Trade Warehouse in Guangzhou  European merchant enters in background while Chinese workers pack tea and porcelain. (Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts/The Bridgeman Art Library)

1. What were the benefits and the drawbacks to the Ottoman Empire of the reforms adopted during the Tanzimat period?

2. How did the Russian Empire maintain its status as both a European power and a great Asian land empire?

3. How did the impact of European imperialism on China differ from its impact on Russia and the Ottoman Empire?
When the emperor of the Qing* (the last empire to rule China) died in 1799, the imperial court received a shock. For decades officials had known that the emperor was indulging his handsome young favorite, Heshen*, allowing him extraordinary privileges and power. Senior bureaucrats hated Heshen, suspecting him of overseeing a widespread network of corruption. They believed he had been scheming to prolong the inconclusive wars against the native Miao* peoples of southwest China in the late 1700s. Glowing reports of successes against the rebels had poured into the capital, and enormous sums of government money had flowed to the battlefields. But there was no adequate accounting for the funds, and the war persisted.

After the emperor’s death, Heshen’s enemies ordered his arrest. When they searched his mansion, they discovered a magnificent
The Ottoman Empire

During the eighteenth century the central government of the Ottoman Empire lost much of its power to provincial governors, military commanders, ethnic leaders, and bandit chiefs. In several parts of the empire local officials and large landholders tried to increase their autonomy and divert imperial funds into their own coffers.

An army led by the central Arabian clan of Ibn Saud, which had adopted the puritanical and fundamentalist religious views of an eighteenth-century leader named Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, took control of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and deprived the sultan of the important honor of organizing the annual pilgrimage. In Egypt the Mamluk slave-soldiers purchased as boys in Georgia and nearby parts of the Caucasus and educated for war reasserted their influence. Such soldiers had ruled Egypt between 1260 and 1517, when they were defeated by the Ottomans. Now Ottoman weakness allowed Mamluk factions based on a revival of the slave-soldier tradition to reemerge as local military forces.

For the sultans, hopes of escaping still further decline were few. The inefficient Janissary corps wielded great political power in Istanbul. It used this power to force Sultan Selim III to abandon efforts to train a modern, European-style army at the end of the eighteenth century. This situation unexpectedly changed when France invaded Egypt.

Egypt and the Napoleonic Example, 1798–1840

Napoleon Bonaparte and an invasion force of 36,000 men and four hundred ships invaded Egypt in May 1798. The French quickly defeated the Mamluk forces that for several decades had dominated the country under the loose jurisdiction of the Ottoman sultan in Istanbul. Fifteen months later, after being stopped by Ottoman land and British naval forces in an attempted invasion of Syria, Napoleon secretly left Cairo and returned to France. Three months later he seized power and made himself emperor.

Back in Egypt, his generals tried to administer a country that they only poorly understood. Cut off from France by British ships in the Mediterranean, they had little hope of remaining in power and agreed to withdraw in 1801. For the second time in three years, a collapse of military power produced a power vacuum in Egypt. The winner of the

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (moo-HAHF-muhd ib-uhn abd ahl-wa-HAHB)
The Ottoman Empire  

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The ensuing contest was Muhammad Ali's, the commander of a contingent of Albanian soldiers sent by the sultan to restore imperial control. By 1805 he had taken the place of the official Ottoman governor, and by 1811 he had dispossessed the Mamluks of their lands and privileges.

Muhammad Ali’s rise to power coincided with the meteoric career of Emperor Napoleon I. It is not surprising, therefore, that he adopted many French practices in rebuilding the Egyptian state. Militarily, he dutifully followed the sultan’s urging and sent an army to Arabia to expel the Saudi from Mecca and Medina. Losses during this successful war greatly reduced his contingent of Albanians, leaving him free to construct a new army. Instead of relying on picked groups of warriors like the Mamluks, Muhammad Ali instituted the French practice of conscription. For the first time since the days of the pharaohs, Egyptian peasants were compelled to become soldiers.

He also established special schools for training artillery and cavalry officers, army surgeons, military bandmasters, and other specialists. The curricula of these schools featured European skills and sciences, and Muhammad Ali began to send promising young Turks and Circassians (an ethnic group from the Caucasus), the only people permitted to serve as military officers, to France for education. In 1824 he started a gazette devoted to official affairs, the first newspaper in the Islamic world.

To outfit his new army Muhammad Ali built all sorts of factories. These did not prove efficient enough to survive, but they showed a determination to achieve independence and parity with the European powers.

Money for these enterprises came from confiscation of lands belonging to Muslim religious institutions, under the pretext that the French occupation had canceled religious trusts established in earlier centuries, and from forcing farmers to sell their crops to the government at fixed prices. Muhammad Ali resold some of the produce abroad, making great profits as long as the Napoleonic wars kept European prices for wheat at a high level.

In the 1830s Muhammad Ali’s son Ibrahim invaded Syria and instituted some of the changes already under way in Egypt. The improved quality of the new Egyptian army had been proven during the Greek war of independence, which lasted from 1821 to 1831, when Ibrahim had commanded an expeditionary force to help the sultan. In response, the sultan embarked on building his own new
army in 1826. The two armies met in 1839 when Ibrahim attacked northward into Anatolia. The Egyptian army was victorious, and Istanbul would surely have fallen if not for European intervention.

In 1841 European pressure, highlighted by British naval bombardment of coastal cities in Egypt-controlled Syria, forced Muhammad Ali to withdraw to the present-day border between Egypt and Syria. The great powers imposed severe limitations on his army and navy and forced him to dissolve his economic monopolies and allow Europeans to undertake business ventures in Egypt.

Muhammad Ali remained Egypt’s ruler, under the suzerainty of the sultan, until his death in 1849; and his family continued to rule the country until 1852. But his dream of making Egypt a mighty country capable of standing up to Europe faded. What survived was the example he had set for the sultans in Istanbul.

Ottoman Reform and the European Model, 1807–1853

At the end of the eighteenth century Sultan Selim III (r. 1789–1807), an intelligent and forward-looking ruler who stayed well informed about events in Europe, introduced reforms to create European-style military units, bring provincial governors under the control of the central government, and standardize taxation and land tenure. The rise in government expenditures to implement the reforms was supposed to be offset by taxes on selected items, primarily tobacco and coffee.

These reforms failed for political, more than economic, reasons. The most violent and persistent opposition came from the Janissaries. Originally Christian boys taken from their homes in the Balkans, converted to Islam, and required to serve for life in the Ottoman army, in the eighteenth century the Janissaries became a significant political force in Istanbul and in provincial capitals like Damascus and Aleppo. Their interest in preserving special economic privileges made them resist the creation of new military units.

At times, the disapproval of the Janissaries produced military uprisings. An early example occurred in the Balkans, in the Ottoman territory of Serbia, where Janissaries acted as provincial governors. Their control in Serbia was intensely resented by the local residents, particularly Orthodox Christians who claimed that the Janissaries abused them. In response to the charges, Selim threatened to reassign the Janissaries to the Ottoman capital at Istanbul. Suspecting that the sultan’s threat signaled the beginning of the end of their political power, in 1805 the Janissaries revolted against Selim and massacred Christians in Serbia. Selim was unable to reestablish central Ottoman rule over Serbia. Instead, the Ottoman court had to rely on the ruler of Bosnia, a neighboring Balkan province, who joined his troops with the peasants of Serbia to suppress the Janissary uprising. The threat of Russian intervention prevented the Ottomans from disarming the victorious Serbians, so Serbia became effectively independent.

Other opponents of reform included ulama, or Muslim religious scholars, who distrusted the secularization of law and taxation that Selim proposed. In the face of widespread rejection of his reforms, Selim suspended his program in 1806. Nevertheless, a massive military uprising occurred at Istanbul, and the sultan was deposed and imprisoned. Reform forces rallied and recaptured the capital, but not before Selim had been executed. Selim’s cousin Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839) cautiously revived the reform movement. The fate of Selim III had taught the Ottoman court that reform needed to be more systematic and imposed more forcefully, but it took the concrete evidence of the effectiveness of radical reform in Muhammad Ali’s Egypt to drive this lesson home. Mahmud II was able to use an insurrection in Greece, and the superior performance of Egyptian forces in the unsuccessful effort to suppress it, as a sign of the weakness of the empire and the pressing need for reform.

Greek independence in 1829 was a complex event that had dramatic international significance. A combination of Greek nationalist organizations and interlopers from Albania formed the independence movement. By the early nineteenth century interest in the classical age of Greece and Rome had intensified European desires to encourage and if possible aid the struggle for independence. Europeans considered the war for Greek independence a campaign to recapture the classical roots of their civilization from Muslim despots, and many—including the “mad, bad and dangerous to know” English poet Lord Byron, who lost his life in the war—went to Greece to fight as volunteers. The Ottomans called on Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt, the son of Muhammad Ali, to help preserve their rule in Greece; but when the combined squadrons of the British, French, and Russian fleets, under orders to observe but not intervene in the war, made an unauthorized attack that sank the Ottoman fleet at the Battle of Navarino, not even Ibrahim’s help could prevent defeat (see Map 24.1).

