The Canton System & The Silver Sink

¶ 4.1

European Demand > Chinese Demand ∴ ∑ Silver → China

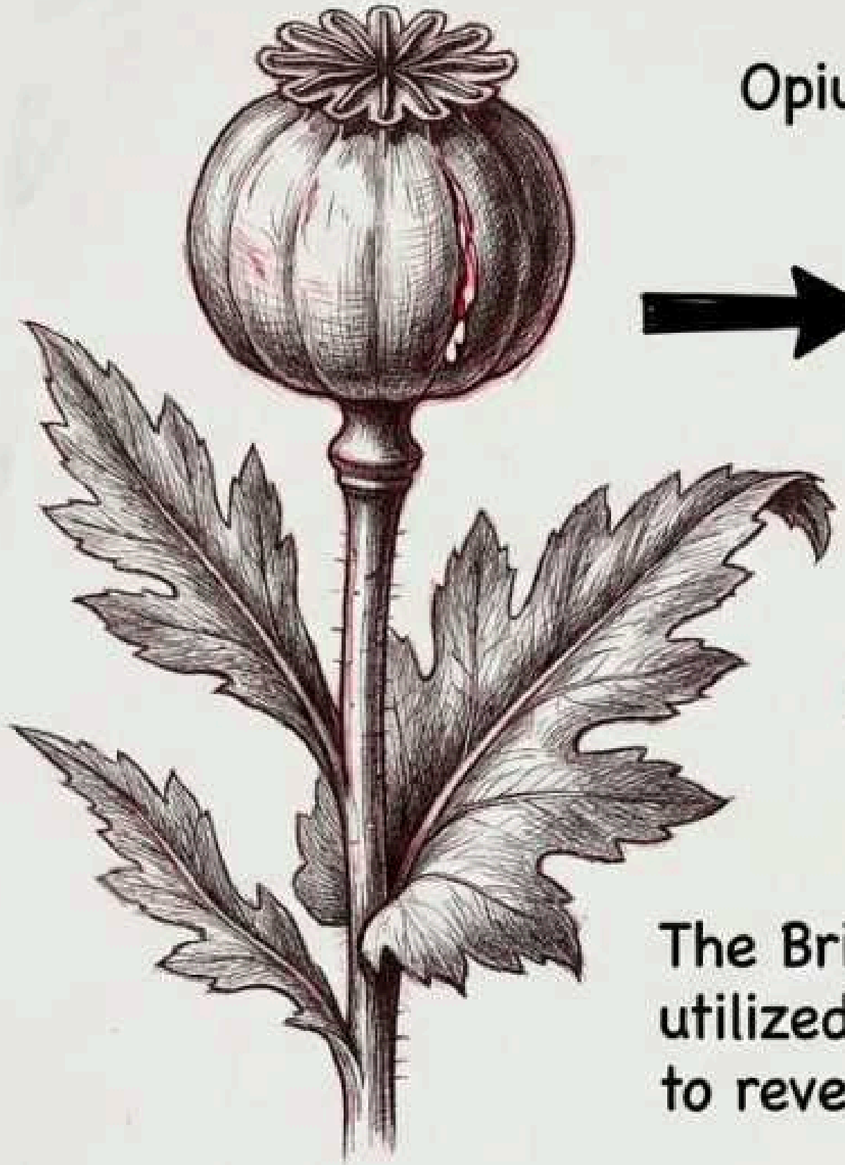


- European trade with China was restricted strictly to Chinese terms.
- Post-1757: Foreign trade limited exclusively to the port of Canton via licensed Chinese merchants.
- Britain purchased vast amounts of goods, but China wanted little in return.

Trade strictly on Chinese terms. Foreign access limited to licensed Canton merchants.

Britain's Answer: The Opium Trade

¶ 4.2



Opium Smuggling = Δ Social Addiction + (∑ Silver → Out)

East India Company grows opium in India → Smugglers sell in China → Silver flows out

Smugglers sell in China → Addiction spreads

1839 → Qing official Lin Zexu seizes and destroys >1,000 tons of British opium at Canton.

