Dowager Cixi and Emperor Xianfeng's struggle with opium addiction likely influenced their judgment and the trajectory of events during their reigns. The degree of their dependence and its precise consequences on their capacity to govern effectively had far reaching effects on the Qing dynasty.

Cixi's resistance to reforms and conservative policies delayed modernisation, contributing to internal instability and foreign encroachment, which the Qing Dynasty never overcame, leading to its collapse in the early 20th century.