Europeans trumpeted the victory of the Greeks as a triumph of European civilization over the Ottoman Empire, and Mahmud II agreed that the loss of Greece

Selim (seh-LEEM) Janissaries (JAN-ih-s say-reens)

Mahmud (MAH-mood) Ibrahim Pasha (ib-raH-HEEM PAH-shah)
Map 24.1 The Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1829–1914 At its height the Ottoman Empire controlled most of the perimeter of the Mediterranean Sea. But in the 1800s Ottoman territory shrank as many countries gained their independence. The Black Sea, where the Turkish coast was vulnerable to assault, became a weak spot as Russian naval power grew. Russian challenges to the Ottomans at the eastern end of the Black Sea and to the Persians east and west of the Caspian aroused fears in Europe that Russia was trying to reach the Indian Ocean.

indicated a profound weakness—he considered it backwardness—in Ottoman military and financial organization. With popular outrage over the military setbacks in Greece strong, the sultan made his move in 1826. First he announced the creation of a new artillery unit, which he had secretly been training. When the Janissaries rose in revolt, he ordered the new unit to bombard the Janissary barracks. The Janissary corps was officially dissolved.

Like Muhammad Ali, Mahmud felt he could not implement major changes without reducing the political power of the religious elite. He visualized restructuring the bureaucracy and the educational and legal systems, where ulama power was strongest. Before such strong measures could be undertaken, however, Ibrahim attacked from Syria in 1839. Battlefield defeat, the decision of the rebuilt Ottoman navy to switch sides and support Egypt, and the death of Mahmud, all in the same year, left the empire completely dependent on the European powers for survival.

Mahmud’s reforming ideas received their widest expression in the Tanzimat (“reorganization”), a series of reforms announced by his sixteen-year-old son and successor, Abdul Mejid, in 1839 and strongly endorsed by the European ambassadors. One proclamation called for public trials and equal protection under the law for all.

Tanzimat (TAHNZ-ee-MAT)  Abdul Mejid (ab-dul meh-JEED)
whether Muslim, Christian, or Jew. It also guaranteed some rights of privacy, equalized the eligibility of men for conscription into the army (a practice copied from Egypt), and provided for a new, formalized method of tax collection that legally ended tax farming in the Ottoman Empire. It took many years and strenuous efforts by reforming bureaucrats, known as the "men of the Tanzimat," to give substance to these reforms. At a theoretical level, however, they opened a new chapter in the history of the Islamic world. European observers praised them for their noble principles and rejection of religious influences in government. Ottoman citizens were more divided; the Christians and Jews, for whom the Europeans showed the greatest concern, were generally more enthusiastic than the Muslims. Many historians see the Tanzimat as the dawn of modern thought and enlightened government in the Middle East. Others point out that removing the religious elite from influence in government also removed the one remaining check on authoritarian rule.

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With the passage of time, one legal code after another—commercial, criminal, civil procedure—was introduced to take the place of the corresponding areas of religious legal jurisdiction. All the codes were modeled closely on those of Europe. The Shari’a, or Islamic law, gradually became restricted to matters of family law such as marriage and inheritance. As the Shari’a was displaced, job opportunities for the ulama shrank, as did the value of a purely religious education.

Like Muhammad Ali, Sultan Mahmud sent military cadets to France and the German states for training. Military uniform models were modeled on those of France. In the 1830s an Ottoman imperial school of military sciences, later to become Istanbul University, was established at Istanbul. Instructors imported from western Europe taught chemistry, engineering, mathematics, and physics in addition to military history. Reforms in military education became the model for more general educational reforms. In 1838 the first medical school was established to train army doctors and surgeons. Later, a national system of preparatory schools was created to feed graduates into the military schools. The subjects that were taught and many of the teachers were foreign, so the issue of whether Turkish would be a language of instruction in the new schools was a serious one. Because it was easier to import and use foreign textbooks than to write new ones in Turkish, French became the preferred language in all advanced professional and scientific training. In numerical terms, however, the great majority of students still learned to read and write in Quran schools down to the twentieth century.

In the capital city of Istanbul, the reforms stimulated the growth of a small but cosmopolitan milieu embracing European language and culture. The first Turkish newspaper, a government gazette modeled on that of Muhammad Ali, appeared in 1831. Other newspapers followed, many written in French. Travel to Europe—particularly to England and France—became more common among wealthy Turks. Interest in importing European military, industrial, and communications technology remained strong through the 1860s.

The Ottoman rulers quickly learned that limited improvements in military technology had unforeseen cultural and social effects. Accepting the European notion that modern weapons and drill required a change in traditional military dress, beards were deemed unhygienic and, in artillery units, a fire hazard. They were restricted, along with the wearing of loose trousers and turbans. Military headgear also became controversial. European military caps, which had leather bills on the front to protect against the glare of the sun, were not acceptable because they interfered with Muslim soldiers’ touching their foreheads to the ground during daily prayers. The compromise was the brimless cap now called the fez, which was adopted by the military and then by Ottoman civil officials in the early years of Mahmud II’s reign.

The changes in military dress—so soon after the suppression of the Janissaries—were recognized as an indication of the empire’s new orientation. Government ministries that traditionally drew young men from traditional bureaucratic families and trained them for ministerial service were gradually transformed into formal civil services hiring men educated in the new schools. Among self-consciously progressive men, particularly those in government service, European dress became the fashion in the Ottoman cities of the later 1800s. Traditional dress became a symbol of the religious, the rural, and the parochial.

Secularization of the legal code had special implications for the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottomans. Islamic law had required non-Muslims to pay a special head tax that was sometimes explained as a substitute for military service. Under the Tanzimat, the tax was abolished and non-Muslims became liable for military service—unless they bought their way out by paying a new military exemption tax. Under the new law codes, all male subjects had equal access to the courts, while the sphere of operation of the Islamic law courts shrank. Perhaps the biggest enhancement of the status of non-Muslims, however, was the strong and direct concern for
Modernized Ottoman Troops  This photograph of a contingent of Imperial Guards in the late nineteenth century shows them equipped and uniformed much like any other European army of the time. The only distinctive feature is the fez, a brimless hat adopted earlier in the century as a symbol of reform. Comparison with the soldiers in the funeral procession of Suleiman the Magnificent (page 528) shows the degree of change from the traditional military uniforms that were still being worn in the eighteenth century. (From one of the original photographic albums of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, 1842–1918/Library of Congress)

their welfare consistently expressed by the European powers. The Ottoman Empire became a rich field of operation for Christian missionaries and European supporters of Jewish community life in the Muslim world.

The public rights and political participation granted during the Tanzimat applied specifically to men. Private life, including everything connected to marriage and divorce, remained within the sphere of religious law, and at no time was there a question of political participation or reformed education for women. Indeed, the reforms may have decreased the influence of women. The political changes ran parallel to economic changes that also narrowed women’s opportunities.

The influx of silver from the Americas that had begun in the 1600s increased the monetization of some sectors of the Ottoman economy, particularly in the cities. Workers were increasingly paid in cash rather than in goods, and businesses associated with banking, finance, and law developed. Competition drove women from the work force. Early industrial labor and the professions were not open to women, and traditional “woman’s work” such as weaving was increasingly mechanized and done by men.

Nevertheless, women retained considerable power in the management and disposal of their own property, gained mostly through fixed shares of inheritance, well into the 1800s. After marriage a woman was often pressured to convert her landholdings to cash in order to transfer her personal wealth to her husband’s family, with whom she and her husband would reside; but this was not a requirement, since men were legally obligated to support their families single-handedly. Until the 1820s many women retained their say in the distribution of property through the creation of charitable trusts for their sons. Because these trusts were set up in the religious courts, they could be designed to conform to the wishes of family members, and they gave women of wealthy families an opportunity to exercise significant indirect control over property. Then, in the 1820s and 1830s the centralizing reforms of Mahmud II, which did not always produce happy
results, transferred jurisdiction over the charitable trusts from religious courts to the state and ended women's control over this form of property. In addition, reforms in the military, higher education, the professions, and commerce all bypassed women.

The Crimean War and Its Aftermath, 1853–1877

Since the reign of Peter the Great (r. 1689–1725) the Russian Empire had been attempting to expand southward at the Ottomans’ expense (see "Russia and Asia," below). By 1815 Russia had pied the Georgian region of the Caucasus away from the Ottomans, and the threat of Russian intervention had prevented the Ottomans from crushing Serbian independence. Russia seemed poised to exploit Ottoman weakness and acquire the long-sought goal of free access to the Mediterranean Sea. In the eighteenth century Russia had claimed to be the protector of Ottoman subjects of Orthodox Christian faith in Greece and the Balkans. When Muhammad Ali's Egyptian army invaded Syria in 1833, Russia signed a treaty in support of the Ottomans. In return, the sultan recognized an extension of this claim to cover all of the empire's Orthodox subjects. This set the stage for an obscure dispute that resulted in war.

