Empires and Encounters

China and informal empire

The ‘unequal treaties’

- Unilateral (not reciprocal) limitation of import tariffs to 5%
- Opening of ports for trade
- ‘extraterritoriality’- foreigners not under Chinese jurisdiction but under that of their own consuls
- The most-favoured-nation clause, extending privileges granted to one foreign power automatically to all others
- As a result, China became an ‘uncolonized extension of empire’ (Jurgen Osterhammel)
- Britain wants ‘a strong and stable government (in Beijing) which would ensure conditions favourable to trade’ (Foreign Secretary Grey)

Mid-century crisis and reform

- Corruption, inefficiency, poverty and famine
- Large-scale rebellions- Taiping rebellion (1850-64) costs up to 20m lives
- Provincial governors seize the initiative from Beijing, defeating the Taiping and experimenting with modern industry (‘self-strengthening’)

The ‘scramble for concessions’

- Germany seized Jiaozhou and railway and mining rights in the northern province of Shandong
- Britain obtains railway concessions, an enlargement of Hong Kong, and the port of Weihaiwei
- France receives railways and Guangzhouwan in the South
- Russia receives railways in Manchuria and Port Arthur
- USA: ‘open door’ declaration

The ‘hundred days’ reforms

- Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao gain influence with the emperor; Guangxi
- For 100 days, edicts promoting wholesale reform emanate from the palace