

CHAPTER 2

Imperialism Encompasses the Pacific, 1900–1914

In the summer of 1905, representatives of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and the Meiji Emperor of Japan spent a month in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, negotiating the terms on which their recent war would end. The Russian delegation was led by Count Sergei Yulyanovich Witte. At nearly seven feet in height, Count Witte was a man of extraordinary personal authority, and his entourage was given the primary place in all ceremonial processions in Portsmouth. His adversary in the negotiations was Baron Jitaro Kimura, barely five feet tall, whose entourage followed politely in Witte's wake, accepted more modest hotel accommodations and was more restrained in demanding privileges and attention from the local hosts. But Kimura was a determined advocate for Japan, and he had an advantage that the prestige of imperial Russia and the imposing presence of Count Witte could not erase: Japan had won the war.

The Russo-Japanese War of 1905 was the first modern conflict in which an Asian power had defeated a European one, and the world's governments and media had some difficulty adjusting to the news. Japan's victory had depended in part the country's rapid centralization and industrialization in the late nineteenth century, producing the startling development and deployment of imperial Japan's modern navy. President Theodore Roosevelt, who hosted the peace conference, hoped to restrain the demands of victorious Japan and to soften the blow to Russia's pride. He succeeded in both. But Russia's loss of the war, and subsequently of the treaty negotiations, discredited the tsarist government at home. Witte's personal loss of prestige also dampened enthusiasm for the modernization programs he had sponsored in industry and the military.



The great Japanese admiral Togo Heihachiro and his flagship *Mikasa* were celebrated in this contemporary magazine illustration. In the Battle of Tsushima Bay, the Japanese fleet sank or disabled twenty-eight of thirty-eight Russian ships while losing only three torpedo boats of their own. The *Mikasa* was built in Great Britain by Vickers but carried the much stronger Krupp armor that would later be used by the dreadnoughts (see Chapter 3). At various times the ship's destruction was demanded by Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. It was instead preserved and restored through international cooperation and is today a museum ship in Yokosuka, Japan.

This was the second time Japan had defeated a land-based empire that had expended enormous resources on naval development. The first victory, in 1895–1896, had ended the hopes of the Qing Empire, based in China, of building a modern navy. European and American journalists and statesmen derided the Japanese victory over the Qing Empire as an easy defeat of a weak and incompetent regime, but they could not dismiss the Russian defeat so easily. In defeating Russia on land and sea, Japan challenged the assumptions of the time concerning the inferiority of nonwhite peoples and their inability to industrialize, lead successful nationalist movements, or to become international leaders.

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 also marked the emergence of the Pacific Ocean as a new arena of imperial competition. Despite the tensions between the new empires of Japan and the United States for domination of the Pacific, there were great parallels in their emergence as sea powers. Both were impatient with the old practices of Britain and France, which emphasized colonization of the land and diplomatic control of the economies of Asia. They also brought with them vigorous new ideologies of empire, claiming to bring prosperity and advancement to the peoples they dominated. Together, they ended both the long age of the land-based empires and the century of British hegemony on the sea.

Twilight of the Land-Based Empires

Although many historians cite the British Empire as the model for understanding how imperialism worked in the nineteenth century, it is important to remember that the British Empire was only one kind of imperial system. In 1900, much of the world—indeed, its most populous parts—was still controlled by empires such as Russia, the Qing Empire based in China, and the Ottoman Empire based in Anatolia, that had existed for centuries and functioned differently from the British Empire. The greatest similarity among these older empires was that they were built on overland expansion. They had expanded in previous centuries by gaining control of strategically important territories that touched their borders. In many cases these territories—such as the steppes of Central Asia, the deserts of the Middle East and North Africa, the inhospitable tundra of northern Asia, and the profitless jungles of southern China and Southeast Asia—demanded higher expenditures for conquest and defense than could be recouped from their development. These empires neither expanded overseas nor created sufficient naval power to defend themselves successfully from foreign assault.

They depended primarily on agriculture for their wealth, but over the centuries the traditional elites had concentrated their riches in the cities. Since the eighteenth century, these empires also supplied Europe with profitable raw and finished goods, bringing the proceeds home and further stimulating their well-established market cities such as Beijing, Guangzhou, Istanbul, and Cairo, which in the nineteenth century continued to generate wealth through their integration with new overseas trade enterprises. Long after the military might of the land-based empires had waned, they remained critical actors in the world economy because their capitals were often great pools of wealth that attracted the newer empires of Europe and the rising commercial interests of the United States of America.

In 1900 the Ottoman, Russian, and Qing empires were in varying degrees of decline. In the mid nineteenth century, the leaders of these empires realized the importance of naval power. But a lack of capital for investment and a lack of native expertise kept their naval development programs from succeeding. The Ottomans in the nineteenth century had made some progress with naval deployment, but they were dependent on Europe to build modern ships for them. Russia still had not made itself a naval power even in the Black Sea. The Qing did not have a navy or any plans for one before the 1870s, and in 1895, when they were easily defeated by Japan, they had to face the fact that their attempts to build a modern navy had been a disaster.

