Civilizations in Crisis: The Ottoman Empire, the Islamic Heartlands, and Qing China

From Empire to Nation: Ottoman Retreat and the Birth of Turkey

- Ottoman decline can be attributed to weak rulers in a system dependent on effective leadership. Urban artisans suffered from competition from European goods, resulting in urban riots. With division at the top and the empire's commercial economy threatened, European neighbors could take advantage of Ottoman weakness. Russian threats were only countered by Ottoman alliances with other European nations. Serbian and Greek national uprisings drove the Ottomans back in the Balkans.

- Yet the empire survived, in spite of military defeat and territorial loss. This was in part due to European efforts to support the Ottomans against the Russians. Reformers within the empire only further divided the ruling elites. Selim III attempted reforms, which were viewed as a threat to the Janissaries and other groups in power. Mahmud II was more successful in pushing reform. Intentionally spurring the Janissaries to mutiny, Mahmud then suppressed them. His reforms followed Western precedents. The Tanzimat reforms—from 1839 to 1876—included Western-style universities, legal reforms, and establishment of newspapers. Opening the economy to foreigners adversely affected artisans. Pushing reforms against women’s seclusion, veiling, and polygamy had a limited impact.

- The reform movements brought Western-educated Turks to question the role of the sultanate. Abdul Hamid attempted to establish autocratic rule, while still continuing reforms. The coup of 1908 brought the Young Turks—members of the Ottoman Society for Union and Progress—to power. The constitution—set aside by Abdul Hamid—was reestablished, with the sultan a figurehead. Internal struggles and Balkan conflicts nearly toppled the movement. Arabs of the Fertile Crescent and Arabia were disappointed to find that the Young Turks wished to maintain the empire.

Western Intrusions and the Crisis in the Arab Islamic Heartlands

- Arabs of the Ottoman Empire had some commonalities with the Turks, especially Islam, but were left undefended from European attacks.

- Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 opened a new era in reforms between the Middle East and Europe. At the time, Egypt had been led by Mamluk families, headed by Murad. Their defeat by Napoleon was a shock, following as it did cen-
turies of Mamluk military ascendancy. The conflict brought no lasting gains for France, but it was a watershed. Muhammad Ali emerged to lead Egypt following Napoleon’s departure. He reformed the army along Western lines. Egyptian peasants were forced to grow export crops. His successors were unable to capitalize on his partial success. His descendants—the Kedives—ruled Egypt until 1952.

Muhammad Ali’s reforms made Egypt dependent on cotton exports and therefore at the mercy of European markets. European lenders gained control of cotton prices and then shares in the Suez Canal. Courses proposed among Egyptians to solve the problem of weak sultans and khedives included jihad and more borrowing from the West. These two approaches were and are essentially at odds. Aflah and Muhammad Abduh favored the latter course, partly because they valued the Islamic tradition of rational inquiry. The financial problems of the khedives led to greater financial control of British and French bankers. Ahmad Orabi led a revolt in 1882, which resulted in the British restoration of the khedives. British control of the puppet rulers and British financial control began a new era.

Egypt had become involved in wars in the Sudan. Egyptian power, centered on Khartoum, was fiercely opposed by Sudanic peoples, especially as Egypt tried to stop the slave trade. Muhammad Ahmad emerged to lead these opponents as the Mahdi. He launched a jihad against Egypt and Britain, motivated by a desire to purify Islam. His military skill led to control of modern Sudan. Following his death, a successor, the Khalifa Abdallah, built a state in the region. The British sent Lord Kitchener to Sudan in 1896. The Battle of Omdurman in 1898 ended the Mahdist state.

The Last Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the Qing Empire in China

- Manchu nomads, north of the Great Wall, were united by Nurhaci in the early 1600s. His banner armies were a powerful force. For decades, the Manchu learned from Chinese bureaucratic methods and employed scholar-officials. Called in to help put down a rebellion, they instead took Beijing. Under the dynastic name Qing, they ruled China. The Manchu elite ruled with few changes to court or bureaucratic procedure. They patronized traditional Chinese arts and Confucianism. Kangxi was himself an important Confucian scholar.