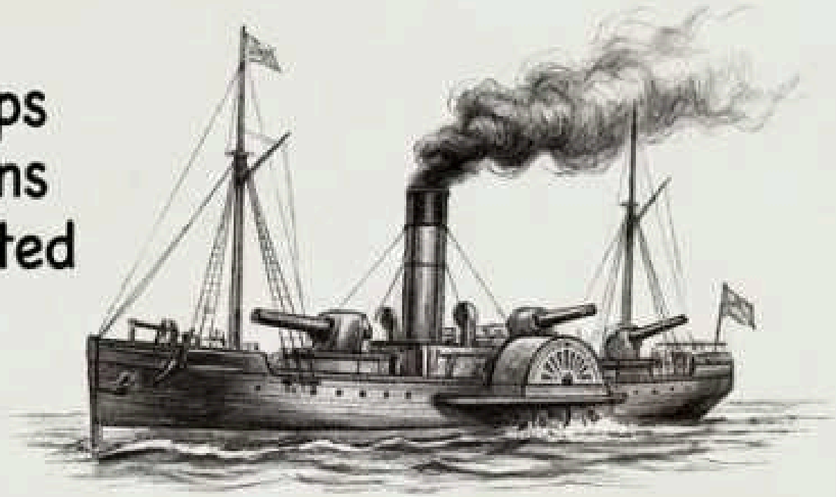
The British East India Company utilized Indian-grown opium to reverse the silver deficit.

Lin Zexu to Queen Victoria: How can Britain sell a poison it bans at home?

The Opium Wars (1839–1860)

¶ 4.3

British steamships and superior guns decisively defeated traditional Qing forces.



First Opium War (1839–1842) → Resulted in the Treaty of Nanjing. Forced China to cede Hong Kong, open five ports to trade, and pay a large indemnity.

Second Opium War (1856–1860) → Culminated with British and French troops burning the emperor's Summer Palace near Beijing.

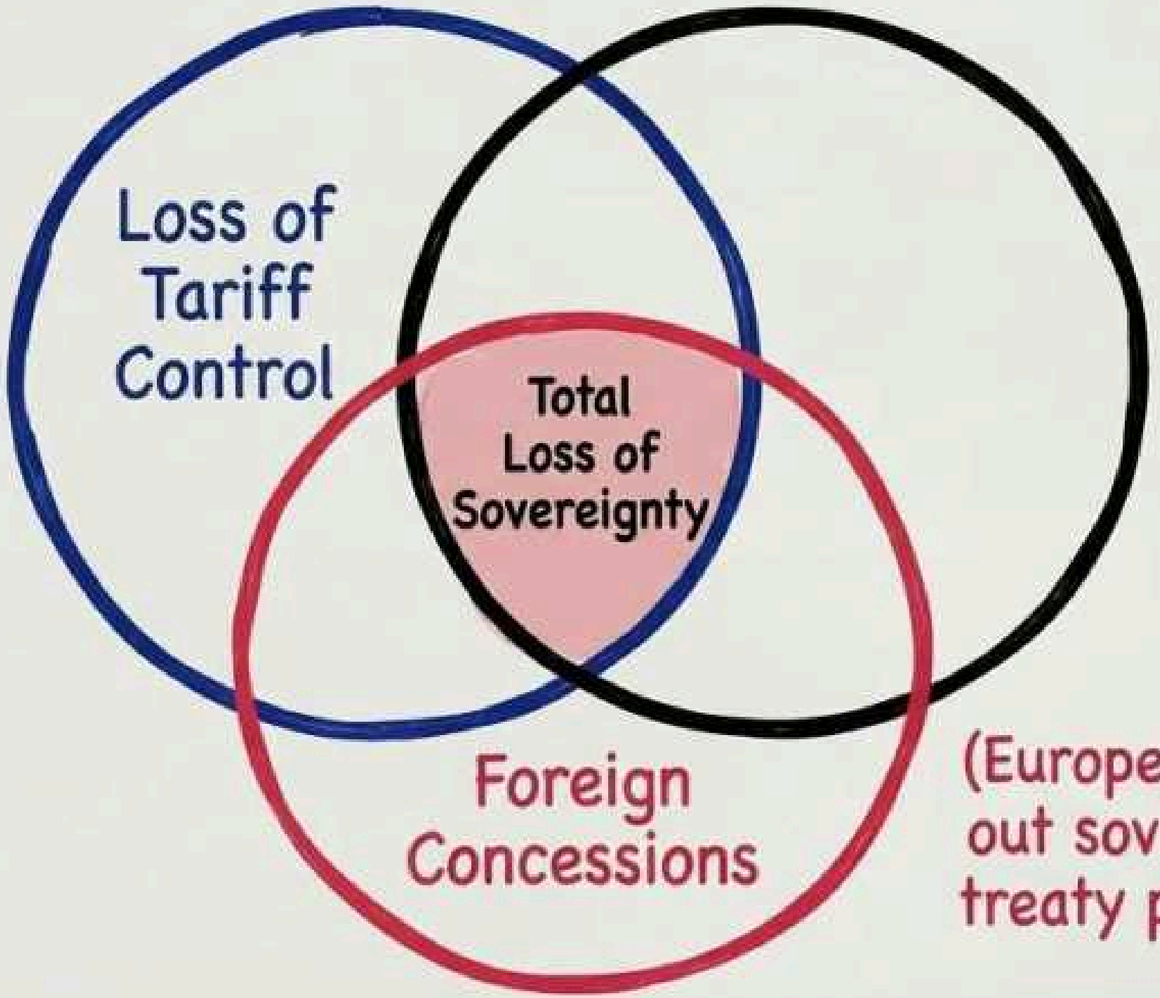


British industrial military technology shatters centuries of Qing military dominance.

