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**The Decline of Imperial China (1800-1911)**

**Directions: Read the following article, which is broken down into 15 separate paragraphs. For each paragraph, you must write down 2 or more thoughts (comments, questions, and/or ideas) in the corresponding “Thought Box.” The first few have been completed for you.**

**Introduction –** Paragraph #1

The 1800's were not kind to China.  Whereas geographic and technological limitations had once kept China fairly isolated from the rest of the world, other forces, in particular the Industrial Revolution then sweeping Europe and America, were closing in to wrench China out of its self-imposed isolation.  As in India, the British East Indies Company would lead this intrusion on China's privacy.

“Thought Box” #1

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| ***- Industrial Revolution*** *– shift from a predominantly agricultural society to a manufacturing one. Included improvements in machinery, iron production, water power, and toolmaking.****- Self-imposed isolation*** *– being separated from others by one’s own choice**- Britain decided to come into China. Why? How is that going to benefit them?* |

**The Opium War and its aftermath (1839-64) –** Paragraph #2

In the early 1800's, China, by its own design, was still largely cut off from trade with the outside world.  All trade with Europe was channeled through one port, Canton.  Even there, Europeans could only trade through specially designated Chinese agents known as *co-hong*.  Several Chinese products, such as silk and porcelain, were in high demand in Europe, but the most popular trade item in the early 1800's was tea, consumption of which increased by a factor of 30 times between 1720 and 1830.  Unfortunately, the tea trade led to a serious drain of silver from Britain.  The British East India Company, desperate for something to offset this trade imbalance, found such a commodity in opium, which not only upset China's balance of trade, but the stability of its whole society.

“Thought Box” #2

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| *- Why would the tea trade lead to a drain of silver from Britain? 🡪 Is silver what they traded to get the tea?* *- Britain must have felt silver for tea was an unfair trade, so they looked to get more from China.* *- Therefore they demanded opium also 🡪 which now messed up China’s trade balance and also affected their society. Opium must have been important to them* |

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**\*Paragraph #3**

\*Two other factors revolving around the differing philosophical outlooks of these two cultures added to the growing tensions:

1). First of all, they had two very different attitudes toward trade**.** On the one hand, the Chinese government viewed trade as a monopoly controlled through its agents. On the other hand by the 1830's, the British were leading the way in the Industrial Revolution and were pushing for a free trade system known as *laissez faire* ("hands off") that would give their manufactured goods an edge against the more expensive handmade goods their foreign competition was producing.

2). Secondly, there was the relative status of the two nations.  The Chinese traditionally saw themselves as the Middle Kingdom and all other peoples as inferior barbarians.  Any goods brought as gifts to the Chinese court were interpreted as tribute that they may or may not graciously acknowledge.  By contrast, the British had a strong democratic tradition that refused to recognize another nation's superiority.

**“Thought Box” #3**

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| *1). China preferred more traditional control over trade. Britain pushed for a more open system that would benefit themselves based on their increasing industrialization… Britain could produce more of their products through manufacturing and therefore have more products available to trade.**2).*  |

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**\*Paragraph #4**

All these economic and philosophical tensions came to a head when the Chinese government had 20,000 chests of the British East India Company's opium burned.  This threatened the tea trade and the result was the First Opium War (1839-42) between Britain and China.  The British navy, with its modern weaponry, quickly and easily won a decisive victory. The resulting Treaty of Nanjing (1842) gave the British access to trade through five ports, control of Hong Kong, and a huge **indemnity** (amount of money/financial compensation) from the Chinese government to cover the cost of the war. It also forced China to accept other countries on equal terms, which was a terrible blow to its pride.

**“Thought Box” #4**

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**\*Paragraph #5**

Britain's privileged status triggered a rush by other nations such as France, Russia, Germany and Japan to force China to grant similar treaties that gave three main concessions.

1). They wanted *most favored nation status*, which automatically gave them all privileges that any other nation had from China.

2). They wanted *extraterritoriality*, which allowed their citizens to live under their own laws even when in China, thus making them virtually immune from Chinese justice.  In fact, any cases involving a European and a Chinese person were to be tried under the European system.

3). Europeans could recover any debts that the Chinese government owed them by collecting China's customs dues and other taxes if the customs dues were not enough.

The First Opium War and its aftermath unleashed a vicious cycle that would eventually lead to the fall of the monarchy.