- Minimal changes occurred in Chinese society under the Manchu, except possibly a decline in the status of women. Rural reforms attempted to bring more land into cultivation and restore the infrastructure of dikes, roads, and irrigation. These improvements were partially successful, yet did little to mitigate the power of landlords. Merchants did well under the Qing as exporters of tea and silk. These compradors linked China to the rest of the world.

- Qing decline went along familiar lines. The examination system ceased to fill its role in bringing forward able administrators. Posts could be bought, and cheating was allowed. The abuses were troubling in a system based on Confucian education, intended to engender concern for the people of China. Again, public works in rural areas were abandoned. In the Shangdong peninsula, the Huanghe river was allowed to flood. Thousands died from famine and disease. Banditry, on the rise, signaled a weakening dynasty. Many expected that a new dynasty would now renew the historical cycle.
Yet the new “barbarians” threatening China could not be sinified and absorbed. In the 18th century, British merchants had turned to opium for export to China. British depended on the trade, but the Chinese saw it as a threat. As much as one percent of the Chinese were addicted, causing widespread social and administrative problems. Efforts to stop the trade began in the 1820s. In the 1830s Lin Zexu was sent to end the opium trade. To do so he confiscated opium, destroyed warehouses, and imposed a blockade. The resulting Opium War ended with Chinese defeat. China was forced to open its ports to foreign trade. Hong Kong was developed as a British outpost. British officials oversaw Chinese trade, and the government was forced to accept foreign ambassadors.

Chinese defeat and growing foreign interference led to revolts. The Taiping Rebellion was led by Hong Xiuquan against the Qing. Although successful militarily, the movement fell apart, especially under British opposition. The Taiping Rebellion challenged not just the Qing government, but also the traditional order. The scholar-gentry thus rallied to the regime. Men such as Zeng Guofan led the self-strengthening movement against Western influence, while embracing Western technology. Manchu attempts at reform were blocked by those resistant to change, such as the dowager empress Cixi. In 1901, the Boxer Rebellion tried to expel foreigners. It resulted in greater European control.

Numerous secret societies formed to end Qing rule, without success. Yet they spawned a succeeding generation of reformers, such as Sun Yat-sen. These revolutionaries targeted foreigners. In 1911, they forced the Manchu from power. The revolution ended the Qing dynasty. In 1905, the civil service exams had been discontinued, after 2,500 years.
Russia and Japan: Industrialization Outside the West

Russia’s Reforms and Industrial Advance

In the wake of the French Revolution, Russia turned from following Western models. Alexander I supported the Holy Alliance in their defense of the religious and political order. Yet Russian intellectuals maintained ties to the West. Pushkin was one of many writers to embrace and enhance the Romantic style. The Decembrist Uprising of 1825 pushed Nicholas I further to the right. Restrictions on political freedom followed. The revolutions of 1830 and 1848 skipped Russia. At the same time, Russia expanded its territory. A Polish national uprising in 1830–1831 was brutally suppressed. Pushing south, Russia took Ottoman lands and supported Greek independence.

Russian industrialization did not keep pace with the West. Peasant labor service was increased to meet demands for grain exports, and the grain trade did have a positive effect on industrialization. The Crimean War—from 1854 to 1856—pitted Russia against the Ottoman Empire. France and Britain, fearful of expanding Russian power, supported the Ottomans. Russian leaders saw the advantage industrialization had given Western powers, and Alexander II pushed for reform. Serfdom was a key issue, and reforming the institution was clearly necessary.

The emancipation of the serfs, in 1861, was carefully planned to maintain tsarist control. The serfs received lands, but had to pay redemption fees. Peasant revolts actually increased because of disappointment at the limitations of the reforms. The tsar set up zemstvos, which gave some political experience to more Russians. The army was reformed and recruitment expanded. Literacy and demands for popular fiction increased. Women’s roles broadened. Industrialization was part of these changes. The trans-Siberian railroad linked western Russia to the Pacific, additionally stimulating the coal and iron industries. Industrialization picked up, especially in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Polish towns. Sergei Witte, the minister of finance from 1892 to 1903, modernized the Russian economy. Foreign control increased, and Russia became a debtor nation. While the volume of manufactures was large, Russia was still only partly industrialized.