The Century of Humiliation (1839–1949)

¶ 4.4

These treaties fundamentally stripped the Qing dynasty of its autonomy.



Extraterritoriality

(Foreigners tried in their own foreign courts, exempt from Chinese law)

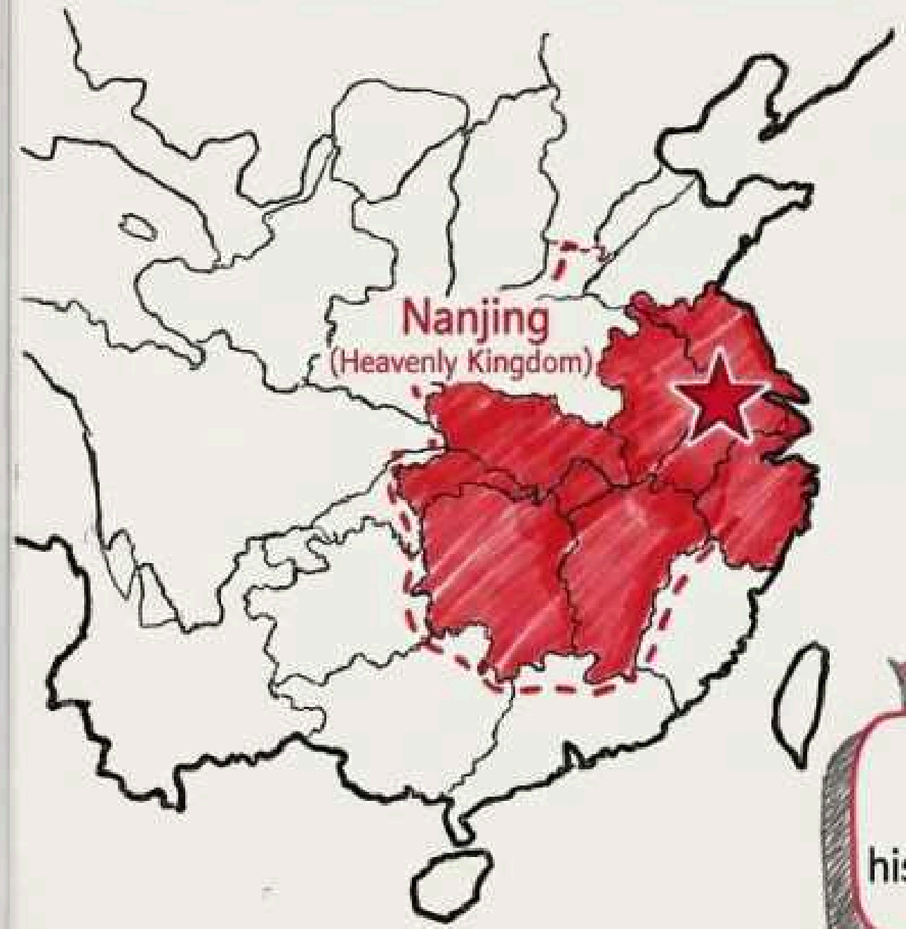
(European powers carving out sovereign territory in treaty ports like Shanghai)

The foundation of what Chinese historians term the Century of Humiliation.

Internal Devastation: The Taiping Rebellion

¶ 4.5

Failed Exam Candidate + Messianic Vision = ~20,000,000+ Casualties



Parameters: 1850–1864

Led by Hong Xiuquan (who believed he was the younger brother of Jesus).

The Heavenly Kingdom ruled much of southern China from Nanjing.



While facing Western pressure externally, China suffers one of history's deadliest conflicts internally.