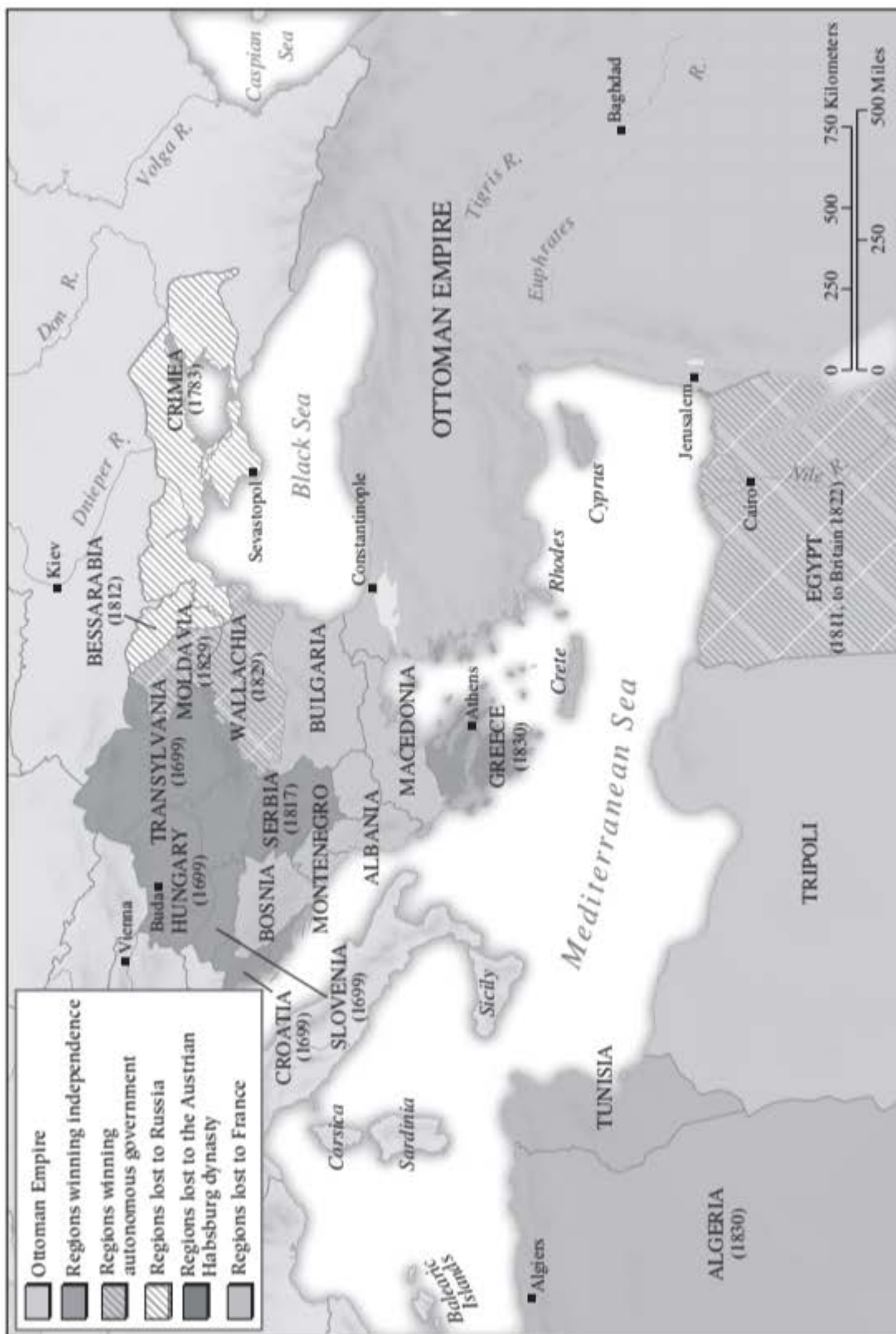
The Ottoman Empire

The oldest of these land-based empires was the Ottoman Empire, ruled by Muslims of Turkic descent, whose capital was at Istanbul (in earlier centuries this had been Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire). The Ottoman Empire had wrested control of Anatolia from the moribund Byzantine Empire and competed with Russia and Hungary for control of Eastern Europe. By the 1700s, the Ottomans were also governing Greece, the Middle East, and much of North Africa. Tensions with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and with Russia were constant. France and Britain were sometimes allies of the Ottomans and sometimes their enemies. But in the middle of the nineteenth century, Britain and France backed the Ottomans against Russia in the Crimean War (1854–1856), which resulted in the halt of Russian expansion into Ottoman lands.

In the later nineteenth century, European culture had a strong impact on the great Ottoman cities. French and German languages were used in the new schools and universities, and for medical, technical, and scientific studies. Newspapers in French kept the Ottoman urban elites informed of current events and international affairs, and many Turks traveled to Europe for education or entertainment. The latest European political ideas reached the Ottoman cities very rapidly. European military reforms in organization and weaponry were introduced into the Ottoman armies in the early 1800s, and European nationalism, constitutionalism, and civil rights were well known in the Ottoman Empire by the 1860s.

These foreign ideas had supporters in the Ottoman Empire, but they also had many opponents. Rebellions by the traditional Ottoman soldiers often brought extreme and widespread violence to the Balkans and frequently to Istanbul itself. Muslim religious leaders were outspoken in condemning the liberalizing influence of European political thought. Nevertheless, by fits and starts, the Ottoman government underwent a very dramatic transformation during the 1800s. By the end of the century, two important ideas had become accepted by a significant number of political leaders in Istanbul: that the Ottoman government should continue to move toward a liberal constitutional monarchy of the British and German kind, and that within the Ottoman Empire there existed a coherent nation of Turkey that had a future of its own, independent of that of the empire. The “Young Turk” party of students, bureaucrats, soldiers, and merchants assumed that in the future the Turkish-speaking portion of the Ottoman Empire would live under its own laws and values, but the areas of the empire that were predominantly inhabited by Europeans or Arabs would have to determine their own fates.

Some of those fates were already easy to guess before 1900. In the Balkans, Serbia and Montenegro had been recognized as independent at the Congress of Vienna of 1878, although they had no way of defending or governing themselves. Russia had become a military protector of both and was expected to absorb or colonize them. Bulgaria had been granted home rule but was also without a government or an army. Bosnia and Herzegovina were coming under the economic and military thrall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan were all known to be coveted by both Britain and France. Though



MAP 2.1 Ottoman Territorial Losses, 1699–1912.

The tensions between Russia and the Ottomans contributed to the erosion of Ottoman control over Egypt and the eastern Balkans, and independence for Greece and Serbia. Russia and Austria-Hungary expanded at Ottoman expense. Algeria was lost to France.

Egypt was nominally an Ottoman territory, it had been under British occupation since 1882 and clearly would become a British possession in all but name if the Ottoman Empire collapsed. And while the European powers intended to dominate many territories of the old empire, local peoples hoped to regain or create independence for themselves. The tensions among rising nationalist movements created long-term instability in the Balkans and parts of the Middle East.

The Russian Empire

The story of Russia in the nineteenth century had many parallels with that of its old enemy, the Ottoman Empire. Russia had begun to examine and adopt some European ideas well before the 1800s. As in the case of the Ottoman Empire, many in Russia—including aristocrats, landowners, and religious leaders—resisted these proposals. Reformers in Russia did not have the gradual success that reformers in the Ottoman Empire enjoyed. Instead, they were forced to use increasingly extreme methods. Terrorism, particularly the use of nitroglycerin explosives in public places, was practiced by anti-government forces by the end of the 1800s. As the twentieth century opened, the Russian political landscape was marked by sharp divisions among the loyalist elites of the aristocracy, the bureaucracy, and the church on the one hand, and their radical opponents among students, middle-ranking military officers, and advocates for rural advancement on the other.

Despite its unstable internal political situation, Russia was feared by the European powers for its expansionist successes. Russian rule had been extended through Siberia to the northern Pacific coast, the Aleutian Islands, and eventually Alaska (which was declared a Russian colony in 1800 and sold to the United States in 1867), despite steady resistance from the Qing Empire based in China. During the nineteenth century, Britain and France had worked together to limit Russian influence in Central Europe, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. By the late 1800s, as the Qing Empire weakened, the focus of Russian expansion returned to Manchuria and the northern Pacific coast. Manchuria could potentially supply the Russian Empire with coal and iron to fuel its new industries and shipyards in the new city of Vladivostok.

In the late 1800s, the international standing of Russia was ambiguous. In the British view, kindly Russian monarchs had learned that the people were not ready for liberal institutions, and that reforms only embolden anarchistic agitators. The old ways would be best for them, so long as Russia did not return to its expansionist enthusiasms of the early 1800s. The American opinion of Russia was very different. A telegraph cable was laid across Siberia by American engineers and laborers, enabling the United States to have more rapid communication with the Middle East and Europe. Siberians—residents of Russian descent who had been exiled to Siberia for political or petty crimes and had been put to work in the mines, forests, and fisheries—had begun a movement for independence. Many were prolific writers and quickly gained some influence among the American travelers. The frontier experience, the wish to free themselves from an old-fashioned monarchy, and the independence and entrepreneurialism of the Siberians found

immediate sympathy among Americans. Alexis de Tocqueville had written decades before that Russia and the United States were destined to dominate the world, and now Americans saw the point of his observation.