Minority nationals raised concerns in Russia, but were secondary to the dislocations caused by industrialization. Calls for reform developed along two lines.
Liberal reforms were sought by businesspeople and professionals. The intelligentsia and student groups called for more radical reform, but remained isolated. Lastly, anarchists aimed to end all government. Failing to find popular support, they turned to violence. Alexander II responded by withdrawing support for reform. He was assassinated in 1881. Repressive measures followed, including anti-Semitic policies, and pogroms. Marxism took hold by the 1890s. Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, Lenin, adapted Marx’s ideas to Russian conditions. His version of Marxism was adopted by the Bolsheviks. Dissatisfaction grew among workers, who unionized and organized strikes. These different currents of unrest made revolution in Russia likely.

Russia made gains against the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century. Aiding the Serbian and Bulgarian independence movements added to Russian pride. However, the Russo-Japanese War broke out in 1904, when Russia threatened Japan’s regional control. The Russian defeat led to the Russian Revolution in 1905. The tsars created the duma to satisfy liberals. The Stolypin reforms eased the peasants’ redemption payments. Kulaks, peasant entrepreneurs, bought land to develop. The duma’s power was steadily weakened, and the Russian government turned its attention to the Balkans.

Similar patterns existed in other eastern European nations. Some chose parliamentary governments, some monarchies. Eastern Europe experienced a period of cultural flowering, with new pride in Slavic culture.

Japan: Transformation Without Revolution

Japan’s shogunate ruled in the early 19th century, with few changes. Shrinking revenues weakened the power of the shoguns after 1850. Developments in intellectual life included the terakoya, or public schools, leading to literacy rates of 40% for men and 15% for women. Nationalist leanings led to the celebration of Shintoism and Japanese culture. At the same time, Dutch studies continued in spite of bans on Western reading. Controlled by monopolies, commerce boomed. Slowing economic growth after 1850 and riots in rural areas led to a climate where change was welcome.

The arrival of Matthew Perry in 1853 threatened Japanese isolation. By 1856, two Japanese ports were open to U.S. commerce. The emperor was pressured to open the country further. Samurai were especially keen, hoping that the change would dislodge the shogun. The samurai began using American firearms in 1866 and defeated the shogun’s troops. Reform came with the installation of a new emperor—Mutsuhito—called Meiji.

The Meiji government replaced the daimyo system with prefects. Samurai were sent to Europe and the United States to learn, turning the group into a force for change. The reforms of 1873–1876 ended samurai privileges and introduced conscription. Iwasaki Yataro is an example of a samurai who changed his stripes. Founding Mitsubishi in 1868, he built railroads and steamers lines. Political parties emerged. A new constitution in 1889 included a diet, modeled on the German legislature. Japan was successful in borrowing from the West while maintaining much of its traditional structure.
Reforms continued with an overhaul of the army and navy. Priority was given to industrialization. Internal tariffs and guilds were ended to clear the way for a unified economy. The government was closely involved in the process of industrialization. Western models were adapted to Japanese conditions. At the same time, entrepreneurs from all levels of society played an important role in the changes. Industrial conglomerations, zaibatsu, emerged. Industrialization was well advanced by 1900. Still dependent on imports, however, the country lagged behind the West. Cottage industry and sweatshops were common.

Japanese society experienced change as a result of economic and industrial change. Population growth was an important issue. Public education was offered to all, focusing on the sciences and technology. Rapid Westernization in the 1870s was replaced by more attention to Japanese values and social structure. Western lifestyles, clothes, and measures were adopted. Women’s roles saw little change. Shintoism gained ground. Foreign policy was adapted to Japan’s increasing involvement in the global economy. The Sino-Japanese War gave Japan a quick victory over China, and hegemony in Korea. Forced by European powers to abandon territory it had taken in mainland China, Japan turned its eyes to Russian lands. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904 was another Japanese victory, and Korea was annexed in 1910.

Urbanization and industrialization resulted in strains in Japanese society. Politics reflected the tensions, with assassinations and frequent dismissal of the Diet. Among intellectuals, questions were rife about Japanese culture’s survival. Their government’s response was to promote nationalism. The country thus avoided the revolutionary turmoil that affected China and Russia.