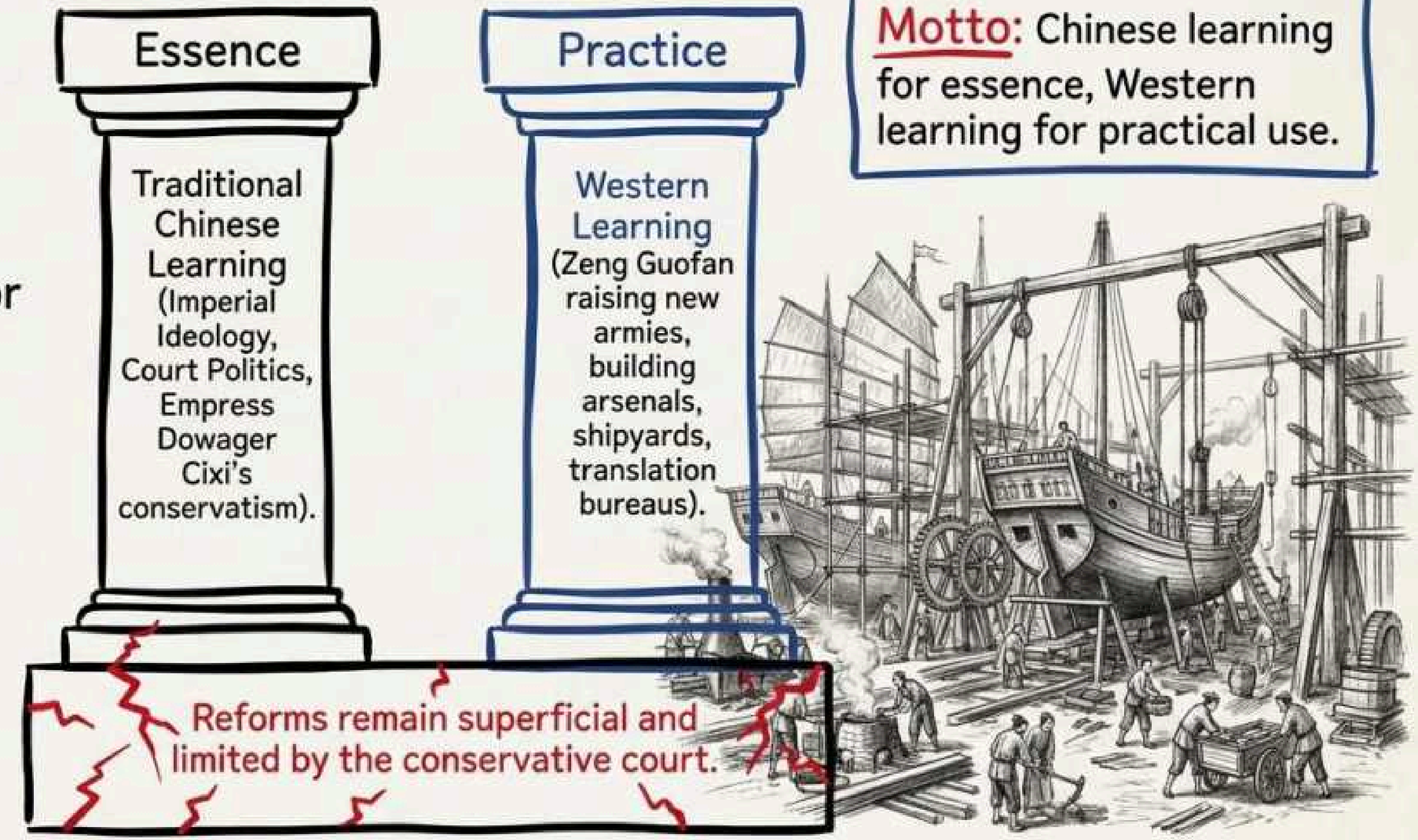
The war to crush the rebellion is one of the deadliest conflicts in human history.