The Qing Empire

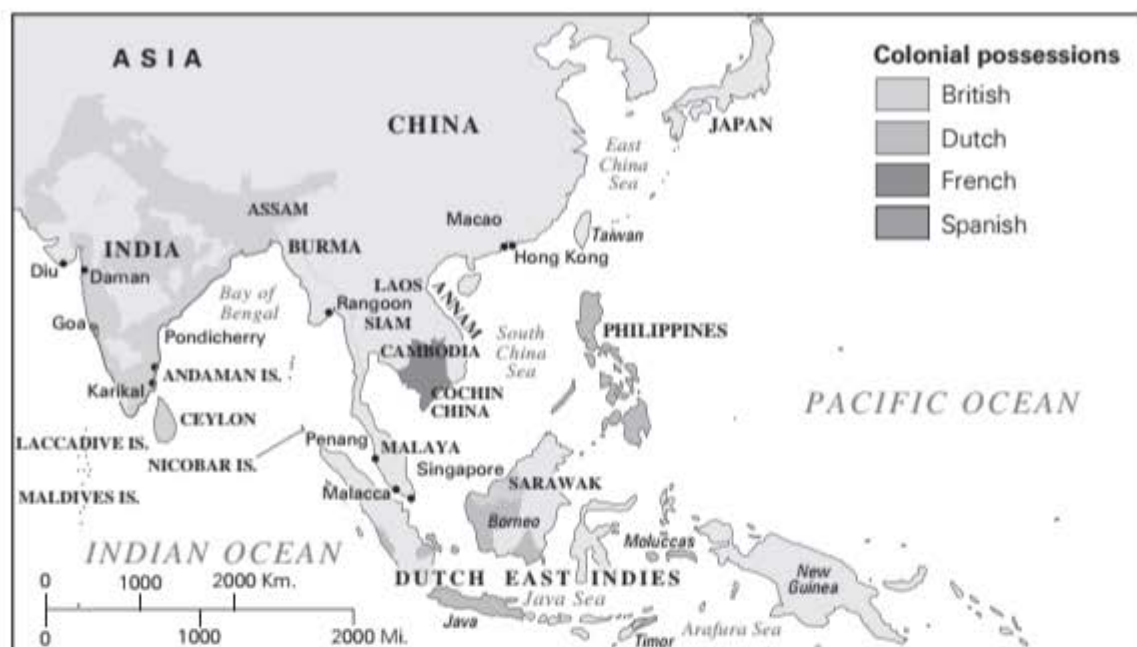
The deepening tensions between Russia and Japan in Manchuria were in many ways a result of the weakening of the Qing Empire. In name, the Qing Empire owned Manchuria, but it was too weak to defend it. This excited the ambitions of both Russia and Japan. Like the Ottoman Empire and Russia, in the 1800s the Qing Empire had experienced a rift between those who argued for reforms inspired by European models and those who struggled forcefully to maintain the traditional system. But the experience of the Qing Empire was different from that of the Ottomans and the Russians.

First, although China had been in continuous contact with Europe for centuries, it did not experience the volume of contacts or the rapidity of exchange that came from being nearer Europe. For instance, Qing leaders had inadequate information regarding Britain's commercial goals or its military abilities. The result was a disastrous Qing defeat by Britain in the first Opium War (1839–1842). This was followed by a series of treaties that, by 1900, allowed virtually all European nations and the United States, Russia, and Japan to import their products to China with little or no tariff, to have their nationals live in China under their own laws, to travel and promote Christianity without interference from Chinese officials, and to station their own military forces in China.

The presence of privileged, aggressive foreigners within Qing boundaries contributed to both the outbreak and the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion (1853–1864). This devastating civil war was the greatest armed conflict before the twentieth century. It cost more than thirty million lives, threatened to topple the Qing government, and left the empire economically as well as politically dysfunctional. Britain and France joined the Qing side in defeating the Taiping rebels, after which the Europeans proceeded to assume critical influence over the empire's management. China as a whole was never colonized, but portions of China were dominated by European powers, and the island of Hong Kong was given to Britain permanently.

In the late nineteenth century, Qing leaders and their foreign advisers cooperated in an attempt to equip China to resist military and naval challenges from Russia and Japan. A navy was regarded as essential, but that would require new mining ventures, new industrial complexes, and the creation of universities to educate chemists and engineers. The test of these programs came in war against France in 1884, and against Japan in 1894–95. Both wars were debacles for the Qing, and they demonstrated that no amount of military industrialization could compensate for a lack of preparation on the part of Qing military officers and engineers or for the corruption of Qing officials.

Between 1864 and 1900, Europeans and Americans arrived in China in increasing numbers. Chinese bureaucrats, journalists, and teachers hoped to learn foreign



MAP 2.2 Western Expansion in Asia and Australasia to 1900.

The year 1900 marked almost 300 years of European expansion into Eastern Eurasia. Before the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5, all imperialists had agreed that in continental China there would be no establishment of colonies. Instead, the powers recognized mutual zones of interest. The Treaty of Shimonoseki, which resolved the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5, challenged this consensus and opened the way to international competition for more direct land and industrial rights in China.

methods. Many younger, educated Chinese came to the conclusion that the Qing Empire itself was China's greatest problem. Nationalism, much of it inspired by European and secondarily by Japanese ideas, led many to wish to foment revolution. Others felt that the Europeans and Americans, with their weapons, their economic ambitions, and their tendency to spread Christianity wherever they went were more dangerous enemies than the Qing Empire. These sentiments helped to incite the Boxer Uprising of 1900, in which contingents of martial arts enthusiasts banded together with spontaneous mobs to attack foreigners in the Qing capital, Beijing, and surrounding areas. An alliance of eight nations, including Japan, Russia, and the United States, sent troops to Beijing to protect their citizens and to put the rebellion down. When the dust settled in 1901, the foreign allies were in temporary control of Beijing.

Traditional Wealth and Modern Trade

In view of the weakness of the Ottoman and Qing empires by the late 1800s, one might ask how these large, unindustrialized, militarily weak empires managed to survive into the twentieth century. Their old mutual rival, Russia, did not have the power to annihilate them, but Britain and France together could have made a

serious attempt to end either empire and seize its territories. However, these old land-based empires should be considered in the overall context of the global economy. Naval might and industrialization were important pillars of power and influence in 1900, but the ability to provide markets was also critical.

The land-based empires all drew most of their wealth from agriculture. They had experienced their greatest expansion in the 1700s, both in terms of the absolute increase in the amount of land they controlled and in terms of improvements in agricultural techniques that made the land more productive. The empires were large enough and encompassed a great enough variety of agricultural zones that they could achieve a high degree of specialization while retaining self-sufficiency. For instance, Ottoman and Qing farmers could devote their lands to highly profitable crops such as cotton, knowing they could turn their crops into cash in a nearby market and buy food and supplies for themselves. Wealth circulated easily within these empires, and they were not forced to seek external markets or external goods for survival. In the nineteenth-century, economic and social reformers acknowledged that agriculture continued to be of primary importance, and tended to protect the traditional patterns of landowning and social power that had produced their great wealth in the early modern period.

Early Trade Imbalances Between Europe and the Land-based Empires

The land-based empires magnified their wealth in the 1700s and early 1800s by selling products in Europe. Russian suppliers to the fur and timber markets made great profits. China's exports of tea to Europe created a huge trade deficit for Britain in the late 1700s and stimulated secondary exports of porcelain, silk, and lacquer-ware. Cotton, hemp, and coffee from the Ottoman territories also found markets in Europe, alerting Europeans to the fact that the Ottoman cities were reservoirs of profits from both internal and external commerce.

The market systems developed in these land-based empires must also be seen in relation to the empires' population structures. The Ottoman Empire, for instance, had a total population of about twenty million people in 1900. But the Ottoman territories were very far-flung, and the imperial system concentrated trade at Istanbul, Cairo, Beirut, and other large cities, bringing together goods and consumers from a territory stretching from Belgrade to Baghdad. Colonization of Ottoman territory by European powers would have detached the colonized region from the centralized and valuable trading system in which it was embedded. Control of the terms of trade at Istanbul through treaty provisions imposed by European imperialists—under threat of invasion—was a far simpler undertaking.