In 1852 the sultan bowed to British and French pressure and named France Protector of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, a position with certain ecclesiastical privileges. Russia protested, but the sultan held firm. So Russia invaded Ottoman territories in what is now Romania, and Britain and France went to war as allies of the sultan. The real causes of the war went beyond church quarrels in Jerusalem. Diplomatic maneuvering among European powers over whether the Ottoman Empire should continue to exist and, if not, who should take over its territory lasted until the empire finally disappeared after World War I. The Eastern Question was the simple name given to this complex issue. Though the powers had agreed to save the empire from Ibrahim's invasion in 1839, Britain subsequently became very suspicious of Russian ambitions. A number of prominent British politicians were strongly anti-Russian. They feared that Russia would threaten the British hold on India either overland through Central Asia or by placing its navy in the Mediterranean Sea.

Between 1853 and 1856 the Crimean War raged in Romania, on the Black Sea, and on the Crimean peninsula. Britain, France, and the Italian kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont sided with the Ottomans, allowing Austria to mediate the final outcome. Britain and France trapped the Russian fleet in the Black Sea, where its commanders decided to sink the ships to protect the approaches to Sevastopol, their main base in Crimea. An army largely made up of British and French troops landed and laid siege to the city. A lack of railways and official corruption hampered Russian attempts to supply both its land and its sea forces. On the Romanian front, the Ottomans resisted effectively. At Sevastopol, the Russians were outmatched militarily and suffered badly from disease. As defeat became imminent, Tsar Nicholas died, leaving his successor, Alexander II (r. 1855–1881), to sue for peace when Sevastopol finally fell three months later.

A formal alliance among Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire blocked further Russian expansion into eastern Europe and the Middle East. The terms of peace also gave Britain and France a means of checking each other's colonial ambitions in the Middle East; neither, according to the agreement that ended the war, was entitled to take Ottoman territory for its exclusive use.

The Crimean War brought significant changes to all the combatants. The tsar and his government, already beset by demands for the reform of serfdom, education, and the military (discussed later), were further discredited. In Britain and France, the conflict was accompanied by massive propaganda campaigns. For the first time newspapers were an important force in mobilizing public support for a war. Press accounts of British participation in the war were often so glamorized that the false impression has lingered ever since that Ottoman troops played a negligible role in the conflict. At the time, however, British and French military commanders noted the massive losses among Turkish troops in particular. The French press, dominant in Istanbul, promoted a sense of unity between Turkish and French society that continued to influence many aspects of Turkish urban culture.

The larger significance of the Crimean War was that it marked the transition from traditional to modern warfare (see Environment and Technology: The Web of War). A high casualty count resulted in part from the clash of mechanized and unmechanized means of killing. All the combatant nations had previously prided themselves on the effective use of highly trained cavalry to smash through the front lines of infantry. Cavalry coexisted with firearms until the early 1800s, primarily because early rifles were awkward to load, vulnerable to explosion, and not very accurate. Swift and expert cavalry could storm infantry lines during the intervals between volleys and even penetrate artillery barricades. In the 1830s and 1840s percussion caps that did away with pouring gunpowder into the barrel of a musket were widely adopted in Europe. In Crimean War battles many
The Web of War

The lethal military technologies of the mid-nineteenth century that were used on battlefields in the United States, Russia, India, and China were rapidly transmitted from one conflict to the next. This dissemination was due not only to the rapid development of communications but also to the existence of a new international network of soldiers who moved from one trouble spot to another, bringing expertise in the use of new techniques.

General Charles Gordon (1833–1885), for instance, was commissioned in the British army in 1852, then served in the Crimean War after Britain entered on the side of the Ottomans. In 1860 he was dispatched to China. He served with British forces during the Arrow War and took part in the sack of Beijing. Afterward, he stayed in China and was seconded to the Qing imperial government until the suppression of the Taipings in 1864, earning himself the nickname “Chinese” Gordon. Gordon later served the Ottoman rulers of Egypt as governor of territory along the Nile. He was killed in Egypt in 1885 while leading his Egyptian troops in defense of the city of Khartoum against an uprising by the Sudanese religious leader, the Mahdi.

Journalism played an important part in the developing web of telegraph communications that sped orders to and from the battlefields. Readers in London could learn details of the drama occurring in the Crimea or in China within a week—or in some cases days—after they occurred. Print and, later, photographic journalism created new “stars” from these war experiences. Charles Gordon was one, Florence Nightingale was another.

In the great wars of the 1800s, the vast majority of deaths resulted from infection or excessive bleeding, not from the wounds themselves. Florence Nightingale (1820–1910), while still a young woman, became interested in hospital management and nursing. She went to Prussia and France to study advanced techniques. Before the outbreak of the Crimean War she was credited with bringing about marked improvement in British health care. When the public reacted to news reports of the suffering in the Crimea, the British government sent Nightingale to the region. Within a year of her arrival the death rate in the military hospitals there dropped from 45 percent to under 5 percent. Her techniques for preventing septicemia and dysentery, essentially sanitary measures like washing bed linens after a death and emptying toilet buckets outside, were quickly adopted by those working for and with her. On her return to London, Nightingale established institutes for nursing that soon were recognized as leaders around the world. She herself was lionized by the British public and received the Order of Merit in 1907, three years before her death.

The importance of Nightingale’s innovations in public hygiene is underscored by the life of her contemporary, Mary Seacole (1805–1881). A Jamaican woman who volunteered to nurse British troops in the Crimean War, Seacole was repeatedly excluded from nursing service by British authorities. She eventually went to Crimea and used her own funds to run a hospital there, bankrupting herself in the process. The drama of the Crimean War moved the British public to support Seacole after her sacrifices were publicized. She was awarded medals by the British, French, and Turkish governments and today is recognized with her contemporary Florence Nightingale as an innovative field nurse and a champion of public hygiene in peace time.

Florence Nightingale During Crimean War  This 1856 lithograph shows Florence Nightingale supervising nursing care in a hospital in Scutari (Uskudar) across the Bosphorus strait from Istanbul. Though the artist may have exaggerated the neatness and cleanliness of the ward, sanitary measures proved the key to Nightingale’s raising of the survival rate of sick and wounded soldiers. (Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library)
in the Crimean War, not its heroic events, made the conflict a turning point in the history of war.

After the Crimean War, declining state revenues and increasing integration with European commercial networks created hazardous economic conditions in the Ottoman Empire. The men of the Tanzimat dominated government affairs under Abdul Mejid’s successors and continued to secularize Ottoman financial and commercial institutions, modeling them closely on European counterparts. The Ottoman imperial bank was founded in 1840, and a few years later currency reform pegged the value of Ottoman gold coins to the British pound. Sweeping changes in the 1850s expedited the creation of banks, insurance companies, and legal firms throughout the empire. These and other reforms facilitating trade contributed to a strong demographic shift in the Ottoman Empire between about 1850 and 1880, as many rural people headed to the cities. Within this period many of the major cities of the empire—Istanbul, Damascus, Beirut, Alexandria, Cairo—expanded. A small but influential urban professional class emerged, as did a considerable class of wage laborers. This shift was magnified by an influx into the northern Ottoman territories of refugees from Poland and Hungary, where rivalry between the European powers and the Russian Empire caused political tension and sporadic warfare, and from Georgia and other parts of the Caucasus, where Russian expansion forced many Muslims to emigrate (discussed later).

The Ottoman reforms stimulated commerce and urbanization, but no reform could repair the chronic insolvency of the imperial government. Declining revenues from agricultural yields and widespread corruption damaged Ottoman finances. Some of the corruption was exposed in the early 1840s. From the conclusion of the Crimean War in 1856 on, the Ottoman government became heavily dependent on foreign loans. In return the Ottoman government lowered tariffs to favor European imports, and European banks opened in Ottoman cities. Currency changes allowed more systematic conversion to European currencies. Europeans were allowed to live in their own enclaves in Istanbul and other commercial centers, subject to their own laws and exempt from Ottoman jurisdiction. This status was known as extraterritoriality.

As the cities prospered, they became attractive to laborers, and still more people moved from the countryside. But opportunities for wage workers reached a plateau in the bloated cities. Foreign trade brought in large numbers of imports, but—apart from tobacco and the Turkish opium that American traders took to China to compete against the Indian opium of the British—few exports were sent abroad from Anatolia. Together with the growing national debt, these factors aggravated inflationary trends that left urban populations in a precarious
position in the mid-1800s. By contrast, Egyptian cotton exports soared during the American Civil War, when American cotton exports plummeted, but the profits benefited Muhammad Ali's descendants, who had become the hereditary governors of Egypt, rather than the Ottoman government. The Suez Canal, which was partly financed by cotton profits, opened in 1869, and Cairo was redesigned and beautified. Eventually overexpenditure on such projects plunged Egypt into the same debt crisis that plagued the empire as a whole.

