

## Analysing the Challenges to the Ancient Empire

The introduction of the “corporate” or “legal personality” to China in the late Qing and early Republican periods had profound consequences for the course of modern Chinese history, and represents the most important form of institutional organisation in the post-imperial state. This part analyses the resilient nature of the imperial state structure and presents the book’s argument that the failure of the imperial empire owes more to internal structural collapse than to external revolutions. After rebellions and reforms had either failed to destroy it or had it rejuvenated, what finally triggered the revolution and demolished the dynastical empire was a decentralisation of industrial power and wealth to corporations. This took place after Western corporations, which became ubiquitous in the Western industrial world, were officially introduced into the body of the ancient Chinese absolutist dynastical order by way of the 1904 imperial reform legislations in the aftermath of the notorious Boxer Uprising.

The Imperial system of government in China was in place for over 2000 years until the Qing dynasty fell in 1911. Why did it fall? Was it simply because there were rebellions? Was it because of domestic court politics? Chapter 2 examines the existential threats to the Chinese imperial ruling system in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and surveys the insights of major historians. It then presents the insight that emerged from this work: that despite the decline of imperial rule, this entrenched bureaucratic system, which was inherited from the previous dynasties and backed up by the military system of the Manchu people, was tougher and more regenerative even in decline than has previously been argued. This adaptable imperial system enabled the ruling house to extend its effective

governing power for over half a century after their defeat by the British in the Opium War in 1842. Although battered, the imperial structure and the Qing state it supported remained intact and functioning until 1911. What eventually did demolish the empire was a decentralisation of industrial power and wealth when commercial corporations began to form in China.