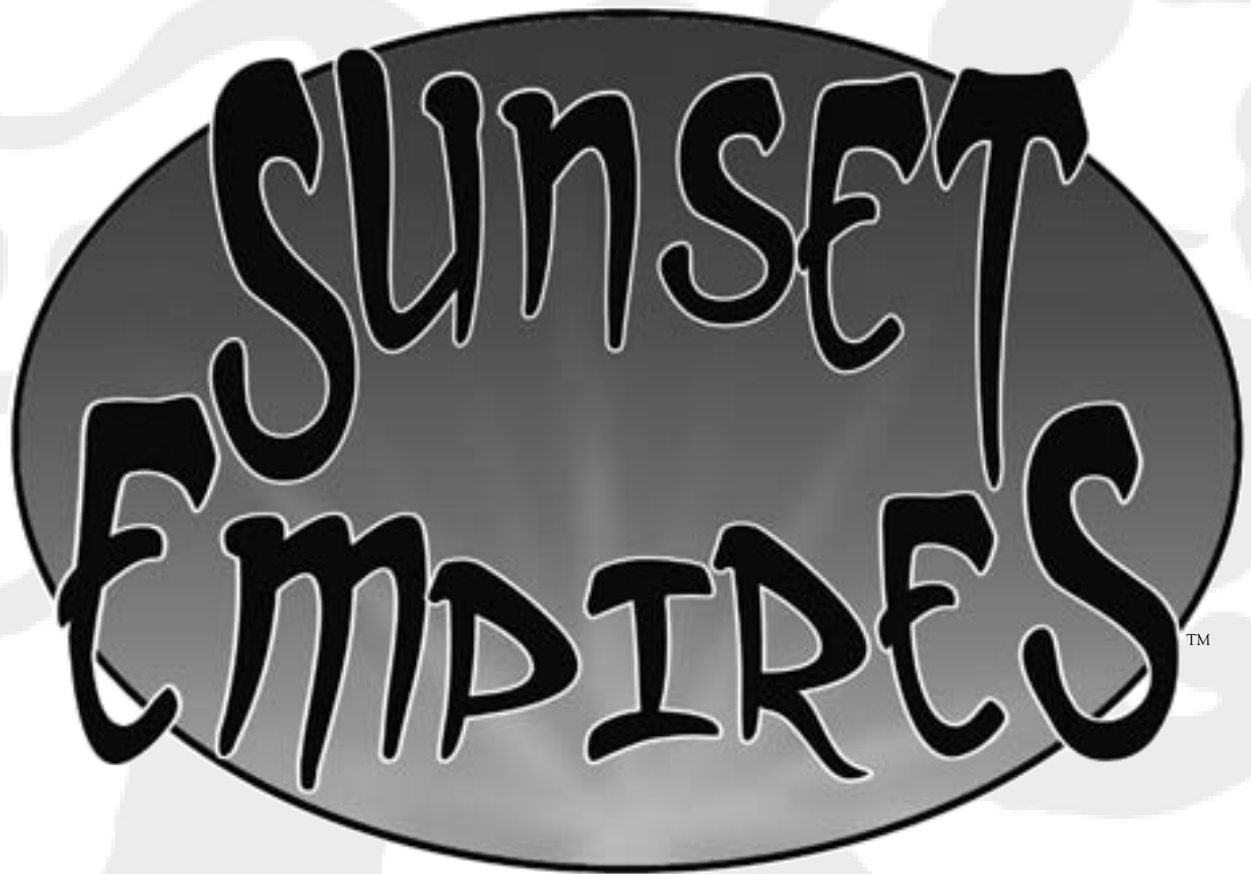


SUNSET EMPIRES



A Sourcebook for *Kindred of the East*



SUNSET EMPIRESTM

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INTRODUCTION

*To starve to death is a very small matter.
To lose one's integrity, however, is a very
serious matter.*

—Ch'eng I, *Reflections of Things on Hand*

TAKE A STEP BACK

The Chinese meant for the phrase, “May you live in interesting times,” to serve as a curse. The people of 19th-century Asia must have keenly felt the cruel irony of this as centuries of advanced thought so clearly spelled their doom, especially in light of the events that gripped their world. In the span of mere decades, cultures that once marked their existence by millennia underwent so many watershed events that some are still recovering from the experience. That Asia emerged from this period of forced participation in Western empire-building with any cultural identity left whatsoever is a testament to its singular will, a will tempered by colonial dominance and brutality. What the British, Germans, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Americans did to the region is unacceptable by modern standards, but any claim Asia was entirely innocent in matters regarding its own fate is too shortsighted — at least for the purposes of this book.

Sunset Empires is part of the history of the World of Darkness; therefore nobody gets to play the part of the wholly innocent victim. Everyone takes a role in setting the course of the Victorian Age; everyone must eventually pay the piper. This book serves as a historical setting, covering the 19th century almost in its entirety, but it

also serves as a vehicle to involve characters in one of Asia's most trying times. Why discuss the Opium Wars when characters can take part in them? Why mention Japan's rapid modernization if characters can't join the internecine fighting dividing the Japanese *uji*?

CAVEAT: IT'S ONLY HISTORY

If fortune indeed favors the bold... then Asia was doomed to fall.

Sunset Empires is driven by historical — and entirely mortal — events. The Kuei-jin are not the movers and shakers of this period... neither are the Kin-jin, the *hengyokai*, or any other *shen* for that matter. The truth hurts, but by the time of the Victorian Era, the Kuei-jin are no longer dominant: they simply haven't realized it yet. This is a pivotal moment in the history of the Kuei-jin, when they realize they are little more than flotsam in a storm of conflicting mortal interests. The world around them is changing with every 19th-century minute, and there is little the Quincunx or other various undead courts can do about it. It is their first lesson in humility since the fall from Wan Xian, and it is a bitter pill to swallow.

This is a time of mortals; of mortal history, mortal agendas and mortal machinations. The *shen* are only

along for the ride. Asia undergoes widespread sociological, geographical and religious change, all because of mortal intervention. For Kuei-jin, it is a shift from a mystical, tradition-based society in which they control and wield power — sometimes openly — to a mortal society beyond their reach. Humanity's pursuit of technology far outstrips the Kuei-jin's capacity to keep up with it, a lesson the Kin-jin learned some time ago. In fact, if the Kin-jin survive this period more easily, it is because they've learned to hide within whatever society rules the day. As long as they still have the nights, the vampires are happy. For Kuei-jin, however, being relegated to the deepest shadows is little more than exile.

With the arrival of the Europeans on Asia's shores, the Kuei-jin mistakenly believe the Kin-jin hold all the cards (or, in this instance, the colonials in their thrall), and that allying or negotiating with them will solve all the Kuei-jin's problems. They believe the Kin-jin are as open in their nature as the Kuei-jin are with Asian society. For this reason, the Kin-jin remain safe at first; the Kuei-jin believe that targeting the Western undead will have an immediate and negative political impact. It is not, however, a true measure of safety. Some Kuei-jin simply don't care about the ramifications of their actions and slaughter Western vampires for the pure satisfaction of it. Still, uncertainty works in the Cainites' favor for now, and they know it.

Finally, the Kuei-jin embody a third axiom... that history is written by the winners. They may blame the Kin-jin for invading their homelands, but many Kuei-jin are just as guilty. Cathayans allowed Kin-jin to settle in their cities, used them to further personal agendas and even entrusted them to act as middle-men with the world at large. Kuei-jin of the twentieth century may treat the presence of Kin-jin as a plague that descended upon them, but Cainites existed in Asia for far longer than most ancestors would care to admit... and they existed because the Kuei-jin allowed them that luxury.

THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND SUNSET EMPIRES

To understand the changes ripping Asia apart, one must understand the forces behind them. For this reason, **Sunset Empires** is more of a socio-historical book than pure setting. Mortal history takes precedence, followed by supernatural history, because each event builds upon the one before to change the face of Asia. To understand the changes, one must understand the event; to understand the event, one must understand its impact on mortal society... especially when the changes unfold over the course of a century.

Unfortunately, the trouble with history is that it's often passive, good only for filling in cracks and free minutes on long bus rides. **Sunset Empires**, however, strives to change this by making history the vehicle for action. Every event has two or more participating factions,

and Storytellers are encouraged to draw characters into one of those groups. Allow them to witness, participate in and even steer history in a different course than the one intended. Just because the text mentions one faction or another doesn't exclude the *wu* or coterie; in fact, it provides Storytellers with an open window through which the characters can be pulled.

If the book mentions the Prince of Manila and his campaign to overthrow the Ashirra of the Sulu Sultanate, then the Prince probably uses agents such as the Kindred characters for his missions. If a section touches upon the collapse of the Flame Court, then the characters may try to stop all hell from breaking loose — or be among the first to help tear the court down. In fact, portions of the book leave certain people nameless. Who is the Prince of Manila? Well, until there's a **Philippines by Night**, he remains a *tabula rasa*: the Storyteller's character. Only those individuals who are canon or have a serious part to play in the 21st century have names. This creates a more fluid history for this book; a necessary adjustment in order to allow characters and Storytellers leeway in changing the universe's chronology (fairly important since the modern era is just a stone's throw away).

Sunset Empires is unique as a setting in that it is a transition point between eras. For Europeans, the Victorian Age is a period when the West is an active participant in world events: a period of stability and prosperity. For Asia, however, the Victorian Age is synonymous with upheaval. It is rarely stable, rarely prosperous (save for Japan and Siam) and a victim of world events rather than a catalyst.

Sunset Empires serves as a bridge between what Asia was and what she becomes. The Asia of the past is best exemplified by **Blood & Silk**, which is a worthwhile companion book to this one. The Asia of tomorrow is what rests in the pages of **Kindred of the East**. The Dharmas, Abilities, Backgrounds, Disciplines, and so forth of this era are largely the same as those in the two aforementioned books, save for a few noted exceptions. Traditionalists and the forces of status quo best emulate the information presented in **Blood & Silk**, while those Kuei-jin hellbent on overtaking the West are representational of the information in **Kindred of the East**.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Before launching into a chapter by chapter synopsis, it is important to note that any event taking place prior to the 19th century is described in the past tense. Anything occurring post-1800, however, is written in the present tense regardless of decade to impart the sense that events unfold as the reader reads them.

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

Chapter One: China revisits the Middle Kingdom during her greatest turmoil. As China unravels and

spirals out of control, it loses territory to foreign countries and prestige in the eyes of its own citizens. This chapter offers an overview of the Five August Courts during this turbulent period and invaluable information on the Quincunx's hierarchy.

Chapter Two: India touches upon the fabled subcontinent and the events birthing the celebrated British Raj, including the Great Mutiny. There's also information on the basic structure of Victorian Indian cities to help Storytellers build their own regional settings.

Chapter Three: Japan deals with one of the only Asian countries to successfully adapt to the new world. This chapter illustrates Japan's ability to remake itself from a traditional Asian nation to the only regional superpower to defeat a European country in war. Storytellers may also find the discussion on *uji* houses, politics and hierarchy especially useful.

Chapter Four: Southeast Asia touches upon the myriad scattered islands and countries of the Golden Courts, as well as the campaigns to tame these wild domains. From the warlike and tribal Burmese, to France's invasion of Indochina, to the Europe-savvy Siam, the region is rich in history, adventure and danger.

Chapter Five: Character Creation summarizes the character creation process with an eye toward keeping it true to the spirit of the era. It also incorporates information offered in **Victorian Age: Vampire** and **Kindred of the East**, as well as offering new P'archetypes and martial arts.

Chapter Six: Storytelling Sunset Empires finally compiles all the previous information together by discussing historical events and potential character roles during such notable milestones as the Great Mutiny, the Opium Wars and the Boxer Rebellions. This section is the only one reserved exclusively for the Storyteller.

LEXICON

Note that the country listed in parentheses is where the term found usage, not necessarily the country that developed its usage (like *compradors* being attributed to China, as opposed to the Europeans who used the term on the Chinese).

Ashirra: (India & Southeast Asia) Cainites of Islamic extraction who first arrived in the region with Muslim merchants.

Bao: (China) In a mortal sense, meaning "reciprocity," a system by which Chinese men and women balance favor for favor and privilege for privilege to avoid feeling obligated toward someone.

Bakufu: (Japan) Meaning "camp office," a system of government whereby the power rests in the Shogunate's hands and not the Emperor.

Benraku: (Japan) Puppet theater where black-clad individuals manipulate puppets on stage while the

audience ignores their presence. Also, an organization within the Thousand Whispers.

Cohong: (China) System of trade established by Chinese government that gave foreign trade rights to merchants called *hongs*. Western traders could only deal with *hongs*, who in turn could dictate prices for imports and exports.

Compradors: (China) Men hired by Western companies to act as go-betweens with Chinese trading partners.

Daimyo: (Japan) A house leader; these senior *gaki* are of ancestor rank.

Guanxi: (China) In a mortal sense, a network of personal relationships allowing someone to maintain *bao* with others, as well as a guide dictating proper social behavior.

Jianmin: (China) Meaning "demeaned people," this rank of society performs the lowliest jobs and services.

Kami: (Japan) Nature spirits central to the Shinto faith.

Muyou: (China) Private secretaries and personal aides to magistrates who oversee multiple districts.

Resident: (Asia) A polite term for watchdog; the colonial regimes assigned local governments a resident or diplomatic agent to "supervise and advise" foreign courts. Residents, in fact, ruled from behind the scenes... if they survived.

Sadhus: (India) A Hindu holy man; Indian mages also use this term as a collective description.

Taipan: (China) Kin-jin princes of the foreign quarters built in Chinese cities. Many such quarters remained protected by European extraterritorial treaties with the local government.

Trimira: (India) Tremere who go "native," adopting the mannerisms and customs of the locals.

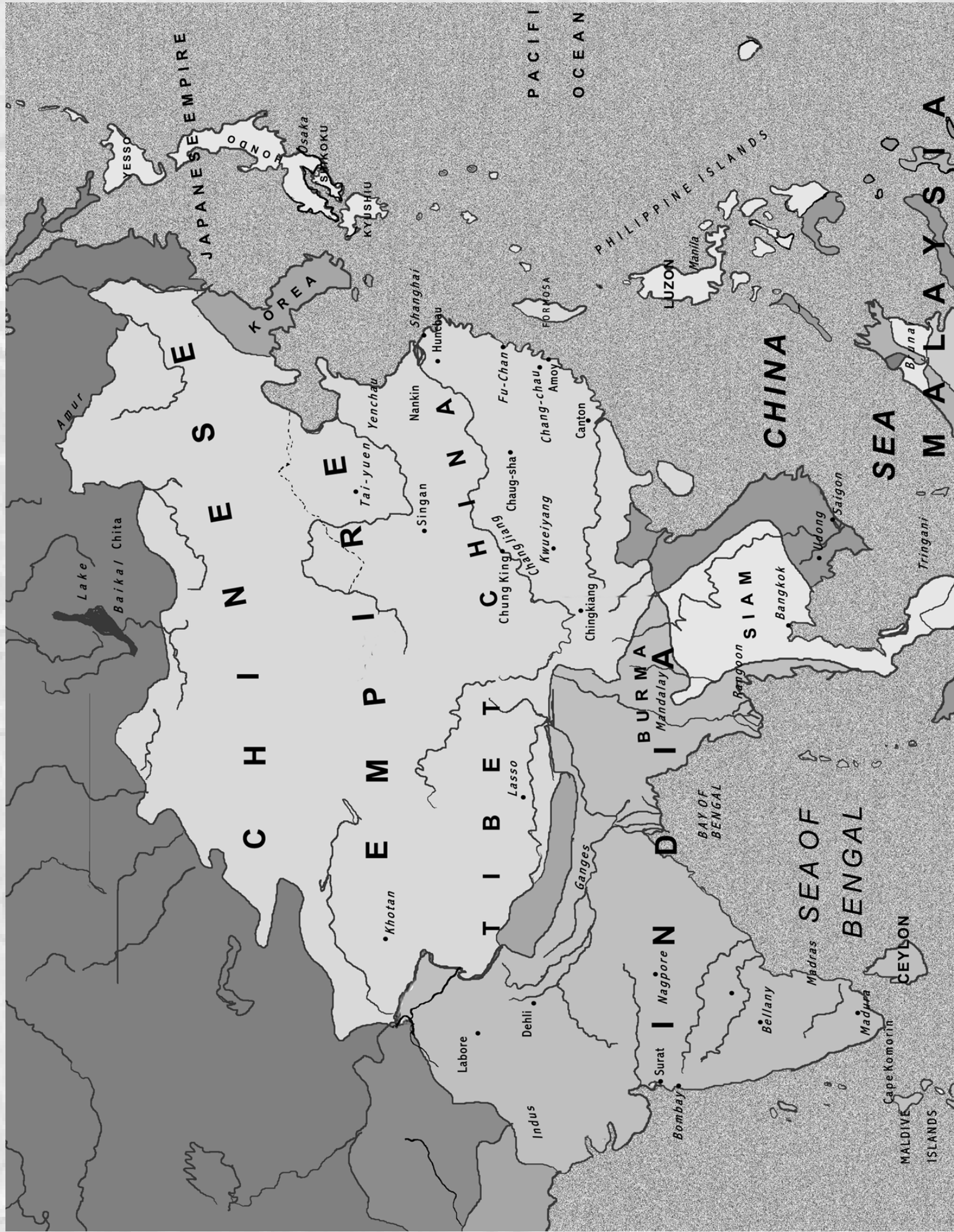
Ukiyo-e: (Japan) A school of beautiful and elegant wood block prints meaning "The Floating World;" the Bishamon use it to describe their rule, which they hope exemplifies the will of Heaven.

Varna: (India) The Hindi word for caste, which consists of brahmins, kshatriyas, vaisyas, sudras and dalits.

Xianzhi: (China) A magistrate; these officials are the only Qing bureaucrats actually governing the people of China, rather than other officials.

Yamen: (China) The lowest level of the local government, these individuals work as tax collectors, runners, policemen or prison guards.

Zaibatsu: (Japan) "Financial clique," or a type of private company. The Japanese government develops new enterprises before giving them to zaibatsu to manage, thereby tying the government's success with that of the company.



CHAPTER ONE: CHINA

The Jiaqing emperor has good reason to be content; the Western calendar marks the start of the 19th century and the Qing dynasty is still in its most prosperous era. Jiaqing assumed power in 1799, after the death of his father, the Qianlong emperor. Tribute flows into the coffers of the Forbidden City from lands as distant as Siam. A robust and efficient bureaucracy watches over millions of peasants working in flooded rice fields. Great storehouses are common sights in Chinese cities as a means of dealing with the incredible surplus of trade goods, enough to dwarf the volume within Europe. Peculiar white-skinned foreigners from the West are amusing curiosities in Beijing and Canton.

Unfortunately, tribute arriving from the small nations bordering China cannot match the sums the imperial government spends maintaining order. The great imperial bureaucracy is clearly beginning to show the effects of wide-scale corruption. Although peasants produce finished goods in large numbers, there are still millions who can't afford porcelain dishes or a silk robe... and the true nature of the white-skinned foreigners is about to emerge. By the end of the 19th century, China ceases to be the Center of the World and instead is repeatedly humbled by foreign powers and unsure of its continued existence.

HISTORY

THE DAWN OF THE 19TH CENTURY

The Qing Empire begins the century in a position of strength over the Europeans. The balance of trade clearly favors China, something the Qing are disinclined to

change. The British are in a particularly poor position. They import raw materials such as cotton and wood into China from their holdings in India. In return, the Chinese sell the British expensive luxury goods like porcelain, silk and tea. It costs the British more to buy the Chinese goods than their returns with the sale of Indian cotton. British silver pours into China and only trickles back out.

The greatest impediments to favorable British goods exchanges are the harsh restrictions placed on trade with Europe. These restrictions include geographic limits on where Europeans may live and mercantile regulations on who can actually trade with foreigners.

The Portuguese colony of Macao is the only city where Europeans may settle. Located at the mouth of the Pearl River estuary, Macao was established in 1553. The Portuguese traders paid tribute every four years to the Chinese for trading rights while China, who never recognized Portuguese claims of regional sovereignty, controlled Macao. When British and French traders first arrived, the city of Macao was the only place they were allowed to settle, thus keeping all the foreigners neatly contained. Eventually, British traders built a settlement dubbed "The Thirteen Factories" further up the estuary on the outskirts of Canton.

Living in the shadow of massive Qing empire, the Europeans initially had little choice but to agree to the Qing's trade restrictions. The Qing saw no difference between these barbarians huddling in Macao and any others paying tribute to the emperor. To accommodate the peculiar requirements of trade with the barbarians (and to further limit their influence), China later created a system of trade called the *cohong*.

TIMELINE

1553	The Portuguese lease the port of Macao as a trading base.
1757	The British build “The Thirteen Factories” settlement on the outskirts of Canton.
1757	The Qing institute the <i>cohong</i> trade system that limits European contact with China.
1793	The British send Lord George Macartney to Beijing to meet with the Qianlong Emperor, with disastrous results.
1800	China bans opium but the British continue exporting it from India.
1802	Britain occupies Macao during the French Revolution.
1808	Britain occupies Macao a second time.
1839	Lin Zexu lays siege to “The Thirteen Factories,” seizes stockpiled opium and expels the British first to Macao, then later to Hong Kong Island.
1839	First Opium War
1840	The Qing seek a peaceful solution to the war, but are unsuccessful. Fighting resumes again in 1841.
1842	The Qing sign the humiliating Treaty of Nanjing, which opens China to foreign trade and influence.
1844	France signs the Franco-Chinese Treaty and the United States ratifies the Treaty of Wangxia.
1850–1868	The Nian and Muslim Rebellions
1851	China’s population reaches 200 million.
1851–1864	The Taiping Rebellion
1853	Nanjing becomes the capital for the Society for the Worship of God.
1856–1858	The Second Opium War
1856–1860	The Arrow War
1858	Treaties of Tianjin
1862	Empress Dowager Cixi becomes regent.
1865	Creation of the Shanghai arsenal factory.
1870–1890	The Self-Strengthening Movement
1890	Telegraph networks now link most cities.
1894–1895	The Sino-Japanese War
1895	The Qing institute the Hundred Days of Reforms, an effort to eliminate corruption inherent in the civil service examination system. The initiative fails.
1895	Empress Dowager Cixi stages a palace coup to retain power.
1898	China leases the New Territories to Britain for 99 years.
1899–1900	The Boxer Rebellion

Trade with Europe was almost insignificant compared to the staggering volume of regular commerce within the empire. The imperial court granted the *cohong* exclusive rights to conduct business with the Europeans. The British, Portuguese, French, and Americans were only authorized to deal with these particular merchants. These *hong* merchants were responsible for collecting imperial tariffs on imported goods and for establishing prices for imports and exports. The *hong* merchants became fabulously wealthy from their monopoly. Excess tariffs and control of market prices ensured that the *hong* merchants accumulated fantastic fortunes, to the envy of their peers and the chagrin of Europe.

As the 19th century approached, the British became increasingly frustrated with the prohibitive restrictions

placed upon them. A steady stream of complaints flowed back to London along with pleas for help. In 1793, the British government sent Lord George Macartney to Beijing to meet with the Qianlong emperor. By normalizing relations between the two nations, the British hoped to open China up to British trade.

The infamous meeting between Macartney and the Qianlong emperor set the tone of China and Britain’s relationship for the next century. Macartney entered the magnificent Forbidden City, and was received into the presence of the Son of Heaven. The British ambassador refused to prostrate himself before the emperor as was traditional, however, and instead simply dropped to one knee as was customary with the British monarch.

In Qing eyes, the British were simply another barbarian nation somewhere across the ocean, like Siam. Scandalized, Qianlong bureaucrats and advisors immediately categorized all British citizens as backward barbarians. This is an important distinction in the eyes of the Qing, as it sets the entire tone for future dealings.