In the case of China, the arguments against colonization were even stronger. The Qing Empire's population in 1900 was about four hundred million—a quarter of the entire population of the earth and twenty times as large as the Ottoman population. Qing trade networks brought together goods and consumers from Siberia to Southeast Asia, and from Central Asia to the borders of Korea. Again, control of the terms of trade at the great ports of Canton (Guangzhou) and

Shanghai was more effective than detaching and colonizing large segments of Qing territory. The European practice, in the middle and late nineteenth century, of imposing predatory treaties upon these empires by using the threat of invasion or bombardment from the sea was called *gunboat diplomacy*, and in many cases it was more advantageous to European imperialists than the colonization of foreign lands would have been.

Imperialism and Market Exploitation

Prior to 1800, Europe produced very little that would bring it profits from the great wealth pools of the Middle East and Asia. Imperialism, however, played its role in reorganizing the global economy in such a way that the flow of wealth could be redirected. Britain used its treaty power to force the Qing Empire to abandon the laws forbidding the import of opium and to radically cut import fees on all British goods. Thereafter, Britain supplied opium to geometrically increasing numbers of Chinese, and it reaped high profits from this trade through the middle of the nineteenth century, after which Chinese opium growers and distributed enjoyed the greater profits. There were, however, more sophisticated ways of tapping the wealth of the land-based empires. Military reform and industrialization in the Ottoman and Qing empires (as in Russia) meant new sales for European manufacturers specializing in everything from gigantic shipbuilding tools to tiny sewing needles. In the middle nineteenth century, British military technology—most famously the “Maxim gun”—was desired by the governments of Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and the Qing Empire, not only to attempt to defend themselves against foreign aggression but also to suppress uprisings among distressed farmers, unpaid soldiers, and angry students.

Though both the Qing and Ottoman empires had reservoirs of great wealth, neither empire had reformed its tax system so that it could exploit this wealth for purposes of industrialization or military modernization. For that, both empires went heavily into debt to Britain, France, Belgium, Prussia, and other European powers. To protect their interests, the Europeans sided with these traditional governments against rebels or nationalists who would not repay the loans. When the governments themselves could not repay, the debts were sometimes forgiven in exchange for greater trade privileges awarded to the European creditors. Ultimately, the greatest European export to these empires was money, on which the Europeans earned a high profit in the form of interest rates. Once the Ottoman and Qing empires were debtors of the European powers, they were also their clients.

European manufactured goods such as cigarettes, matches, sewing machines, and weapons could now be imported at prices set by the Europeans themselves, making the goods cheap and popular. British and French nationals lived in the Ottoman and Qing empires under the protection of “extraterritoriality,” which exempted them from prosecution under local laws. Where they owned property, British or French law applied. There were larger concessions too. At the conclusion of the Crimean War in 1856, Britain acquired from the Ottoman Empire the right to build and control the Suez Canal, giving it an invaluable direct sea

route from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. In China, Britain also controlled a part of the mainland north of Hong Kong island and a large portion of the city of Shanghai.

By 1900, the sea-based empires of Europe had achieved a restructuring of power and influence in very widely separated parts of the world. The Ottoman and Qing empires, after all, had for centuries dominated millions of square miles of territory, hundreds of millions of people, and the overwhelming portion of the world's wealth. Many more people had considered Istanbul or Beijing to be a center of culture and power than had ever looked at London or Paris that way. But in the nineteenth century these things had changed. Military power based on the sea was now a fundamental factor. With battleships, great guns, and adequate supplies of coal and steel, Britain, France, and Germany had begun to define Europe generally and themselves specifically as the new centers. Wealthy and educated people all over the world began to study the technologies, political and economic systems of Europe.

In the later 1800s, relationships between the Ottoman and Qing empires on one hand and the European powers on the other were still symbiotic, or mutually supportive. The European powers, who were now the most productive in the world and in need of both raw materials and markets, depended on the survival of these empires in order to keep tapping into their partly depleted, but still considerable, concentrations of wealth. The new patterns of empire, which would change these practices dramatically, originated in the Pacific with the emergence of two new imperial competitors.

Pacific Imperialists

The Ottoman and Qing empires were dominated and to a certain extent restructured by newly dominant European powers, but Russia was treated differently. The primary strategy of Britain and France in the nineteenth century was to impede Russia's expansion and its acquisition of strategically or commercially advantageous ports in the Black Sea. But by 1900 the focus of European concern over Russian expansion had shifted to the northern Pacific. The combination of commercial income from the development of Vladivostok and access to raw goods such as timber, iron, and coal promised that Russia could become an industrial power on the basis of its Northeast Asian holdings.

Russia's development of its "Maritime Province" in Asia was limited, however, by a weakening of the central government, growing indebtedness to European creditors, and a sparse population in the Siberia. Mining was labor-intensive, and miners were always in short supply. Railroads, which were used elsewhere by the late nineteenth century to move equipment, raw goods, and troops to develop mining and heavy industry, were late in being developed in Siberia and the Maritime Province. The ultimate result was that Russia, despite its long history in the region, was slow in building up its military and industrial strength there. As a consequence,

by the first years of the twentieth century, Japan had emerged as the foremost challenger to Russian dreams of dominating the North Pacific.

Japan Arrives

Besides threatening Russia's ambitions in the Pacific, Japan was also a rival to Britain and France for exploitation of the remaining wealth of the Qing Empire. Japan's sudden emergence not only as an independent and industrializing nation but also as a new imperial power took many in both Asia and Europe by surprise. In the middle 1800s, it had appeared that Japan might be subordinated through an unequal treaty system, as China had been. This time the rival sea power was new—the United States of America. In 1853, the United States demanded that Japan agree to open its ports (which were closed by law to foreign trade). The result was a long political crisis in Japan, which by 1868 had risen to the level of civil war. In the traditional system, the emperor was head of state and the shogun was head of government. The government of the shogun was overthrown, and a group of young leaders from the provinces worked together to create a centralized, industrializing government that they hoped would spare Japan the humiliation and impoverishment to which China was being subjected. To command popular unity and support, they made the Meiji emperor the figurehead of the revolution and called the event the Meiji Restoration.

This group of young leaders had carefully studied European and American methods of government, education, military development, financing, medicine, culture, and fashion. They knew the importance of railroads and shipyards, and despite the high cost of industrialization, they were able to finance heavy industries in a very short period of time through innovative methods of deficit financing. At the same time, they used traditional loyalty to the emperor to motivate the Japanese people to throw themselves into projects for modernizing communications and education while creating very advanced industries. Within a generation, critical portions of the Japanese economy had been transformed, and the society as a whole was undergoing deep change.

The Japanese leaders, some of whom remained in power until the First World War, argued to protect Japan from encroachment by the imperialist forces that were at work in nearby China, the Japanese navy should become imperialist itself. Japan, like Britain, is an island with comparatively sparse mineral resources and little timber. A very small portion of the land (less than 20 percent) is suitable for farming or for the support of a growing population. In the later 1800s, Japan found much of the timber, minerals, and human labor needed for its industrialization in Korea. When the Qing Empire challenged Japan's growing power in Korea in 1894, the Japanese rapidly defeated the reputedly formidable new Chinese navy. After its victory, Japan wished to gain the same expansive economic and legal privileges as the other imperialists who had signed unequal treaties with the Qing.

The Japanese victory rang alarm bells for Britain and France. It also stunned and concerned the United States, which was in the process of establishing itself as

a new power in China. These countries joined with others to keep Japan from demanding too many concessions from the defeated Qing Empire. In a treaty of 1896, Japan was permitted to take the island of Taiwan—as Britain had taken the island of Hong Kong—but was otherwise expected to be content with the treaty provisions that the other powers enjoyed. To underscore the point, the Americans and the Europeans developed the so-called Open Door policy in China, a restatement of the principle that no one country should try to seize control of large amounts of Chinese territory and exclude the others. The written agreements supporting the Open Door policy were being completed when the Boxer Uprising broke out in 1900.