**“Thought Box” #5**

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**\*Paragraph #6**

China's decline would invite either a disastrous war or intervention in a revolt to push or preserve foreign interests.  **This would cause many Chinese to wake up to the need for reform.  However, the Chinese hatred for foreign barbarian ways would trigger a conservative reaction against the reforms, leading to further decay (conflict and civil unrest).** This cycle would repeat itself three times, being triggered by the Taiping Rebellion, war with Japan, and the Boxer Rebellion.

**“Thought Box” #6**

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**\*Paragraph #7**

Two other factors would aggravate this cycle even further.

1). Increasing population: The introduction of new crops from the Americas and a well-regulated agriculture under the Ming Dynasty had caused China's population to expand to 400,000,000, putting a tremendous strain on China's ability to support itself.

2). There was the government's recent failure to maintain the flood control projects, which had unleashed terrible floods and food shortages on China.

**“Thought Box” #7**

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**\*Paragraph #8**

All of these factors triggered the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64), a peasant revolt started by a frustrated scholar, Hong Xiuchuan who claimed he was the brother of Jesus Christ.  Hong inspired his followers with a revolutionary fervor that banned alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, held property in common, and called for the equality of all, including women. His movement swept over much of China before the government finally crushed it with foreign help.  The Taiping rebellion was typical of any number of peasant revolts throughout Chinese history in its revolutionary and religious vision of a new world.  It was also terribly destructive, probably killing even more people than World War I.

**“Thought Box” #8**

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**\*Paragraph #9**

Faced with these overwhelming problems from both within and without, a two-fold program of reform emerged:

1). Chinese scholars tried to revive and stress the old Confucian virtues.

2). They tried to adapt Western technology in order to control the Western "barbarians."

**“Thought Box” #9**

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**\*Paragraph #10**

This sparked serious debates about how feasible it was for China to be able to adapt Western technology while maintaining the purity of Chinese culture, for the Chinese still despised Western ways as barbaric.  Whatever their doubts, reformers set up several factories producing such things as weapons, ammunition, steamships, and textiles.  They built railroads and telegraph lines which peasants often tore down since they disrupted the natural harmony of the countryside.  The Chinese government even bought one railroad and tore it up for such a reason.

**“Thought Box” #10**

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**\*Paragraph #11**

Several factors seriously limited the extent of China's modernization.  In contrast to Japan, which was successfully industrializing in the late 1800's, there was **no real central direction** to coordinate these efforts.  Rather, provincial officials on a local level did them.  Also, the influx of Western "barbarians" created a good deal of bitterness against the West and a reluctance to conform to its ways.

**“Thought Box” #11**

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**\*Paragraph #12**

Therefore, China saw little progress toward modernization. By the 1890's, China was more vulnerable than ever to foreign powers carving out “spheres of influence.”  Under this system, the dominant power (among the foreign countries) in that sphere controlled the economy through such things as collecting taxes and constructing railroads and telegraph wires, while still leaving administrative duties and expenses to local Chinese officials.  This allowed the various foreign powers to drain China of money without having to assume the more burdensome responsibilities of government.

**“Thought Box” #12**

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**\*Paragraph #13**

War with Japan: However, what really shook China out of its lethargy was a war with Japan, which had successfully modernized in reaction to the West over the past 40 years.  This clash, known as the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) was fought over control of Korea.  To everyone's shock, the Japanese navy soundly defeated the Chinese navy and claimed Korea, Taiwan, and a huge indemnity as the price of victory.

**“Thought Box” #13**

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**\*Paragraph #14**

Such a humiliating defeat sparked a new movement among Chinese scholars for widespread reforms.  Between 1900 and 1910, more modern ministries were formed, the old Confucian based civil service exams were abolished, provincial assemblies with the semblance of democracy were established, and a new law code was introduced.  More modern schools were set up, while many young Chinese students studied abroad in the West, both of which spread the Western ideas of democracy and nationalism among Chinese intellectuals.  Such reforms only raised expectations of more reforms, and a revolution in 1911 overthrew the monarchy and established a republic in its place.

**“Thought Box” #14**

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**\*Paragraph #15**

However, China's problems were far from over.  Almost from the start, the new republic was doomed by the lack of a healthy economy and educated middle class, elements necessary to sustain any strong democracy.  As a result, the next 40 years would see China embroiled in two world wars, civil war, and revolution.

**Thought Box” #15**

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