As barbarians, China expected the British to present tribute to the emperor in return for the privilege of trading with China. Only civilized nations can exchange gifts and act as equals. By losing that distinction, the British were relegated to the status of ignorant savages in the eyes of the Chinese empire. The Qing therefore interpreted Macartney's gifts to the emperor as fitting tribute, but nothing more.

The imperial court considered the matter closed, and Qianlong commented that the British couldn't possibly have anything that China needed. Later, the Jiaqing emperor sent the British monarch an apology for this incident. His letter and accompanying gifts were discovered in a forgotten storeroom in London in the 1880s, all unopened.

The unanswered question, however, is why did the Qianlong emperor dismiss the British, smugly assured that China was supreme among the world's nations? Partly because China was, in its own way, at the pinnacle of regional, economic and technological innovation. The Chinese understood water-powered machines intimately and used them to husk rice, pulp fibers and crush sugar cane. Farming and water transportation, the absolute cornerstones of the Chinese economy, had progressed as far as possible without such devices as the steam engine. This invention might have been worthwhile to China, except that the one thing China did not lack was manpower. Why develop machines to replace people when internal migration was relatively easy and a vast pool of manpower existed? The Qing empire operated at the highest level of output for the present technology. The raw materials and conditions to fuel an industrial revolution simply weren't available.

Another reason for the brush-off stemmed from China's traditional ambivalence toward outsiders. China's history is replete with foreign conquerors. The Qing themselves were Manchus from the northeast corner of China who had conquered the Han Chinese, the overwhelming regional ethnic majority. Admittedly, some members of the imperial court were clearly fascinated with the West's science and technology, which they encountered through Jesuit missionaries. The Qianlong emperor's assertion that the West could offer China nothing arose from traditional pressures, however, and was designed to reinforce the dearly held notion of innate Chinese superiority over all other cultures. This unswerving adherence to tradition would prove to be the single greatest contributor to China's impending woes.

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Frustration mounts for the British and other Europeans while the century's first decades pass. The West senses the unimaginable profits that the world's largest market offers. British sailors traveling past Shanghai confirm that its port activity is equal to that of London. Reports of British smugglers braving the Qing bans on foreign trade contain tales of towns producing mountains of fine porcelain and rivers of exquisite silk. One such smuggler, Robert Fortune, earns wealth and notoriety as a "botanical spy," stealing different types of tea plants that the British cannot grow in India. With the market for cotton declining, the British grow desperate to replace their lucrative interests. Opium becomes that product, imported and sold throughout China at a significant profit.

In China, opium addiction is at near-epidemic proportions for the first half of the 19th century. Although opium was outlawed years ago by imperial decree, the authorities never enforced the ban. Regional opium production is considerable, but European-manufactured opium is of higher quality, and therefore in greater demand. Additionally, opium addiction isn't confined to any particular strata of society; bureaucrat and beggar alike waste years in smoky opium dens. Officials in the imperial bureaucracy realize opium is a problem, but can't decide on how to resolve the issue. Some believe legalization is the solution, but they eventually lose the debate to the traditionalists; the Chinese decide upon a campaign of eradication.

For the British, opium is a financial godsend — one they have no intention of giving up. In 1800, opium is banned again by imperial decree, but the British continue selling it illegally without regard for the Chinese government's declaration. By 1825, the opium trade generates so much revenue for the British that they can afford to liberally purchase Chinese goods. They have silver to spare, after all, even exporting the metal itself out of China. Troubled by the growing crisis, the emperor dispatches Lin Zexu to Canton to eliminate the opium problem. Lin launches a vigorous crackdown on opium users and smugglers in 1839.

In anticipation of potential (and much sought after) legalization, the British had been stockpiling opium in Canton. As part of his attempts to eradicate the opium trade, Lin seizes these reserves, which he destroys by diluting them in water and flushing the water into the river. The authorities detain 350 foreign traders for several days and blockade the Thirteen Factories.

To add insult to injury, Lin expels the British from the district, forcing them to flee to Macao. The furious British traders meet with Lin to demand some form of recompense. Lin, however, instead asks them to cease trading in opium. When they refuse, Lin chases the British from Macao. They finally settle on the island of

Hong Kong, despite strong local resistance to their presence. Regardless of the hostile local climate, the British continue smuggling and use their illicit revenues to buying tea from American companies.

The tense situation comes to a head in July 1839, when British sailors kill a Chinese man in Kowloon, the town across the bay from Hong Kong. The British refuse to surrender the men to Chinese officials. China responds by sending several war junks to the area to force the surrender, to which the British navy replies by firing on the Chinese ships. The First Opium War begins.

THE FIRST OPIUM WAR (1839-1842)

The First Opium War is fought primarily on the sea. Although the Qing have more ships than the British, their junks are antiquated, with less maneuverability and fewer guns. Both sides employ rockets to start crippling fires aboard enemy vessels, but the British crews are seasoned veterans from skirmishes with faster and deadlier French and Spanish ships. The war junks are simply outmatched, enabling the British to blockade Canton and Ningbo, and eventually sail along China's northern coast to Tianjin, the port closest to Beijing, in late summer of 1840. Stunned by their defeats, the Qing negotiate for a British withdrawal to Canton while they seek a resolution to the war. Both sides later reject this agreement and the British resume their attacks on Canton, bombarding and occupying a portion of the city in 1841.

By now, the British steamships arrive in Canton. These warships are flat-bottomed, so they can sail up rivers to engage Chinese troops. They also feature compartmentalized hulls, allowing them to withstand more damage. They cement British dominance of the seas and allow for ground assaults against Canton.

On land, the Chinese outnumber British forces just as they did on the sea, sometimes by significant odds. Simple military logic seems to favor the overwhelming Chinese numbers, but the British soldiers are far better trained and equipped than the Chinese. All British soldiers carry percussion lock muskets, which are quite resistant to the rain and wind. They fight with discipline and employ field artillery, a type of unit the Chinese have never before seen.

Most of the troops stationed in Canton are members of the militia-like Army of the Green Standard, which is composed almost entirely of Han Chinese. They are poorly trained and poorly directed, since their principle duties include guarding imperial buildings and serving as a public labor force. They carry bows, swords, poles, chainmail, crossbows and matchlock muskets — far cruder firearms than the British models. Despite inventing gunpowder, the Chinese didn't refine it; the powder used by the Chinese troops is of very low quality. Cannons also defend the city, but are equally hampered by low-quality gunpowder.

Even with their overwhelming technological edge, the British soldiers and marines don't defeat the Chinese without effort. The British retreat from some battles and, despite, the size of British cannons, Canton's stout walls shrug off most shots. Still, what remains impressive about the British victory is what they accomplish despite their small numbers. The British rarely field more than a thousand men in any given battle and yet manage to capture and hold a section of Canton. The Chinese should overwhelm the British by sheer superiority of numbers, but doesn't. Still, the Jiaqing emperor realizes he must placate these foreign barbarians until China regains its footing. To that end, he signs the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, granting unheard-of trade concessions for the British.

Britain's primary concern is expanding trade with China, which has a vast economy beyond the hills of Canton. The clear intent behind the Treaty of Nanjing is to make trade with China as easy as possible for British subjects. While the treaty doesn't open China completely, it is a groundbreaking step forward. The treaty establishes five "treaty ports" — Canton, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai — that are open to British merchants; British negotiators struggle to add cities along the Yangtze that would unlock the interior, but to no avail. Of these five treaty ports, Shanghai eventually emerges as the most friendly to foreign influence. Britain also secures "most-favored nation" status with the Qing, automatically granting them any subsequent Chinese rights or concessions to any other nation. The Chinese must also pay a large indemnity of several million taels for losses to hong merchants and the destruction of British opium.

China dismantles the cohong system, giving the British consuls and merchants the right to deal directly with Qing officials. This is an incredible concession in the minds of the Qing bureaucrats; how can these uncouth barbarians expect to speak and negotiate with the refined and educated officials of the central government?

Britain receives Hong Kong Island in perpetuity, though British officials in England are furious at the negotiators in China for this concession. As an island, Hong Kong is nearly worthless, a barren rock with a mediocre port. Kowloon is a better prize, since it provides arable land that can reduce British dependence on food imports. Kowloon also provides access to the mainland itself and could serve as an excellent base from which to launch future military assaults if they become necessary. The negotiators, however, are reluctant to abandon the substantial settlement on Hong Kong (following the expulsion from Macao), and so chose Hong Kong as their base of operations.

The most significant concession in the Treaty of Nanjing is the establishment of extraterritoriality, which exempts British subjects from Chinese criminal or civil laws — with exception to cases involving opium smuggling. This concept is a holdover from British

dealings with Turkey and other Muslim countries, and proves a massive blow to Qing prestige. This weakens the Qing in the eyes of the Han Chinese, who recognized the power the British must possess to force the compromise.

Other nations secure arrangements similar to the Treaty of Nanjing in 1844, with France signing the Franco-Chinese Treaty and the United States ratifying the Treaty of Wangxia. Neither nation goes to war with China. The Qing are still reeling from the First Opium War and are concerned about the implications of British technological and scientific superiority. They sign the American and French treaties in order to avoid any future disasters.

THE TAIPING REBELLION (1851-1864)

The First Opium War's cost reduces the imperial coffers significantly, especially when combined with the reparations to the British. Unable to rely on imperial funds to supplement the province's administrations, governors must impose new taxes to cover costs. The famines that haunted China's history return throughout the country at this time as well, sparking great migrations of Chinese peasants searching desperately for work and food. Bandit attacks also intensify as people grow more desperate.

Into this impoverished scene comes Hong Xiuquan, a member of the Hakka ethnic minority who had failed the civil service exams. He lived in poverty to the north

SWIFT OCEAN-STRIDING BANDITS

The greatest thorn in the British Admiralty's side during the First Opium War isn't the imperial navy, but a pirate fleet plaguing the Canton region called the Swift Ocean-Striding Bandits. The Bandits are a Scarlet Screen for a Thrashing Dragon disciple named Yao Wei. With years of experience fighting and harassing European trading vessels and warships, Yao Wei's loyalty to the Flame Court and the Quincunx is unquestioned.

At the start of the 19th century, the pirate lord Ching Yih consolidates many independent pirates under his banner, marshaling a force of 600 ships of six squadrons with each named after a different color. Ching Yih dies suddenly in a typhoon in 1807, but his wife, Ching Shih, assumes control of the pirate fleet.

The fleet grows tremendously during her tenure, swelling to nearly 800 junks and 1000 smaller ships. She institutes a series of rules that were unheard of for the time, such as requiring her permission for any pirate to go ashore, and loot gained by one ship is partially distributed to all other crews. She also forbids the abuse or rape of women, though the pirates can still sell them as slaves or take them as concubines.

Ching Shih's success creates friction with jealous lieutenants, leading to a brutal battle between her Red Squadron and the Black Squadron, commanded by Kwo Po Tai. The pirate fleet splinters afterward. Kwo Po Tai, along with the Black Squadron, pledges loyalty to the Qing government as privateers. Ching Shih retires after the battle, but her lover, Chang Pou, takes the rest of Red Squadron and hunts down the renegade Green and Yellow Squadrons.

The Green and Yellow Squadrons are unfocused, losing a few skirmishes to both the Red Squadron and the new British steamships that appear. The Quincunx, however, recognizes the value of a pair of battle-hardened pirate fleets and dispatches Yao Wei to establish control of the Green and Yellow Squadrons.

Yao Wei is a talented and powerful Wan Kuei for one so young, and has little difficulty assuming control of the fleets. She has a strong grasp of Jade Shintai and runs across the waves to enemy ships in hidden coves in order to sabotage them. Her supernatural vandalism and reconnaissance, along with superior numbers, allows Yao to gain most of the few naval victories against the British navy during the First Opium War.

Yao Wei becomes extremely wealthy during and after the Opium War. She establishes a hidden base in the islands of the South China Sea, off the coast of Hainan. Like many of the area's islands, Yao's base is an impressive pillar of stone rising high from the water, dotted with vegetation along the sides and top. She hides dozens of stolen cannon in small caves dotting the island's steep walls, hidden by foliage and netting. Reefs protect the approach to the island, but there are several anchorages within easy rowing distance from shore. Inside the island is a large network of natural and artificial caves storing the plunder from dozens of European trading ships. Yao Wei maintains a hidden lair under the waterline in a cave accessible only by a very long swim and steep climb.

of Canton without much hope of changing his situation. His destiny changes, however, when he becomes ill and receives several visions that identify him as the younger brother of Jesus Christ. According to his visions, it is Hong's sacred duty to rid China of the demons threatening it and to establish a Heavenly Kingdom that will govern all in fairness and glory.

The core of Hong's philosophy is a blend of Old Testament Christianity, utopian collectivism and idealized Confucianism. Hong proposes communities where all wealth flows into a central coffer, from which wise and respected officials would redistribute it to the citizens. The demons plaguing China are a result of old religious traditions spawning evil. Buddhist and Taoist temples are symbols of China's spiritual corruption, and only God's word is legitimate. Theater, gambling, alcohol and prostitution are all sinful, and members cannot own slaves. The Society of God-Worshippers' philosophy strikes a chord with the disenfranchised Hakka minorities in southern China as well as with thousands of starving Chinese from across the land.

Hong builds his cadre of followers in the first few years after his visions, called the Society of God-Worshippers. He baptizes thousands of men and women who flock to his banner (though he personally was unbaptized). Many of the dispossessed join the Society's ranks, even drawing from among the bandits roaming the countryside. It is not long before the Society has grown so large that even the financially strapped Qing officials take notice.

The government launches an attack against the Society in 1851 that is successfully repulsed by Hong's followers. Hong, casting the hated Manchu as the demons God ordered him to vanquish, renames the Society to "The Taiping Tianguo," or "Heavenly Kingdom of Eternal Peace." Hong then leads his forces northward to battle against the Qing.

The Qing empire cannot mount a solid resistance to the Taiping. Hong's armies sweep toward the Yangtze, their ranks swelling after each victory. Upon reaching the Yangtze, Hong turns his army east, traveling down the river. They sack hundreds of temples and capture dozens of cities on their way to Nanjing, which they attack with 750,000 troops organized into male and female divisions. In 1853, the Taiping rename Nanjing, calling it Tien-ching, their "Heavenly Capital."

The Taiping follow through on their radical communal ideas. They consolidate lands under their control, redistributing them equally among all citizens. They collect all the food and goods of the towns, distributing them according to need. The Taiping institute very progressive ideas regarding the rights of women, granting them the right to own land and to divorce their husbands. They even abolish the Manchu practice of female foot binding.

In 1859, Hong Ren-gan, the Taiping prime minister, drafts an elaborate modernization proposal inspired in part by Hong Kong Westerners. The proposal includes the creation of central banks, railroads, post offices and a secret police, and suggests that votes be cast by ballot and inventors be allowed to patent inventions. Alcohol would be prohibited, as would geomancy, since it often interferes with mining prospects. By this time, however, the Taiping are beginning to falter. Hong Ren-gan's proposal is never implemented.

The fall of the Taiping has little to do with the Qing. At the start of the rebellion, Western merchants competed to provide weapons and supplies to the Taiping. Indifferent to China's internal politics, the British and American traders simply capitalized on an opportunity. What eventually worries the West (and costs the Taiping its support) is the Taiping philosophy.

Although Taiping beliefs start as a Christian philosophy, they change over the years into something beyond fundamentalism... almost beyond recognizable Christian tenets. Initially, Western Christians feel a vague kinship with the fledgling Chinese flock and their desire to build God's domain inside China. By the 1860s, however, popular Western sentiment turns against the Taiping as they garner a reputation as unpredictable and difficult trading partners.

Unlike conditions in Canton before the First Opium War, Western influence in China now encompasses a much larger area. Still, most Europeans realize that Taiping poses a greater threat to their interests than the Qing. In response, the British, French and Americans throw their weight behind the Xianfeng emperor, believing it is preferable to have a weak enemy controlling China than a strong one.

Unfortunately, the Qing seem to inevitably rely on unusual, shortsighted and ultimately self-destructive measures to ensure their empire's continuation. Unable to respond to the Taiping on a national military level, they institute a broad commercial tax called the *likin*. Provincial governors collect the *likin* tax to fund their armies in fighting the spread of the Taiping. While this tactic proves quite successful in keeping the Taiping in check, it grants unprecedented power and control to the provincial governors. Once the Taiping Rebellion ends, these governors keep the *likin* tax and their new provincial armies strong, thus forever diminishing the imperial court's central authority. The Qing never again holds complete control over its own military.

Still, it requires a combination of both internal and external forces to put an end to the Taiping Rebellion. From the outside, the Qing and the provincial governors slowly crush the Taiping using military force with the subtle backing of the Europeans. From the inside, the Taiping model of centralized wealth proves too tempting for the vast majority of Taiping officials, leading to widespread corruption. Back-biting and internal

squabbles weaken the Taiping just as the Qing gain strength, but the rebellion's defeat is due in no small part to the actions of a unique mercenary unit dubbed the "Ever Victorious Army." Although under Chinese control, the Ever Victorious Army contains Western mercenaries and officers who use Western military tactics and weapons to inflict significant defeats upon the Taiping. Led by famous commanders like British officer "Chinese" Gordon and American Frederick Townsend Ward, the Ever Victorious Army is crucial in routing the Taiping's attempted capture of Shanghai in 1860. Hong Xiuquan, the "Heavenly King," commits suicide in Nanjing just before its fall to Qing forces in 1864.

THE ARROW WAR (1856-1860)

Also known as the Second Opium War and the Anglo-French War, the Arrow War unfolds during the middle of the Taiping Rebellion. Unlike the First Opium War, this conflict is less of a war and more of an opportunistic power grab by the British and French. The war is named for the *Arrow*, a Chinese-owned ship registered in Hong Kong, under British colors. Despite flying the British flag, Chinese officials capture the *Arrow* in 1856 on charges that it is a pirate ship and imprison its crew. As a final insult, the officials unceremoniously lower and discard British flag she flew.

The incident becomes the match that lights the powder keg of growing British resentment toward the Chinese since the Treaty of Nanjing. The Chinese have been lax in implementing some of the treaty's conditions. Western traders are still forbidden to enter and work in Canton, despite its status as one of the five treaty ports, and there are also countless incidents involving the accidental punishment of British citizens by Chinese judges despite the provisions of extraterritoriality. The seizure of the *Arrow* is the excuse the British need to launch a new military campaign against China and rectify the situation.

Similarly, it does not take the French long to recognize the opportunity that a brief war with China might provide. In 1856, a French missionary in central China had been tortured and executed along with some of his followers. Like the *Arrow*, the French use this incident to deplore the actions of Chinese officials, joining the British offensive. The assembled British and French fleet sails to Tianjin, the northern port serving Beijing, but the few naval skirmishes against the Chinese prove eye opening.

The Chinese were not idle following their overwhelming naval defeats in the First Opium War. By the time of the Arrow War, Chinese ships showed dramatic improvements in both construction and tactics even though they were still without steamships. In the battle of Bei Ha, the Chinese use Western field artillery and intersecting fields of fire to decimate the foreign forces, handing the British their worst defeat ever in

China. Still, when the European fleet arrives at Tianjin, the Qing sue for peace and agree to the Treaties of Tianjin in 1858.

The Treaties of Tianjin dramatically spread Europe's influence and power within China, penalizing the Middle Kingdom with crippling indemnities to defray the British and French costs. All Europeans bearing valid passports can travel freely throughout China; Christian missionaries receive imperial protection, and British ships may now pursue Chinese pirates into any port, not just treaty ports. Six new treaty ports emerge, four of them along the Yangtze river for use following the Taiping Rebellion, granting Westerners their long-coveted access to China's internal markets. Most importantly, foreign envoys are stationed in Beijing, allowing for quicker access to the Imperial Court.

Unfortunately, when the Qing fail to ratify the treaties in the next year, Britain sends envoys to expedite the process. Those envoys are, in turn, executed. Hostilities resume, with Lord Elgin and Baron Gros leading the British and French forces against Beijing. Qing officials flee the capital before the Western army arrives, the emperor among them.

In reprisal for the murder of the British negotiators, the European army loots and sacks the emperor's Summer Palace, shocking the entire nation. One of the most important symbols of imperial rule is annihilated, and the Qing prestige, already suffering from defeat in the First Opium War, is thus dealt another serious blow. Under these conditions, the Qing agree to the Peking Convention, a supplement to the Treaty of Tianjin in which they agree to abide by that treaty's conditions. The British also use the Peking Convention to impose more penalties... more indemnity, 10 extra treaty ports and the imperial protection granted to missionaries extended to traders as well.

The most significant provision, however, is the legalization of opium.

THE NIAN AND MUSLIM REBELLIONS (1850-1868)

The revelation of Qing weakness following the First Opium War resound across China. Rebellious elements that previously confined themselves to skirmishes with imperial forces explode into full-scale war. Although smaller than the Taiping Rebellion, the Nian and Muslim Rebellions prove a drain on Qing military and economic resources, postponing victory against the Taiping for many years.

The nian are gangs of bandits and malcontents plaguing the northern provinces of Shangdong, Henan and Anhui. Composed mostly of military deserters, peasants and others from the lower classes, they stage raids across northern China with relative impunity. When the Taiping begin their march in the south, the nian begin launching more overt strikes against the

Qing, relying on anti-Manchu sentiment to garner support among local people. The nian are superb guerilla fighters and rely on hit-and-run tactics and a strong cavalry to harass the Qing for over a decade. In the end, however, the various nian factions are unable to unite, falling to the imperial forces without having much more of an effect than siphoning away the Qing's badly needed resources for a time.

Meanwhile, in the Shaanxi and Gansu areas of northwest China, tensions between Muslim Chinese and the provincial governors had been building for many years. Sensing the Qing's disorientation, the Muslims rise against the governors, hoping to establish their own Muslim nation within China but suffering the same lack of focus plaguing the nian. Unable to mount a concerted effort, they eventually fall before the governor's army. Muslim rebels also foment unrest in southwest Yunnan province, but fail to make significant gains despite a decade of conflict.

One noteworthy effect of the Nian and Muslim Rebellions is the dissemination of modern Western weapons into China's interior by both imperial and rebel forces. Western guns were superior to Chinese weapons and much preferred, despite their greater cost. The Muslims used swords, guns, cannons and *gingals*, which they often filled with grapeshot. A common tactic was to burrow under the walls of a city and plant explosive charges to bring them down. The Nian were relatively gun-poor, relying more on swords, spears and bows.

These two upheavals, along with the Taiping Rebellion and the Arrow War, have a profound effect on the Qing dynasty's collective psyche. Their grip on China weakens year after year, to the extent that it is a miracle the Qing remain in power (and they know it). Feeling uniquely vulnerable, the Qing are determined to rebuild both their power and China's dominance.

THE SELF-STRENGTHENING MOVEMENT (1870-1890)

Rapid modernization proves very attractive to Qing moderates who believe Western innovations in science and technology are crucial to lifting China to equal footing with the foreigners. They consult Jesuit and Protestant missionaries for Western knowledge. Unfortunately, however, the social and political traditions of Confucian China and the extraordinary manipulations of the Empress Dowager Cixi hamper this effort.

One of the Self-Strengthening Movement's principle leaders is Li Hongzhang. Previously known as the "architect of the Taiping's destruction," Li learned much by observing the Ever Victorious Army. He saw how Western technology and innovations flourished under Chinese control, and sought to use the same model in modernization efforts.

Under Li's direction, the Qing government hires Western advisors to help build new weapons and ships,

believing the first step of Self-Strengthening should be military. The most impressive feat in this direction is the construction of the Jiangnan Arsenal outside Shanghai. The Arsenal produces the most modern military weapons and steamships Western technology can devise. Vast sums of money pour into the Arsenal, leading to the development of advanced magazine rifles, smokeless gunpowder, cartridges, large caliber artillery shells, massive coastal defense guns and electrically detonated naval mines. The Arsenal also constructs steamships, though at a slower pace. Before long, twenty similar arsenals on a smaller scale sprout up across China. The Fuzhou Arsenal surpasses Jiangnan in steamship production and becomes the most important shipyard in all China. All are staffed with Western military experts who advise the Chinese on manufacturing and construction techniques.