¶ 4.6

The Self-Strengthening Movement

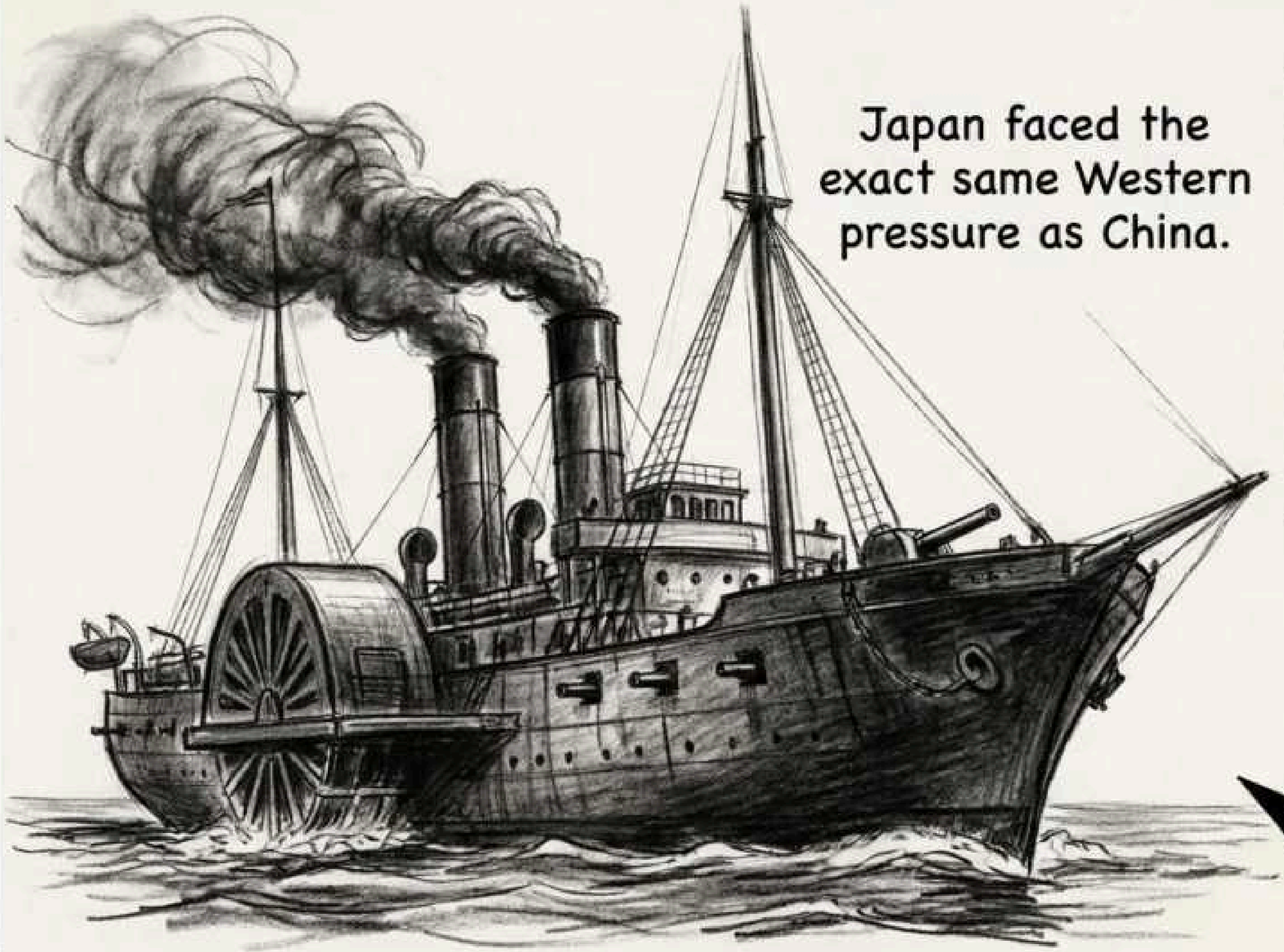
Empress Dowager Cixi dominated the court for decades and fiercely resisted deeper systemic change.

Motto: Chinese learning for essence, Western learning for practical use.



Japan's Encounter: The Black Ships

¶ 4.7



Japan faced the exact same Western pressure as China.

Action (1853)

American Commodore Perry sails into Edo Bay demanding open ports.

↓

Reaction (1854)

Shogunate signs a treaty → Cascade of unequal treaties with other Western powers follows.

↓

Internal Shockwave
Intense Samurai outrage.

Samurai outrage: The Shogun had yielded to foreigners.

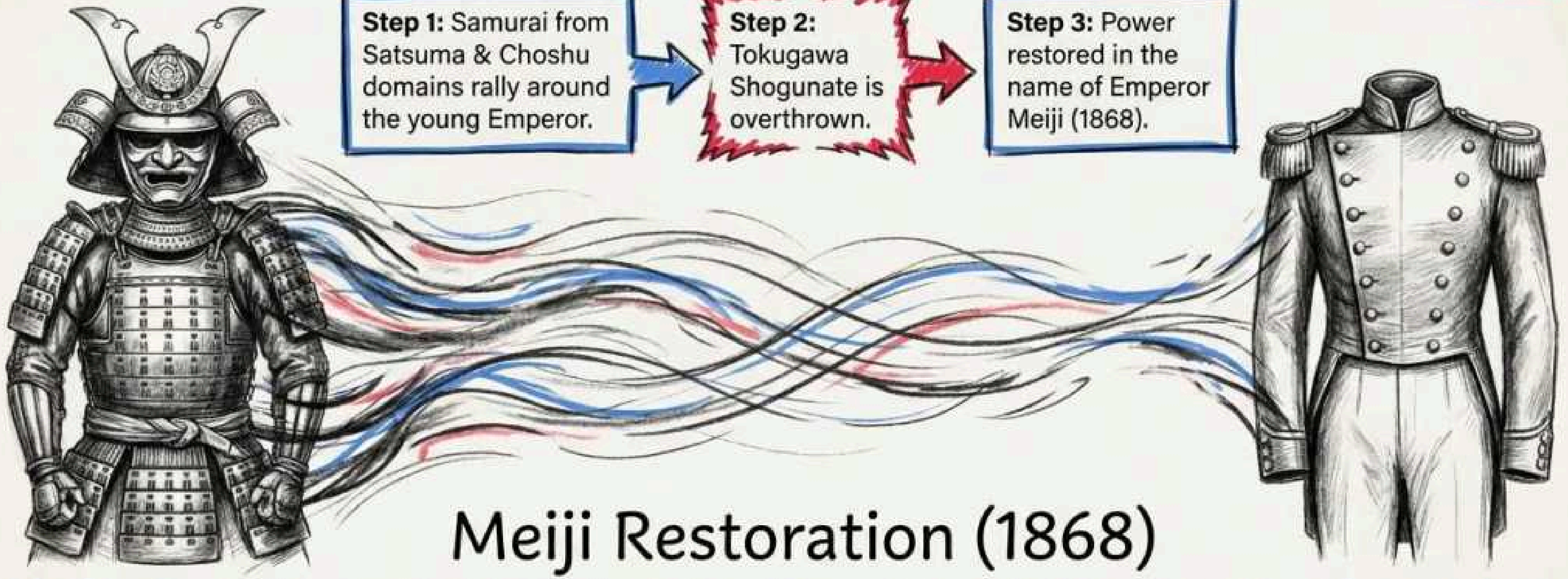
The Meiji Restoration (1868)