In the 1860s and 1870s reform groups demanded a constitution and entertained the possibility of a law permitting all men to vote. Spokesmen for the Muslim majority expressed dismay at the possibility that the Ottoman Empire would no longer be a Muslim society. Muslims were also suspicious of the motives of Christian elites, many of whom enjoyed close relations with European powers. Memories of attempts by Russia and France to interfere in Ottoman affairs for the benefit of Christians seemed to some to warrant hostility toward Christians in Ottoman territories.

The decline of Ottoman power and prosperity had a strong impact on a group of well-educated young urban men who aspired to wealth and influence. They believed that the empire's rulers and the Tanzimat officials who worked for them would be forced to—or would be willing to—allow the continued domination of the empire's political, economic, and cultural life by Europeans. Though lacking a sophisticated organization, these Young Ottomans who are sometimes called Young Turks, though that term properly applies to a later movement—promoted a mixture of liberal ideas derived from Europe, national pride in Ottoman independence, and modernist views of Islam. Prominent Young Ottomans helped draft a constitution that was promulgated in 1876 by a new and yet untried sultan, Abdul Hamid II. This apparent triumph of liberal reform was short-lived. With war against Russia again threatening in the Balkans in 1877, Abdul Hamid suspended the constitution and the parliament that had been elected that year. He ruthlessly opposed further political reforms, but the Tanzimat programs of extending modern
schooling, utilizing European military practices and advisers, and making the government bureaucracy more orderly continued during his reign.

**THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE**

Awareness of western Europe among Russia’s elite began with the reign of Peter the Great (r. 1689–1725), but knowledge of the French language, considered by Russians to be the language of European culture, spread only slowly among the aristocracy in the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1812, when Napoleon’s march on Moscow ended in a disastrous retreat brought on more by what a later tsar called “Generals January and February” than by Russian military action, the European image of Russia changed. Just as Napoleon’s withdrawal from Egypt paved the way for the brief emergence of Muhammad Ali’s Egypt as a major power, so his withdrawal from Russia conferred status on another autocrat. Conservative Europeans still saw Russia as an alien, backward, and oppressive land, but they acknowledged its immensity and potential power and included Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801–1825) as a major partner in efforts to restore order and suppress revolutionary tendencies throughout Europe. Like Muhammad Ali, Alexander attempted reforms in the hope of strengthened his regime. Unlike Muhammad Ali, acceptance by the other European monarchs saved a rising Russia from being strangled in its cradle.

In several important respects Russia resembled the Ottoman Empire more than the conservative kingdoms of Europe whose autocratic practices it so staunchly supported. Socially dominated by nobles whose country estates were worked by unfree serfs, Russia had almost no middle class. Industry was still at the threshold of development by the standards of the rapidly industrializing European powers, though it was somewhat more dynamic than Ottoman industry. And the absolute power of the tsar was unchallenged. Like Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, Russia engaged in reforms from the top down under Alexander I, but when his conservative brother Nicholas I (r. 1825–1855) succeeded to the throne, iron discipline and suspicion of modern ideas took priority over reform.

**Russia and Europe**

In 1700 only 3 percent of the Russian people lived in cities, two-thirds of them in Moscow alone. By the middle of the nineteenth century the town population had grown tenfold, though it still accounted for only 6 percent of the population because the territories of the tsars had grown greatly through wars and colonization (see Chapter 20). Since mining and small-scale industry can be carried out in small communities, urbanization is only a general indicator of modern economic developments. These figures do demonstrate, however, that, like the Ottoman Empire, Russia was an overwhelmingly agricultural land. Moreover, Russian transportation was even worse than that of the Ottomans, since many of the latter’s major cities were seaports. Both empires encompassed peoples speaking many different languages.

Well-engineered roads did not begin to appear until 1817, and steam navigation commenced on the Volga in 1843. Tsar Nicholas I built the first railroad in Russia from St. Petersburg, the capital, to his summer palace in 1837. A few years later his commitment to strict discipline led him to insist that the trunk line from St. Petersburg to Moscow run in a perfectly straight line. American engineers, among them the father of the painter James McNeill Whistler, who learned to paint in St. Petersburg, oversaw the laying of track and built locomotive workshops. This slow start in modern transportation compares better with that of Egypt, where work on the first railroad began in 1861, than with France, which saw railroad building soar during the 1840s. Industrialization projects depended heavily on foreign expertise. British engineers set up the textile mills that gave wool and cotton a prominent place among Russia’s industries.

Until the late nineteenth century the Russian government’s interest in industry was limited and hesitant. To be successful, an industrial revolution required large numbers of educated and independent-minded artisans and entrepreneurs. Suspicious of Western ideas, especially anything smacking of liberalism, socialism, or revolution, Nicholas feared the spread of literacy and modern education beyond the minimum needed to train the officer corps and the bureaucracy. Rather than run the risk of allowing the development of a middle class and a working class that might challenge his control, Nicholas I kept the peasants in serfdom and preferred to import most industrial goods and pay for them with exports of grain and timber.

Like Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, Russia aspired to Western-style economic development. But fear of political change caused the country to fall farther behind western Europe, economically and technologically, than it had been a half-century before. When France and Britain entered the Crimean War, they faced a Russian army equipped with obsolete weapons and bogged down by lack of transportation. At a time when European engineers were making major breakthroughs in fast loading of cannon through an opening at the breech end, muzzle-loading artillery remained the Russian standard.
Despite these deficiencies in technology and its institutional supports, in some ways Russia bore a closer resemblance to other European countries than the Ottoman Empire did. From the point of view of the French and the British, the Cyrillic alphabet and the Russian Orthodox form of Christianity seemed foreign, but they were not nearly as foreign as the Arabic alphabet and the Muslim faith of the Turks, Arabs, Persians, and Muslim Indians. Britain and France feared Russia as a rival for power in eastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean lands, but they increasingly accepted Tsar Nicholas's view of the Ottoman Empire as "the sick man of Europe," capable of surviving only so long as the European powers found it a useful buffer state.

From the Russian point of view, kinship with western Europe was of questionable value. Westernizers, like the men of the Tanzimat and later the Young Ottomans, put their trust in technical advances and governmental reform. Opposing them were intellectuals known as Slavophiles, who considered the Orthodox faith, the solidarity of peasant life, and the tsar's absolute rule to be the proper bases of Russian civilization. After Russia's humiliating defeat in the Crimea, the Slavophile tendency gave rise to Pan-Slavism, a militant political doctrine advocating unity of all the Slavic peoples, including those living under Austrian and Ottoman rule.

On the diplomatic front, the tsar's inclusion among the great powers of Europe contrasted sharply with the sultan's exclusion. However, this did not prevent the development of a powerful sense of Russophobia in the west. Britain in particular saw Russia as a geopolitical threat and despised the continuing subjection of the serfs, who were granted their freedom by Tsar Alexander II only in 1861, twenty-eight years after the British had abolished slavery. The passions generated by the Crimean War and its outcome affected the relations of Russia, Europe, and the Ottoman Empire for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

Russia and Asia  The Russian drive to the east in the eighteenth century brought the tsar's empire to the Pacific Ocean and the frontiers of China (see Map 20.1) by century's end. In the nineteenth century Russian expansionism continued with a drive to the south. The growing inferiority of the Russian military in comparison with the European powers did not affect these Asian battlefronts,
since the peoples they faced were even less industrialized and technologically advanced than the Russians. In 1860, Russia established a military outpost on the Pacific coast that would eventually grow into the great naval port of Vladivostok, today Russia’s most southerly city. In Central Asia the steppe lands of the Kazakh nomads came under Russian control early in the century, setting the stage for a confrontation with three Uzbek states farther south. They succumbed to Russian pressure and military action one by one, beginning in 1865, giving rise to the new province of Turkestan, with its capital at Tashkent in present-day Uzbekistan. In the region of the Caucasus Mountains, the third area of southward expansion, Russia first took over Christian Georgia (1780), Muslim Azerbaijan (1801), and Christian Armenia (1813) before embarking on the conquest of the many small principalities, each with its own language or languages, in the heart of the mountains. Between 1829 and 1864 Dagestan, Chechnya, Abkhazia, and other regions that were to gain political prominence only after the breakup of the Soviet Union at the end of the twentieth century became parts of the Russian Empire.

The drive to the south intensified political friction with Russia’s new neighbors: Qing China and Japan in the east; Iran on the Central Asian and Caucasian frontiers, and the Ottoman Empire at the eastern end of the Black Sea. In the latter two instances, a flow of Muslim refugees from the territories newly absorbed by Russia increased anti-Russian feelings, but in some cases also brought talented people into Iran and the Ottoman lands. Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Bukharan exiles who had been exposed to Russian administration and education brought new ideas to Iran in the later decades of the century, and a massive migration of Crimean Turks and Circassians from Russia’s Caucasian territories affected the demography of the Ottoman Empire, which resettled some of the immigrants as far away as Syria and Jordan and others as buffer populations on the Russian frontiers.