By 1880, military modernization reaches a state where Qing officials feel comfortable addressing other sectors of their economy. The trappings of Western industry also find use in China, with steam-powered machines aiding mining operations and new steel production techniques leading to an increase in overall productivity. Electrical equipment construction and the modern processing of chemicals also take root; Chinese use machines to mint their currency and steam travel on the country's vast internal waterways becomes more common.

Railroads and telegraphs slowly spread across the land, but these last two innovations face strong resistance in some areas. Citizens complain that the tracks and lines of "progress" interfere with local geomantic currents, and some locals even destroy sections of track and telegraph lines in protest. Despite these saboteurs, technological development continues spreading until most major cities are linked by telegraph by 1890. Rail service lags behind, with railroads starting primarily along the coastal areas of China before spreading inward.

Progressive Qing leaders like Li have grand plans for China's modernization, but the reality of implementation is hampered by the chronic problems faced by Chinese society. Opium addiction continues to be a major social problem, draining the wealth and the manpower of China and hobbling any potential reforms. The imperial coffers are also perpetually empty, thanks to a long series of treaty indemnities and rebellions that placed a continued strain on finances, allowing no time for the treasuries to recuperate. The government has been skimming from the *likin* tax for some time, but even that added income is not nearly enough to defray the costs of both modernization and traditional expenses.

At the same time, Qing society continues to stagnate despite the technological progress of this period. The previous fifty years had created a strong current of xenophobia in the imperial court, but time and again, foreigners bearing foreign ideas humbled the Chinese. The goal of the Self-Strengthening Movement is to somehow integrate Western science without introducing

Western ideas. Many concepts championed by Western nations, like personal freedom and democracy, threaten the Qing dynasty's continued survival. The imperial throne suspects that Western missionaries not only preach Christianity but equality and individualism as well, all ideals that cut against the very grain of traditional Chinese society.

There are Qing government officials who are interested in exploring the Western models and integrating some of these aspects into China. They are typically progressives from the ranks of provincial governors, who saw Western technology first hand during the Taiping Rebellion. Arrayed against them, however, are the traditionalists. These officials hold strongly to the past glories of the emperor and traditional Chinese society and are based in Beijing.

Fortunately for the progressives, they can point to the fact that the traditionalists were, in some cases, the same people whose actions had precipitated the First Opium War. Still, the progressives have not set themselves an easy task. Aside from having to overcome the tremendous inertia of Chinese tradition, they must also contend with the Empress Dowager Cixi.

THE OPPOSITION

The Empress Dowager rose to power after the death of the Xianfeng emperor in 1861. The emperor was succeeded by his five-year-old son, the Tongzhi emperor, but Cixi, an imperial concubine and mother of the new emperor, was named regent in 1862.

During the first years of her reign, the Empress Dowager plays the progressives and traditionalists against each other. Encouraging Li Hongzhang and his arsenals, she privately assures the traditionalists that China will remain free of tainted barbaric ideologies. Cixi quickly becomes enamored of her power, however, and jealously safeguards it. When the Tongzhi emperor dies suddenly at 19, Cixi adopts her four-year-old nephew as her son and places him on the throne, ensuring that her role as Empress Dowager remains secure. The traditionalists back this questionable tactic, thus earning Cixi's gratitude and leaving the progressives with very little political influence.

Despite strong cultural resistance, some Western schools emerge to teach both Christian and European knowledge, funded and staffed by missionaries. Some middle and upper class Chinese display a strong interest in these institutions, but never as serious alternatives to traditional Chinese schools. The crux of the issue is that the Chinese civil service exams, crucial to societal and economic advancement, still used the same classical texts and ideas. Sending a child to a Western school would cripple their chances for success in the central government. Admittedly, there is a steady flow of Chinese emigration to the West at this time, but it is comprised of peasants looking for manual labor in distant lands. Those upper class Chinese emigrating to work in the

West benefit tremendously from study at Western schools, but these people are a very small minority.

THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR (1894-1895)

The Sino-Japanese War, despite the name, is a conflict without the scope implied by the term "war." For many years, China enjoyed tremendous indirect influence over Korea's affairs. Korea paid tribute to the Qing emperors and the Qing kept a paternal eye over their neighbor. In 1894, however, Japan is in an expansionist frame of mind and sees Korea as a natural target. Japan dispatches its forces to Korea, making their strength known, but several skirmishes over the summer and fall of that year inflict yet another staggering blow to Chinese pride.

Thanks to the Meiji Restoration, Japan is furiously engaged in a modernization program much like China's. The difference, however, is that the island nation succeeds spectacularly whereas China struggles with each step on the path. While the Chinese army in Korea is the roughly equal to Japan's in terms of technology, the Japanese also absorbed and applied the lessons of Western thought, particularly those of Western military strategy.

The battle of Pyongyang was particularly telling, revealing the vast differences between the two armies despite almost identical weapons on both sides. The Chinese still employed cavalry with 15-foot lances, which Japanese marksmen whittled down to nothing. China's strategy was to fire all their limited ammunition in one furious volley, then retreat. The Japanese quickly learned to simply wait until the Chinese stopped firing before attacking. Additionally, the Chinese forces did not enforce any sort of standardized weapon requirements for their forces, handicapping them strategically and causing them to suffer from chronic ammunition shortages. This type of blunder forced their eventual retreat and ceded their interests in Korea.

The Sino-Japanese War has a telling psychological impact on both sides. For centuries, China viewed Japan as a "younger brother," eager but a bit underdeveloped. The "younger brother," however, unexpectedly trounced their older sibling and proven technological superiority. For the Japanese, the victory has the opposite effect. Long used to living under the shadow of China, the Japanese see an unprecedented weakness in the Chinese, which emboldens them and fuels their expansionist dreams.

THE BOXER REBELLION (1899-1900)

It is 1899, and in Shanxi, Shangdong and Zhili, a crippling economic depression forces many people into poverty and starvation: The conditions are ripe for a peasant rebellion. The Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists emerges, also known as the Boxers. By this time, Christianity reaches all corners of China, but

has only a small number of converts. Still, the Boxers claim that Christianity is to blame for the current social hardships. The Christians ignore Heaven and anger the spirits and ghosts of the world. Once the Christian “devils” are destroyed, however, Heaven will show China favor again.

Some people claim the Society was actually descended from earlier secret societies with anti-Manchu leanings, such as the White Lotus Sect and the Eight Trigrams Society. Regardless, the Boxer philosophy was heavily steeped in martial arts and mysticism, promising its followers immunity to bullets after 100 days of training and the ability to fly after 400 days of training. The Boxers taught a technique called “Armor of the Golden Bell” that hardens the skin against swords and arrows. While claims of supernatural prowess are hard to verify, the Boxers’ ferocity is commonly known. The Boxers, in a nod to their efforts at spiritual and cultural purity, refused to use guns or cannons unless the situation clearly and absolutely required them. They identified three categories of “Hairy Men,” who are dire enemies of China: Chinese Christians, Chinese who buy or use imported goods, and foreigners such as Europeans, Americans and Japanese.

By the middle of 1899, the Boxers are staging countless attacks on Chinese Christians and Western missionaries, with fledgling cells of the Society spread across China. Contemporary propaganda paints the Boxers as xenophobic, but the vast majority of the Boxers’ victims are Chinese.

Sensing that the Boxers can serve as a tool to weaken the foreign presence in China, the Empress Dowager quietly orders the provincial governors to support the Boxers and their struggle. Unfortunately, the political decline begun during the Taiping Rebellion comes to fruition during the Boxer Rebellion.

The provincial governors realize that the West is far too vital to the regions’ economic and social stability to be undermined without serious repercussions. Since they control strong, modern provincial armies (the fruit of the *likin* and other taxes), the central and southern governors actually help stamp out the fledgling Boxer movements in their provinces. Only the northeastern governors, like Li Bingheng, obey the edicts to support the Boxers.

The Boxers first rely on terrorist actions including arson, theft, kidnapping and vandalism. Emboldened by these early successes, however, they gather into a large force and march on Beijing, causing tremendous social upheavals in the capital during July and August of 1900 as the Empress Dowager’s strategy backfires. They lay siege to the city’s foreign quarter and kill the German ambassador. The empress evacuates to the Summer Palace in the confusion, withdrawing support from the fanatical rebels who have surpassed her ability to keep them in check. Finally, a relief column of foreign troops arrives and disperses the Boxers for good.

Horrified by the recent events, the Western powers force China to sign the Boxer Protocols, creating a large Western military presence in Beijing and effectively arresting the Chinese court. Other provisions include the largest indemnity yet paid to the West, suspension of all civil service exams throughout the nation and an arms embargo against China.

At the close of the century, China is in dire straits and far from the heyday of over a hundred years ago. Attempts to modernize are largely unsuccessful; the nation’s coffers are empty after massive indemnity payments to the West; confidence in the Qing dynasty is shattered and the next fifty years is a period of tumult.

For the Quincunx’s Wan Kuei, it seems as though the Sixth Age is beginning.

SHADOWLANDS

The events and ideas discussed in each August Court do not pertain solely to the regional capitals. It’s inevitable that certain events do refer to the regional seats of power specifically, but Storytellers should remember that references to “The Flesh Court” refer primarily to the region and not specifically to Shanghai, for example.

THE FLAME COURT

Seers claim the Flame Court traditionally represents the southern direction, symbolizing greater yang, upheaval and change. It is inevitable, they say, that this court play host to sweeping events in such times of great crisis.

More than any other region, southern China’s experience throughout the 19th century is marked by violence. Much of the First Opium War occurs around Canton, which is also near the launching point of Hong Xiquan’s Society of God-Worshippers. Unlike Shanghai and eastern China, Canton bitterly fought expanding Western influences every step of the way. More than anything else, however, the Wan Kuei remember this time for the collapse of the Flame Court.

For Storytellers who want to highlight violent and vigorous resistance to Western imperialism, the Flame Court is the best setting. The most significant military clash between China and the West, the First Opium War, unfolds mostly on the southern China seas. Armies also besiege Canton several times during the war. Even after ostensibly being opened to foreigners, it still refuses to admit Westerners until the Arrow War forces a compromise.

Over the course of the century, the mortal tensions in China dissolve the Flame Court into bewildering disarray. The *wu* of Canton and other cities in southern China pull in a hundred different directions and no one is willing to follow anyone else. Still, there is ample opportunity for an astute and ambitious *wu* to garner respect and prestige well into the 21st century, with the seeds of the Flame Court’s rebirth sown by the characters with the Storyteller’s help.

The Kin-jin trying to gather influence and power in southern China are generally traditionalists who are infused with the spirit of imperialism and taking a conqueror's approach. Their arrogance and hubris, however, gives them decidedly mixed results. For Europe's Kindred, there is a strong temptation to look back on previous colonization for guidance. Western vampires in the New World and Africa found wealth, success and domains, and now many travel to China with similar dreams. What most fail to realize is that China has indigenous vampires who hold the cultural and numerical advantage. Those Kin-jin learning this lesson will enjoy long tenures in China stretching beyond the current century. All others will retreat home like injured dogs or fall before the Asia's potent *shen*.

THE HISTORY OF THE FLAME COURT

For the Flame Court, the novelty of Western visitors has long since faded by the inception of the 19th century. Above all, the southern Chinese are industrious traders, and the sight of foreign ships (from Southeast Asia or India) in any town's harbor is far from unusual. In Canton, however, foreign has come to mean European or American.

A sizable majority of Kuei-jin who lair in Canton take advantage of the cohong mercantile system during the period in which it is in place. Few make it their primary interest, however, relying on it more as an additional source of revenue. The tendrils of the cohong system spread throughout the region, linking Canton with northern cities along the coast like Shantou and Xiamen. The Flame Court Ancestor, an advanced Rootless Tree known as Five Earthly Seasons, takes advantage of this fact and quietly uses the cohong as Scarlet Screens to further the local Wan Kuei's wealth.

In Macao, the number of Kin-jin steadily grows as more Western vampires succumb to the promise of wealth from Chinese silks and porcelains. The Taipan (Kin-jin prince) of Macao, the Portuguese Ventrue Donatus Pessao (who arrived here a century ago), is painfully aware of his domain's precarious status. He must present lavish tribute to the Flame Court every two years, and counts it a miracle every time he returns to his haven safely.

Pessao's domain's size is also his greatest advantage in holding power, since Chinese law dictates that new Westerners must remain within the tight confines of Macao's foreign quarter. Without Obfuscation, Vicissitude or other supernatural means, it is impossible to remain anonymous for long. A few brave Kin-jin have established havens in Canton's Thirteen Factories quarter to escape Macao's cramped conditions, among them a young firebrand Ventrue named Robert Pedder.

Astute Kuei-jin and Kin-jin observers sensed the approach of the First Opium War, letting some Kin-jin to flee for the relative safety of British India, while others who saw opportunity in a potential war aligned their

interests accordingly. Meanwhile, mortal authorities expelled the British from Canton and Macao in 1839 and initiated the First Opium War. Many Devil Tigers and Resplendent Cranes saw this as a way to expel Macao's Kin-jin, while one vocal Flame Court faction, the Cutting of Troubled Blossoms, argued that the First Opium War was punishment from Heaven for allowing unclean gweilo vampires into the area. In the end, the only thing that saves Macao's Kin-jin is the British military.

The war between Kuei-jin and Kin-jin is brief but costly. Canton's Wan Kuei have their hands full steering clear of the British and their impressive weapons. The sporadic attacks that they do launch, however, are costly to Macao's embattled Kindred. Macao's Tremere fare best of any against their Eastern enemies, and reports to Vienna concerning the wonders of the Cathayans spark a centuries-long commitment to uncovering Eastern supernatural lore. Meanwhile, during the "Siege of Macao," Robert Pedder launches a coup against Donatus Pessao for the Taipan's position, but fails in spectacular fashion. He barely escapes aboard a junk bound for Hong Kong, a minor fishing village on a nearby island. Pedder manages to salvage a scrap of victory from his defeat, however, quickly turning Hong Kong into a safe harbor for British refugees from Macao and robbing Pessao of manpower.

The war ends, leaving the Flame Court in shock. Humbled by mere barbarians and ashamed by the Treaty of Nanjing, the Court falls into a morass of bickering, blame, and twilight wars, with dozens of *wu* plotting independently to sabotage and expel the British. These same *wu* suffer from the abolition of the cohong system and the indemnities demanded by the British. The dissent and confusion spreads throughout the region, with Wan Kuei ambassadors from other August Courts reporting on the ferocity and depth of the squabbling. Rather than use his influence to calm the Flame Court, however, Five Earthly Seasons doesn't appear to rectify the situation. It is only in hindsight that his motives become clear.

At the inception of the 19th century, Five Earthly Seasons is poised on the threshold of becoming a bodhisattva after guiding the Flame Court for nearly two centuries; it is a reflection of his enlightenment. Before he can proceed toward the Hundred Clouds, however, Five Earthly Seasons knew he would have to break both his Flame Court Ancestor Mask and the Flame Court as well, to free himself from its influence over his enlightenment. Starting with encouraging involvement with the cohong, then spurring the Wan Kuei to expend tremendous resources in the Opium War (in often conflicting agendas) and stirring the dissent and twilight wars during the post-war period, Five Earthly Seasons brings the Flame Court to the edge of collapse.

The Taiping Rebellion begins in 1851, just north of Canton. At the same time, the Society of Brigands and Decadent Dynasty-Toppling Devils, a Devil-Tiger

movement, also calls for the withdrawal of the Mandate of Hell from all August Courts. Five Earthly Seasons, interpreting these events as symbolic deaths of both mortal and Wan Kuei society, suddenly abdicates as Flame Ancestor. Rootless Tree mandarins whisper that Five Earthly Seasons has successfully Embraced the True Death, saddling an already enfeebled court with new shadow war over the succession of the Flame Ancestor's throne.

No strong candidate emerges for the remainder of the century, even though several legitimate candidates from different Dharmas vie for the Ancestor rite, and the Blood Court's heavy-handed interventions only serve to exacerbate the situation. Distrust between the two courts is common knowledge throughout the Quincunx, and has roots in both cultural and spiritual ideologies. Blood Court Wan Kuei see the political chaos as unseemly and unproductive, and while many Flame Court Kuei-jin agree, most insist on charting their own course without "the northern meddlers." The Blood Court eventually declares the Flame Court "collapsed," an opinion that spreads to the other August Courts.

In Macao and Hong Kong, the Kin-jin receive third-hand reports painting a baffling picture of the Flame Court. Many Kin-jin, and the Tremere in particular, believe this an opportunity to establish more domains across China's southern coasts. Unfortunately for the Kin-jin, the British victory in the First Opium War engenders dangerous overconfidence in almost all Western vampires.

Fledgling Taipan establish havens in all the other treaty towns mentioned in the Treaty of Nanjing with startling speed, expecting little resistance. Just as in the mortal sphere, the Kin-jin use tactics and technology to quickly overwhelm local Wan Kuei still reeling from their first war. Despite initial success in all the treaty ports, however, only Shanghai retains its Kin-jin population by 1850. The Western vampires who attempt to hold their havens find that no matter how dire local Wan Kuei politics appear, the Cathayans are capable of temporary and effective alliances to destroy presumptive Kin-jin.

STORIES OF THE FLAME COURT

The Flame Court is a perfect setting for a Sunset Empires chronicle. The period's major themes (struggle and change) play out in the area's events, allowing for countless story opportunities. The First Opium War serves as a great backdrop for a story or chronicle. Characters can be active fighters against the British and the Kin-jin, with Storytellers increasing the number of Kin-jin involved in the Opium War to provide the *wu* with more fodder. Many of the war's most decisive battles occur at sea, and characters with a maritime concept can take their fight to the oceans in an undead-style corsair game.

For less combat-oriented *wu*, the struggle against the West may involve infiltration and espionage, with

characters penetrating Kin-jin society to sabotage them or gain more information. The formative stage of Hong Kong's founding occurs at this time. The characters might be shoulder to shoulder with the Righteous Devils of Kowloon, battling with them and other Wan Kuei to establish dominance in Hong Kong.

If the Storytellers are interested in a chronicle centered on events in the mortal world, they can establish their chronicles at the dusk of the 18th century, so that characters can entangle themselves in the cohong merchant system before its collapse. They can also start after the cohong's ruin and suffer from its loss, with *wu* scrambling to establish new Scarlet Screens to provide income.

The post-War period is likewise wide open. Many towns and cities are ripe for the taking by ambitious *wu*, especially with the spread of Kin-jin and the Kuei-jin heresies likely to follow Taiping Rebellion (like an increase in the number of Rising Phoenixes or "Jesuses," as some have called themselves). Power-hungry characters might strike deals with clandestine supporters in the Blood Court to facilitate their rise to prominence, while other *wu* struggle in shadow wars to ensure that the other August Courts don't interfere in the Flame Court's internecine fighting.

Additionally, with the Flame Court's ancestorship in question, the possibility for political intrigue is significant. Who are the candidates... the characters or their mentors? What are the characters willing to do to ensure that their faction assumes control over the Flame? Regardless of the answer, their opposition will be no less than the *wu* supporting the other candidates.

THE BLOOD COURT

The Blood Court has long been the seat of Qing power, throughout the 19th century. Their reputation for inflexibility and propriety is foremost in the minds of the Kuei-jin who see the Blood Court as the Quincunx's unofficial leader. The Blood Ancestor is well aware of his court's reputation and tries to ensure that its prestige and reputation remain untarnished. Many jina and mandarins from the other August Courts, however, have enough experience to see through its veneer of propriety.

The Blood Court's Wan Kuei are typical of the Ivory Tower mentality hampering the Chinese bureaucracy and aristocracy throughout this century. Those outrageous European barbarians are far from Beijing at the beginning of the 19th century, where only those uncouth Cantonese must deal with them. Even after the First Opium War, it is only southern China and the Flame Court significantly affected by the defeat. Over the course of the century, however, the Qing dynasty that unravels before the Blood Court's eyes. Many within the Blood Court begin a struggle for the reins of power, hoping to preserve the traditions of China and the Wan Kuei.

Although the Resplendent Cranes never lose control of the Blood Court during this period, its leadership

switches hands repeatedly as different Crane factions rise and fall in popularity. Some would-be ancestors actually believe their own propaganda, and speak as though the future of the entire Middle Kingdom rests in their claws. Even those whose Dharmas seemingly focus more on spiritual matters — The Song of the Shadow and Path of a Thousand Whispers — are still politicians first in this court.

Despite the cut and thrust of Kuei-jin politics, however, all members of the Blood Court are devoted to setting a good example. Propriety is of crucial importance to Blood Court members, who see themselves as setting example for all Kuei-jin. They scrupulously adhere to the terms and conditions of twilight and midnight wars so that other Wan Kuei might learn from their example.

HISTORY OF THE BLOOD COURT

The Blood Court's fortunes mirror those of China, at least for the first few decades of this century. Wan Kuei factions, their claws firmly in the Qing bureaucracy, spread across several courts in and out of Beijing. Although their influence ebbs and surges, the positioning of these factions remains constant.

The Qing dynasty are Manchus and hail from the northeast corner of China. As is the fate of all other conquerors of China before this, the Manchu are almost completely integrated with the greater Chinese melting pot. In spite of this cultural homogenization, however, the most influential Blood Court faction is entirely made up of Manchu Resplendent Cranes, and is known as the Society of Wise and Virtuous Magistrates. The Society makes excellent use of its racial ties to the ruling dynasty and enjoys broad influence throughout the imperial bureaucracy's upper echelons.

On the heels of the Wise and Virtuous Magistrates is the Jade Brush Brotherhood, another alliance of Cranes. The Jade Brush Brotherhood does not have a racial component, however, and is far more progressive than their traditionalist Manchu brethren. Following them are the Grave-Polishing Caretakers, a mixed *wu* from all Dharmas with ties to the ghosts and interests of the Yin World. The final major faction in the Blood Court is the Devils of the Black Lantern. Dominated by Devil Tigers, the Black Lanterns monitor the Qing for signs of corruption and eliminate that which they discover.

Prior to Lord Macartney's arrival, the Blood Court pays virtually no attention to the tiny group of gweilo huddled in Macao and Canton, having other issues to consume their attention. The Society of Wise and Virtuous Magistrates, for example, is focused on eradicating the rampant opium addiction within China. The Jade Brush Brotherhood generally agrees that opium is a serious threat to all China, but they are content to allow the Virtuous Magistrates to expend their resources combating the problem. Some of the Jade Brush *wu* even provide opium smugglers and dealers with secret aid in an attempt to make the Virtuous Magistrates' jobs more difficult.

After the disastrous meeting between the British lord and the emperor, the Virtuous Magistrates adopt a dismissive and condescending position toward the West. The other Blood Court factions endorse a similar position, promptly forgetting the matter as a non-event. Their blind arrogance, however, becomes their downfall.

When the British declare war in 1839 and the naval battles of the First Opium War are underway, the Wise and Virtuous Magistrates commit a serious error. Believing the British to be ragtag barbarians who know nothing of civilized customs, the Blood Court dismisses the Flame Court's reports regarding the prowess of the British. The Virtuous Magistrates are so confident of victory that they steer the Scarlet Screen Qing officials into sending almost no initial aid (to do otherwise would be an embarrassing display of weakness). The subsequent humiliating loss of the First Opium War and the formation of Kin-jin domains in the treaty ports damages the prestige of not only the Wise and Virtuous Magistrates *wu*, but also the Blood Court itself.