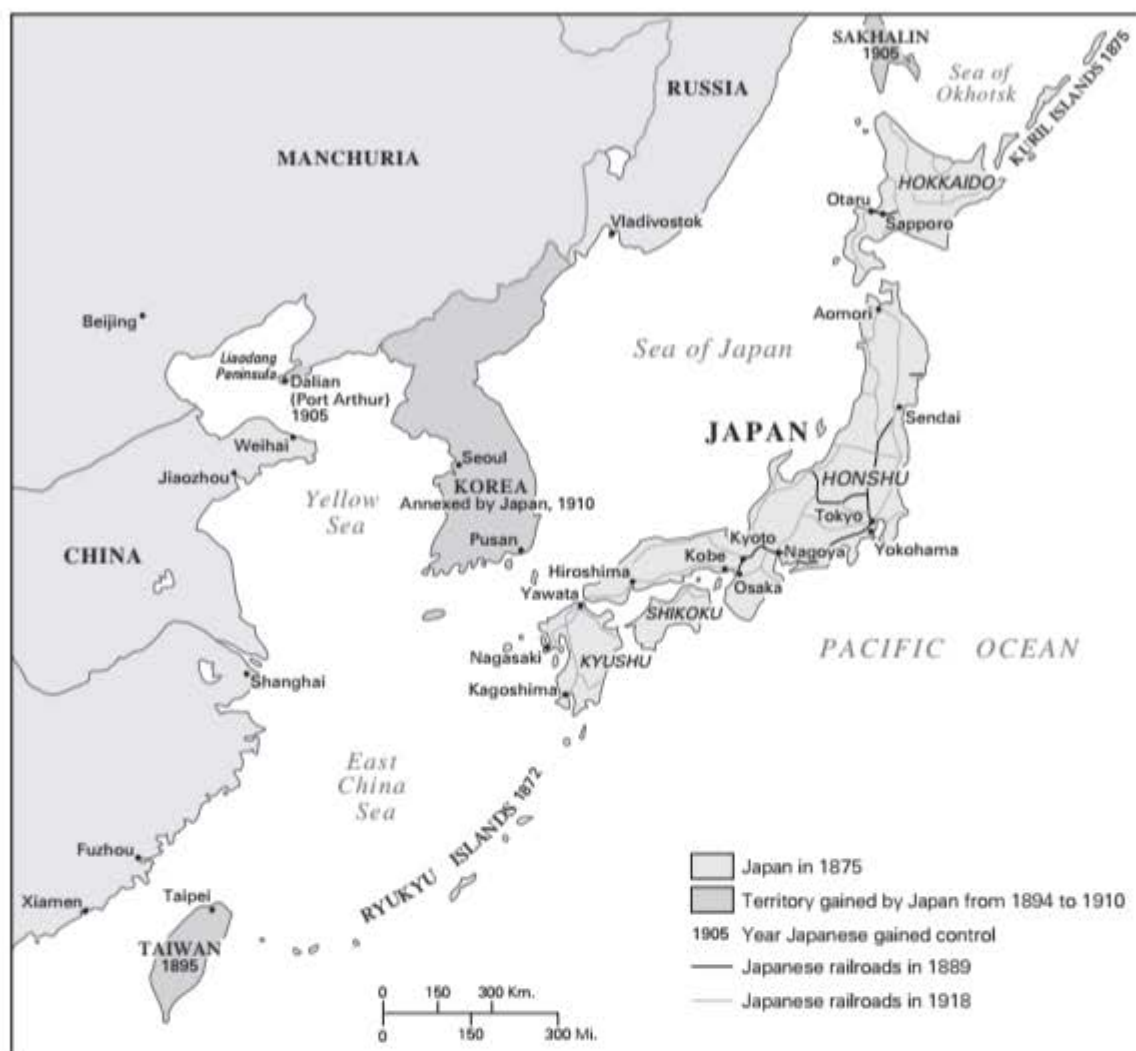
In suppressing the Boxers, Japan joined the European imperialists, Russia, and the United States in occupying the Qing capital and deciding how to punish Qing leaders for permitting (or encouraging) the uprising. But when the Boxer Uprising was quelled in 1901, the Japanese found that they still were neither trusted nor fully respected by their fellow imperialists. Britain signed an alliance with Japan in 1902, but the United States refused to change immigration laws that discriminated against Japanese and other Asians, and Russia refused to back off from the portions of Manchuria it had seized before Japan could move to do the same.

The rivalry between Russia and Japan finally led to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. Russia was by far the most successfully expansive power in Asia, and had been engaged in a very sophisticated program of military industrialization for more than ten years. The port at Vladivostok seemed to offer a strategic advantage for any Russian military maneuvers in the North Pacific. But, once again, the Japanese were the surprise victors.

Ideological and Strategic Challenge of the Pacific Empires

The international ramifications of the Russian defeat were immediate. One of the strongest reactions was among American journalists and other opinion makers who had previously championed the cause of “progressive” imperialism. The height of their enthusiasm for the concept had come during the American acquisition of the Philippines in 1898. After defeating Spain—which had been demonized in the American press as one of the most despotic and obscurantist of the European imperial powers—the United States had forced the older empire to sell the Philippines for \$20 million. The American navy steamed to Luzon, and American soldiers and marines—many of them former “Indian fighters” from the American West—established an overt military government on the islands.

Before Spain had sold the Philippines to the United States, a Filipino independence movement was already in progress. In summer and fall of 1898, the movement formed a government, created a university, drafted a constitution, and confirmed Emilio Aguinaldo y Famy as president. In June of 1899, the Philippine Republic declared a war of independence against the United States. Despite the fact that the American forces disarmed the population, resistance fighters continued their struggle with sticks, rocks, bows and arrows, and occasionally stolen



MAP 2.3 Expansion of the Japanese Empire.

As a result of treaties with the Qing Empire resulting from war or threat of war, by 1900 the Japanese empire included the Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan, and was a dominant military and industrial presence in Korea. Following the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, Japan made Korea a “protectorate” and assumed control of southern Sakhalin Island. Korea became a formal colony of Japan in 1910.

guns. In 1901, Aguinaldo was captured by the American authorities and forced to retire from public life. President Theodore Roosevelt ordered that the U.S. colonial government in the Philippines be transformed from military to civil. The army officers there protested that the military struggle had not been concluded—that, on the contrary, the widespread resistance of the whole population seemed as strong as ever. The Philippine Republic continued in name under the leadership of Macario Sakay y de León, until he was captured and hanged by U.S. authorities in 1907.

Robert Taft, who had been appointed the new civil governor of the Philippines, claimed publicly that no Filipino had ever spoken out against the occupation.

In fact, U.S. martial law in the Philippines made it a felony to criticize the United States or to call for an end to the occupation. It was left to a Filipino resident of the United States, Sixto Lopez, to point out that not only did the population of the Philippines reject the “blessings” of U.S. rule, but that Americans, of all people, should know exactly why it did so: “The Filipinos, like the Americans, prefer to be men, even in poverty, rather than subjects in luxury.... Surely the manly American must have temporarily forgotten all this when he speaks of ‘giving’ the Filipinos ‘prosperity under American rule!’”¹

Lopez was challenging the assumption, made famous at the time by Theodore Roosevelt and a host of writers, that there was a hierarchy of races. These ideas were a hodgepodge of Spencerian and Huxleyan notions, combined with a new “environmentalism,” meaning that a people’s mental, physical, and cultural traits are formed from their earliest environmental conditions and cannot be changed. The popular notion was that peoples who originated in temperate climatic zones suitable for agriculture, like the so-called “Anglo-Saxons,” had the capacity to create orderly, prosperous societies in which individuals have maximum freedom. Other peoples who came from places where it is extremely hot or extremely cold were assumed to have deficiencies caused by their adaptation to harsh conditions. Such peoples, according to this ideology, must be taught how to do it by the more “progressive” races. Though the inferior peoples would never assume a leadership role, they could learn to be reliable servants and sidekicks, and they could enjoy



Bettmann/Corbis

Emilio Aguinaldo led the armed resistance against Spanish imperialism in the Philippines. When the United States declared war on Spain in 1898, Aguinaldo was leading a Philippines independence movement, and in 1899 he was appointed president by a constitutional convention. When the United States refused to recognize the independence of the Philippines, Aguinaldo declared war on the United States.