In a broader political perspective, the Russian drive to the south added a new element to the Eastern Question. Many British statesmen and strategists reckoned that a warlike Russia would press on until it had conquered all the lands separating it from British India, a prospect that made them shudder, given India’s enormous contribution to Britain’s prosperity. The competition that ensued over which power would control southern Central Asia resulted in a standoff in Afghanistan, which became a buffer zone under the control of neither, and direct competition in Iran, where both powers sought to gain an economic and political advantage while preserving the independence of the Qajar dynasty of shahs.

### Cultural Trends
Unlike Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, which began to send students to Europe for training only in the nineteenth century, Russia had been in cultural contact with Western Europe since the time of Peter the Great (r. 1689–1725). Members of the Russian court knew Western languages, and the tsars employed officials and advisers from Western countries. Peter had also enlisted the well-educated Ukrainian clerics who headed the Russian Orthodox Church to help spread a Western spirit of education. As a result, Alexander I’s reforms met a more positive reception than those of Muhammad Ali and Mahmud II.

While Muhammad Ali put his efforts into building a modern army and an economic system to support it, the reforms of Sultan Mahmud II and Alexander promised more on paper than they brought about in practice. Both monarchs hoped to create better organized and more efficient government bureaux, but it took many years to develop a sufficient pool of trained bureaucrats to make the reforms effective. Alexander’s Council of State worked better than the new ministerial system he devised. The council coordinated ministry affairs and deliberated over new legislation. As for the ministries, Alexander learned a lesson from Napoleon’s military organization. He made each minister theoretically responsible for a strict hierarchy of officers below him and ordered the ministers to report directly to him as commander-in-chief. But this system remained largely ineffective, as did the provincial advisory councils that were designed to extend the new governing ideas into outlying areas.

Ironically, much of the opposition to these reforms came from well-established families that were not at all unfriendly to Western ideas. Their fear was that the new government bureaucrats, who often came from humble social origins, would act as agents of imperial despotism. This fear was realized during the conservative reign of Nicholas I in the same way that the Tanzimat-inspired bureaucracy of the Ottoman Empire served the despotic purposes of Sultan Abdul al-Hamid II after 1877. In both cases, historians have noted that administrative reforms made by earlier rulers began to take hold under conservative despots, though more because of accumulating momentum and training than because of those rulers’ policies.

Individuals favoring more liberal reforms, including military officers who had served in Western Europe, intellectuals who read Western political tracts, and members of Masonic lodges who exchanged views with...
Freemasons in the west, formed secret societies of opposition. Some placed their highest priority on freeing the serfs; others advocated a constitution and a republican form of government. When Alexander I died in December 1825, confusion over who was to succeed him encouraged a group of reform-minded army officers to try to take over the government and provoke an uprising. The so-called December revolt failed, and many of the participants were severely punished. These events ensured that the new tsar, Nicholas I, would pay little heed to calls for reform over the next thirty years.

Though the great powers meeting in Paris to settle the Crimean War in 1856 compelled the Ottoman sultan to issue new reform decrees improving the status of non-Muslim subjects, Russia faced a heavier penalty, being forced to return land to the Ottomans in both Europe and Asia. This humiliation contributed to the determination of Nicholas’s son and successor, Alexander II, to institute major new reforms to reinvigorate the country. The greatest of his reforms was the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the conferral on them of property rights to prevent them from simply becoming hired laborers of big landowners (see Chapter 26). He also authorized new joint-stock companies, projected a railroad network to tie the country together, and modernized the legal and administrative arms of government.

Intellectual and cultural trends that had germinated under Alexander I, and that grew slowly under Nicholas, flourished under Alexander II. More and more people became involved in intellectual, artistic, and professional life. Under Alexander I education had expanded both at the preparatory and university levels, though Alexander imposed curbs on liberal thought in his later years. Most prominent intellectuals received some amount of instruction at Moscow University, and some attended German universities. Universities also appeared in provincial cities like Kharkov in Ukraine and Kazan on the Volga River. Student clubs, along with Masonic lodges, became places for discussing new ideas.

Nicholas continued his brother’s crackdown on liberal education in the universities, but he encouraged professional and scientific training. By the end of his reign Russian scholars and scientists were achieving recognition for their contributions to European thought. Scholarly careers attracted many young men from clerical families, and this helped stimulate reforms in religious education. Perhaps because political activism was prohibited, clubs, salons, and organizations promoting scientific and scholarly activities became more and more numerous. The ideas of Alexander Herzen (1812–1870), a Russian intellectual working abroad who praised traditional peasant assemblies as the heart of Russia, encouraged socialist and Slavophile thinking and gave rise, under Alexander II, to the narodniki, a political movement dedicated to making Russia a land of peasant communes. Feodor Dostoyevsky* (1821–1881) and Count Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), both of whom began to publish their major novels during the reign of Alexander II, aired these and other reforming ideas in the debates of the characters they created.

The initially ineffective bureaucratic reforms of Alexander I, which set in motion cultural currents that would make Russia a dynamic center of intellectual, artistic, and political life under his nephew Alexander II, resemble in some ways the Tanzimat reforms of the Ottoman Empire that preceded the emergence of the Young Ottomans as a new and assertive political and intellectual force in the second half of the nineteenth century. There was more overlap between the two groups of reformers and intellectuals in the Ottoman case than in the Russian, but the resemblance indicates parallel attitudes toward change on the part of the rulers.

Unlike the Ottoman Empire, however, Russia belonged to two different spheres of development. It entered the nineteenth century as a recognized political force in European politics, but in other ways it fit the Ottoman model of change. Rulers in both empires instituted reforms, overcame opposition, and increased the power of their governments. These activities also stimulated intellectual and political trends that would ultimately work against the absolute rule of tsar and sultan. Yet Russia would eventually develop much closer relations with western Europe and become an arena for every sort of European intellectual, artistic, and political tendency, while the Ottoman Empire would ultimately succumb to European imperialism.

The Qing Empire

In 1800 the Qing Empire faced many of the crises the Ottomans had encountered, but no early reform movement of the kind initiated by Sultan Selim III emerged in China. The reasons are not difficult to understand. The Qing Empire, created by the Manchus, had skillfully countered Russian strategic and diplomatic moves in the 1600s. Instead of a Napoleon threatening them with invasion, the Qing rulers enjoyed the admiration of Jesuit priests who likened them to enlightened philosophers. In 1793, however, a British attempt to establish

Feodor Dostoyevsky (FE-oh-dor dohl-stoh-YEHV-skee)
diplomatic and trade relations—the Macartney mission—turned European opinion against China (see Chapter 20).

For their part, the Qing rulers and bureaucrats faced serious crises of a depressingly familiar sort: rebellions by displaced indigenous peoples and the poor, protests against the injustice of the local magistrates, and official corruption of the sort discussed at the start of this chapter. They dealt with these problems in the usual way, by suppressing rebels and dismissing incompetent or untrustworthy officials, and paid little attention to contacts with far-off Europeans. Complaints from European merchants at Canton, who chafed against the restrictions of the “Canton system” by which the Qing limited and controlled foreign trade, were brushed off.

Economic and Social Disorder, 1800—1839

Early Qing successes and territorial expansion sowed the seeds of the domestic and political chaos of the later period. The Qing conquest in the 1600s brought stability to central China after decades of rebellion and agricultural shortages. The new emperors encouraged the recovery of farmland, the opening of previously uncultivated areas, and the restoration and expansion of the road and canal systems. The result was a great expansion of the agricultural base together with a doubling of the population between about 1650 and 1800. Enormous numbers of farmers, merchants, and day laborers migrated in search of less crowded conditions, and a permanent floating population of the unemployed and homeless emerged. By 1800 population strain on the land had caused serious environmental damage in some parts of central and western China.

While farmers tried to cope with agricultural deterioration, other groups vented grievances against the government: minority peoples in central and southwestern China complained about being driven off their lands during the boom of the 1700s; Mongols resented appropriation of their grazing lands and the displacement of their traditional elites. In some regions, village vigilante organizations took over policing and governing functions from Qing officials who had lost control. Growing numbers of people mistrusted the government, suspecting that all officials were corrupt. The growing presence of foreign merchants and missionaries in Canton and in the Portuguese colony of Macao aggravated discontent in neighboring districts.

In some parts of China the Qing were hated as foreign conquerors and were suspected of sympathy with the Europeans. Indeed, the White Lotus Rebellion (1794–1804)—partly inspired by a messianic ideology that predicted the restoration of the Chinese Ming dynasty and the coming of the Buddha—raged across central China for a decade. It initiated a series of internal conflicts that continued through the 1800s. Ignited by deepening social instabilities, these movements were sometimes intensified by local ethnic conflicts and by unapproved religions. The ability of some village militias to defend themselves and attack others intensified the conflicts, though the same techniques proved useful to southern coastal populations attempting to fend off British invasion.