The Devils of the Black Lantern blame the humbling defeat on the Blood Court and initiate a fierce inquisition, which falsely accuses a number of Wan Kuei of spiritual and moral laxity. They receive the Jade Brush Brotherhood's support, thanks to the Black Lanterns' emphasis on targeting Virtuous Magistrates. Several Virtuous Magistrates face the Eye of Heaven while a few flee the Blood Court to avoid prosecution, leaving Jade Brush Cranes to fill the power vacuum and gain significant ground.

A short period of relative calm follows until the Taiping Rebellion surges out from southern China in 1851, and the Society of Brigands and Decadent Dynasty-Toppling Devils follows in its wake. The Jade Court is overwhelmed by the rampaging Devil-Tigers and requests the Blood Court's assistance in dealing with the threat. In an effort to regain lost ground, the Wise and Virtuous Magistrates lead a coalition of other factions that supply jade, funds and troops to help combat both the Taiping Rebellion and the zealous Heavenly Devils. One of the coalition's main supporters, the Grave-Polishing Caretakers, is concerned with the tremendous number of ghosts that the rebellion spawns. In return for influence over the ghosts' disposition, the Caretakers provide occult assistance to the Blood Court coalition by facilitating travel along dragon lines and opening several Yin-aspected dragon nests as staging points for the Blood Court Wan Kuei.

Despite the concerted efforts of two Courts, however, the Taiping and Dynasty-Toppling Devils continue scoring victories until the Taiping eventually exhaust themselves, and the Qing restores order by default. The leaders of the Devil-Tiger Society come to doubt their cause as their efforts fail to spark further revolt in other regions of China, even amongst other Devil-Tigers. The Devils of the Black Lantern, in particular, maintain their neutrality during the Taiping Rebellion. The Brigands

Society eventually disbands and its members return to their cities, some becoming enmeshed in shadow wars against *wu* they fought during their failed revolt. Although the Virtuous Magistrates claim a share of the victory over the Brigands Society, the Qing's ineptitude during the Taiping period leads many court observers to wonder whether the Virtuous Magistrates' shadowy influences aren't causing more harm than good.

It is the Arrow War that finally drives a dagger into the heart of the Virtuous Magistrates faction. This time, Britain and France actually attack Beijing and sack the Summer Palace, providing the Jade Brush Brotherhood with the mandate to launch a series of coordinated shadow wars against the Wise and Virtuous Magistrates. Although most are not midnight wars, they are exceedingly vicious, destroying dozens of Wan Kuei in carefully orchestrated and ritualized coups. Minor factions of various persuasions fall into the conflict by choice or default, stretching it out over three terrifying years. By the time it is finished, the Jade Brush Brotherhood is in control of the Blood Court.

The Jade Brush mandarins immediately shift the nature of the Qing dynasty by abandoning old Scarlet Screens and throwing support behind new ones. These progressive Crane mandarins recognize the power inherent the West's knowledge and technology. They support several prominent initiatives in the Self-Strengthening Movement, such as the creation of Western arsenals and the formation of schools teaching a Western curriculum. The Black Lantern Devil-Tigers maintain a sharp eye on these initiatives, however, subverting some and blocking others. The tattered Virtuous Magistrates vigorously oppose the Jade Brushes' agendas within the Blood Court, but cannot prevent them.

It is during the first years of the Self-Strengthening Movement that a few brave Kin-jin slip into Beijing. From their havens in the newly established foreign quarters, they quietly observe the city and the Cathayans. There is one Kin-jin in particular, however, who does not remain beneath the Blood Court's notice; with unusual care, he is ferreted out and captured. His name is Antonio de la Passaglia.

Antonio de la Passaglia is a Giovanni *ancillae* overwhelmed by dreams of China's riches. Its Shadowlands are wondrous to him, and — even better — the Chinese wraiths seem completely unaware of his clan's history. Passaglia sees a golden opportunity to build staggering amounts of influence without competition from other Cainites. Before he can capitalize on it, however, word of the bizarre Western necromancer spreads quickly through the local Yin spirit courts. The Grave-Polishing Caretakers descend on Passaglia.

Passaglia knows enough about Cathayans to realize that they generally revile his kind, destroying Cainites through extended torture. His quick thinking and reasonable grasp of both Mandarin and Chinese customs saves him. He offers to share his knowledge of necromancy

and betray his fellow Cainites in return for his unlfe. Intrigued by the possibilities, the Caretakers spare his existence and hide Passaglia in a remote northern court for study.

As the Self-Strengthening Movement continues forward, the Virtuous Magistrates agitate the ultra-conservative members of both the Blood and Qing Courts. The slow implementation of "progress" among mortals damages the Jade Brush Brotherhood's prestige within the Blood Court. To avoid any further loss of status, the Jade Brush Brotherhood swiftly adds their voices to those of the traditionalists, abandoning their progressive ways.

When the concubine Cixi is named Empress Dowager, the Virtuous Magistrates see their opportunity to their influence to the Dowager Empress. The ultra-traditionalists of the Virtuous Magistrates back Empress Cixi through Scarlet Screens when she adopts her nephew and manipulates the imperial succession to retain her power, making a power play of their own. Their position secured, it is now the Magistrates who launch a flurry of shadow wars to unseat the Jade Brush Brotherhood in a reversal of the events decades prior.

The shadow wars are initially quite unsuccessful, and the Virtuous Magistrates are in danger of costly defeat. It is the Grave-Polishing Caretakers who turn the tides, however, by using the Kin-jin Passaglia to their advantage as a willing spy in Beijing's Foreign Quarter. In exchange for their support against the Jade Brushes, the Caretakers demand the right to govern all policy regarding Kin-jin. Facing a tremendous loss, the Wise and Virtuous Magistrates agree.

The Grave-Polishing Caretakers launch independent shadow wars, overwhelming the Jade Brushes and returning the Blood Court to the Wise and Virtuous Magistrates by 1890. Unfortunately, this conflict leaves them vulnerable to a shadow war that House Genji instigates, a conflict that the Japanese *uji* wins under cover of the Sino-Japanese War. It is an ominous herald of matters to come, both for the Magistrates and for Japan.

The Boxer Rebellion takes most Wan Kuei observers by surprise, but the Magistrates quickly take advantage of the situation. The Society's jina and mandarins echo the Boxers' anti-Christian message within the Blood Court, making grand promises for the future once Christianity is eradicated. Unfortunately, the Virtuous Magistrates focus too intensively on the imperial court to the neglect of all other fronts. The Jade Brushes, on the other hand, correctly gauge the reaction of the provincial governors; they use their influence to stiffen local resistance to secret imperial decrees exhorting support for the Boxers.

The disastrous attacks on Beijing in 1900 prove a tremendous embarrassment to the Virtuous Magistrates. Some Wan Kuei use the chaos in the Foreign Quarter to attack local Kin-jin, thanks to intelligence provided by

Passaglia, but the final humiliation is Beijing's by European troops. The Wise and Virtuous Magistrates again face a flurry of shadow wars from many fronts. The 20th century begins with the Blood Court in disarray.

STORIES OF THE BLOOD COURT

In the Blood Court, Wan Kuei politics play out with the greatest fervor and ruthlessness of any other court. China faces crisis after crisis throughout the century, and the Blood Court embroils itself in many of them, even if only in subtle and indirect ways. The self-inflicted pressure to serve as role models for the Quincunx creates nearly unbearable tension among the Blood Court's members.

Only the Blood Court's most active political factions earn mention above. Storytellers should not hesitate to design their own factions as appropriate. These new factions may choose not to concern themselves with the course of national politics, instead focusing on simple governance of Beijing or forming relations with local Yang spirit courts. The difficult part of existence in the Blood Court, however, is the ease with which disparate factions suddenly find themselves banding together for survival.

The brief history above is not set in stone, certainly; Characters wishing to join and influence the factions above have every opportunity to do so, given the many shadow wars that need heroes and villains to fill the ranks. Storytellers may encourage characters to create their own political faction as well, changing the course of Chinese and Wan Kuei history. What might happen if the Dowager Empress could not manipulate her nephew onto the throne? Would the moderates in the Qing government have enough time to complete their more ambitious modernization projects?

For Storytellers focusing on Kin-jin in the Blood Court, Antonio de la Passaglia's betrayal becomes doubly important. Does he truly abandon his Clan, or are the Giovanni playing a dangerous and byzantine game of double-dealing and treachery? Do any of the Kin-jin in Beijing suspect his duplicity or are they the victims of his schemes?

Passaglia survives his initial contact with the Cathayans because he understands the Chinese language and Chinese customs — an attitude contrary to the West's usual arrogance — and because he doesn't paint himself as an equal of the Wan Kuei. He appears outwardly humble and defers to the Cathayans on most issues, playing to a mentality still rooted in the distant past, when China was "the center and civilized pinnacle of the world." Clever Cainites can accomplish many things beneath the noses of their Cathayan hosts if they don't lose control of their tempers or egos. Most Kindred will remain in Beijing just long enough to build fortunes and gather unique supernatural lore that will afford them a huge advantage when they return to the West.

For Beijing chronicles, the Summer Palace's fall is a perfect climax to a story arc. Much of the mortal activity surrounding the Qing bureaucracy takes place in the

Forbidden City. The Wan Kuei have no formal Masquerade, like the Kin-jin, but are careful to avoid scrutiny in places like the Summer Palace, where the Blood Court conducts most of its business. When the British ransack the Summer Palace, it occurs during the day, using technology with which the Blood Court's mandarins and ancestors are unfamiliar; in short, the Western armies outnumber and outgun them. In selecting the Summer Palace as the setting's principle location, Storytellers should make it as real and comfortable as possible for players. It will make the looting of the palace very vivid, and help create stories where the characters must travel to London to recover stolen treasures and antiques.

THE FLESH COURT

Unlike other portions of China, the Wan Kuei of the Flesh Court have a far less unequal relationship with the Europeans. Shanghai becomes a treaty port in 1842, and an immediate partnership is struck between Chinese and Western mortals. The eastern Chinese have a reputation for pragmatism and greed that treats the arrival of trade-oriented foreigners as a singular opportunity, and the Flesh Court is a reflection of that mindset. The Flesh Ancestor is Chong Pan, a Resplendent Crane known for progressive theories that some say border on impropriety — or even heresy.

Chong Pan derives significant political support from outside his Dharma, specifically from several well-respected Thrashing Dragons. The Flesh Court approaches the arrival of Kin-jin with more understanding, even while still agreeing that the foreign devils are inferior to Kuei-jin in every way. The Kuei-jin eliminate Kin-jin who are clearly worthy of extermination, but tolerate those who exist as "humble and well-behaved dogs." This tolerance infuriates the Blood and Flame Courts, however, who hold definitively hostile views toward the Kin-jin.

The Flesh Court's Wan Kuei are the most progressive of the Quincunx. Their acceptance of foreigners affords them much broader access to Western science, technology and knowledge. As a result, Flesh Court vampires generally have the best insights into the Western mind, gathering the most practical information about the Kin-jin of anyone. The Flame Court Wan Kuei know best how to fight the West, but the Flesh Court best understands the West. This laxity brings unnecessary strife to the Flesh Court throughout the period. Distracted by the Taiping, mandarins across the Court fail to keep a closer eye on the Kin-jin blundering into China's supernatural landscape.

HISTORY OF THE FLESH COURT

Prior to the Treaty of Nanjing, the Quincunx already held the Flesh Court in a dim light. Chong Pan's moderate policies regarding the suppression of heretical Dharmas and relations with the Emerald Mother's courts consistently draw criticism from the Blood Court. The

issue isn't that the Flesh Ancestor refuses to destroy heretics, for example, but that he doesn't do so summarily. Traditionalists worry that studying and understanding a corrupt creature corrupts the examiner. Chong Pan simply doesn't share the reflexive xenophobia exhibited by many Wan Kuei.

Tolerant or not, however, even Chong Pan is shocked when Shanghai becomes a treaty port. Europeans flood into Shanghai on the wings of avarice, and some mandarins and jina push for an active resistance against the influx, as demonstrated by the Cantonese. The cries of the traditionalists grow more strident when Kin-jin appear in the city's foreign quarters.

Several *wu* take matters into their own hands, some even executing new Kin-jin arrivals. In a rare display of force, the Flesh Ancestor reminds all *wu* across the Flesh Court that he alone determines the fate of the Kin-jin in his domain. One *wu* faces the Eye of Heaven in protest, while many quietly question the wisdom of Chong's decrees. As in previous political crises, it is the Thrashing Dragons who rally behind Chong, many of whom find the Kin-jin and the West intriguing; a golden opportunity to experience the world without actually leaving the Middle Kingdom. They support the Crane Ancestor because Chong is a convenient shield against potential slander from Blood Court arch-conservatives. The common view among the local Thrashing Dragons is that the Wan Kuei should stay their hands against the Kin-jin until learning all the Westerners have to teach.

The Kin-jin trickling into Shanghai are mostly daredevils and opportunists at heart, since stories from Macao and Canton paint existing in other Chinese cities as a dangerous prospect. Shanghai is a tempting prize to young Licks from the Old World looking to build their fortunes and reputations. Ventruue, Brujah and Lasombra are the vanguard of Kindred expatriates in Shanghai, while the Tremere emerge there with the greatest influence, due largely to their occult investigations.

Once the Taiping Rebellion begins, the Flesh Court suddenly sees Kin-jin with a fresh perspective. Reports come in telling of angry Taiping soldiers razing temples and inadvertently destroying resident Wan Kuei. After the rebels capture Nanjing, the Flesh Court focuses on toppling the religious radicals before they turn an eye on Shanghai. The Flesh Ancestor, determined to preserve Shanghai from this ragtag group of bandits and rebels, in turn supports the formation of the Ever Victorious Army in protecting Shanghai, thus softening the attitudes of some Flesh Court Wan Kuei. If Western mortals can produce such tremendous benefits for China, they reason, then can it be possible that Kin-jin might hold similar promise?

In Nanjing, however, the Wan Kuei are in disarray. The city's capture destroys countless Scarlet Screens, and with a new government in place, reforming mortal influence won't occur overnight. This is doubly hard to adapt to, given that Taiping culture doesn't respect or

venerate the supernatural as traditional Chinese culture does. Shanghai Wan Kuei also feel little confidence in using Nanjing's courts to re-establish control over the city, and so expand their own influence into Nanjing as a defensive measure. The result is nearly two decades of unofficial shadow wars between the two courts for indirect control of Nanjing. Only following the Taiping's defeat does Shanghai withdraw its resources from Nanjing.

While the Flesh Court's attention focuses on Nanjing, the Kin-jin quietly gather impressive influence and domain within Shanghai. Unlike all other treaty ports, Western companies here make good use of local Chinese workers like the *compradors*, men hired by Western companies to act as go-betweens with Chinese trading partners. Other Chinese earn positions of authority and responsibility within Western companies. The Kin-jin follow suit as well, creating Chinese ghouls and even Embracing native childer — the vast majority of whom receive Final Death at the hands of outraged Wan Kuei.

It is perhaps inevitable that some Kin-jin in Shanghai are actually members of Europe's infamous Hellfire Clubs, drawn to the Orient as a treasure trove of new occult mysteries. Hellfire members actually have an easy time uncovering the supernatural in China, since the *shen* do not follow any formal Masquerade or Veil. Sadly, Kin-jin occultists are also completely unfamiliar with the pitfalls of the East, including the Yama Kings. It doesn't take *akuma* long to target naïve Hellfire Kin-jin, especially as local ghosts and spirits are extremely aloof when dealing with Western occultists (compared to the Wan Kuei, the Kin-jin seem little more than headstrong children, with little notion of the correct rituals required to placate spirits, much less the ability to speak in proper Mandarin). In some cases, Hellfire occultists abandon subtlety altogether and resort to brute force rituals and bindings to learn what they need. With such naïve souls before them, it's child's play for *akuma* agents of Tou Mu and Mikaboshi to deceive headstrong Hellfire members into believing they are bargaining with Yang or Yin spirits, rather than those of Yomi.

As more treaty ports open, Western ideas and knowledge make even greater inroads with the people of China. Flesh Court Wan Kuei take an enlightened approach to this opportunity and make tentative contact with the Kin-jin community, even though such contact is highly structured and restricted to very specific occasions and representatives. The court also assumes that while the Kin-jin possess no supernatural knowledge of substance to offer the Wan Kuei, they can prove or refute certain arcane theories about the West that have circulated for years.

Just as the Flesh Court reaches out, however, Kin-jin leaders in several towns uncover Yomi-tainted Hellfire Clubs in their domains, which they mistake for overly debauched gatherings. These local Taipan correctly surmise that their Cathayan "hosts" will annihilate them if they discover these depraved gatherings, and launch a

desperate and covert struggle in Shanghai and other towns to root out these depraved Hellfire Clubs (by exiling affected Kindred) before the Cathayans act. Many Kin-jin incur heavy Prestation debts to the Tremere, Giovanni and Setites during these purges, but the Taipan also discover one or two Cathayan Hellfire members, drawn into the Club by their Infernalities. The purges are largely successful; while some Wan Kuei possess an inkling of these events, they uncover no damning evidence of Yomi corruption.

As the century wanes, the Flesh Court maintains its tolerant and modern character. Many *wu* grow quite wealthy by linking their interests with the Western traders, and since many European companies maintain Kin-jin ties, the two groups of vampires often become de facto partners in many ventures. The Flesh Court continues to receive blistering criticism from the Blood Court and remnants of the Flame Court for this attitude, but the Flesh Ancestor carefully adheres to the letter of Quincunx decrees regarding gweilo, often finding ways to twist those decrees to his advantage.

STORIES OF THE FLESH COURT

For Storytellers highlighting or exploring the Kuei-jin's complicity in the troubles of the 19th century, the Flesh Court is probably the best setting. In contrast to the remaining Quincunx, the Flesh Court is openly curious and remarkably tolerant toward foreigners, reaping the benefits from this progressive attitude. No other region in China is as wealthy or successful as the Flesh Court, but this success alienates the other courts.

Ancestor Chong is remarkably controversial throughout this century. Prominent Quincunx leaders and scholars are quite vocal while berating his policies, though he seems unperturbed by this unfavorable scrutiny. The Flesh Ancestor even faces critics within the Court itself, and the threat of a coup is eminently possible. Storytellers incorporating politics into their chronicle can create a sub-plot around this controversial Ancestor. A progressive *wu* might throw their support behind the Ancestor and protect his interests, averting assassination attempts and shadow wars. Traditionalist *wu* might side with the Flesh Ancestor's critics, helping destabilize or topple the Ancestor by attacking his supporters. If Chong Pan does fall, it's likely that his successor will be conservative, forever altering the Flesh Court's history.

Hellfire Clubs exist both in and outside the Flesh Court, though they survive here the longest, allowing for any number of subplots. One option is that the characters could be upstanding *akuma* hunters who discover the Kin-jin Hellfire Clubs. What if the Yomi patron of one club is the same who tormented one character in Hell? If the *wu* features a Devil-Tiger occultist, they may wish to infiltrate the club and learn all they can about the Yama King patron before destroying the Yomi-tainted gweilo.

One interesting Storyteller option is a crossover chronicle involving Cathayan and Kin-jin demon

hunters. If the targeted Hellfire Club contains prominent Wan Kuei and Kindred, it might be politically embarrassing for the Flesh Court. Perhaps the mixed *wu*/coterie forms a unique (and temporary) partnership to combat the spread of Yomi's influence.

Other fusion games might include a Wan Kuei *wu* and Kindred coterie searching for a link between the two types of vampires, especially the Saulot/Zao-lat bridge. This may also allow the Storyteller to add his own slice of Antediluvian mythology to the chronicle. What if a coterie uncovers a lost book fragment that tells of the Gangrel Antediluvian's travels to the East? What if it hints at the Ravnos Antediluvian's activities?

The Shanghai of the late 1800s is also where a group of forward-thinking Devil-Tigers first forms the Electric Monkey Wickedness Club—known then as the Golden Monkey Wickedness Club—and makes extensive inroads into many Western trading houses. Although Devil-Tigers are the founders of the club, they allow members from other Dharmas to join if they also wish to subvert foreign companies.

THE JADE COURT

Much of the Jade Court's image is built around spiritual emphasis and the Shaolin Temple's bodhisattvas. This region's Gui Ren traditionally contemplate inner conflicts and explore the finer points of orthodox and heretical Dharmas, offering them insight that is widely celebrated throughout the Quincunx. Wan Kuei frequently make pilgrimages to various courts in the region when they cannot discern the next step on enlightenment's path, though in the past, devious *akuma* in the Jade Court took advantage of the Dharmic pilgrims, turning them to Tou Mu's service. By the turn of the 19th century, however, the shameful memories of the Jade Court's purge are faint indeed.

Unlike their southern neighbors, the Jade Court's experience with Westerners is quietly antagonistic, with Christian missionaries being almost the only ambassadors Europe has in central China. Christianity and Confucianism hold very different messages. The Jade Court's mandarins are certainly not Christians, turning the differences between Christian and non-Christian views into one of the key struggles between East and West.

As with European peasants centuries before, Christianity is wildly popular with the Chinese lower classes, who carry the banner of its message of obedience to God rather than the Qing rulers. Christianity finds no purchase, however, among the middle and upper classes. This dislike for Christianity only strengthens with rise of the Taiping rebels, who are stridently Christian—in their own way. The overwhelming majority of Jade Court vampires share the scholars' and traditionalists' broad views regarding Christianity.

The Jade Court's fortunes during this time remain dependent on the Taiping, whose battles occur within

the Jade Court's domains. Millions of Chinese perish during this rebellion, and the Jade Court must call on the Blood Court for aid if it is to survive. New ghosts and *chih-mei* are arising in large numbers as the Jade Court struggles to maintain order. More disturbing though, perhaps, is that Kin-jin support for the Taiping is responsible for significant damage to ancient temples and holy sites.

The Jade Ancestor is a Wise Centipede named Go Shan-tang. Prior to the spectacular disappearance of the Flame Ancestor Five Earthly Seasons, most in the Jade Court are comfortable with the idea of a Wise Centipede Ancestor. The Jade Ancestor enjoys the support of influential *wu* with respected Centipede members, though observers speculate about the tight-knit nature of the Jade Court's Centipedes. The Dharma seems suited to solitary pursuit of enlightenment, so to see many Rootless Trees working in apparent harmony is unsettling for some.

HISTORY OF THE JADE COURT

Like the Flame Court, the Jade Court was familiar with the West for some time before the 19th century. During this time, Christian missionaries braved official edicts forbidding proselytizing or traveling within China. Missionaries penetrated the interior of the country and established very low profile churches and congregations, a practice that grows more prevalent as the century passes.

Regardless of the harshness of the punishment carried by the edicts, those who wish to know more about Christianity or the West find ways to get around them. Even the government ignores its own edicts; several Jesuits live and teach in Beijing during this time, and are the most common missionaries found. Unlike the ever-prevalent Buddhist holy men and women, the Jesuits are extremely well educated. They teach not only Christianity, but also Western science, mathematics, logic, philosophy, history and astronomy. They also take considerable pains to bring the upper classes into the Christian fold.

Not every Jesuit missionary with a small church, however, is as simple as he appears. Many Lasombra, Tremere, Malkavian and Brujah attempt to penetrate central China in pursuit of converts and lore, but their fate is largely determined at the local level. Like the Flesh Court, some Jade Court scholars will refrain from summarily executing any Kin-jin they find, though some Devil-Tiger occultists prefer to research these foreign devils while stretching them over a searing-hot rack. Some open-minded mandarins, fortunately, encounter Sabbat who follow Paths of Enlightenment and begin tentative dialogues to learn more.

The First Opium War threatens the few attempts at understanding, however, with a sudden backlash against the West and Kin-jin. Wan Kuei opinion as a whole swings toward the notion that all Europeans are uncultured savages. Local ancestors launch "investigations" against Gui Ren who deal with Kin-jin,

declaring many *akuma*. Some *wu* from the chaotic Flame Court migrate north to Jade looking for stability and continued survival, but the growing Wan Kuei populace strains resources and sparks internal struggles for influence. Kin-jin missionaries end up scrambling for their unives, while local *wu* take the opportunity for some ad hoc revenge.