¹ Sixto Lopez, “Do Filipinos Desire American Rule?” *Gunton’s Magazine*, 22 (June 1902).

the benefits of orderly societies run by more advanced peoples. A decade before the American movement into the Pacific, this idea had been called the “white man’s burden” by its advocates, claiming self-sacrifice on behalf of less fortunate, inferior people.

These claims were frequently met with opposition and derision by American writers. Mark Twain, Edgar Lee Masters, and William Dean Howells were prominent writers who denounced the new imperialism. Anti-imperial sentiment was also strong in women’s publications, and the social activist Jane Addams—who argued that militarism and democracy were not compatible in the long run—was only one of the prominent women opposing U.S. imperialism in Cuba, Hawaii, and the Philippines. But they were an insignificant minority in comparison to the policymakers who advised and encouraged the McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft governments. Theodore Roosevelt spoke for the majority of his generation when he proclaimed that the coming of American imperialism to the Pacific would mean the breaking of the shackles of the old despotic empires of Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands, and the spreading of new forces for prosperity and liberation.

At about the same time that Roosevelt was proselytizing for American imperialism, a generation of Japanese educators and writers was producing a new amendment to the overall theory. Japan, they noted, was also in the temperate zone, and since 1868 the Japanese had proved efficient at adapting all the features of “progressive” culture to their own islands: capitalism, industrialization, imperialism, constitutional government, and even Christianity. This would seem, they pointed out, to give the Japanese a place among the band of progressive, liberal imperialists. Many of writers were too polite to point out that this seemed to poke a large hole in the theory of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race that was often advertised at the time. More radical Japanese writers with less international exposure did make such statements, however.

The international argument for Japan’s inclusion among the imperialists was made. And although the leaders of Britain and the United States had no intention of allowing Japan to acquire enough territory to become a rival of their countries, they could certainly agree that Japanese influence over certain Asian nations—particularly China and Korea—would be beneficial. Japan would invigorate them and get them started on the path to prosperity and liberty. In Japan, academics, journalists, and young army officers began to discuss the idea of a “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere,” in which millions would advance and enrich themselves under Japanese leadership and instruction. Although Roosevelt and his peers might have approved of Japan’s new role as a progressive, instructive, reforming imperialist in Taiwan and Korea, the Japanese historian Asakawa Kan’ichi—a 1909 graduate of Dartmouth College and an observer of the Portsmouth negotiations in 1906—was disturbed by the ambiguities of Japan’s claims:

“In its economic aspects, does reform mean the creation of circumstances favorable to the quick exploitation of Korea’s resources by the Japanese? This is certainly one interpretation. Another and very different interpretation is that reform means not the exploitation but the development of the resources; not exploitation

for the sole interest of the Japanese but development for the large and increasingly large common interests of the Koreans and the Japanese. Which of these two economic interpretations forms the motive of Japan's reform of Korea?"²

Japan's characterization of itself as a progressive imperialist power was not a serious challenge to the United States until the Japanese defeat of Russia in 1905. People who were considered European and superior had been bested in battle after battle by this upstart Asian power. After the defeat of the Qing Empire by Japan in 1895, the Europeans had banded together to prevent Japan from maximizing its advantages. With Japan's defeat of Russia, the European powers and the United States intended to do this again. The Russians came to Portsmouth believing that the United States would lessen the blow of their defeat, and they were right. When the treaty talks concluded in 1906, Japan was given no territorial rights on the Asian mainland other than recognition of its interests in Manchuria and Korea and outright control of half of Sakhalin. Japan basically made no immediate material advances as a result of its victory at a time when victory in war was normally accompanied by substantial awards of money, territory, and privileges.

In Japan, reaction to the treaty focused less on Russia and more on the United States, which was seen as having designed the terms of the treaty. The rivalry between Japan and the United States in the Pacific was already keen. Japanese military strategists had targeted Hawaii in the early 1890s and were bitterly disappointed when the United States overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy and seized control of the islands in 1898. In the same year the United States gained the Philippines—another Japanese target. And in Japanese eyes the United States added insult to injury when it extended its ban on Asian immigration to both these newly acquired Pacific territories.

For Britain, the tolerance of Japanese expansion into Korea, Manchuria, and elsewhere in eastern Asia was now combined with a wariness regarding the development of Japan as a Pacific sea power. This was evident not only in the series of naval treaties restricting the growth of the Japanese fleet after 1905 but also in a newly cooperative position toward Russia. In 1907, Britain and Russia concluded a nonaggression pact that essentially ended a long-standing and wide-ranging British willingness to use military force to prevent Russian expansion. Britain and Russia even collaborated in dividing Iran into spheres of interest, each hoping for rights to the oil that was known to be somewhere under the Iranian soil.

But Japan's development of sea power remained an important issue. This was the most zealously guarded and regulated area of international military armament. The great sea powers—Britain, the United States, France, Germany, and Italy—attempted to draft new international laws that would stipulate ratios for the building of armored ships by the various powers. In these drafts, the United States and Britain were in the top rank, with the highest quotas. Germany was next, and

²Asakawa Kan'ichi, "Comment on The Treaty of Portsmouth," 1906.

France and Italy were in the lowest rank. These recommendations were among many drafts of new international laws, and a plan for an international court, that were written but not ratified by any of the proposed participants before World War I. After 1906, Japan was included in the ranks of international sea powers, but the intention was to keep Japanese production of military ships on a level with that of Italy or France. Though these ratios were not ratified or enforced, the basic concept persisted and eventually provided the foundation for multinational treaties after World War I.

Japanese Imperialism in Continental Asia

Seeking opportunities for expansion in Asia that would not provoke a head-on collision with the United States, Japanese military strategists looked once again to the Qing Empire. Meiji-era Japanese military strategists had stressed the need to control Korea, which could otherwise become a launching point for a Chinese or Russian invasion of Japan. In 1905, Japan was also able to force a treaty upon Korea, declaring the latter a “protectorate” (a concept borrowed from the U.S. control of certain Pacific islands) of Japan, putting it effectively under Japanese control.

The larger plan of Japanese strategic planners was to use northern Korea as a staging point for moving toward Manchuria, which was even richer in mineral deposits and agricultural productivity. Korea and Manchuria together supplied Japan with iron, coal, timber, wheat, and labor, while Taiwan supplied labor and some rice. Japanese manufactured goods began to dominate the markets of all East Asia. But the effects of Japanese imperialism on Korea, in particular, were harsh. Koreans were forced into labor camps in the north of their country and in Manchuria, while those remaining in their homes were required to provide shelter, food, and in many instances sex to occupying Japanese troops. Korean outrage was so intense that a Korean laborer assassinated Japanese Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi in 1909 in the Manchurian city of Harbin. Japan’s reaction was to make Korea a formal colony in 1910.

