Qing Self-Strengthening

Qing Dynasty 清: 1644 - 1911 (last imperial dynasty; ruled by the Manchus, a tribal people whose homeland lies to the northeast of Ming China; consider themselves the successors to the Jurchen Jin dynasty)

Xianfeng Emperor 咸豐 (r. 1851-1860)
Tongzhi Emperor 同治 (r. 1861-1875)
Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧太后 (regent and de facto ruler from 1861-1908); born into a family of humble origins the Yehe Nala Manchu clan; becomes consort to the Xianfeng Emperor; mother to the Tongzhi Emperor; aunt to the Guangxu Emperor; after the death of the Xianfeng Emperor she helps to plot a coup with other high-ranking Manchu Princes to wrest power from the regents of the young Tongzhi Emperor; from that time on she wields real power from “behind the curtain”; plays the conservatives off against the reformers to maintain a balance at court and to preserve her own reigns on power.
Guangxu Emperor 光緒 (r. 1875-1908)

First Opium War, 1839-1842
The Taiping War, 1851-1864
Second Opium War (Arrow War), 1856-1860

Important Figures in the Taiping Movement:
Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1813-1864); leader of the Taiping movement; originally a would-be scholar from a poor Hakka family; converts to Christianity; believes himself to be the younger brother of Jesus; convinced that he has been chosen by God to wipe out the Manchus and establish a new Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace; launches a civil war that nearly topples the Qing dynasty.

Yang Xiuqing 楊秀清 (d. 1856): a charcoal peddler from Guangxi; becomes central to the Taiping movement, eventually gaining the title of “East King”; converts to Christianity; claims to have visions and channels the voice of the Holy Ghost; engages in faith healing activities among the peasants devoted to the Society of God Worshipers in Guangxi; after setting up the Taiping capital in Nanjing, Yang has a falling out with Hong Xiuquan; in a bloody purge in 1856 Yang and some 20,000 followers are killed on the orders of Hong Xiuquan.

Ever-Victorious Army: group of western mercenaries in Shanghai who band together to create a fighting force to assist the Qing in the defeat of the Taipings; founded by American Frederick Townsend Ward; led by Captain Charles Gordon; not nearly as victorious as they claimed; indicative of decision by Western powers to support the Qing rather than the Taiping forces.

Treaty of Tianjin (1858) & Convention of Beijing (1860): follows the conclusion of the 2nd Opium War between British and French forces and the Qing; provisions of the treaty include: opening ten more treaty ports in coastal and inland cities; allowing for the unrestricted preaching of Christianity in China; legalizing opium; establishing formal diplomatic residences for ambassadors of Western powers in Beijing; and ceding Kowloon to Great Britain.

Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811-1872): Confucian statesman from Hunan; organizes the Hunan provincial army (Xiangjun 湘軍) out of local militia forces, which helps to defeat the Taiping forces; an important
figure in the late Qing self-strengthening movement; advocates importing western military technologies; Zeng remains staunchly loyal to the Qing, but the type of regionally based military power that he accrues sets in motion a pattern of devolving power to provincial strongmen, which will eventually challenge centralized rule.

Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901): protégé of Zeng Guofan; important leader in the self-strengthening movement; organizes the Huai Army (Huajun 淮軍) in 1861, which helps to defeat the Taipings and other mid-century rebellions; advocates building modern-style arsenals, shipyards, and railways; wins the confidence of the Empress Dowager Cixi; by the end of the 19th c., becomes the most powerful figure in officialdom, especially in negotiating with foreign powers; often blamed for the devastating military defeats the Qing suffered at the very end of the dynasty.

Yixin 奕訢, title: Prince Gong 恭親王 (1833-1898): sixth brother of the Xianfeng Emperor; negotiator on the Qing side for the Treaty of Tianjin and the Convention of Beijing; central figure in the Tongzhi Restoration (1862-1874), along with Wenxiang 文祥 (1818-1876) and Cixi; important Manchu official involved in the Qing self-strengthening projects; establishes the Tongwenguan (Interpreters College) as an affiliate of the Zongli Yamen; leader of the Zongli Yamen from 1861-1864, and then from 1894-1898.

Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837-1909): official and general active in late Qing self-strengthening efforts; appointed to governorship of Hubei and Hunan; builds modern-style factories, arsenals, and railways; advocates the ti-yong models of Chinese learning and development, i.e., retaining Chinese learning as the principle or essence but adapting western learning for practical use; traces of this formula for blending Chinese and western learning can be seen in Chinese state initiatives even to this day.

Kaozheng 考證 (evidentiary scholarship) movement: 18th-century philosophical trend; concerned with philology and textual verification of the ancient classics; secular and apolitical in tone but could be harnessed to state literary projects such as the Four Treasuries.

Statecraft school of scholarship: especially prevalent in early nineteenth century; focused on learning gearing to the pragmatics of governing; a precursor to the ti-yong approach to learning in the mid 19th century.

Xuehaitang Academy 學海堂 (1817-1903); founded in Guangzhou by Ruan Yuan 阮元; combined training in the Chinese classics with study in western mathematics and geography; important in fostering a vibrant intellectual tradition in Guangzhou; it is this tradition that paves the way for later important re-interpreters of the Confucian tradition such as Kang Youwei.

Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1856): Hunan Confucian-trained scholar; becomes a key muyou for Lin Zexu in the mid-19th century; one of the first Chinese scholars to become interested in learning about the west even before the outbreak of the first Opium War; part of the statecraft movement in early 19th-century scholarly circles.

Mufu 幕府: tent government; private bureaucracies of civilian officials; the people who staffed such bureaucracies were known as muyou 幕友 or “tent friends.” These private bureaucracies become the backbone of the self-strengthening movement in the second half of the 19th century.