The Taiping Rebellion ends the Jade Court's brief courtship with calm and normalcy following the Treaty of Nanjing. Central China becomes a vast battleground, and no gathering of *wu* can stop the Taiping's superior numbers. This zealous tide destroys Buddhist and Taoist temples, claiming Jade Court Scarlet Screens by the handful while the Taiping recoup their losses through fresh converts from the lower classes. It's only a matter of time before local ancestors pressure the Jade Ancestor for outside aid — aid that comes from the Blood Court.

The Jade Court requires assistance in both the mortal and supernatural spheres. The Yin World is in total disarray, with ghosts arising at an alarming pace — among them newly-dead Christians who expect to find themselves in Heaven. The rebellion proves fertile ground for the Second Breath and incidences of uncontrolled *chih-mei* violence increases significantly. Many Jade Court Wan Kuei fear *akuma* will find the *chih-mei* before they can.

Adding to their woes, the Jade Court must also contend with the Society of Brigands and Decadent Dynasty-Toppling Devils. The Society sees the Taiping Rebellion as a sign that Heaven has revoked the Mandate of Hell. While the Taiping concentrate on mortal institutions, the Dynasty-Toppling Devils sweep through the local Wan Kuei courts. The Qing Dynasty's failure and corruption are merely symptoms of the Quincunx leadership's negligence, according to the Society. Some Brigands *wu* launch overt attacks against Jade Court members and institutions, like temples, while other *wu* try undermining the courts through covert actions (spying, blackmail, assassinations, etc.). Most Devil-Tigers loyal to the Jade Court fight the Brigands Society just as vigorously as other Dharmas, but some do join the Society's ranks.

Throughout the Rebellion, the Jade Court finds itself unable to lay the foundation for long-term stability in the region, since towns and cities in the area may change mortal leadership 20 times before the Taiping finally fall. Once the Taiping Rebellion ends, the Jade Court faces rebuilding its power base and influence over the long-term; a daunting task, to say the least.

During this aftermath, many introspective members of Jade Court suffer serious spiritual doubts. The Taiping's faith in Christianity was one reason for their sustained success. Wan Kuei following the orthodox Dharmas clearly failed to anticipate the danger of this religion. This begs the unspoken question: Is Chinese culture and thought somehow inferior to that of the West?

It is that troubling thought that creates both a dislike and curiosity for Western thought — a situation aggravated by the Peking Convention. Under that treaty, several more cities along the Yangtze are open to foreigners, and significant protection is extended to Western missionaries. These changes cause no small amount of trepidation in the Jade Court, whose members must grapple with the same uncertainty that the Blood, Flame and Flesh Courts suffer.

STORIES OF THE JADE COURT

The Jade Court serves as the Quincunx's spiritual locus, its reputation drawing China's greatest philosophical and theological minds. Throughout the 19th century, the local Wan Kuei face a steady stream of Gui Ren pilgrims defeated by foreigners, predicting the Sixth Age's immanent arrival. If these Western ideas are indeed harbingers of the Wheel of Ages, then what chance do mere disciples, jina or even mandarins have of reaching the Hundred Clouds before the world plunges into darkness? Some Wan Kuei suffering from these crises of faith turn to the Yama Kings in desperation.

Storytellers can craft any number of stories surrounding this spiritual crisis. The most straightforward stories involve the *akuma*. Whether new Yomi servants among the Flame Court refugees or freshly harvested *chih-mei* taken during the Taiping period, those purging Yomi influence from the Quincunx have plenty to do in the Jade Court. For more conventional problems, there are a whole host of political issues from which to draw. Jade Court vampires with reputations as spiritual teachers are in strong demand, and competition for their time and favor may lead to twilight wars. Those with impeccable credentials as spiritual leaders benefit tremendously from patronage, but any threat to those credentials, real or imagined, could bring these lavish gifts and accolades to a halt... just how far will a *wu* go to protect scholarly honor and spiritual reputations?

The notion of Kin-jin missionaries also easily lends itself to a crossover story. Are the characters straight-laced and traditional Wan Kuei, thus turning Kin-jin into reasonably powerful antagonists? Perhaps if the characters are more progressive, they might find themselves defending the Kin-jin against others. Regardless, the missionary will likely have plenty of local Chinese converts blind in devotion and inured to personal suffering, while the Kin-jin may also possess plenty of Western knowledge to interest the Wan Kuei.

The Society of Brigands and Decadent Dynasty-Toppling Devils may bring martial-derived stories to a chronicle. While the Society doesn't have Christian goals, they do believe the Qing Dynasty is no longer fit to rule China. The opportunistic Society simply follows in the Taiping wake, letting the mortals do a lion's share of their work. The Society are ready-made antagonists for a *wu* of characters, but adventurous Storytellers may also focus the chronicle on a sympathetic Society.

Maybe the characters assume control of the Society and lead it to victory, toppling the current Qing and Quincunx leadership and fundamentally impacting Chinese history forever.

One option for conspiracy-minded Storytellers involves the Taiping Rebellion. Although Taiping-based Christianity eventually horrifies Western Christians, they are quite sympathetic to these rebels initially. What if a powerful coalition of Christian Kin-jin lends considerable financial and supernatural backing (like *vitae* for ghouls) to the Taiping? The characters may begin by simply protecting their town against the Taiping, slowly uncovering the Kin-jin conspiracy that draws them to distant cities like Canton or Shanghai in pursuit of this Kin-jin "Triad."

THE BONE COURT

The Bone Court stands in stark contrast to rest of the Quincunx. It encompasses the most (and least populated) land in China. Large distances separate the towns and cities, and there is a virtual absence of Western companies and people here throughout the 19th century. Little in the Bone Court's sphere of influence proves to enticing to the average Western trader. Tea, silk and porcelain remain the primary foreign interest, which are produced in much greater quantities elsewhere in the country. Even after 1860, when Christian missionaries receive broad permission to travel, Europeans remain rare in western China.

The Bone Court is more loosely structured than other August Courts, and the distances between cities provides local courts a certain autonomy. As a result of this isolation, it's not uncommon to find peculiar local courts composed entirely of Thrashing Dragons or even one subordinate to a local Yin spirit. Travel along dragon lines is widespread in the Bone Court, especially if there's an auspicious connection of lines to a particular destination, and a sizable majority know the Imbuing The Jade rite.

For the Bone Court, the Qing's politics and affairs are of secondary or even tertiary concern. Many towns do not share the daily routine of most traditional Chinese cities. Their daily level of commerce might easily be represented by nomadic herders arriving on the town's outskirts to trade for finished goods. Many places remain quite insular and slow to adopt modern ways. This is also true of the region's Wan Kuei, whose distance from the remaining Quincunx makes their politics and culture seem less important. *Shen* and local spirits concern the Bone Court Kuei-jin far more since they have a more immediate and daily impact.

HISTORY OF THE BONE COURT

The one constant in the Bone Court is the Ancestor and Bone Flower, Ku Zu, who remains in power long before and after this century's span. Her icy grip means the usual politicking of any August Court surrounds her

ministers and interests, but Ku Zu remains aloof from it all, focusing her attention on the Bone Library and mythical Mt. Meru.

Prior to the 19th century, the Bone Court maintained a long-standing treaty with regional Beast Courts known as the Treaty of Courteous Devils and Beasts. Toward the end of the 18th century, Xiong Ren and Wan Kuei diplomats gathered at a neutral site in Sichuan province to re-examine the treaty. The Xiong Ren complained that Wan Kuei were responsible for weakening several dragon nests. The Bone Court's diplomats denied the charges, but the Ferocious People brought Yin and Yang spirits as witnesses. When the Xiong Ren demanded control of the nests, the Bone Court negotiators flatly refused. The shapechangers withdrew from the treaty, setting the stage for war.

The 19th century begins with neither side scoring a decisive victory in the following decade of fighting. Many Wan Kuei courts receive the news of the Treaty's dissolution too late, suffering heavy losses from surprise Xiong Ren attacks. In retaliation, the Bone Court calls upon powerful *fang-shih* to wither and divert Dragon Lines leading to several Xiong Ren nests. Spirits ally with both sides, honoring ancient mutual aid pacts.

One benefit to the war is the discovery and destruction of several previously hidden corrupt nests. In one special case, local Wan Kuei and Xiong Ren declare a temporary truce to cleanse a particularly corrupt Yomi nest in their territory. Unfortunately, many dragon nests fall in the battles, and the tremendous expenditures of Chi causes havoc to the natural ebb and flow of the landscape. Yin and Yang Chi storms coalesce and race along dragon lines, overwhelming and snuffing out lesser nests in the vicinity.

There is no victor in this war; after a decade of fighting, both sides simply exhaust themselves and cannot continue battling. The Xiong Ren come out on top nominally after claiming some key Dragon Nests. While remaining ostensibly aloof during the conflict, the Bone Ancestor takes the "defeat" poorly and executes a dozen Wan Kuei for incompetence.

The First Opium War nearly passes the Bone Court unnoticed. Though they receive news from other August Courts, it barely impacts this isolated region. Bone Library scholars instead begin a careful search for information matching the reports of Kin-jin. They find their information woefully lacking, however, leading several *wu* to gather more information privately. Some *wu* venture to the newly established treaty ports for first-hand observation, while others simply steal books and manuscripts from other libraries across China. The Bone Ancestor, seeking to make the Bone Library the greatest repository of supernatural lore in the Middle Kingdom, justifies the thefts as transferring valuable knowledge into the hands of those best suited to care for it. A few innovative *wu* actually travel to India searching for information on Kin-jin, remembering tales of battles between the heretical Indian Kuei-jin and native Kin-jin.

The Bone Court is far more aware of the Taiping and the Muslim Rebellions. The fight against the Taiping consumes the Qing and the Blood Court, and few bureaucrats or mandarins can spare any attention to the "border provinces" of the Bone Court. More importantly, they curtail the flow of imperial funds, unleashing famine and poverty across the Bone Court. The effectiveness of local Scarlet Screens suffers from the lack of Qing funds, leaving local pawns to maintain their own influence and finances.

A secondary but equally important effect of the two rebellions, is to create a sudden influx of ghosts. China is used to large-scale battles, but modern weapons create death tolls that were unheard of until now. The Yellow Springs' bureaucracy struggles to maintain order while opportunistic Jade Censors manipulate the incoming ghosts to reap huge benefits. While common practice during times of war, the Yellow Springs' political landscape grows uncertain, affecting those Wan Kuei whose fortunes remain tied to the Yin World. Unsure of which Yin governors or magistrates will emerge with power, Wan Kuei appease as many as possible, allowing clever ghosts to play one *wu* against another in growing twilight wars. The fact that many Muslim ghosts are emerging in the Yellow Springs creates strife as well.

Muslim Wan Kuei are rare, but do appear during the Muslim Rebellions. The Bone Court's isolation serves to safeguard these tortured vampires and their views, though many become demon hunters, wreaking havoc in remote courts during the confusion of the Muslim Rebellions. Most Islamic Gui Ren follow the Flame of the Rising Phoenix. One court in the Bone Court's barren corner actually consists solely of this heretical Dharma and its Muslim followers. Known as the Survivors of Allah's Fiery Mercy, the court orchestrates much of the Muslim resistance with help from peculiar spirits of the Near West.

Following the Taiping and Muslim Rebellions, the Bone Court grapples with more traditional problems... those of uncovering lore and information that will allow the Kuei-jin to regain the upper hand against Kin-jin. Unfortunately, in the minds of most Quincunx vampires, the Bone Library holds the key. The *wu* protecting and maintaining the Bone Library suddenly find themselves in a precarious position; competition for finite Library resources is fierce and each visiting *wu* believes its mission paramount. Some visitors are mere disciples and easily handled, while other *wu* consist entirely of respected and powerful mandarins used to getting their way. Chongqing also faces overcrowding with the influx of scholarly *wu*, forcing the Bone Ancestor to cap the number of visitors at any particular time to combat the growing unrest. Devious *wu* on the "waiting list" try hastening their turn at the library by orchestrating a crisis in another *wu*'s home territory, forcing that rival to return home to deal with the matter and freeing up space in the Bone Library.

Christian missionaries also begin to trickle into the region, but those Cainites brave and foolhardy enough to venture into the Bone Court pay dearly for this mistake. One advantage of “border provinces” is that strict adherence to Qing treaties is difficult to enforce. Additionally, Mandarin is hardly a common language here, so communication is painfully slow. Virtually no Kin-jin survives a Bone Court city for more than a year, and while the destroyed Kin-jin’s allies may be infuriated by the casual destruction of their associates, an effective response to such actions remains logistically untenable.

STORIES OF THE BONE COURT

The Bone Court remains isolated from many of this century’s most influential events. As a result, it is suited for more “traditional” chronicles without all the turmoil and ideas that the West brings. Storytellers who wish to acknowledge Western themes but still base their chronicles in the Bone Court have several options.

The Court may form the characters’ *wu* with the purpose of traveling to other Chinese or even Indian cities to uncover new Western knowledge and Kin-jin lore. Visiting other *wu* in foreign cities might prove

WEIGHTS, LENGTHS, CURRENCY AND PRICING

Weights

1 liang (tael)	1.33 English ounces
16 liang	1 jin (1.33 pounds or 0.66 kilograms)
100 jin	1 shi (133 pounds)

Lengths

1 cun (inch)	1.4 English inches
10 cun	1 qin (foot, 14.1 English inches)
10 qin	1 chang
180 chang	1 li (0.33 English miles, 0.5 kilometers; a common measure of overland distance)

Area

1 mou	0.166 acres or 0.055 hectares
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Prices

High-quality land, good year	10,000 cash per mou
High-quality land, bad year	1,000 cash per mou
Low-quality land, good year	3,000–4,000 cash per mou
Low-quality land, bad year	300–400 cash per mou
Rent for first-grade land	500 cash per mou
Rent for second-grade land	400 cash per mou
Rent for third-grade land	300 cash per mou
Wages for servant in a prince’s household	4 taels in money and grain per month
Wages for regular soldier	2 taels per month and rice allotment
Wages for agricultural laborer during harvest	100 cash per day
Wages for agricultural laborer during off-season	70–80 cash per day
Room rent	150–200 cash per month
Militia soldier’s food allowance	50 cash per day
Militia instructor’s food allowance	200 cash per day
Regular soldier’s food allowance	150 cash per day
Knife	500 cash
One foot of white cotton cloth	100 cash
14-year-old boy	4,000 cash
11-year-old boy	1,000 cash
Woman	10,000 cash

Currency

The standard unit of currency is the *tael* (liang), which consists of one ounce of silver cast into small oval ingots, sometimes known as *shoes*. There are smaller units of copper currency called *cash* (wen or li). One tael varies in value from 1000 to 1500 cash, depending on market conditions.

dangerous, however, if the characters remain ignorant of local customs and inadvertently insult someone important. Indigenous supernatural pitfalls also present a similar danger, such as failing to pay a local spirit the proper respect.

The future of Ku Zu, the Bone Ancestor, is already secure through to the 21st century. Much of the Bone Court's politicking occurs for lesser posts than the August Ancestor's. The Bone Court's prestige lies in the Bone Library, and to become a member of the *wu* maintaining and guarding the library is to earn status among the local political and social elite.

Another avenue to prestige is making high-profile "donations" to the library, such as risking unlife and limb to "recover" valuable artifacts or texts. For those of true bravery (or foolishness), an expedition to fabled Mt. Meru is one surefire means to glory. The majority of *wu* departing for Meru never return, but those who return with treasures supposedly from Meru become instant celebrities. It is difficult to know if a triumphant *wu* actually reached the mythical site, but the key lies in presenting artifacts difficult to classify or otherwise identify. Clever and skillful *wu* often receive the benefit of the doubt, but destruction awaits those discovered to have lied about their artifacts' origins.

Although most friction with the Xiong Ren occurs at the century's start, there's no reason Storytellers can't re-introduce the Ferocious People in a struggle to control local nests. Crossover stories are certainly possible, with Wan Kuei and Xiong Ren teaming up against Yomi or Kin-jin.

Enterprising *wu* may also establish dominion over towns, since some have no vampire court present. Many local and mortal leaders find themselves in dire financial shape with imperial tax payments diverted to battle the Taiping. Fortunately, a *wu* with external resources can assuage famine and unrest, often surefire heralds of minor peasant revolts. These suffering towns are desperate for help, enough to overlook the nature of their rescuers. In cities with an already established Wan Kuei presence, the Muslim and Taiping Rebellions are a perfect time to wrest control of the city away from its current leaders. Some *wu* might travel to the Blood Court to curry favor from its mandarins, ensuring towns in western China receive less imperial aid than normal and facilitating eventual conquest for the *wu*.

For characters focusing on the Yin World, unscrupulous Wan Kuei may actively encourage violent conflict so that allied Jade Censors and magistrates can reap more souls. Since Bone Flowers dominate the Bone Court, an individual's standing in the Yin World is often a consideration in social status.

SOCIETY

Most Wan Kuei exist within China's cities and towns. Though the Second Breath forever sets them

outside active mortal culture, they still immerse themselves in it nightly. For chronicles set in 19th-century China, players and Storytellers must have a good grasp of that society.

GOVERNMENT

China's political system begins with the emperor — the Son of Heaven and demigod who bridges Heaven and Earth. Although an emperor's actual political power varies greatly over history, the office itself undergoes very few changes.

As many as 100 messages from regional and civic officials reach the emperor every day, each requiring his personal attention. The emperor often works from dawn till late into the night, responding to these messages and holding audiences when ceremonial duties don't take precedence, the majority of which are rituals to venerate Heaven on behalf of the entire nation.

The trappings and symbols of the emperor are sacred objects and it is a capital offense to misuse or mishandle them. The emperor always writes with red ink, the government with black ink, and yellow is the emperor's color (and forbidden for others to wear). The Qing dynasty is based in the Manchu ethnic group. The emperor, top Qing officials and military commanders use the Manchu language as a secret code.

Below the emperor are six Boards administering in the national interest and governed by ministers with little direct power to influence events. The post's prestige often compensates for the lack of overt influence, however, since the prestige of its minister can affect how the Boards are ranked.

The Board of Civil Appointments oversees the civil service examination system at the highest levels and controls the general movement and promotion of Qing bureaucracy officials. The Board of Revenue tends to the collection and distribution of taxes. The Board of Rites ensures people observe all major rituals in the correct manner. The Board of War serves as civilian liaison to the military hierarchy, which exists outside the central government. The Board of Punishments maintains an administrative eye over various provinces and their judges, while the Board of Works (the largest of the six) is in charge of all the titanic public works projects occupying the government across China. Communication between the ministers and staffs of the Boards is always poor, thus hampering their overall effectiveness.

Governor-generals manage multiple provinces; usually two, but sometimes as many as three. Their primary duty is overseeing civil and military officials, with the power to promote or demote civil administrators and make recommendations regarding military commanders. Governors-general must regularly report on the financial health of their provinces and, in most cases, are the highest level of judicial appeal for the provinces they manage.

Governors are the true foundation of the Qing government. They aren't isolated from the Forbidden City's population, but they wield near-total power within their domains, sharing the same duties as a governor-general on a smaller scale. They are also responsible for overseeing the collection of customs duties and supervising the provincial civil service exam system. They administer the grain tribute system that collects grain and rice as a tax, and redistribute it to officials as part of their compensation. They also handle the use and distribution of salt. As with the governors-general, the provincial governors also influence the appointment of civil servants within their territory.

Provincial commissioners hold little direct authority save as advisors, but ease the governors' burden. A governor may appoint any number of commissioners, but their numbers are usually kept low for practical purposes. Financial commissioners are common, responsible for handling the provinces finances and taking a census every 10 years. They are also responsible for ensuring the dissemination of imperial commands throughout the province. Judicial commissioners manage the province's postal system, evaluate the suitability and performance of local judges and help in the administration of the civil service exams. Education commissioners are responsible for the quality of the province's schools, which prepare students for civil service exams.

Provinces usually consist of four or five circuits called *dao*, each governed by intendants, or *daotai*. The *daotai* have many duties and responsibilities. Like the governors, they are responsible for customs collections and grain tribute (again, on a smaller scale) and also handle water works, communications and some minor diplomacy. During the Self-Strengthening Movement, *daotai* implement the economic modernization and military reforms.

Each circuit then falls into two or three prefectures divided by minor distinctions. Although prefects watch over each, they often become simple assistants to the *daotai*. Below prefectures is the lowest and final level of the Qing bureaucracy... the district. Three to five districts comprise a circuit, with a magistrate, or *xianzhi*, overseeing each. Magistrates are the Qing officials actually governing China's populace, rather than other officials, and are in charge of 100,000 to 250,000 people, depending on the region. More than any other official, magistrates are like "mini-emperors," performing both civil and religious duties and acting as role models for their communities; the embodiment of refined, scholarly, Confucian gentlemen.

The magistrate's duties are the broadest of any Qing official. Any responsibility mentioned previously of Qing officials are also those of a magistrate, but on the local level. Magistrates also lead religious rituals for the community during important festivals and holidays.

Hundreds of clerks and assistants serve the *xianzhi*, though the most important aides are private secretaries called *muyou*. The *muyou* have scholarly degrees but no

real power in the administration. Below them are clerks, commoners with no degree or hope of advancing within the bureaucracy, but with some measure of prestige from their work. The lowest government position are the *yamen*, who work as tax collectors, runners, policemen or prison guards. Although sometimes classified as *jianmin* ("demeaned people"), they often wield significant influence through the collection of "informal fees."

The local magistrate government follows the six Imperial Boards of Beijing model, with the same level of prestige attached to each board. *Muyou* often head the boards and competition for these posts is fierce, since they are one of the few ways available to gain the notice of a *daotai* or prefect.

Outside the Qing bureaucracy exist town and village headmen. Although a headmen is supposedly elected by his peers, the magistrate often steers the elections through informal support of particular candidates. These headmen report to the magistrate regularly and can suffer punishment for their community's faults or shortcomings. Despite this, minor prestige accompanies the post despite the fact that headmen rarely hold degrees, making it attractive to most men.

THE EXAMINATION SYSTEM

In Qing China, success and wealth await only those who earn degrees in the civil service exam system. This system, however, is behind the cultural and social inflexibility hampering China's modernization throughout the 19th century. It encourages stagnation by rewarding rote memorization of classical texts and stale parroting of historical commentaries. Independent thinkers rarely do well.

The civil service exams test familiarity with core texts of Confucian thought, forcing students to study the *qianzi wen* ("essay of a thousand characters") before progressing to the Four Books and the Five Classics. Calligraphy and poetry composition follow, as does instruction in the "eight-legged essay" style. Exams also require familiarity with traditional commentaries and history. Study guides of outstanding answers from previous exams are expensive, but not uncommon.

There are three stages of exams, each corresponding to a different regional level. The local exams are held twice every three years and consist of the *xiankao* (district-level), the *fukao* (prefecture-level) and the *shengyuan* (circuit-level). Upon completion of the *shengyuan* degree, the person receives the title of "government student." For most scholars of the period, however, the *shengyuan* level is the highest they'll achieve.

The provincial-level exams are a triennial event and require an applicant to have the *shengyuan* degree. Those who pass these exams receive the *juren* ("recommended man") degree. The final exams are the metropolitan-level, held in Beijing, and require the *juren* degree. Those who pass earn the *jinshi* ("advanced

scholar”) degree. The best of the new jinshi graduates receive a supplemental exam known as the *dianshi*, which the emperor administers himself, even though it is something of a formality compared with previous exams. Top performers in the *dianshi* go on to the Hanlin Academy, which is the fast track to political and bureaucratic power.

With the exception of the *dianshi* exam, the examination format is the same at all levels. Each exam consists of three 24-hour sessions. Students bring food and water into a cubicle and don’t emerge until the next day. One session focuses on classical texts, one on discourse and one on policy questions, though the session on classical texts is the most important.