The Opium War and Its Aftermath, 1839–1850

Unlike the Ottomans, the Qing believed that the Europeans were remote and only casually interested in trade. They knew little of the enormous fortunes being made in the early 1800s by European and American merchants smuggling opium into China. They did not know that silver gained in this illegal trade was helping finance the industrial transformation of England and the United States. But Qing officials slowly became aware of British colonies in India that grew and exported opium, and of the major naval base at Singapore through which British opium reached East Asia.

For more than a century, British officials had been frustrated by the trade deficit caused by the British demand for tea and the Qing refusal to facilitate the importation of any British product. In the early 1700s a few European merchants and their Chinese partners were importing small quantities of opium. In 1729 the first Qing law banning opium imports was promulgated. By 1800, however, opium smuggling had swelled the annual import level to as many as four thousand chests. British merchants had pioneered this extremely profitable trade; Chinese merchants likewise profited from distributing the drugs. A price war in the early 1820s stemming from competition between British and American importers raised demand so sharply that as many as thirty thousand chests were being imported by the 1830s. Addiction spread to people at all levels of Qing society, including very high-ranking officials. The Qing emperor and his officials debated whether to legalize and tax opium or to enforce the existing ban more strictly. Having decided to root out the use and importation of opium, in 1839 they sent a high official to Canton to deal with the matter.

Britain considered the ban on opium importation an intolerable limitation on trade, a direct threat to Britain’s economic health, and a cause for war. British naval and marine forces arrived at the south China coast
in late 1839. The power of modern naval forces dawned on the Qing slowly. Indeed, Qing strategists did not learn to distinguish a naval invasion from piracy until the Opium War was nearly ended.

The Opium War (1839–1842) broke out when negotiations between the Qing official and British representatives reached a stalemate. The war exposed the fact that the traditional, hereditary soldiers of the Qing Empire—the Bannermen—were, like the Janissaries of the Ottoman Empire, hopelessly obsolete. As in the Crimean War, the British excelled at sea, where they deployed superior technology. British ships landed marines who pillaged coastal cities and then sailed to new destinations (see Map 24.2). The Qing had no imperial navy, and until they were able to engage the British in prolonged fighting on land, they were unable to defend themselves against British attacks. Even in the land engagements, Qing resources proved woefully inadequate. The British could quickly transport their forces by sea along the coast; Qing troops moved primarily on foot. Moving Qing reinforcements from central to eastern China took more than three months, and when the defense forces arrived, they were exhausted and basically without weapons.

The Bannermen used the few muskets the Qing had imported during the 1700s. The weapons were matchlocks, which required the soldiers to ignite the load of gunpowder in them by hand. Firing the weapons was dangerous, and the canisters of gunpowder that each musketeer carried on his belt were likely to explode if a fire broke out nearby—a frequent occurrence in encounters with British artillery. Most of the Bannermen, however, had no guns and fought with swords, knives, spears, and clubs. Soldiers under British command—many of them were Indians—carried percussion-cap rifles, which were far quicker, safer, and more accurate than the matchlocks. In addition, the long-range British artillery could be moved from place to place and proved deadly in the cities and villages of eastern China.

Qing commanders thought that British gunboats rode so low in the water that they could not sail up the Chinese rivers. Hence, evacuating the coasts, they believed, would protect the country from the British threat. But the British deployed new gunboats for shallow waters and moved without difficulty up the Yangzi River.

When the invaders approached Nanjing, the former Ming capital, the Qing decided to negotiate. In 1842 the terms of the Treaty of Nanking (the British name for Nanjing) dismantled the old Canton system. The number of treaty ports—cities opened to foreign residents—increased from one (Canton) to five (Canton, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai), and the island of Hong Kong became a long-term British colony. British residents in China gained extraterritorial rights. The Qing government agreed to set a low tariff of 5 percent on imports and to pay Britain an indemnity of 21 million ounces of silver as a penalty for having started the war. A supplementary treaty the following year guaranteed most-favored-nation status to Britain. This meant that any privileges that China granted to another country would be automatically extended to Britain as well. This provision effectively prevented the colonization of China, because giving land to one country would have necessitated giving it to all.

With each round of treaties came a new round of privileges for foreigners. In 1860 a new treaty legalized their right to import opium. Later, French treaties established the rights of foreign missionaries to travel extensively in the Chinese countryside and preach their religion. The number of treaty ports grew, too; by 1900 they numbered more than ninety.

The treaty system and the principle of extraterritorially resulted in the colonization of small pockets of Qing territory, where foreign merchants lived at ease. Greater territorial losses resulted when outlying regions gained independence or were ceded to neighboring countries. Districts north and south of the Amur River in the northeast fell to Russia by treaty in 1858 and 1860; parts of modern Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the northwest met the same fate in 1864. From 1865 onward the British gradually gained control of territories on China’s Indian frontier. In the late 1890s France forced the court of Vietnam to end its vassalage to the Qing, while Britain encouraged Tibetan independence.

In Canton, Shanghai, and other coastal cities, Europeans and Americans maintained offices and factories that employed local Chinese as menial laborers. The foreigners built comfortable housing in zones where Chinese were not permitted to live, and they entertained themselves in exclusive restaurants and bars. Around the foreign establishments, gambling and prostitution offered employment to part of the local urban population.

Whether in town or in the countryside, Christian missionaries whose congregations sponsored hospitals, shelters, and soup kitchens or gave stipends to Chinese who attended church enjoyed a good reputation. But just as often the missionaries themselves were regarded as another evil. They seemed to subvert Confucian beliefs

Shanghai (shahng-hie)
by condemning ancestor worship, pressuring poor families to put their children into orphanages, or fomenting against footbinding, a centuries-old practice that crippled the feet of young girls to satisfy a male obsession with tiny feet as a standard of beauty. The growing numbers of foreigners, and their growing privileges, became targets of resentment for a deeply dissatisfied, daily more impoverished, and increasingly militarized society.

**The Taiping Rebellion, 1851–1864**  

The inflammatory mixture of social unhappiness and foreign intrusion exploded in the great civil war usually called the

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**Map 24.2 Conflicts in the Qing Empire, 1839–1870**  
In both the Opium War of 1839–1842 and the Arrow War of 1856–1860, the seacoasts saw most of the action. Since the Qing had no imperial navy, the well-armed British ships encountered little resistance as they shelled the southern coasts. In inland conflicts, such as the Taiping Rebellion, the opposing armies were massive and slow moving. Battles on land were often protracted attempts by one side to starve out the other side before making a major assault.

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Interactive Map: Conflicts in the Qing Empire, 1839–1870

**Taiping Rebellion**  
In Guangxi, where the Taiping movement originated, entrenched social problems had been generating disorders for half a century. Agriculture in the region was unstable, and many people made their living from arduous and despised trades such as disposing of human waste, making charcoal, and mining. Ethnic divi-

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**Taiping** (tie-PING)
Nanjing Encircled  For a decade the Taipings held the city of Nanjing as their capital. For years Qing and international troops attempted to break the Taiping hold. By the summer of 1864, Qing forces had built tunnels leading to the foundations of Nanjing's city walls and had planted explosives. The detonation of the explosives signaled the final Qing assault on the rebel capital. As shown here, the common people of the city, along with their starving livestock, were caught in the crossfire. Many of the Taiping leaders escaped the debacle at Nanjing, but nearly all were hunted down and executed. (Roger-Viollet/Getty Images)

sions complicated economic distress. The lowliest trades frequently involved a minority group, the Hakkas, and tensions between them and the majority were rising. Problems may have been intensified by the sharp fluctuations in the trade of opium, which flooded the coastal and riverine portions of China after 1842, then collapsed as domestically grown opium began to dominate the market. Also, the area was close enough to Canton to feel the cultural and economic impact of the growing number of Europeans and Americans.

Hong Xiuquan, the founder of the Taiping movement, experienced all of these influences. Hong came from a humble Hakka background. After years of study, he competed in the provincial Confucian examinations, hoping for a post in government. He failed the examinations repeatedly, and it appears that he suffered a nervous breakdown in his late thirties. Afterward he spent some time in Canton, where he met both Chinese and American Protestant missionaries, who inspired him with their teachings. Hong had his own interpretation of the Christian message. He saw himself as the younger brother of Jesus, commissioned by God to found a new kingdom on earth and drive the Manchu conquerors, the Qing, out of China. The result would be universal peace. Hong called his new religious movement the “Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace.”

Hong Xiuquan (hoong shee-OH-chew-an)
Hong quickly attracted a community of believers, primarily Hakka like himself. They believed in the prophecy of dreams and claimed they could walk on air. Hong and his rivals for leadership in the movement went in and out of ecstatic trances. They denounced the Manchus as creatures of Satan. News of the sect reached the government, and Qing troops arrived to arrest the Taiping leaders. But the Taipings soundly repelled the imperial troops. Local loyalty to the Taipings spread quickly; their numbers multiplied; and they began to enlarge their domain.