By that year it was clear that the Qing Empire was on the verge of collapse, and Japan was poised to seize whatever gains were possible. Hopes that Qing reforms and industrialization would allow China to become at least marginally self-sufficient were gone by the beginning of the twentieth century. But among the provincial governors who became national leaders in the Qing Empire during the late nineteenth century were several who were actually successful on a regional basis. These men, most well-known among them Li Hongzhang, were able to make advances in reforming the regional military, establishing industry, restructuring education, and even getting international recognition. The result, however, was not a stronger empire but a more severely decentralized one. Some progressive areas, particularly in northern and coastal China, prospered as their governors became more powerful. Other areas, particularly in central China, became more lawless and impoverished and could not obtain support from the central government as they had a hundred years before.

Many of the regional leaders could see the end of the empire coming. This was particularly true in Manchuria, where after 1905 Japanese industrialists began to build a railroad system for the purpose of moving food, heavy goods, and people between Korea and Manchuria. The local Qing leaders were helpless to prevent this Japanese encroachment, and instead they began to enter into a kind of partnership with the Japanese military leaders sent to protect the new railways and mines. In exchange, the Japanese militarists did not assassinate or remove these leaders, and in many cases shared a small portion of the profits with them. The local leaders were also expected to share with the Japanese military any information they had about the imminent fall of the Qing Empire.

Given these circumstances, it may seem ironic that Japan became a leading inspiration for Chinese nationalists. Young Chinese students and professors who were convinced that the Qing Empire had to be replaced by a national republic had been looking to Japan for ideas and financial support ever since Japan had so unexpectedly defeated the Qing navy in 1895. To these young nationalists, Japan demonstrated that Asians could industrialize as quickly and effectively as Europeans. Indeed, Asian nations that followed Japan's example might become international powers in their own right. Japanese leaders had also publicly protested the American prohibition on Asian immigration, not only to the United States but to its new territories in Hawaii and the Philippines. This was particularly inspiring to young urban Chinese, who also protested the prohibition as part of their nationalist movement, organizing demonstrations and boycotts of U.S. goods but getting no support from either their own imperial government or from local governors. Nationalists from all over Asia—including India, Vietnam, and eastern Russia—flocked to Japan to find encouragement, funds, and freedom from the restrictive speech laws that pertained in their own countries.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen, a native of Canton who had been educated in Hong Kong and Hawaii, became the leader of the Chinese Patriotic Alliance (Tongmeng hui), which sought to overthrow the Qing and establish a nationalist republic in China. His headquarters in 1905 was in Tokyo, and many of his new concepts, such as nationalism and national sovereignty, came into the Chinese language through borrowings from Japanese. Sun was always working from a position of weakness and had to accept monetary contributions wherever he could find them. Many such contributions came from the Japanese government, which hoped that if Sun were successful he would consider Japan a sponsor and a friend. Japan was poised to gain great influence, and perhaps outright control, of large portions of China once the Qing Empire finally collapsed.

Abandonment of the Land-Based Empires

The collapse of the land-based empires continued into the second decade of the twentieth century. It is important to note two features of these individual declines. First, groups within the imperial borders noted and exploited the weakness of these



GLOBAL Technologies

Global Communications

Once the basic elements of electric current were understood in the eighteenth century, inventors quickly devised methods to transmit signals over wires. This permitted rapid, long-distance transmission of messages of syncopated electrical bursts, the basis of the telegraph. But to make this communication global, it was necessary to extend cables beneath the seas. The British Empire was the leader in these developments. The acquisition of gutta-percha (a flexible substance from the latex of certain trees) from Malaya allowed undersea cables to be insulated but remain relatively flexible. The first

trans-Atlantic cable was completed in 1858, and Latin America added to the network soon after. But the huge Pacific remained a daunting challenge. In 1902, Britain succeeded in laying a cable between Canada and Australia, with links to New Zealand. East Asia did not have a direct connection to the United States until the completion of the San Francisco-Honolulu-Yokohama cable of 1909.

As transoceanic cables were being laid, experimenters such as the American Elisha Gray and Alexander Graham Bell (a Scot working in the United States) were attempting to learn how to transmit speech via long-distance electrical impulses. Bell studied the behavior of the membrane in a corpse's ear to understand the analysis and replication of sound waves, or "harmonic telegraphy." Gray and Bell's patent applications for the telephone were filed the same day in Boston in 1876, and many of the technical aspects were similar, but Bell was awarded the patent. Many other

old imperial regimes as early as, or earlier than, foreign imperialists. The results were dispiriting and sometimes disabling internal troubles, ranging from rebellion to civil war. In all the land-based empires, secessionist movements like that of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire—advocating the use of the local vernacular for newspapers and theater, self-government, and some political protections—appeared. In the Russian Empire, Ukrainian nationalism emerged, as well as movements for independence in the Caucasus and among the Tartars of Central Asia. Before the fall of the Qing Empire, Mongolia and Tibet established their independence.

But the situation in the Ottoman Empire was the most complex in many ways. By the 1880s, peoples under the control of the Ottoman Empire, such as the Arabs, Turks, Kurds, and Croats, had perceived that the empire was dissolving. To varying degrees, they succeeded in forming groups that advocated independent national governments for themselves. The Armenian group was formed in the 1870s and was very active in both Ottoman and Russian territories. By the 1880s, it was a definite threat, and beginning in 1896 Ottoman rulers licensed Turkish and Kurdish soldiers and mercenaries to slaughter Armenians of all ages and occupations. After they assumed power in 1908, the nationalist Young Turks

inventors, including Thomas Edison, worked on the problems of amplification and number dialing that made working telephones possible. In the United States, the telephone companies were always private corporations, of which the most dominant was American Telephone and Telegraph, which directly or through its subsidiaries controlled telephone use in the United States, Canada, the Caribbean and—after World War II—Japan. In 1984, AT&T was forced by the United States government to fragment into smaller companies. In Britain, local private telephone companies were permitted, but the post office controlled the long-distance, or trunk, cables and over time bought out many of the smaller local companies. In 1981, British Telecom became a public corporation separate from the post office.

Alexander Graham Bell had argued that it should be possible to send many separate signals simultaneously through a single cable, and this insight is at

the heart both of the early telephone systems and of the modern Internet system. The wide application of computers in industrial and in military affairs in the very early 1960s led scientists to speculate on how information could be structured for transmission so that computers could talk to each other over the telephone lines. Computers that could perform the functions of handling and forwarding “packets” of information were the basis of the earliest internet, which was funded by the United States Department of Defense. All the elements familiar to modern Internet users—e-mail, bulletin boards, hypertext, encryption, and even the graphical user interface—were present in some form from the inception of the Internet. Since the 1970s, telephony and the Internet have advanced together, leading to the near universality of voice-over-internet-protocol communications today.

continued to authorize the slaughter of Armenians. Between 1896 and the end of the Ottoman Empire, it is estimated that well over a million Armenians were murdered in these openly genocidal campaigns. Whatever the Turkish motives behind these massacres were, the beginning of the story was Armenian attempts to establish an independent nation as the Ottoman Empire collapsed.

In the Middle East the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire produced more anxieties, because Egypt was already under British control and it was clear that either Britain or France would seize the territories of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. In the Arabian peninsula there was fear that a new wave of European imperialism would threaten the independence of the loosely allied groups in the region. Sharif Hussein bin Ali, the ruler of Mecca, became the leading strategist in the movement for Arab independence. Though his plans for a single Arab state were not realized, he later aided the British campaigns against remnant Ottoman forces that concluded the First World War in the Middle East (see Chapter 3). Britain and France had entered into a secret agreement in 1916 to divide the Arab lands of the vanishing Ottoman Empire between themselves. France took Syria and Lebanon, and Britain took Palestine and Jordan. Britain’s deal with Russia

to split dominance over Iran had paid off, and oil had been discovered within the British sphere in 1908. By the time Britain acquired Palestine and Jordan, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later British Petroleum Company) had been formed, with the British government owning the majority of the shares. This gave Britain a dominant position in the Middle East for decades to come.