What makes competition in these exams so fierce are the quota system for graduates and the limited number of degrees available. Only 15 to 25 jinshi degrees are awarded to each province during a testing period, as opposed to the approximately 15,000 juren and 25,000 shengyuan degrees handed out nationwide every three years. Cheating scandals have plagued the examination system throughout China’s history, and the 19th century is no different.

In addition to degree quotas, another frustrating bottleneck exists. While there are one million degree holders in any given year, there are only 20,000 positions in the bureaucracy. Jinshi-level graduates normally find positions as circuit intendants or prefects at the mid ranks of the local bureaucracy. Jinshi at the metropolitan level

often receive passable duties like Reader in the Grand Secretariat or Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Transmission. Jinshi may also become magistrates, while Juren degrees usually secure positions of *muyou* or other minor local posts. Shengyuan holders are not usually members of the bureaucracy, but are “lower gentry” with a few token privileges and easy work as teachers or tutors (known as “plowing with the writing brush”).

While a bureaucrat’s power and influence is substantial, there are limits built-in to the system to prevent abuse. The Qing reassign officials as often as every 3 years to ensure that no individual becomes too corrupt or too familiar with a particular region. While this limits the influence of the official bureaucrats, it allows clerks and *yamen* at the local level to accumulate lifetimes of influence. Officials can sometimes alter or circumvent appointments to various posts, like when wealthy families purchase a position, though officials are prevented from serving in their native cities or regions to avoid the appearance of impropriety.

THE CLASSES OF QING SOCIETY

The Chinese place great importance on society’s various levels and the place of each person. The West encourages individuality with various distinct ties to organizations and people, but for the Chinese, the individual is at the center of a vast web of interconnected relationships and obligations, connections largely governed by two concepts: *bao* and *guanxi*.

RANKS AND SALARIES OF THE QING BUREAUCRACY

Title	Salary (in taels/shi of rice)
Prince of the Blood	10,000/5,000
Duke	700/350
Earl	610/305
Count	510/255
Viscount	410/205
Baron	310/155
Civil Official, Grade 1A-1B	180/90
Civil Official, Grade 2A-2B (governor-general)	155/78
Civil Official, Grade 3A-3B (governor)	130/65
Civil Official, Grade 4A-4B (intendant)	105/52
Civil Official, Grade 5A-5B (prefect)	80/40
Civil Official, Grade 6A-6B (deputy prefect)	60/30
Civil Official, Grade 7A-7B (magistrate)	45/22
Civil Official, Grade 8A-8B (private secretary)	40/20
Civil Official, Grade 9A	33/16
Civil Official, Grade 9B	31/15

Yanglian (“to nourish integrity”) supplements some salaries, and can range anywhere from 13,000 to 20,000 taels for a 2A official, to 410 to 2,000 taels for a 7A. These figures don’t include informal fees and gifts received through *guanxi*.

Society rigorously observes and evaluates Bao (“reciprocity”) in all Chinese men and women. It is important a person avoids owing *benqing* (“human feelings”) to another, which bao helps from happening. *Guanxi* is the means by which someone maintains bao and *benqing*. It is a hidden, constructed network of personal relationships and an overriding guide in social behavior. There are dozens of different *guanxi* relationships a person can accumulate over a lifetime including *qinshu guanxi* (lineage-based), *yingqin guanxi* (in-law-based), *shiyi guanxi* (family friendship) and *tongliao guanxi* (bureaucratic). *Guanxi*’s importance is that it reinforces status relationships, so when people engage in *guanxi*, the favors and gifts they bestow confirm the status and obligations between them. *Guanxi* also makes behavior predictable and can be a source of comfort in that sense. Those of low social status needn’t feel unsure of how to act in the presence of high status individuals since *guanxi* will provide the answer.

Hereditary nobles sit at the top of the Qing social hierarchy. Most are imperial clansmen with varying ties to the emperor, and in the 19th century, almost all are ethnic Manchus. Civil or military officials with distinguished service may also earn a noble title, though this practice is rare. The nobility receive many special privileges fairly common by Western noble standards, like metropolitan bureaucratic appointments, and have little trouble earning or buying degrees. Since the central bureaucracy handled the majority of the Qing’s administration, the nobility of this era spent most of its time pursuing leisurely or scholastic subjects.

Civil bureaucrats of all levels occupy the next rung of society. From the governors-general and imperial court officials all the way to the district *muyou*, members of the Qing government earn respect as scholarly Confucian gentlemen. Within this strata, unique official dress and symbols of office distinguish bureaucrats of different ranks. For those of 1A rank, the trappings include a ruby hat button, an embroidered patch featuring a white crane and a jade belt clasp with rubies. For officials of 9A rank, they wear a silver hat button, a white-tailed jay on the patch and a buffalo horn belt clasp. The bureaucracy maintains strict observance of these dress codes and levies harsh penalties against anyone “out of uniform.”

Between the bureaucrats and the commoners are a special group, the scholar-gentry. These degree holders have no official position in the bureaucracy, but the prestige of being scholar-gentry often overlaps with the lowest levels of official bureaucrats. The scholar-gentry wear gold or silver brocades and fancy embroidery, normally denied to commoners, and they enjoy several legal perks as a result of their education. They are exempt from corporal punishment, aside from the death penalty, and from labor service and labor taxes; commoners cannot call upon them as witnesses either.

The scholar-gentry’s most important benefit, however, is relatively free access to Qing officials. The scholar-gentry use *tongjian guanxi* (“same year”) when dealing with officials, which only applies to those who passed their exams in the same year as the scholar-gentry—but it proves quite handy in most situations. Generally, the scholar-gentry are akin to Europe’s landed gentry; most of their income comes from providing services as unofficial magistrates. They are school administrators, militia organizers, public works managers and, often, arbiters for minor disputes brought before them. They also collect taxes and pass them along to higher officials.

Commoners form the vast majority of Chinese, constituting several distinct classes whose status is just as rigorously observed as it is among the upper classes. The three broad classifications of commoners, in order of importance, are peasants, artisans and merchants. In most regions, peasants are the overwhelming majority, except in cities. They are the poorest commoners, with little opportunity to purchase advantages leading to social advancement. Nearly half of all peasants own their own land and another quarter are tenant farmers.

Northern families usually own 20 to 30 *mou*, while southern families own an average 12 to 15 *mou*. This can comfortably sustain a family of five with enough left over to sell at the market. Wealthier peasants sometimes accumulate up to 120 *mou* of land. A family’s holdings often lie scattered across a given village, forcing them to travel between lots to tend all their crops. The major northern crops are millet and wheat, but farmers have frequent low yields and famine is not uncommon. Rice and beans flourish in the south, where the climate creates a long and forgiving growing season, and good fishing grounds are abundant for peasants supplementing their income and food. Donkeys and mules are the common draft animals of the north, while water buffalo are popular in the south.

Although society considers artisans of a lower class than peasants, they make more money and are better off. The average daily wage for artisan is 160 cash, with a day’s food costing around 100 cash alone. The artisans’ ranks contains craftsmen (carpenters, blacksmiths), commodities providers (silk, paper, candles) and service providers (doctors, barbers, fortune-tellers, marriage brokers). In the north, they live in mud-walled houses and sleep on heated brick beds, but in southern villages, artisans build houses from woven bamboo and thatch.

The lowest-ranked commoners are the merchants, who compensate for low status with wealth. Literature and popular culture stigmatizes merchants as unscrupulous and parasitic, but these characterizations weigh on the minds of many merchants, forcing them to pursue *guanxi* and propriety harder than most. Merchants are either simple traders (including street peddlers), brokers or consignment dealers; all three often gather significant wealth, enough so that successful merchants can purchase

influence as scholar-gentry, either through corrupt civil exams or judicious and expensive use of *guanxi*. Qing officials sometimes meddle in commerce, forging ties to particular merchant families, which later translates as influence for the merchant.

Unlike Japan, social mobility in China is an option for many and not uncommon. The quickest way to advance is to obtain a degree, since there is no stigma attached to moving from the ranks of commoner to the higher levels. Commoner families often endure many sacrifices so one intelligent and diligent son can take the civil service exams to achieve the jinshi degree and bring prosperity to his entire family.

Below the commoners are other groups with little opportunity for advancement. Monks, nuns and priests have less standing than merchants. Unlike Western clergy, most Eastern monks and nuns are illiterate and uninformed, content to spend their life in religious duties. Orphans often join the clergy, as do those who shame themselves and must travel to other towns. This low status doesn't necessarily translate as poor treatment of the clergy, some of whom enjoy tremendous *guanxi* with upstanding community members — enough to derive good status.

The Army of the Green Standard is the local militia of every region. It also serves as a sort of public workforce. They often guard important public buildings like bureaucratic offices, storehouses and armories, and receive esteem equivalent to monks and nuns (except in times of crisis, when their status rises).

At the absolute bottom of the social ladder are the *jianmin*, the “demeaned people.” In contrast to the *liangmin* (“good people”), the *jianmin* perform the lowliest jobs and services as slaves, entertainers, prostitutes, criminals, government runners, boat people and beggars. The yamen of the official bureaucracy also fall in this category but, as mentioned earlier, often accumulate some status through abuse of their positions.

RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

rites

Rituals and sacrifices are a common part of religious life and emphasize color, form, numbers, positions, music and sacrificial objects. Incense, jade, bells, silk and drums are all common elements of Chinese religious rituals, of which there are three different levels corresponding to the region addressed by the ritual.

Great sacrifices are only performed at the imperial level. As mentioned earlier, much of the emperor's time is spent in ceremonial duties, including conducting sacrifices on behalf of the entire empire. Two of the most important sacrifices are the Worship of Heaven, honored on the winter solstice and on New Year's Day, and the Worship of Earth, conducted at the height of summer.

Middle sacrifices occur on the provincial level. Rituals focusing on the land and grain are common as are veneration of the sun and moon, while rituals honoring the spirits of wind, rain, thunder, clouds, mountains and rivers occur during festivals and holy days. Rituals also pay homage to deceased sages, meritorious officials and virtuous women.

Local magistrates, whose pivotal duties include leading religious ceremonies, perform most common sacrifices. At this level, the magistrate must honor a long list of gods including the god of war (Guandi), the god of literature (Wenchang), the god of agriculture (Xian Nong), the Three Sovereigns (Sanhuang), the fire god (Huoshen), the dragon god (Longshen) and the city god (Chenghuang). The city god is by far the most important deity. He is equal to the magistrate in the local spirit court and is served by the Lords of the Earth, who correspond to the magistrate's own *muyou*. The magistrate is also responsible for ceremonies honoring the unhonored dead, placating them and keeping them from rising as ghosts.

BUDDHISM

There are four major sects of Chinese Buddhism, divided into two groups informally known as “those for doctrine” and “those for practice.” The Lotus School and the Flowery Splendor School comprise the first group. The Lotus follows in the Three Truths: the Truth of Emptiness, the Temporary Truth (which ranks all creatures from insects to buddhas) and the Truth of the Mean. The Flowery Splendor School emphasizes three complementary pairs of attributes men must balance: universality and speciality, similarity and difference, integration and disintegration.

The Chan and the Pure Land Schools constitute the second group. Chan Buddhism is the inspiration behind what becomes Japanese Zen Buddhism, while the Pure Land doctrine speaks of enlightenment through good works and faith. It is by far the most popular and least demanding form of Chinese Buddhism.

TAOISM

China has two types of Taoism: Northern and Southern. Northern Taoism is known as “Compete Perfection Taoism” and is largely a monastic tradition headquartered in Beijing, in the White Cloud Monastery. Adherents pursue self-perfection through a regimen of a rigorous diet (consuming no meat or alcohol), exercise and celibacy. Southern Taoism is the “True Unity Taoism,” and is the Northern school's opposite in many ways. Southern Taoists may marry and consume meat and alcohol, except on special days. They also use magic to attain self-perfection, often selling charms and potions to anyone seeking them for fortune telling. Sometimes people also call upon them to perform minor religious services, like funerals.

THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF CHINESE LIFE

When Chinese men and women reach various ages, they celebrate special ceremonies to mark their passage into a new phase of life. These ceremonies are of tremendous importance, and families routinely incur large debts to pay for "a proper ceremony."

BIRTH

A child's birth is an important event in Chinese society. The continuation of lineage is of crucial relevance at all levels of society, and infants receive many charms and protection prayers to safeguard them. The Chinese believe evil spirits favor male infants over female ones, so to ward the males from unwanted spiritual attention, they often receive a "milk name" for the first few years of life. The child receives a formal name at the "one month" ceremony, which is another reason for celebration, but for the first two years of the child's life, family members spoil them rotten.

Generally, families prefer male children to female children since lineage follows the male line, while women are "a burden" to most families. Infanticide through drowning is a real threat for female infants and occurs across society's strata. The rich do it for the sake of propriety, while the poor do so out of a sense of harsh practicality, believing it more humane to kill the girl now than condemn her to a life of poverty and shame. For families who cannot produce male heirs, it isn't uncommon to purchase and adopt a boy.

CHILDHOOD

This period falls between the years of three and 16, during which time the family instills an unswerving instinct for filial obedience. Families bombard children with stories of dutiful sons and daughters who sacrifice themselves to help their parents. One story tells of a man who sells himself into slavery to pay for his father's proper burial. Another is of a woman who nourishes her toothless old mother with milk from her own breast. This sense of responsibility is the single largest contributor to Chinese cultural stability, and parents ensure their children learn this particular lesson well.

Upper class boys begin their studies at this age, learning verse, brushwork and classical literature, writing characters and playing musical instruments and strategic games. Girls have fewer options... embroidery and weaving, though some receive informal instruction in classic literature (but it's not common). Families bind the feet of Manchu girls at age six, forcing almost all Chinese women to spend their lives in the inner apartments of a Chinese household. A common saying among women is that they hope they reincarnate as dogs so they might have greater freedom.

Society consistently teaches children to subordinate their feelings to those of their parents. Chinese law says a child who strikes or harms a parent is committing a

capital crime, leading to immediate execution in some harsh districts. This constant repression of emotions leads to a distrust of those same passions in adulthood.

In some well-to-do families, there is a period of young adulthood for boys where the constant reinforcement of filial duty lessens and the boy may seek out his first sexual experience. Prostitutes often provide the first encounter, but servant girls are also common choices. Girls in similar families continue their life of seclusion, remaining properly chaste.

ADULTHOOD

Adulthood is almost always marked by marriage. For men, the event falls between 18 to 21 years old, while women marry between 16 to 18. Marriage is a vital means of continuing the family's lineage; so important, in fact, that society even expects slaves to marry. Chinese couples rarely marry for love. Love often grows from marriage, but arranged unions are the norm. Every village has a marriage-broker whose job it is to facilitate engagements and arrange matches.

There are three forms of marriage in China, the most common being the major marriage, where an adult bride transfers and is reborn into a husband's home. The minor marriage places the bride in the future-groom's home for 10 to 15 years before the wedding, as a kind of "future daughter-in-law" of the family. The rarest form of matrimony is the matriarchal marriage, where the groom lives with the bride's family for a few years before marrying. Matriarchal marriages are often the only choice for men from families with many sons.

One interesting facet of marriage involves the bride's allegiance. Once a woman enters her husband's household, she must leave her old family ties behind. Duty and obligation to her husband's parents and grandparents become her primary filial responsibilities, so naturally, Chinese folk tales contain many stories of cruel mothers-in-law who mistreat new brides. While the empire strictly controls Chinese women in matters of divorce, a woman can seek divorce if she participated in mourning one of her husband's parents or grandparents.

The Chinese also practice concubinage, to ensure male birth for the family. If a concubine produces a male heir, the household wife becomes the child's mother, not the concubine. Understandably, concubines are a constant source of friction between husband and wife. A husband's sexual desires most often lay with the young concubines, leaving the older wives to raise the children in near-celibacy.

MIDDLE AND OLD AGE

Age earns great respect in Qing China. When a man or woman reaches her forties or fifties, they are middle-aged. Most hope to reach this stage with a male heir to carry their name, some measure of prestige and some wealth to sustain them through their remaining years.

Once a person reaches fifty, society treats them with significant reverence; each birthday celebration thereafter is more grand than the last. Those falling on milestones, like fifty or sixty years, are even greater celebrations. They invariably feature a longevity theme, such as longevity noodles, longevity candles, longevity banners and anything else promoting the celebrant's continued good health and long life.

ENTERTAINMENT AND LEISURE

While society emphasizes the importance of group and family responsibility, the majority of Chinese leisure activities focus on individual efforts. Boxing, tai chi and kung fu enjoy wide practice, though those in the upper classes rarely spar as routinely as commoners. The cultivation and appreciation of gardens is quite popular, as are serene walks through a garden accompanied by a caged songbird. All ages and classes also delight in kite flying and boating on rivers and lakes (for those close to water). Young men also enjoy rooster and cricket fights.

One set of activities, known as the Four Noble Recreations, are also popular at all levels. They are painting, calligraphy, playing the qin ("lute") and *weiqi*. *Weiqi*, known in Japan as Go, involves careful placement of black or white stones to gain control over a checkered game board.

Troupes frequently stage plays across Qing China, sometimes for the benefit of a sponsoring town or as private entertainment for wealthy families and their party guests. It's not unusual for honored guests to decide which play they'd like to see at that moment, thus forcing actors to memorize a dozen of the most popular works.

Gambling houses, brothels and the ubiquitous opium dens plague most towns and cities for those seeking such pleasures. These businesses usually offer suitable bribes to the police to stay open, with the bribes often couched in terms of *guanxi* between the madame and the police officer.

THE COURTS OF THE WAN KUEI

Wan Kuei scholars disagree when comparing the Quincunx's courts with those of mortal China. There are clear parallels between the two, and debate over which exerts the greater influence is ongoing. Many of the Confucian ideals enshrined in mortal social structures, like filial duty and propriety, are also present in the laws and customs of the Wan Kuei courts. Where Chinese officials might supervise the construction of canals or collect bushels of rice as tax, however, Wan Kuei officials guard Dragon Nests from demonic corruption or gather pure jade for spiritual tribute. The Quincunx sees their political duties as essential components of Heaven's will. It is proper that mortals follow elaborate government systems, and as the heirs of the Wan Xian legacy, it is proper that the Wan Kuei should also form their own systems to best fulfill their duties to Heaven.

TYPES OF COURTS

Traditionally, a court is an identity created by allied *wu* of common goals. In the past, however, Wan Kuei courts were more transitory arrangements than those of the 19th century. If one or more allied *wu* withdrew from the arrangement, the court lost strength and sometimes disintegrated. In some cases, Kuei-jin formed courts knowing they were temporary, pending the pursuit of a particular goal. With the growth of cities and calcification of both mortal and Kuei-jin culture, however, courts lost some of their fluid nature. *Wu* may still leave courts occasionally to move to another court, but as in other aspects of Gui Ren existence, this is easier for a *wu* of mandarins or jina than one of disciples.

Although courts form according to common interests shared by allied *wu*, there are two broad types of courts constituting the large majority of all Chinese courts. Political courts are, by far, the most common. They convene to oversee Kuei-jin interests and mortals of a particular geographic area like towns or cities. Large cities may hold several political courts, each with its own territory and tradition and each with a unique set of problems to sorely test a city's ancestor.

Social courts are less common than their political counterparts and are situated in the most unusual places. They form around social goals (like protecting and maintaining a Dragon Nest), areas of scholarly interest and even regional concerns. Chongqing's Bone Library forms the foundation for a few social courts, like the Court of the Jade Cloud and the Court of Humble Devils. At other times, they consist of several *wu* with similar scholarly goals, like the Court of Unblinking Scribes, who seek ancient texts for translation and preservation in the Blood Court.

Social court *wu* have little direct interest in politics, often believing themselves superior to it. Unlike political courts, they don't adhere to a common structure, since their goals vary widely from court to court. They remain free of the tedious extra levels of bureaucracy and red tape associated with political courts. What the social and political arenas share, however, is intrigue and inter-*wu* rivalries, even though conflicts in the former usually center on academic or non-political ideology.

Most social courts operate under the territorial mandate of a larger political court, forcing some interaction through the ambassadors responsible for maintaining relations between these neighbors. The exact relationship and division of power between social and political remain muddy at best, but it isn't uncommon for questions of jurisdiction and influence to be settled through shadow wars.

THE HIERARCHY OF HELL

Wan Kuei courts are the Quincunx's backbone, providing a crucial sense of stability for the Wan Kuei who face various terrors and obstacles nightly. To

understand their importance, however, one must understand the various roles constituting the Quincunx, the highest levels of which contain those individuals with both exceptional talent and connections.

Bestowed Ancestor of the Celestial Realms

At the pinnacle of the Quincunx mountain sits the Bestowed Ancestor, arguably the most influential Kuei-jin in all of Asia. The Quincunx is a mighty political and social system backed by the resources and commitment of thousands of Wan Kuei. The Bestowed Ancestor is their voice, their heart and their spirit, speaking with all the power it implies. His word is law and he is the ultimate authority and final arbiter of any dispute. On his shoulders rests no less than the Quincunx's prosperity, safety and dominance over all other Kuei-jin, Kin-jin and *shen*. He carefully scrutinizes the broad affairs of the *gaki* and *penangallan*, the barbaric Kin-jin and the Xiong Ren, all for their potential impact on the Middle Kingdom. The Bestowed Ancestor's ceremonial duty is to represent the Quincunx's Wan Kuei in Heaven's Bureaucracy and receive and honor her counterparts in the Yin and Yang Worlds, the high-ranking dragon-spirits. When a decision affects all Wan Kuei, ranging from restrictions on Kin-jin contact to proscription of controversial text, it is the Bestowed Ancestor who speaks for all.

It is the Five August Ancestors, the Wan Kuei governing the Quincunx's five regions, who choose the Bestowed Ancestor. Each August Ancestor sponsors a vampire for the position before furiously campaigning and scheming for their candidate's nomination for Bestowed Ancestor. It's not just the August Ancestors' opinions that will settle the question of candidacy. Many local ancestors and mandarins pay fanatical attention to the race, offering support and politicking as well to promote their favorite. There is tremendous prestige and honor in having one's nominee become Bestowed Ancestor, and the fall of more than one August Ancestor began with a disastrous nomination for the Bestowed Ancestor. In the end, the Bestowed Ancestor is usually a compromise candidate who threatens all five ancestors the least.

Wan Kuei who assume the Bestowed Ancestorship are often vampires of tremendous personal and political power. It isn't uncommon for former August Ancestors to occupy the post. Once the Five August Ancestors decide on a candidate, they perform a unique version of the Naming the Ancestor rite, presided by a Resplendent Crane bodhisattva from the Shaolin Temple.

The ritual's first portion involves the usual meditations on the Great Principle with high standards demanded of composition. The second portion involves a grueling vigil, lasting 48 hours, in a dangerous and distracting environment filled with flame and sharp implements. The third portion requires the candidate defend himself against three mandarins in simultaneous combat. Unlike the standard rite, the test also contains

a fourth portion known as Bowing to Heaven. To ensure the prospective Bestowed Ancestor can perform the proper ceremonial duties, the Five August Ancestors select a dragon-spirit, whom the candidate must honor without error in accordance with tradition. These ceremonies are tremendously complicated, ornate and littered with potential missteps.

Bestowed Ancestors may serve as little as a year or as long as a century, depending on the circumstances for vacating a post. The most common cause is retirement, especially when their next step is becoming bodhisattva, who have little interest in the political existences and fortunes of other Kuei-jin. Some Bestowed Ancestors actually experience *den* in office, realizing that the Quincunx's concerns are no longer theirs. For others comes the recognition that there is no new enlightenment in the role of Bestowed Ancestor; they must walk a different path to reach bodhisattva.