¶ 4.8

Step 1: Samurai from Satsuma & Choshu domains rally around the young Emperor.

Step 2: Tokugawa Shogunate is overthrown.

Step 3: Power restored in the name of Emperor Meiji (1868).



Meiji Restoration (1868)

Rich Country + Strong Army = Resistance to the West

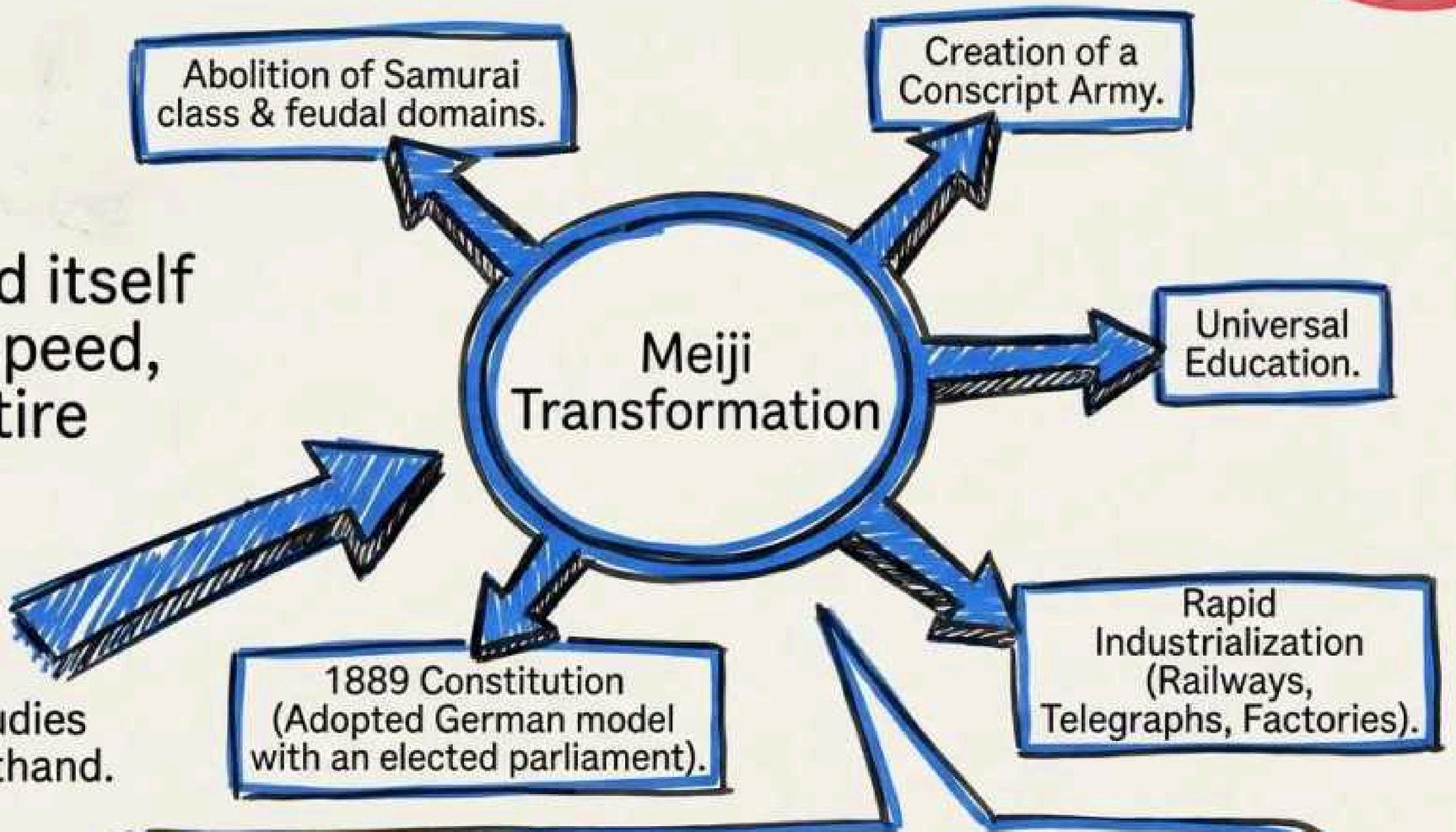
The new leadership reached a radical conclusion: survival required mimicking the aggressor.