In East Asia, there was no real rival to the expanding Japanese Empire. As much as Europe or the United States fretted about the growing Japanese industrial and military presence in Korea, Manchuria, northern China, and the western Pacific, they were unwilling or unable to make a substantial intervention except through diplomacy. Japanese ambitions were not limited to coastal East Asia, but also extended to Siberia and Mongolia. By 1905, Mongols were looking forward to the end of the Qing Empire, and many were feeling nationalistic; they did not want Dr. Sun or other nationalist Chinese to control Mongolia. Japanese strategists attempted to create partnerships with Mongol nationalists, but they encountered strong competition from their old Russian rivals. Mongolia declared its independence from the Qing in 1910 and made a Buddhist religious leader head of state. However, Japan and Russia continued to compete with each other for influence with the new Mongol government.

Russia also attempted to gain power in the Qing province of Xinjiang, which had formerly been Eastern Turkestan. This largely Muslim, Turkic-speaking region had been conquered by the Qing in the 1700s after a series of very bloody campaigns, and in the 1800s it had been the site of many large, violent uprisings in which local military leaders attempted to achieve independence from the Qing Empire. Though none of these rebellions was really successful, each created hopes of success in the future, and each invited the attention of foreign powers hoping to gain influence with local leaders. Since control of Turkestan would be a strategic advantage in either protecting or invading Afghanistan, Iran, India, Tibet, or China, Russia was greatly interested in the area, as was Britain. They competed through the 1800s in the “Great Game,” but by the 1905–1910 period it was still unclear who had the upper hand.

In Tibet, another Qing territory, Britain was the primary foreign interventionist. In the late 1800s, British scouts from India were investigating whether Britain should make an attempt to wrest Tibet away from the Qing. Instead, Britain opted to encourage Tibetan nationalists to declare independence from the Qing—exactly the strategy that Japan was following in Korea at this time. In 1910, Tibetan nationalists did indeed declare independence, and Britain supplied advisers and rifles to aid the Tibetan cause.

This left China in a very precarious position in 1910. The Qing Empire had all but evaporated, yet a Qing emperor—the infant Puyi—was still on the throne. China itself had not declared its independence, but Mongolia and Tibet had done so, and Manchuria was clearly not controlled by China any longer. When the Chinese nationalist revolution broke out in 1911, it was relatively limited in geographical scope and only months in duration. In early 1912, Puyi’s guardians arranged for him to abdicate but to continue to reside in the Forbidden City in Beijing. However, the decentralization that had characterized China in the late

1800s continued to dominate the politics of the Republic of China in the 1910s. Powerful local leaders—now called “warlords” by foreign observers—forced the new republic to bargain with them for control, and in 1915 one of them attempted to have himself installed as emperor. The plot failed, but for the next ten years China was divided between a government headed by Sun Yat-sen in the south and a coalition of warlords based at Beijing. When Sun died in 1925, his dream of a unified Chinese republic with a civil government and liberal laws for the protection of the common people seemed to have no hope of being realized.

A weak and disunited China was unable to solve the problem of Japanese military expansionism in Asia. The old Qing Empire had been protected by the imperialist alliance from outright colonization by any single power, but the republic’s situation was different. Though the republic promised to respect the conditions of the unequal treaties and continue foreign privileges in the colonies and treaty ports, it did not assume the debt of the extinct Qing Empire. As a result, foreign powers felt that protecting the republic against internal or external challenges was less urgent. Moreover, after 1912, Europe was distracted by its own tensions and could not maintain the unity of interest and action that had enabled it to protect China from colonization by Japan.

By 1915, the disintegration of the land-based empires and the momentum behind the new empires based on advanced sea technologies combined to create unusual possibilities and great dangers in many parts of the world. In the vast and diverse territories that had once been the Qing Empire, independent border states attempted to stabilize themselves, Chinese nationalists struggled unsuccessfully to centralize and control an enormous population, and local governors bargained with foreign powers to achieve some modest degree of economic security. In the lands of the weakening Ottoman Empire, Turkish nationalists were carving out the new Turkish Republic, which would attempt to centralize and control a modest population, while the more far-flung parts of the Ottoman Empire were left to declare their independence and fight against encroachment by the new imperial powers, particularly Britain and France. In Russia, the decline of imperial prestige and the economic exhaustion of the ambitious industrialization programs had stimulated many dissident and revolutionary movements. Army officers, university students, and farmers were all reservoirs of revolutionary sentiment and action, and were slowly working toward coordinating and focusing their efforts. In 1917, Russia underwent two revolutions. The first, in February, was an attempt to establish a liberal, nationalist democracy on the ruins of the old empire. The second, in October, was a tightly organized, radical, authoritarian revolution led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin that within a few years created the Soviet Union.

CONCLUSION

The decline and dissolution of the land-based empires was a long process, during which profound changes in global political relationships, economic fortunes, and living conditions took place. The sea-based empires of Britain, France, Germany,

Belgium, and Italy at first did not colonize the old empires or destroy their traditional economies or market centers. On the contrary, once these old regimes had become debtors of the European empires and had lost the ability to regulate commerce across their own borders, the European powers actively worked to suppress domestic movements for major reform or national governance. But the arrival of the United States and Japan as new powers competing for control of Pacific resources and trade routes changed the outlook of the European empires. They attempted to support Russia, instead of frustrating it at every turn as they had done earlier. They incorporated the United States and Japan into the unequal treaty system in China, and the United States became a signatory of unequal treaties with the Ottoman Empire. And they found the United States a willing partner in their attempts to restrain Japan's prodigious industrial and naval development.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, however, it was clear that the late-nineteenth-century system was no longer viable. Attempts to codify the old values of respecting other powers' territorial interests and naval status failed. Japan had established a new pattern of colonization in Taiwan and Korea. Instead of concentrating on acquiring raw materials at low cost, Japan made its colonial possessions centers of industrialization. It built railroads, shipyards, extensive telegraph systems, trolleys, and factories that were the equal of those in Japan, and it also built schools to educate locals in the scientific and engineering knowledge that was necessary for industrialization. In this way, Japan transferred its industrial base to its possessions, keeping down the cost of its manufactured goods and by acquiring raw materials cheaply and employing low-paid workers. One of Japan's major conceptual conflicts with the European powers and the United States after its defeat of China in 1895. It claimed that it should be allowed to colonize parts of China and control its own industries there in order to make them efficient in ways that the weak and traditional Qing government would never be able to do. This was an argument that would prove very influential with Japan's imperialist rivals in China.

In its conflicts with the other sea-based powers over colonization, trade rights, and heavy ship ratios, Japan was the harbinger of a new era. Its colonization of Taiwan and Korea demonstrated that the old system of propping up traditional agriculturally based empires and their huge urban markets could not survive. The old land-based regimes collapsed within a decade of each other—the Qing in 1912, Russia in 1917, and the Ottoman in 1922. The European powers followed the Japanese example, scooping up the weaker border territories and bringing them under direct control, and eventually making them centers of outlying industry as well as agriculture, lumbering, and mining. Nationalists in the affected areas became more sure of their cause and more convinced that imperialism and exploitation went together. Theodore Roosevelt's ideal of imperialism as an elevating and progressive force was overshadowed by a new attitude—on the part of both proponents and opponents—that imperialism was as the Russian revolutionary leader Lenin described it: exploitative, unmerciful, and unjust.

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