

ATL: thinking and self-management skills

Create an info graphic that clearly develops the links between economic problems, social unrest, political tensions and the impact of foreign influence in China up to 1911.

Economic problems

- The vast majority of the population were peasants. Farming was barely sufficient for subsistence and it was labor intensive. There was a lack of modernization.
- Peasants often faced starvation during floods or droughts
- Peasants bore the paid tax burden for the state, which included before 1911, the great Manchu imperial court.
- The population grew by 8% after 1850, but the land cultivated only increased by 1 per cent. This imbalance made famines more frequent.
- Peasants' plots of land were reduced even though landlords increased rents
- Some peasants paid 80 per cent of their harvest in rent and taxes.
- Peasant poverty led many to migrate to the cities, but there was high urban unemployment due to improved industrial technology and cheap Western imports.
- Inflation weakened the financial position of the government.
- There was widespread corruption among local and provincial government officials which meant that a significant amount of tax revenues did not reach the central government.

Political tensions

- The European imperialist powers had humiliated and exploited China in the 19th century. This had destabilized China's ruling Manchu regime.
- After China was defeated by Britain in the mid 19th century in the Opium Wars the great Chinese Empire was carved up into 'spheres of influence' by the Europeans, Americans and by Japan.
- China had been forced to sign unequal treaties that gave the imperialist powers extraordinary controls over Chinese trade and territory.
- Missionaries flooded into China in an attempt to spread Christianity.
- There was widespread corruption in local government.
- The Taiping Rebellion, which raged from 1850 until 1864 spread throughout southern China, was only finally put down by the deployment of regional armies and with foreign assistance. Millions of Chinese were killed in the rebellion. The role played by regional armies signaled the beginning of the shift of power away from central government. After the fall of the Manchu in 1911, control became regionalized in a period known as the warlord of the 1920s.
- Some of the educated elite in China attempted to resist western influence. However, their 'Self-Strengthening Movement' was bitterly divided as to how to modernize China, and the Manchus did not meaningfully support reform.
- China lost more territory to foreign powers after it was defeated in a war with Japan in 1895. It suffered further humiliation and loss of territory in the settlement that concluded Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905).
- There was widespread anti-foreign sentiment in China. This exploded in the Boxer Rebellion in 1899. However, without modern weaponry, this anti-foreign revolt was doomed to fail.