The Taipings relied at first on Hakka sympathy and the charismatic appeal of their religious doctrine to attract followers. But as their numbers and power grew, they altered their methods of preaching and governing. They replaced the anti-Chinese appeals used to enlist Hakka with anti-Manchu rhetoric designed to enlist Chinese. They forced captured villages to join their movement. Once people were absorbed, the Taipings strictly monitored their activities. They segregated men and women and organized them into work and military teams. Women were forbidden to bind their feet (the Hakka had never practiced foot-binding) and participating fully in farming and labor. Brigades of women soldiers took to the field against Qing forces.

As the movement grew, it began to move toward eastern and northern China (see Map 24.2). Panic preceded the Taipings. Villagers feared being forced into Taiping units, and Confucian elites recoiled in horror from the bizarre ideology of foreign gods, totalitarian rule, and walking, working, warring women. But the huge numbers the Taipings were able to muster overwhelmed attempts at local defense. The tremendous growth in the number of Taiping followers required the movement to establish a permanent base. When the rebel army conquered Nanking in 1853, the Taiping leaders decided to settle there and make it the capital of the new “Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace.”

Qing forces attempting to defend north China became more successful as problems of organization and growing numbers slowed Taiping momentum. Increasing Qing military success resulted mainly from the flexibility of the imperial military commanders in the face of an unprecedented challenge. In addition, the military commanders received strong backing from a group of civilian provincial governors who had studied the techniques developed by local militia forces for self-defense. Certain provincial governors combined their knowledge of civilian self-defense and local terrain with more efficient organization and the use of modern weaponry. The result was the formation of new military units, in which many of the Banner men voluntarily served under civilian governors. The Qing court agreed to special taxes to fund the new armies and acknowledged the new combined leadership of the civilian and professional force.

When the Taipings settled into Nanking, the new Qing armies surrounded the city, hoping to starve out the rebels. The Taipings, however, had provisioned and fortified themselves well. They also had the services of several brilliant young military commanders, who mobilized enormous campaigns in nearby parts of eastern China.
China, scavenging supplies and attempting to break the encirclement of Nanjing. For more than a decade the Taiping leadership remained ensconced at Nanjing, and the "Heavenly Kingdom" endured.

In 1856 Britain and France, freed from their preoccupation with the Crimean War, turned their attention to China. European and American missionaries had visited Nanjing, curious to see what their fellow Christians were up to. Their reports were discouraging. Hong Xiuquan and the other leaders appeared to lead lives of indulgence and abandon, and more than one missionary accused them of homosexual practices. Believed of the possible accusation of quashing a pious Christian movement, the British and French surveyed the situation. Though the Taipings were not going to topple the Qing, rebellious Nian ("Bands") in northern China added a new threat in the 1850s. A series of simultaneous large insurrections might indeed destroy the empire. Moreover, since the Qing had not observed all the provisions of the treaties signed after the Opium War, Britain and France were now considering renewing war on the Qing themselves.

In 1856 the British and French launched a series of swift, brutal coastal attacks—a second opium war, called the Arrow War (1856-1860)—that culminated in a British and French invasion of Beijing and the sacking of the Summer Palace in 1860. A new round of treaties punished the Qing for not enacting all the provisions of the Treaty of Nanking. Having secured their principal objective, the British and French forces joined the Qing campaign against the Taipings. Attempts to coordinate the international forces were sometimes riotous and sometimes tragic, but the injection of European weaponry and money helped quell both the Taiping and the Nian rebellions during the 1860s.

The Taiping Rebellion ranks as the world’s bloodiest civil war and the greatest armed conflict before the twentieth century. Estimates of deaths range from 20 million to 30 million. The loss of life came primarily from starvation and disease, for most engagements consisted of surrounding fortified cities and waiting until the enemy forces died, surrendered, or were so weakened that they could be easily defeated. Many sieges continued for months, and after starving for a year under the occupation of the rebels, people within some cities had to starve for another year under the occupation of the Imperial forces. Reports of people eating grass, leather, hemp, and human flesh were widespread. The dead were rarely buried properly, and epidemic disease was common.

The area of early Taiping fighting was close to the regions of southwest China in which bubonic plague had been lingering for centuries. When the rebellion was suppressed, many Taiping followers sought safety in the highlands of Laos and Vietnam, which soon showed infestation by plague. Within a few years the disease reached Hong Kong. From there it spread to Singapore, San Francisco, Calcutta, and London. In the late 1800s there was intense apprehension over the possibility of a worldwide outbreak, and Chinese immigrants were regarded as likely carriers. This fear became a contributing factor in the passage of discriminatory immigration bans on Chinese in the United States in 1882.

The Taiping Rebellion devastated the agricultural centers of China. Many of the most intensely cultivated regions of central and eastern China were depopulated and laid barren. Some were still uninhabited decades later, and major portions of the country did not recover until the twentieth century.

Cities, too, were hard hit. Shanghai, a treaty port of modest size before the rebellion, saw its population multiplied many times by the arrival of refugees from war-blasted neighboring provinces. The city then endured months of siege by the Taipings. Major cultural centers in eastern China lost masterpieces of art and architecture; imperial libraries were burned or their collections exposed to the weather; and the printing blocks used to make books were destroyed. While the empire faced the mountainous challenge of dealing with the material and cultural destruction of the war, it also was burdened by a major ecological disaster in the north. The Yellow River changed course in 1855, destroying the southern part of impoverished Shandong province with flooding and initiating decades of drought along the former riverbed in northern Shandong.
Cixi's Allies In the 1860s and 1870s, Cixi was a supporter of reform (see page 703). In later years she was widely regarded as corrupt and self-centered and as an obstacle to reform. Her greatest allies were the court eunuchs. Introduced to palace life in early China as managers of the imperial harems, eunuchs became powerful political parties at court. The first Qing emperors refused to allow the eunuchs any political influence, but by Cixi's time the eunuchs once again were a political factor. (Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Purchase, 1963–1964, Neg #5C-GR 261)

inspector-general of a newly created Imperial Maritime Customs Service. Britain and the Qing split the revenues he collected. Britons and Americans worked for the Qing government as advisers and ambassadors, attempting to smooth communications between the Qing, Europe, and the United States.

The real work of the recovery, however, was managed by provincial governors who had come to the forefront in the struggle against the Taipings. To prosecute the war, they had won the right to levy their own taxes, raise their own troops, and run their own bureaucracies. These special powers were not entirely canceled when the war ended. Chief among these governors was Zeng Guofan, who oversaw programs to restore agriculture, communications, education, and publishing, as well as efforts to reform the military and industrialize armaments manufacture.

Like many provincial governors, Zeng preferred to look to the United States rather than to Britain for models and aid. He hired American advisers to run his weapons factories, shipyards, and military academies. He sponsored a daring program in which promising Chinese boys were sent to Hartford, Connecticut, a center of missionary activity, to learn English, science, mathematics, engineering, and history. They returned to China to assume some of the positions previously held by foreign advisers. Though Zeng was never an advocate of participation in public life by women, his Confucian convictions taught him that educated mothers were more than ever a necessity. He not only encouraged but also partly oversaw the advanced classical
Chinese Responses to Imperialism

The Opium War, followed by the Taiping Rebellion, revealed China's weakness for all to see, but there was no agreement on what should be done to restore its strength. A few provincial officials were able to take effective action, but the competing ideas that were heard at the imperial court tended to cancel each other out.

Feng Guiren, an official and a scholar, came into contact with Westerners defending Shanghai when he took refuge there from the Taiping. The following is from a book of essays he published in 1861.

According to a general geography compiled by an Englishman, the territory of China is eight times that of Russia, ten times that of the United States, one hundred times that of France, and two hundred times that of Great Britain... Yet we are shamefully humiliated by the four nations, not because our climate, soil, or resources are inferior to theirs, but because our people are inferior... Now, our inferiority is not due to our allotment from Heaven [i.e., our inherent nature], but is rather due to ourselves... Why are the Western nations small and yet strong? Why are we large and yet weak? We must search for the means to become their equal, and that depends solely upon human effort....

We have only one thing to learn from the barbarians, and that is strong ships and effective guns.... Funds should be allotted to establish a shipyard and arsenal in each trading port. A few barbarians should be employed, and Chinese who are good in using their minds should be selected to receive instruction so that in turn they may teach many craftsmen. When a piece of work is finished and is as good as that made by the barbarians, the makers should be rewarded with an official juren degree and be permitted to participate in the metropolitan examinations on the same basis as other scholars. Those whose products are of superior quality should be rewarded with the jinsih degree [ordinarily conferred in the metropolitan examinations] and be permitted to participate in the palace examinations like others. The workers should be paid double so that they will not quit their jobs.