New leadership concludes: Japan must learn from the West to resist it.

Astonishing Speed: Meiji Modernization

¶ 4.9

Japan transformed itself with astonishing speed, overhauling its entire society.



A complete systemic and societal overhaul achieved in a single generation.

Diagnostic Matrix: Why Did Japan Modernize Faster?

¶ 4.10

	Qing China	Meiji Japan
Geography & Unity	Vast/fragmented ✗	Smaller/united once shogunate fell ✓
Ideological Baggage	Deep investment in ancient imperial ideology ✗	Less invested in ancient ideology ✓
Pre-conditions	✗	High prior literacy, commercial networks, and Dutch learning ✓
Power Dynamics	Reformers struggled against a powerful, conservative court ✗	Reformers held real, absolute power ✓

Japan's pre-existing networks and pragmatic leadership enabled rapid adaptation.

Japan's Rise to Imperial Power

¶ 4.11



Japan rapidly transitions from a threatened island nation to a formidable colonizing empire.

1894–95: First Sino-Japanese War
(Japan defeats China, takes Taiwan, controls Korea).

1904–05: Russo-Japanese War
(Defeats Russia — the first Asian victory over a European great power in modern times).

1910: Annexation of Korea
(Ends the Joseon dynasty).

Japan shifts rapidly from a threatened nation to a colonizing empire.

China's Defeat and The Boxer Rebellion

¶ 4.12

Defeat by Japan profoundly shocks Chinese reformers.

A — Top-down Reform

1898 Hundred Days' Reform
(Young Guangxu Emperor & Kang Youwei)

BLOCKED
(Cixi crushes reform, imprisons Emperor)

Bottom-up Revolt — B

1899–1900 Boxer Rebellion
(Anti-Christian/Anti-Foreigner movement besieges Beijing legations)

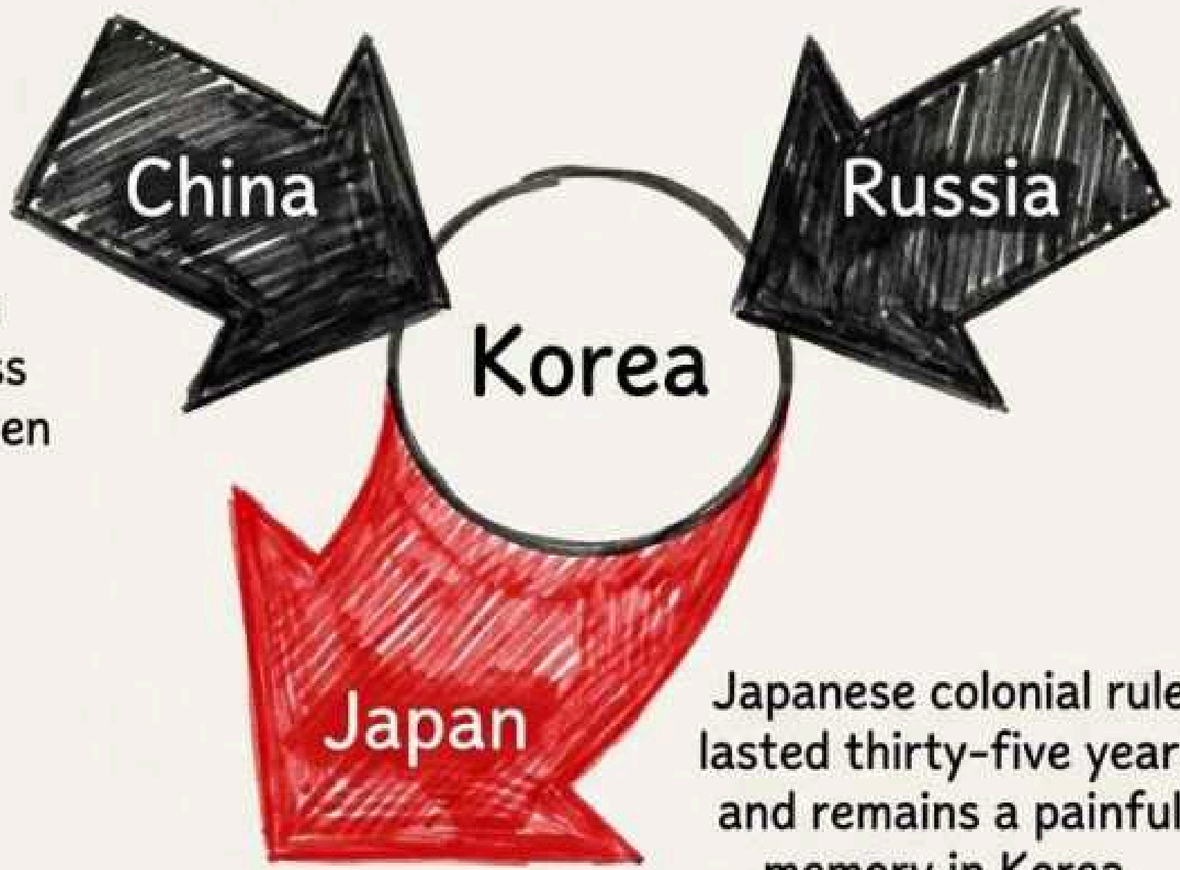
CRUSHED
(Eight-nation army invades, imposes huge indemnity)



Shocked by defeat to Japan, China attempts reform but collapses into reactionary rebellion.

The Tragedy of Korea

¶ 4.13



Korea attempts own reforms, but weakness makes it a prize between three empires.

Japanese colonial rule lasted thirty-five years and remains a painful memory in Korea.

1895: Japanese dominance established; assassination of Queen Myeongseong.

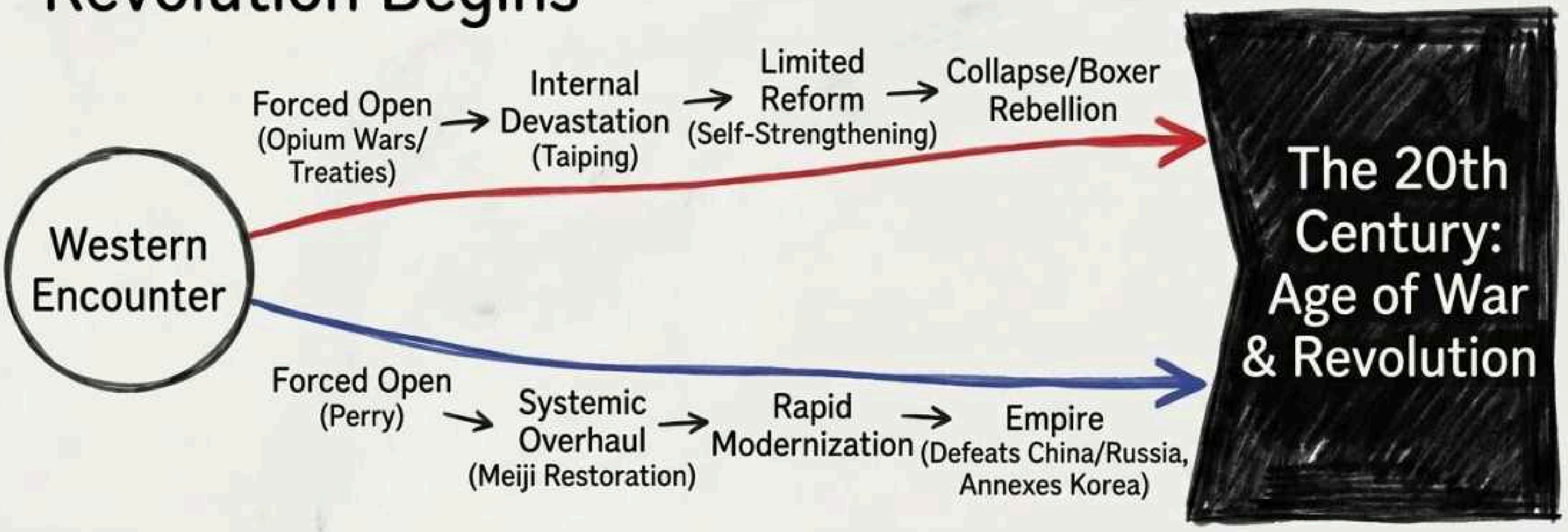
1905: Korea becomes a Japanese protectorate.

1910: Full annexation by Japan.

Caught between empires, Korea's attempts at reform fail, resulting in 35 years of painful colonial rule.

Summary: The Age of War and Revolution Begins

¶ 4.14



The Encounter with the West forged entirely different destinies for East Asia's traditional powers.