Our nation's emphasis on civil service examinations has sunk deep into people's minds for a long time. Intelligent and brilliant scholars have exhausted their time and energy in such useless things as the stereotyped examination essays, examination papers, and formal calligraphy. We should now order one-half of them to apply themselves to the manufacturing of instruments and weapons and to the promotion of physical studies. The intelligence and ingenuity of the Chinese are certainly superior to those of the various barbarians; it is only that hitherto we have not made use of them. When the government above takes delight in something, the people below will pursue it further; their response will be like an echo carried by the wind. There ought to be some people of extraordinary intelligence who can have new ideas and improve on Western methods. At first they may take the foreigners as their teachers and models; then they may come to the same level and be their equals; finally they may move ahead and surpass them. Herein lies the way to self-strengthening.

In 1867 the debate over how to resist foreign military pressure surged through the imperial court. Waren, a Mongol who held the rank of grand secretary, spoke for the conservatives.

Mathematics, one of the six arts, should indeed be learned by scholars as indicated in the imperial decree, and it should not be considered an unworthy subject. But according to the viewpoint of your servant, astronomy and mathematics are of very little use. If these subjects are going to be taught by Westerners as regular studies, the damage will be great.... Your servant has learned that the way to establish a nation is to lay emphasis on rites and rightness, not on power and plotting. The fundamental effort lies in the minds of people, not in techniques. Now, if we seek trifling arts and respect barbarians as teachers... all that can be accomplished is the
training of mathematicians. From ancient down to modern times, your servant has never heard of anyone who could use mathematics to raise the nation from a state of decline or to strengthen it in time of weakness. . . .

Since the conclusion of the peace, Christianity has been prevalent; and half of our ignorant people have been fooled by it. The only thing we can rely on is that our scholars should clearly explain to the people the Confucian tenets, which may be able to sustain the minds of the ignorant populace. Now if these brilliant and talented scholars, who have been trained by the nation and reserved for great future usefulness, have to change from their regular course of study to follow the barbarians, then the correct spirit will not be developed, and accordingly the evil spirit will become stronger. After several years it will end in nothing less than driving the multitudes of the Chinese people into allegiance to the barbarians.

The opposing group of ministers who backed the idea of “self-strengthening” responded.

Your ministers have examined the memorial of Woren: the principles he presents are very lofty and the opinion he maintains is very orthodox. Your ministers’ point of view was also like that before they began to manage foreign affairs; and yet today they do not presume to insist on such ideas, because of actual difficulties that they cannot help. . . .

From the beginning of foreign relations to the present there have been twenty or thirty years. At first the officials inside and outside the capital did not grasp the crux of the matter, and whether they negotiated peace or discussed war, generally these were empty words without effect. . . . Therefore your ministers have pondered a long-term policy and discussed the situation thoroughly with all the provincial officials. Proposals to learn the written and spoken languages of foreign countries, the various methods of making machines, the training of troops with foreign guns, the dispatching of officials to travel in all countries, the investigation of their local customs and social conditions. . . . all these painstaking and special decisions represent nothing other than a struggle for self-strengthening. . . .

We too are afraid that the people who are learning these things will have no power of discrimination and are likely to be led astray by foreigners, as Woren fears. Therefore we have deliberated and decided that those who participate in these examinations must be persons from regular scholastic channels. It is indeed those students who have read widely and who understand right principles and have their minds set upon upright and grand purposes—and the present situation is just what causes the scholars and officials to feel pain in heart and head—who would certainly be able to lie on faggots and taste gall [i.e., nurse vengeance] in order to encourage each other vigorously to seek the actual achievement of self-strengthening. They are different from those who have vague, easygoing, or indifferent ideas.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. How do the views of the writers reflect their own backgrounds as officials who achieved their offices through the traditional examination system?
2. In what ways do these passages indicate a deep or a shallow understanding of the West?
3. How do the ideas expressed here compare with the attitudes toward reform in the Ottoman and Russian Empires as discussed elsewhere in this chapter?

education of his own daughters. Zeng’s death in 1872 deprived the empire of a major force for reform.

The period of recovery marked a fundamental structural change in the Qing Empire. Although the emperors after 1850 were ineffective rulers, a coalition of aristocrats supported the reform and recovery programs (see Diversity and Dominance: Chinese Responses to Imperialism). Without their legitimization of the new powers of provincial governors like Zeng Guofan, the empire might have evaporated within a generation. A crucial member of this alliance was Cixi, who was known as the “Empress Dowager” after the 1890s. Later observers, both Chinese and foreign, reviled her as a monster of corruption and arrogance. But in the 1860s and 1870s Cixi supported the provincial governors, some of whom became so powerful that they were managing Qing foreign policy as well as domestic affairs.

No longer a conquest regime dominated by a Manchu military caste and its Chinese civilian appointees, the empire came under the control of a group of reformist aristocrats and military men, independently powerful civilian governors, and a small number of foreign advisers. The Qing lacked strong, central, unified leadership and could not recover their powers of taxation, legislation, and military command once they had been granted to the provincial governors. From the 1860s forward, the Qing Empire disintegrated into a number of large power zones in which provincial governors handed over leadership to their protégés in a pattern that the Qing court eventually could only ritually legitimate.

Cixi (tsuh-shee)

Comparative Perspectives

Most of the subjects of the Ottoman, Russian, and Qing rulers did not think of European pressure or competition as determining factors in their lives during the first half of the nineteenth century. They continued to live according to the social and economic institutions they inherited from previous generations. By the 1870s, however, the challenge of Europe had become widely realized. The Crimean War, where European allies achieved a hollow victory for the Ottomans and then pressured the sultan for more reforms, confirmed both Ottoman and Russian military weakness. The Opium War did the same for China. But China, unlike the other empires, was also stricken by rampant civil war and regional uprisings.

Though all three empires faced similar problems of reform, military rebuilding, and financial disarray, China was geographically remote from Europe and thus removed from the geostrategic tug-of-war between Britain and Russia. Yet despite British fears about Russian threats to India, the tsars enjoyed the advantage of being included in high-level deliberations among European powers. The Ottoman Empire, which had once dominated eastern Europe, was largely excluded from these deliberations. To many European diplomats and overseas investors, its final demise seemed only a matter of time, leaving up in the air the question of who would reap the benefits.

In analyzing the crises of the three empires, historians today stress European economic pressures and observe that all three empires ultimately became insolvent and saw the overthrow of their ruling dynasties. However, at the time what most impressed the Ottomans, Russians, and Chinese was European military superiority, as demonstrated in the Greek war of independence, the Crimean War, and the Opium War. Thus for all three empires, dealing with military emergency took priority over deeper reforms throughout most of the time period of this chapter.
SUMMARY

- What were the benefits and the drawbacks to the Ottoman Empire of the reforms adopted during the Tanzimat period?
- How did the Russian Empire maintain its status as both a European power and a great Asian land empire?
- How did the impact of European imperialism on China differ from its impact on Russia and the Ottoman Empire?

Although the Tanzimat period began with the sultan declaring in 1839 a measure of equality for all Ottoman citizens, improving military performance was at the center of the reforming effort. This reform enhanced the role of the military while other administrative changes reduced the social role and governmental influence of the religious elite. The result was an unbalanced reform effort that eventually led to a military takeover of the country.

For Russians, defeat in the Crimean War and the revelation that Russian arms were no match for modern European weaponry were counterbalanced by the comparative weakness of the peoples to the east and south into whose territories they aggressively expanded. Thus Russia shared in the imperialist expansion that the other European states were engaged in even while lagging far behind in industrialization and efficient government.

The course of Russian expansion into Asia made it a neighbor of Qing China, but other European powers were seen as greater threats. Britain, France, and the United States used every means available to gain the freedom to exploit China economically. With respect to the empires nearer to home, however, European imperialists—the United States had minimal involvement—considered financial investment to be somewhat less important than limiting Russian expansion or weakening the Ottoman state and improving the lives of its Christian and Jewish populations.

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SUGGESTED READING


On the Qing Empire of the nineteenth century see Pamela Kyle Crossley, Orphan Warriors: Three Manchu Generations and the End of the Qing World (1990), and for a more detailed political history see Mary C. Wright, The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-chih Restoration, 1862–1874 (1971). On indigenous economic development see Madeleine Zelin, The Merchants of Zizang: Industrial Entrepreneurship in Early Modern China (2005). There is a very large literature on both the Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion, including reprinted editions of contemporary observers. For general histories of the Opium War see Peter Ward Fay, The Opium War 1840–1842: Barbarians in the Celestial Empire in the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century and the War by Which They Forced Her Gates Ajar (1973); Christopher Hibbert, The Dragon Wakes: China and the West, 1793–1911 (1970); and the classic study by Chang Hsin-pao, Commissioner Lin and the Opium War (1964). For a recent, more monographic study on Qing political thought in the period of the Opium War see James M. Polachek, The Inner Opium War (1992). On the Taiping Rebellion, enduring sources are S. Y. Teng, The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers: A Comprehensive Survey (1971), and C. A. Curwen, Taiping Rebel. The Deposition of Li Hsien-lung (1976); see also Caleb Carr, The Devil Soldier: The Story of Frederick Townsend Ward (1992). The most recent study is Jonathan D. Spence, God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan (1996).