Historically, Bestowed Ancestors step down suddenly and with little warning. This has a decidedly chaotic effect on the Quincunx, who must begin the process anew each time. On rare occasions, Bestowed Ancestors do bring disgrace to themselves, facing the Eye of Heaven to expiate their shame. Some Bestowed Ancestors fall victim to accidents, usually incurred while on dangerous spiritual pilgrimages, while others fall to Yomi assassins. Thankfully, corruption of a Bestowed Ancestor is rare. The Bestowed Ancestor is under greater scrutiny than any other Kuei-jin, making the concealment of Yomi-taint that much harder.

The Five August Ancestors

China falls into five broad geographic regions known as the Five August Courts of the Quincunx, each governed by an August Ancestor. The August Ancestors also carry their court's name, like the Bone or Jade Ancestor. Although the rank of August Ancestor is still rarified, they concern themselves more with concrete and practical matters than the Bestowed Ancestor, whose duties involve abstract and ceremonial components.

The August Ancestors' duties are primarily supervisory (though they also conduct ceremonial duties to maintain relations with their spiritual counterparts). Each Quincunx region hosts countless courts and local ancestors, and while local ancestors ensure their individual courts work harmoniously, the August Ancestors must maintain regional harmony. August Ancestors are the highest authority within their regions. They are arbiters of disputes brought before them, from the spiritual to the judicial to the martial. In cases where someone levies charges against a local ancestor, it is the August Ancestor who oversees the investigation. An August Ancestor also assumes proactive regional roles. If a protracted twilight war is taking a heavy toll on local Chi, for example, the August Ancestor might unilaterally intervene and settle the dispute, often to the disadvantage of both groups.

Although an August Ancestor's selection comes from the local ancestors of a particular region, the Bestowed Ancestor's blessing is a requirement. This often leads to local ancestors rubber-stamping the Bestowed Ancestor's choice since it implies potential *guanxi* in future dealings with the new August Ancestor.

The Bestowed Wu

There is no official recognition or duties afforded to members of the Bestowed Ancestor's *wu*, though unofficially they wield tremendous indirect influence (if also undefined and vague). Some Bestowed *Wu* members may earn official positions as Bestowed Advisors, a known and established position in the Hierarchy of Hell, but regardless, the Bestowed *Wu* has the ear and trust of the Bestowed Ancestor. For those who find the official channels of communication blocked, currying favor with a Bestowed *Wu* is an attractive and viable alternate strategy.

Wu

For Storytellers gauging the approximate social status of any ancestor's *wu*, assume that they inhabit the next lowest rung of the political ladder. For example, the *wu* of a particular city ancestor wield as much indirect influence and respect as the local ancestor, even though they are still subordinate to that ancestor.

Bestowed Advisors

The Bestowed Ancestor may create these temporary positions to administer unique and unforeseen problems. Bestowed Advisors wield status equal to August Ancestors, but their direct influence and power remains variable and highly dependent on the Bestowed Ancestor's whims. They speak with the Bestowed Ancestor's voice and must often travel across China, but these positions are always temporary, even though that may range from a single year or a single decade. If the Bestowed Ancestor steps down before his Advisors complete their assignments, it is common courtesy for his Advisors to also resign out of respect. If that assignment is a true threat to the Quincunx, the next Bestowed Ancestor will typically appoint someone else to resolve the issue, though this is not always the case.

Many Dharma ancestors heading specific Quincunx-wide commissions also fall into this rank, since their duties last only until the completion of their objective. The Bestowed Advisor (sometimes known as the Ancestor for the... Commission) also has a small entourage of aides and adjuncts in the form of mandarin advisors and jina lieutenants to help him in his task.

The Hidden Ministers

Each August Ancestor normally appoints five Wan Kuei as Hidden Ministers to oversee the fundamental

areas of vampire society. Like the August Ancestor, the Hidden Ministers have regional authority over their respective portfolios, though the August Ancestor may overrule any Hidden Ministers' decision (risking undermining the Minister's image). The Ministries, in order of importance and prestige, are Jade, Rites, *Shen*, War, and the Garden (mortals). A sixth post exists, though it remains unmentioned both for its role among the Hidden Ministers and because it upsets the august balance inherent in the number "five." That role is the Hidden Minister of Hushed Lanterns.

The Hidden Minister of Jade collects and dispenses funds for the court, whether as traditional mortal currency or as jade. Each August Court maintains a treasury to lend aid or fund projects benefiting the court and all its members, but the system is often rife with minor corruptions and embezzlement is not uncommon. The treasury also handles jade, or more specifically, high-quality jade suitable for investing with Chi, creating protective charms and using in rites like Imbuing the Jade or in sacrifices to Yin and Yang spirits. Every regional court must pay the August Court a yearly jade tax as a form of brotherhood payment.

The Hidden Minister of Rites oversees a broad range of activities, including ensuring the just and fair execution of local shadow wars. Anyone who feels a particular shadow war was unfair or biased may appeal (if they survived) to the Hidden Minister if they find no redress at the local level. The Minister of Rites approves, often tacitly, any accusations of *akuma* or Yomi-taint, and has the power to investigate and condemn local ancestors if necessary. The Hidden Minister of Rites also safeguards the region's feng shui and overall vitality of Dragon Nests and lines.

The Hidden Minister of *Shen* is a diplomatic post with a dual purpose. This position's public mandate is maintaining relations with regional *shen*, including Xiong Ren, *hsien*, *chi'n ta*, ghosts and spirits. The Hidden Minister of *Shen* spends his time flitting from party to summit, sharing banquets, words and treaties with *shen*, and ensuring the prevention of violent conflict. This position's private mandate, however, is advising the August Ancestor of exploitable weaknesses in rival *shen*, turning the Minister into a gentleman spy of sorts.

When all else fails and open conflict is inevitable, the Hidden Minister of War is often the general directing regional Kuei-jin forces against the enemy. Until recently, this Hidden Minister concerned himself with *shen*-related conflicts. Unfortunately, the Kin-jin "invasion" as well as growing foreign influence places the Hidden Minister of War at odds with his contemporaries. The Minister is normally responsible for organizing resistance against specific adversaries. This includes commandeering whatever resources the August Court can muster, as well as detailing battle plans and tactical objectives (pending approval from the Bestowed Ancestor and the Five August Ancestors). The Hidden Minister of War,

however, faces a conundrum born from the dynamic conflict between practicality versus tradition. It is the Minister's role to use any necessary advantages to the Quincunx's benefit, even if it means borrowing from the West's superior technology. This decision goes against the status quo and traditional-minded Quincunx who sees any foreign influence as inherently corruptive and decidedly unwanted. This opposition currently hamstringing the Quincunx from launching an effective campaign against the barbarian invaders.

The Hidden Minister of the Garden tends to regional mortal affairs, safeguarding "the proper and virtuous well-being of the populace." While this might seem a Herculean task, most Ministers of the Garden are troubleshooters. If a particular city faces famine or extreme poverty, the Hidden Minister intervenes, instructing local mandarins to implement relief efforts through Scarlet Screens or find out why the situation exists (since extended epidemics sometimes indicates Heaven is not pleased with a situation). If she feels a community isn't celebrating important festivals with proper enthusiasm, she might order local Wan Kuei to punish the inhabitants.

Finally, the Minister of Hushed Lanterns is an unknown post, one deliberately kept hidden to all but the August Ancestors and the other Ministers. The Minister of Hushed Lanterns is a troubleshooter of sorts, handling "unpleasant problems" and embarrassing situations the August Ancestor or Ministers don't want to handle directly. Perhaps an influential ancestor has become *akuma*, or the Minister of Jade himself is grossly incompetent. At that time, the Minister of Hushed Lanterns intervenes and "rectifies" the situation. In capacity as fixer, this Minister answers only to the August Ancestor. All Minister-related requests must go through the Ancestor first.

City Ancestor

In large cities with multiple courts, the inevitable protracted disputes and twilight wars are a strain on a court's members and resources, necessitating an arbiter in the form of city ancestor. This is a temporary position born of local circumstance, and is usually assigned by a Bestowed Advisor or even a Hidden Minister of Rites. This Wan Kuei oversees the entire city's affairs and courts, even drawing upon any court's resources as she sees fit. City ancestors hoping to remain popular, however, must never rely too heavily on one court, for fear of accusations of favoritism. Quincunx law also allows for a city ancestor's removal if the local ancestors unanimously agree.

In most cases, the city ancestor's skill as arbiter isn't a matter of forcing both sides into a reconciliation; that's the technique of barbarians. Instead, the city ancestor must find a suitable compromise that allows both sides to save face and not appear weak in their decision, regardless of the settlement. The city ancestor's job is to make all parties look good, thus forestalling any future initiatives by disgruntled parties looking for revenge.

Local Ancestor

All the ranks in the Quincunx hierarchy above this one are mostly supervisory. A local ancestor, on the other hand, is a ruler of singular power. No Wan Kuei rises to the rank of ancestor without wielding considerable personal influence, Dharmic enlightenment and political acumen. A local ancestor listens to the advice of his mandarins and jina, but doesn't need their approval.

Few candidates engage in as much political infighting and maneuvering as those jockeying for the position of local ancestor. This is a watershed station, for beyond it lies the vaunted arches of the Quincunx's upper crust. None of the positions above this are even attainable without serving as local ancestor first, and Kuei-jin history is filled with stories of the shrewd and ambitious local ancestor becoming an August Ancestor in relatively quick succession. Still, the while the lobbying to attain ancestorship is great, many earn this position through carefully cultivated allies and personal shrewdness.

Yin & Yang Ambassador

Any fool can dabble in the Spirit Worlds, but it takes a special mind to fathom and appreciate either the numbing cold of the Yin Realms or the dynamic heat of the Yang Realms. The Yin Ambassador serves the local ancestor as her bridge with the local Yin World and its frightening realms. Normally pulled from Bone Flower or Resplendent Crane stock (though a Black Axis Scholar diplomat is not unusual), the Yin Ambassador understands the nuances and customs of ghostly society, as well as the political situations within the Jade Kingdom and other such realms.

Conversely, the Yang Ambassador is the analogue to the Yin emissary, providing a bridge to the dynamic and vibrant Yang World. Recruited mostly from the Thrashing Dragon and even Devil-Tiger Dharmas, the Yang Ambassador is well versed with the customs and etiquette necessary for dealing with spirits like the *kami* or with the denizens comprising the Dragon Kingdom of the Sea.

Regardless, the ambassadors are advisors on matters relating to the Yin and Yang Worlds and experts on the Chi usage of their particular domain. Often times, these emissaries advise and teach *hin* and disciples how to handle Chi Imbalance or use the Chi Arts to their full effect. Most often, however, the ambassadors oversee the court rituals dealing with spirits, negotiate with its denizens on behalf of the local ancestor and deal with any breaches of protocol between the court and its spirit allies.

The Five Ministers

Almost a perfect counterpart to the Hidden Ministers serving each August Ancestor, the Five Ministers aid the local ancestor in much the same way (though this lot usually answers directly to the Hidden Ministers of their region). Indeed, they act as proxies for their superiors, carrying out decisions handed down by the Hidden Ministers verbatim, but on a local level.

Like their superiors, the Five Ministers encompass the offices of Jade, Rites, *Shen*, War and the Garden. Unlike the Hidden Ministers, however, there is no Minister of Hushed Lanterns because the position remains unknown to Kuei-jin of this rank. The Five Ministers are of mandarin status, though in regions beset by high Kuei-jin attrition, a jina may also become minister *pro temp* on recommendation of the local ancestor until they find a suitable replacement.

The Minister of Jade deals with the local treasury, and is responsible for collecting regional taxes and tributes to the Hidden Minister above her. She also supplies the Yin and Yang Ambassadors with the necessary jade for appeasing the spirits during official functions.

The Minister of Rites supervises local shadow wars and helps determine the conflict's victor if there is no city ancestor to handle the duties. Often times, the Minister of Rites and the city ancestor are one in the same. If a participant wishes to challenge this minister's ruling in a conflict, they may petition the matter before the local Hidden Minister of Rites. The Minister may also investigate charges and suspicions of heresy and even detain suspected *akuma* (as an Inquisitor of sorts), but only the local Hidden Minister or local ancestor may officially charge anyone of being *akuma* (though, in truth, this doesn't stop others from making the accusation). The Minister of Rites is merely the eyes and ears for his superior.

The Minister of *Shen* is every bit the ambassador the Hidden Minister is when dealing with *shen*, even though the Quincunx officially treats him as an aide to the region's Hidden Minister. This role requires the Kuei-jin to handle all mundane aspects of ambassadorship with all *shen* save the Ten Thousand Spirits, who remain under the Yin and Yang Ambassadors' domain. Still, this Minister acts as spy and intermediary with local *shen*. Only when a matter involves an entire court (Kuei-jin or otherwise) does the Hidden Minister of *Shen* intervene.

If the Hidden Minister of War is a Quincunx general, then the Minister of War serves as his adjunct. This Minister has little to do with the actual fighting, and is instead the eyes, ears and mouthpiece through which the Hidden Minister's orders issue forth, and through whom the Hidden Minister receives his information. The Minister of War is also a quartermaster of sorts, ensuring that the local Kuei-jin have the necessary supplies during times of conflict and requisitioning the necessary stock from his superior or from neighboring War Ministers.

As with the previous examples, the Minister of the Garden oversees regional mortal concerns on behalf of the local Hidden Minister, until the Hidden Minister deems the situation severe enough to warrant his personal attention. This Minister also supervises local festivals and holidays, ensuring mortal participation through a network of Scarlet Screens serving various temples and shrines.

First Oni: The General of Hell

The position of First Oni is an odd one, for it carries far more power than its status suggests. The First Oni, as General of Hell, is often a powerful figure indeed. He is normally a Devil-Tiger of mandarin rank and oversees the security of the entire region. The only reason this rank doesn't earn higher status in the Quincunx hierarchy is because of the power and influence a First Oni already wields. To place him closer to the Five August Ancestors would be to risk a popular coup and give one Dharma (the Devil-Tigers) an uneven advantage within the Quincunx's hierarchy.

First Oni is akin to a warlord, overseeing regional security, protecting it against *akuma* and Yomi influences and usually heading sanctioned campaigns against enemies. There is often confusion over the difference between First Oni and Minister of War, especially during conflicts, but the distinction is simple. The Minister and Hidden Minister of War are both bureaucrats, ensuring their forces are well stocked and organized for battle. They have everything to do with stock and little to do with manpower. The First Oni, however, is often the field general and warrior of repute, coordinating and leading the various *wu* on and off the battlefield. The Minister of War may relay information and strategy, but it falls to the First Oni to direct those forces as befits the situation.

Naturally, the arena of First Oni is not exclusively that of war; instead, First Oni oversees the training of various "firebird," or southern oriented, *wu*. Additionally, he directs the efforts of local Infant Devil Civilizer Societies and maintains the court's kennels for those *chih-mei* too incorrigible to save from their state. The First Oni and his assistants train those deemed beyond redemption to serve as obedient pack hounds through a brutal program of torture and hardship.

Infant Devil Civilizer (sometimes same as First Oni)

There is a when and where for a parent's gentle persuasion, but during the taming of wild *chih-mei* is not such a time. Into this role steps the Infant Devil Civilizer, the supervisor of various local Infant Devil Civilizing Societies' efforts to reclaim wild *chih-mei*. Most often the First Oni and Infant Devil Civilizer are one in the same, but when the First Oni has too many duties to properly attend to this function of his role (during times of war or upheaval), he may choose an Infant Devil Civilizer to handle the hunting, training and kenneling of these wild vampires.

Unfortunately, becoming Kuei-jin is a hard existence. The Infant Devil Civilizer is the beginning of that often tortured path. He must inflict seemingly cruel punishment to bring the *chih-mei* from his frenzied state, but without crossing the fine line that might brand him a monster as well. Additionally, the Infant Devil Civilizer oversees the reclamation of *chih-mei* and insures the Devil-Tiger societies are properly trained for such duties; he also has many contacts and resources among the Spirit Worlds to

alert them of regional *chih-mei* disturbances. At no time, however, does he give assignments to track a particular wild vampire. Instead, he alerts all the *wu* beneath him and lets them contend with the matter. In this manner, the Infant Devil Civilizer is a game warden of sorts, directing the hunters to the best safari spots.

The recovery of such creatures is a sport, and many Civilizers compete with one another using their monthly quota as a betting margin. It's for this reason that a Civilizer might send a *wu* into neighboring territory, if only to deprive his opponent's kennels for the sake of the bet.

Local Ancestor's Wu

Like the Bestowed *Wu*, the local ancestor's *Wu* enjoys significant unofficial influence. Such a *wu* often finds itself courted by individuals hoping to catch the local ancestor's attention or alternatively, a target for the ancestor's enemies. Regardless, many local ancestors ensure their former *wu* is comfortable by offering them positions as Inquisitors for the Minister of Rites, adjuncts to the Minister of Gardens, couriers for court matters or protectors of regional Dragon Nests. The possibilities are endless, but such *wu* should also remember that the ancestor's enemies are now their own. Opponents may try and win the *wu* to their side, or use them to embarrass the local ancestor.

Court Wu

All courts have *wu* serving them. Most often, the courts create five *wu* encompassing the five directions to maintain an auspicious balance. The smaller courts, however, will typically content themselves with having at least one *wu* with five members, each owing to a particular direction. Regardless, the *wu* leader enjoys some influence that places him just below the rank of a court officer.

Court *wu* are the go-to Kuei-jin for any numbers of tasks (depending on their direction or affiliation). Some may serve the local court as a force of change or as researchers into occult matters. Others might be ambassadors. Regardless, a court *wu* is either a puppet or a catalyst for their ancestor or mandarins.

The Lowest

At the bottom of the heap below the *wu* rank-and-file lie Dhampyrs, Devil-People and (in the case of Devil-Tigers) Bakemono. *Hin*, *chih-mei* and sometimes heimin are below even these servants. Regardless his or her status, however, everyone has a place under Heaven, or at least a role to fulfill. That means there are no unnecessary people, only unfilled roles. While the Quincunx may frown or look down upon this lot, they know the ladder cannot exist without all its rungs in place.

CHAPTER TWO: INDIA

HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

Long before the Portuguese arrived in the 16th century, India occupied a semi-mythical place in the European imagination. Dominating the Indian Ocean trade routes, it was a multi-cultural crossroads, home to massive empires for centuries preceding Christ's birth. The succession of foreign traders and conquerors like the Dutch, English and French who followed the Portuguese contributed to entangling an already complex and intrigue-ridden political landscape.

Britain's slow dominion in India marks both the failure of indigenous power and the rise of the East India Company. It is not until the 19th century's latter half that the British become a racist and alien ruling class isolated from their subjects. Even now, however, they follow a path laid down by their predecessor, the Mughal Empire, whose lords were also foreign conquerors.

FROM TRADERS TO RULERS (1600-1799)

Portuguese explorers were the first Europeans to reach India since the ancient Greek traveler Hippalus, but luckily they knew what to expect. Indeed, their goal was to secure Muslim-dominated and centuries old trade in Asian luxuries like spices, silk and cotton. India played a vital role in this endeavor, with the Malabar Coast ports and their mainly Muslim merchants acting as the

middlemen between the Middle East and Southeast Asia. India was also rich, with Gujarati cotton as valuable as either silk or Indian opium in China.

Portugal's huge profits in India attracted the competing Dutch, English and French, leading Queen Elizabeth to charter the East India Company in 1600 to claim Britain's share of the Asian trade. The Dutch blockaded the EIC from direct access to the Spice Islands, delaying their arrival in India to 1608. The EIC was a purely commercial venture that was initially unsuccessful, thanks to a low demand of English goods in India and Asia. The EIC was forced to involve itself with local Asian markets to procure acceptable trade goods, thus enmeshing it in local politics as well as commerce.

Politically, the near impassable Deccan Plateau inhibited travel and trade, dividing India north and south. In the south the last great Hindu state, the Vijayanagar Empire, had collapsed under sustained Muslim pressure and left southern India fractured into a chaotic medley of minor states. In the rich north (and the most productive half of India), the Mughal Empire was in ascendance. Founded by a warrior people from Central Asia, the Mughal Empire was a feudal, militaristic state with expansionist fever, and it treated outlying realms as inferiors who must kowtow and pay tribute to their glory and power.

Initially, the EIC involved itself in an ongoing battle with the Portuguese, who had monopolized Indian trade. The Convention of Goa in 1635 ended the fighting, however, and the EIC entered a long period of commercial growth. In 1639, the EIC founded its first southern trading

TIMELINE

1600	East India Company (EIC) authorized by Queen Elizabeth.
1608	EIC lands in India for the first time.
1635	Convention of Goa settles disputes between Portugal and England.
1639	EIC leases the town on the Coromandel Coast that becomes Madras.
1661	EIC acquires Bombay from Portugal.
1691	EIC leases mud flats and anchorage in Bengal that later become Calcutta.
1698	EIC purchases Zamindari (tax landlord) rights to area around Calcutta.
1717	EIC granted tax-free status in Bengal, in return for small tribute to weakened Mughal Emperor.
1757	Battle of Plassey makes EIC the undisputed power in Bengal.
1765	EIC granted Diwani (lordship) over Bengal by the Mughal Emperor, EIC gains effective control over Bihar.
1773	Governor General appointed by Parliament to try to end rampant corruption.
1775–82	First Maratha War
1760	Pondicherry, last French port in India, falls to the EIC.
1764	Bengali revolt crushed by EIC.
1769–70	Bengal famine kills a third of the population because of EIC abuse of its traditional tributary rights under Diwani.
1775	EIC gains effective control over Orissa.
1779–1784	First Mysore War
1784	India Act gives British Parliament political oversight of EIC, but leaves commercial and local affairs in the hands of the EIC.
1789	Second Mysore War
1793	EIC replaces traditional concepts of land ownership in Bengal with freehold.
1799	Third Mysore War
1800	Nizam's Dominions, a major central Indian princely state, allies with the EIC; Travanco re-allies with EIC.
1801	Annexation of the Carnatic Coast to Madras.

port after negotiating lease of Madraspatam (later known as Madras) on the Coromandel Coast. In 1661, it moved its western operations from Surat to Bombay, which it acquired from the Portuguese. In 1691, the EIC settled the last great trading port when it leased a series of mudflats and an anchorage in Bengal, India's richest province.

By the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Mughal empire was decaying, its once liberal attitudes to its majority Hindu subjects replaced by a fundamentalist approach. At the same time, attempts to expand the Empire south drained its energy, slowly shattering into in a series of warring princedoms following invasions from both the south and north. The EIC capitalized on this weakness, securing tax-free status in Bengal from the Mughal Emperor in 1717. The Mughal Governor of Bengal objected, however, and the dispute eventually culminated in the Battle of Plassey in 1757. The Mughal emperor formally acknowledged EIC's local dominance in 1765, granting the company *Diwani* (lordship) over Bengal. At the same time, the EIC extended its commercial and administrative interests into Orissa and Bihar.

Diwani gave the EIC feudal dominance and numerous trade monopolies, but the vast inflow of wealth also led to endemic corruption. In 1773 the British government appointed a Governor General to Calcutta to stem the corruption, and in 1784 introduced the India Act. This placed the EIC under Parliamentary scrutiny, aimed at restricting further territorial growth, eradicating corruption and providing for revisions to the EIC's royal charter. During this same period, the EIC drove the French and Portuguese from India (except for Portuguese Goa), while British India took its first steps toward Empire in a series of small wars in the south. By the end of the century, many princely states believed it better to befriend the EIC than incur its animosity. While still independent in name, most of southern India was already under British influence via negotiations.

EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION (1799–1857)

Despite British Parliament's reluctance to acquire more territory in India, the ambition of local officials and the nature of politics between the Princely states makes it

1803–05	Second Maratha War.
1804	Sindia allies with the EIC.
1806	Vellore Mutiny
1812–19	Pindari War
1814–16	Ghurkha War
1815	EIC acquires effective control of Ceylon (Sri Lanka).
1817–19	Third Maratha War
1818	Rajput states ally with the EIC.
1824–28	Bhurtore Intervention
1824	Barrackpore Mutiny
1833	EIC divested of its last commercial functions, becoming purely an instrument of British imperialism.
1838–42	First Afghan War
1843	Sind Campaign, Gwailor Campaign
1844	Southern Maratha Campaign
1845	Sind Frontier Hill Tribes Campaign
1845–46	First Sikh War; Kashmir acquired by EIC.
1848–49	Second Sikh War
1856	Oudh brought under EIC rule.
1857	Sepoy Mutiny begins.
1858	Government of India Act replaces the EIC with direct British rule; First Northwest Frontier Expeditions.
1859	Sepoy Mutiny officially ends.
1864–65	Bhootan Expedition
1868	Second Northwest Frontier Campaign
1874	Naga Hills Expedition
1876	Queen Victoria appointed Empress of India.
1877–78	Jowakhi Campaign
1878–80	Second Afghan War
1885	First meeting of the Indian National Congress.

inevitable. London's loose leash over the Governor General exacerbates the situation because of communication delays between India and England. While the Governor General justifies most conflicts as defensive measures, the first half of the 19th century is actually one of aggressive imperial expansion in India.

The new century's first conflict consumes the powerful southern princely state of Mysore (1799-1800), using the sultan's relationship with the French as an excuse. The British annex half Mysore's territory, handing the remainder to minor Hindu rajas concurrent with a series of treaties with other southern Indian states. As a result, the EIC controls or allies itself with all of India south of the Deccan by 1802.

The EIC is wary of the powerful Maratha states of the Deccan plateau, which threaten Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, so they set out to safeguard their interests. In two wars from 1803–1805 and 1817–1818, the EIC accomplishes what the Mughals could not and break the Marathas' power. Bombay takes half their territory, breaking up the remainder between minor rajas.

As a sign of its growing power and scope, the EIC also fights a series of other small wars between the Maratha conflicts. Between 1812 and 1819 it destroys the Pindaris, large bandit armies composed of Afghans, Arabs and mercenaries: the last remnants of the old Mughal Imperial armies. This brings a peace to central and northern India unknown since the height of the Mughal Empire.

Further north, the EIC fights a protracted war from 1814 to 1816 with the warrior Ghurkhas of Nepal. British military prowess so impresses the Ghurkhas that they subsequently become reliable mercenary soldiers, happy to fight for the Crown. Another of India's traditionally martial sects, the Rajputs, also allies itself with the EIC in 1818, becoming a mainstay of the British colonial army.

Finally, after numerous campaigns to secure small states and enforce peace, the EIC attacks the Sikhs of the Punjab (northwest India) in 1843, fighting two subsequent wars in 1845–1846 and 1848–1849. The EIC annexes the Punjab, creating the borders of British India known to world maps until 1947. The northwest campaign also brings the EIC into contact with the Afghans and other hill peoples of the Hindu Kush. Starting with the first

Afghan war in 1838, the EIC (and its successor, the British Raj) launches campaigns every few years to keep the raiding tribesmen relatively under thumb.

The British government comes to terms with this imperialistic drive by 1833, when it removes the EIC's commercial duties and turns it into an organization dedicated to the domination and exploitation of India. This attitude change stems from the changes sweeping Britain with the Industrial Revolution, which not only instills an innate sense of Western superiority, but also creates both a need for raw materials to feed the new industries and new markets to buy British product. India fills these roles and fires the imaginations of social reformers eager to bring "civilization" to the natives.

From the 1840s, Britain makes a determined effort to teach English and provide a Western-style education to Indians. This creates a class of Indian Englishmen who act as intermediaries with the "uneducated" native masses. Meanwhile, British missionaries flood India in ever-increasing numbers, disrupting traditional society and religion without any regard for the cultures already in existence. The British further aggravate this social disruption by undermining the fundamental structures of Indian life.

Politically, the EIC acts much like any other invading force India had previously experienced until 1848. While it disenfranchises members of the elite, the lives of the vast majority only experience marginal change. The EIC leaves allied and subjugated states to their own devices, as long as the British receive uninterrupted trade and tribute and no internal troubles spill out into neighboring territories.

In British-controlled territories, the EIC deals with natives through the system of *Zamindars* (tax landlords) established by the Mughals. Only Bengal undergoes widespread changes, with Zamindars having freedom over their land and the method by which they gather taxes. This modernization leads to decades of disputes, making the EIC initially reluctant to disturb tradition in its other new possessions.

Lord Dalhousie, the 1848 to 1856 Governor-General, completely changes this acquiescent approach. He steadily expands the areas under direct British rule, using various excuses to pension off the princely rulers using small stipends. Between 1848 and 1854 he absorbs numerous Maratha states, removing the last princely rulers from the valuable Gangetic plain in a series of bloodless coups ending with Oudh's acquisition in 1856.

Dalhousie also pushes the foundations of British rule, building railways, telegraphs and all-weather road systems (though even before his rule, the Grand Trunk road from Calcutta to Peshawar linked the Gangetic plain together for the first time). Finally he enforces freehold tenure across northern India despite the social and economic turmoil it causes in Bengal. The result is a boom in plantation agriculture, especially in opium and indigo.

Plantations ruthlessly exploit the already hard-pressed peasantry, and many wealthy Indian nobles and merchants replace traditional feudal relationships with ones that model themselves on European commerce.

Even after Dalhousie's acquisitions there are still almost 600 princely states in 1856, many of which are uncertain of Britain's intentions. With the advent of more reliable and faster communications, that uncertainty spreads throughout northern India. Fortunately, British interference and modernization in the south is far less aggressive, resulting in fewer social problems. The principle risk being faced by the EIC is that Indians constitute the vast majority of their troops.

So long as the EIC filled the role of conquering lord, no different than a Raja or Sultan, using local mercenaries proved no problem. Up until the 19th century, even the European troops in EIC employ were mostly mercenary and not even English. The EIC acted exactly like any local Indian prince.

In 1794, however, the EIC created a formal military establishment. The local Sepoy troops are still mercenaries, now hired and trained in the European manner with no strong ties to the EIC, except what personal loyalty their British officers instill. Yet, the British are still dependant on Indian troops, as the Mughals before them. In 1794, there were 82,000 Sepoys. In 1856, there are 214,000. Most Sepoys hail from relatively high social standing, at least half being high Brahmin *varna* (caste) or Rajputs. British pay is not high, but it is regular, respected and, for military castes like the Rajputs, a welcome career.

Because of their relatively high caste, close proximity with the British and constant travel, the Sepoys become a focal point for growing insecurity among low-caste Indians of the Vaishya and Shudra *varna*. Issues dealing with pay complaints, not unusual with mercenaries, are compounded by cultural insensitivity, leading to increasing occurrences of mutiny. In 1806, Sepoys in Vellore mutiny after officers order them to shave their beards, remove caste markings and wear hats made of leather. In 1824, Sepoys in Barrackpore mutiny over hazard pay for serving in Burma and being forced to travel by ship in contravention of caste prescriptions. Other pay disputes led to mutinies in the Sind Campaign and Sikh wars, but the final straw is the 1856 unilateral decision by Lord Canning, the new Governor General, that Bengal troops would serve overseas, which incurs loss of caste by Hindu Sepoys.

The British arrogance and insensitivity toward cultural differences not only damages their relations with their Sepoys, but also strains relations with all levels of Indian society. While violence is rare, riots are not. Conspiracy theories run rampant throughout society — paranoid rumors that the British are going to enforce Christianity on all Indians or deprive all princes of their domains. With these forces arrayed against the British, mutiny is inevitable thanks to Mughal dynasty loyalists and northern merchants trying to undermine the Sepoys' loyalty.

THE GREAT MUTINY (1857-59)

By the start of 1857, the Crimean War in Europe leaves British army units in India at their lowest numbers ever. Most of the units are stationed in the Punjab, where the conquest of the Sikhs is in its final hours. In the 800 miles between Patna, west of Calcutta, and the Punjabi border, there are only five British Regiments. This lack of stabilizing forces in the area allows paranoia among the Sepoys to build, reaching a new high with rumors that the British are issuing new ammunition greased with pig or cow fat. There's even a "prophecy" that British rule will collapse on the 100th anniversary of the British victory at Plassey (the battle that ended the Mughals once and for all).

The Sepoys' discontent bubbles to the surface time and again, but the British ignore the problems as isolated incidents. First at Berhampur in February, then Barrackpore in March, then Lucknow and Barrackpore at the beginning of May, Sepoy regiments refuse to handle the new ammunition and are disbanded. Still the British do nothing. Finally, on May 10th at Meerut (north of Delhi), a major mutiny breaks out, more than British officers and loyal Sepoys can handle. The mutineers quickly gain control of the town and massacre the Europeans. The Meerut Sepoys, intent on restoring the Mughal Empire and thus Muslim primacy over their Hindu neighbors, march south to Delhi.

Delhi's general population supports the revolt, instigating another massacre of Westerners. Fortunately, British officers manage to blow up the arsenal, denying their adversaries a huge supply cache. The mutineers proclaim the Mughal Empire's restoration, bringing the aging emperor, Bahadur Shah II, out of retirement. News of the rebellion spreads quickly across northern India via telegraph and dispatch riders. In some cities, like Lucknow, Peshawar and Agra, the British disarm potentially disloyal Sepoys before the mutiny spreads. Elsewhere, though, Sepoys in fifty barracks join the revolt. The main centers are in the Ganges districts, but portions of Rajputana, Central India and Bengal are also affected... and where there is mutiny, massacres of Europeans and British sympathizers quickly follow.

Outside the Ganges Districts, loyal Sepoy regiments and the few British troops remaining quell the disorganized mutineers, but a number of rebellious units fall under the control of several Muslim nobles. Central command under the nobles remains loose and banditry is rampant, while in Cawnpore and Lucknow, small white garrisons and loyal Sepoys are under siege. Believing the Mughal Court is orchestrating the mutiny, the British decide that capturing Delhi is central to crushing the insurrection. Upon seizing nominal control of the Ganges Districts, the British march loyal troops south from the Punjab to besiege Delhi. In a strange turn of events, three British Commanders-in-Chief die of disease during their fight against the mutineers, two of them during the siege on Delhi itself.

The siege at Cawnpore ends in negotiations in late June, but mutineers under Muslim noble Nana Sahib break the truce, massacring the British troops and taking Caucasian women and children as hostages. At Lucknow, the small garrison holds out against as many as one hundred thousand mutineers (with many locals joining the mutineers). That the revolt did not spread further is mainly thanks to many central and southern Hindu princes who wanted nothing to do with restoring the Muslim Mughal. As a result, Sepoy troops from the south and most of central India remain loyal to the British and help to restore control in the north. Additionally, the British raise divisions of newly conquered Sikhs to fight, bringing them into the siege at Delhi.

On September 14, the British launch their assault on Delhi and capture it after six days of fighting. Large numbers of mutineers escape southeast toward Lucknow. Delhi and its inhabitants are the first victims of Britain's ire and desire for revenge. Troops burn large tracts of the city, loot the rest and massacre huge numbers of locals. Massacres are hardly unusual in traditional Indian warfare following a siege, but the British traditionally kept their troops under tighter reign. In Delhi, however, enraged white regiments instigate the burning, murdering and looting. The British capture Bahadur Shah II fleeing the city and exile him, ending the last vestiges of the Mughal Empire and heralding a new British one.

In the south, the British work furiously to raise the siege at Lucknow. The first relief column approaches by way of Cawnpore, but the mutineers massacre the hostage women and children upon its approach. The British continue against growing opposition and, on September 25th, reinforce Lucknow with more troops and supplies. It isn't until November 17th that the siege finally ends and the army evacuates the civilians. In March 1858, the British move to secure the Ganges Districts in a bitter three month campaign of atrocity on both sides. Tantia Topi, the mutineers' leading commander, retreats into the jungles to fight a guerrilla war after the British decisively defeat the rebels. This jungle war continues until April 1859, when the British capture and execute Tantia Topi, ending the mutiny.

THE BRITISH RAJ (1859-1914)

Even before the Great Mutiny ends, Britain rebuilds and strengthens its position. In 1858, the Government of India Act replaces the EIC with formal British rule, eliminating any pretense of Britain's place in India. Reformation and imparting civilization to the benighted savages falls before Imperial domination where only Britain's needs matter. There are now three clear goals; to ensure no further revolts happen and that the Indian people "know their place," to ensure the British government profits from its rule of India and to ensure British industry profits via access to India's massive markets.

British Parliament ratifies this new imperial policy in 1876 by appointing Queen Victoria Empress of India,

THE CASTES

Hinduism is perhaps best known for implementing a seemingly rigid caste system dictating one's social and religious standing in society. The caste system isn't a cruel socio-political tool to oppress the masses, but rather, a system of conduct and behavior to protect the purity of the higher castes and keep them from life's inherent impurities. In fact, the high castes have greater eating and living restrictions, and rely on the castes below them to handle the necessities they cannot.

The castes originally consisted of four basic groups called *varna*, which exist to this day. They are, in descending order of importance: *Brahmins* (priests), *kshatriyas* (rulers and warriors), *vaisyas* (traders and merchants) and *sudras* (serfs and farmers). The *vaisyas*, *kshatriyas* and *brahmins* are also *dvija* or twice-born; they distinguish themselves with a sacred thread worn over the right shoulder. The *brahmins* are closest to the gods and must remain the purest, while *sudras* are furthest from the gods and thus less restricted in their diets and actions. In relation to food, for example, raw food is immune to pollution, and thus acceptable to all. The pollution occurs during the preparation and handling of the food, meaning that only certain castes can share certain meals (*brahmins*, for example, may or may not eat meat according to region, but almost all do not eat cattle). This distinction also applies to occupation, death and marriage, which created the necessity for so-called "Untouchable" caste, a strata of society who handle the really polluted jobs like tanning leather, cremations, scavenging, etc.

Two important distinctions to bear in mind are: 1) Caste is not an indication of wealth and 2) The *varna* are the tip of the sociological iceberg. In the former distinction's case, land is an indication of one's wealth, and while the *brahmins* are often land owners, many may also live in poverty on par with *sudras*. For the latter's case, the *varna* are broad definitions given further form through *jati* (also caste) distinctions. This translates into thousands of sub castes according to regions and language groups. Thus, in one area, vegetarians of a caste may receive greater respect than meat-eaters. In another region, shepherds, farmers and cattle tenders may all constitute different *jati* within the same *varna* (*sudra* in this case). On this level, movement within a *jati* is possible, but movement within a *varna* (a hereditary position) is far more difficult.

ending reformation of Indian society in favor of total domination and economic exploitation, and replacing the notion of superior civilization for superior race. Thus, Indians can never aspire to British superiority, for they are "inferior" by virtue of color. Such justifications and the engines of industry make British colonialists even more arrogant and contemptuous of local customs than before the Great Mutiny.

Assessing the problems leading to the Great Mutiny, the British finalize the Indian army reforms. By 1870, they operate as British military units, dismantling the last vestiges of the feudal mercenary system the EIC had inherited. Officers now hail directly from the British army. Other reforms include disbanding Indian artillery units, making it impossible for future rebellions to attack fortifications. Another innovation is units with Sepoys of mixed ethnic and religious backgrounds, making cooperation unlikely except under British command. The British also recruit light units from martial cultures like the Rajputs, Sikhs, Ghurkhas, Jats and Pathans. Most believe the majority of other Indian communities to be their traditional enemies, suiting them perfectly to their secondary role of ensuring Sepoy loyalty. The British Colonial Army, however, only secures all these reforms in the 1890s.

The EIC's old, cumbersome and anarchic administration also undergoes vigorous and urgent reforms, many already underway before the Great Mutiny. The administration becomes streamlined and bureaucratic, run to the same unflinching standards as in Britain. Patronage, corruption, nepotism and the other traditional vices of Indian governance are weeded out. British interference also extends much deeper into Indian life, including the creation of a complete body of Indian law, mirroring British law, which imposes uniform regulations across all Indian castes, cultures and religions.

Such "reforms" were motivating factors in the Great Mutiny. To ensure it does not happen again, Britain moves to ensure their acceptance by both aristocrat and peasant alike. The acquiescence of the Sultans and Rajas is especially important, since many peasants only joined the Mutiny because their traditional rulers did.

To ensure loyalty and enforce modern standards, British appointees are to "assist" the princes in running their states. Yet, Britain also acknowledges their power and importance, offering significant public respect and generous economic incentives for their cooperation. Few object, except along the northwest peripheries, and even then only sporadically. The local princes lend British rule great legitimacy across India, at least initially.

Slowly, however, this cooperation costs the princes the respect and obedience they traditionally receive. This partially stems from the rise of an Indian middle-class and the concept of Indian nationalism that brands the princes as traitors. The fading respect for the nobility is also due to the princes' betrayal of their traditional roles. Educated and worldly, the nobility takes advantage of British legal

reforms to exploit peasants in manners unacceptable to traditional feudal systems. With military service now in British hands, great landowners ignore the peasant's needs (who once constituted the local armies) and grow rich off the impoverished villagers farming their lands. Peasants feel betrayed, breeding a simmering resentment that greatly undermines — and eventually destroys — rural India's traditional social system.

The British remain unaware of the injustices of rural life, or that peasants constitute the majority of the Indian population. Their lack of understanding of the backward and traditional nature of village life hampers their attempts at improving the lives of peasants. Despite numerous British reforms and programs, for example, most peasants do not understand or take advantage of the provided opportunities, leaving only the wealthier and better educated peasants (such as village headmen) to benefit. Thus, the new economic reforms only compound the old social inequities in rural villages, and the new class of small landowners is even more avaricious than the former feudal overlords. This, in turn, perverts what remains of traditional Indian rural society.

The effort to modernize India requires far more officials than Britain can provide, thus creating a vast army of Indian bureaucrats to carry the white-collar burden. In the 1850s, English universities were founded in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras to address this problem. Their graduates now fill the junior and provincial ranks of British administration and business, creating an affluent, educated, and English-speaking middle-class. Indeed, English is the common language allowing Indians of all ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds to communicate. An Indian national consciousness appears, distilling many traditional elements into a new unified form.

British administration and business also requires infrastructure for efficient communication and transportation. Side by side, telegraphs and railways penetrate India's heart, becoming a key part of the new imperial structure tying the country together. In 1857, there are only 200 miles of railways tracks in India; by 1869 there were 4,255 miles; in 1880, 8,494 miles and by 1905 there will be 28,054 miles. Along with the telegraph and innumerable all-weather roads, these railways open the most backward and isolated areas for travel, trade and British rule. Only the northeast and northwest mountains and deepest recesses of the southern jungles remain isolated from the new modern India. Thanks to these reforms, British power increases throughout the second half of the 19th century, reaching its zenith between 1899 and 1905, a golden time of imperial prosperity, superiority and strength.

All is not good for the Indians, however. Throughout the late 19th century, the Indian population grows strong, with a drop in disease-related deaths and bandit depredations. In 1855, India is 175 million strong, but by 1911, it soars to 303 million. Rural areas suffer from over

population, slums grow on the outskirts of big cities and many poor Indians are disaffected with their lot and the traditional roles society demands of them. Overpopulation exacerbates the famines regularly sweeping across India, a situation worsened by Britain's disinterest in agriculture aside from the collection of land taxes.

There are few new irrigation projects, while penny pinching undermines attempts to staunch the effects of famines. Combined with the population surge, this lack of investment leads to worsening famines that move from year to year, depending on the monsoons. Thus, it is always possible for some people to flee famine-struck areas. Between 1860 and 1879, there are eight famines, including the 1876-78 famine that kills five million people. For the next 15 years, the monsoons hold, but then, from 1896 to 1908, there are three major famines that spark massive and unprecedented population migrations and changes to India's ethnic balance.

As their rule grows more secure, Britain takes advantage of the opportunity to drain more and more money out of India, some of it indirectly by using Indian troops overseas or Indian money to pay for imperial rule. Instead of attempting to build the Indian economy to support their needs, however, the British government sabotages the local economy. British business interests receive preferential treatment, impoverishing India and distorting the entire country's economic growth. British "improvements" favor projects that strengthen their rule and trade (like railways and ports), rather than projects to benefit the average Indian (like irrigation canals, schools and hospitals) exacerbating the problem further.

This economic imbalance forces India's middle-class, who suffer directly from the economic hardship, to question British rule from the 1870s onward, a catalyst which eventually mixes with the new cultural/national drive to fuel the Indian nationalist movement. The middle class' growing disenchantment leads to formalized resistance against British rule with the first meeting of the Indian National Congress in 1885. It isn't until 1929, however, that Indian independence formally becomes the Congress' goal; it takes Indian nationalists (divided by ethnicity, religion and caste) that long to overcome their belief that British rule is necessary for keeping India whole. The rise of Indian nationalism takes Britain by surprise, but by the 1890s they have a well-developed secret police already in place.

Before the Great Mutiny, Britain's pre-eminence in the world is unquestioned. In the century's last five decades, however, other European powers rise up to challenge it. Britain has no intention of losing its place as the strongest nation in the world, and thus is determined to keep India under its thumb. Another rebellion will invite the intervention of other European nations. This risk grows when Russia expands into Central Asia and initiates a shadowy conflict of espionage, intrigue, corruption and border wars. Its proponents call this conflict the Great Game, which also encompasses spying on

various Indian Princely states and ensuring that no foreign power foments rebellion or subverts British subjects. This secret police mechanism easily focuses on the growing Indian Nationalist movement, but the campaign does not truly become vicious until well into the 20th century.

A QUESTION OF TIBET

In 1792, China sealed Tibet's borders, making it all the more tantalizing for European explorers hoping to penetrate Asia's exotic interior. While China eventually lessens this restriction, Tibet remains adamant in keeping her borders closed to Westerners. More so, Tibet refuses to trade with India for several reasons, chief among which is a fear of smallpox (the Tibetans believe that death from smallpox sends the victim straight to hell).

Britain, however, has fears of its own, not the least of which is Russia. In 1800, the distance between the borders of British India and Russia is 2000 miles, but by 1876, that distance drops by half. Fearing Russian incursions into India through Tibet, Britain infiltrates Tibet (creating the Great Trigonometrical Society in Calcutta) to map her terrain and establish the locations of her principle cities, such as Lhasa.

To this end, they use *pundits*, Indians disguised as Buddhist pilgrims, to penetrate the Himalayan shield between Tibet and India. The British measure a pundit's stride, and thus calculate distances according to their steps (approximately 2000 steps per mile), training these spies to keep a constant stride even when scaling slopes. The pundits carry a rosary of 100 prayer beads common to Hindus and Buddhists, measuring every hundred steps with a small bead and every half mile with the larger bead. Additionally, the pundits carry staffs concealing thermometers, prayer wheels hiding a compass and a strong box with a sextant.

The pundits prove invaluable in detailing Tibet's interior, inspiring great works of literature like Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. Their chronicles are even public knowledge, with the exploits of agents like "Chief Pundit," "the Patwar" and "Krishna" recounted in the Royal Geographical Society's *Journal*. The Tibetans, however, are brutal in punishing anyone assisting pundits and other spies. They confiscate their property or flog them publicly, and punish their servants by chopping their hands and feet off, then gouging their eyes out before leaving them to die.

SHADOW LANDS

INTRODUCTION

With India's rich mix of cultures and religions, it's hard to tell where myth ends and reality begins. Both Kindred and Kuei-jin claim to have arrived first, and the memories of their eldest ancestors conflict, their truths lost in time's mists. What is certain is that both sides have been fighting for as long as India's history itself, and both found solace in India's great religious movements, veiling their activities in its grim myths. In the Victorian Age, the age-old balance unravels slowly, sending the subcontinent sliding toward the massive bloodbath accompanying Partition in 1947 (when India and Pakistan split).

SHADOW HISTORIES

PAST NIGHTS

Both Cainites and Kuei-jin place their arrival in India with the Aryan invasions, millennia before the modern era's birth. Both also claim mystical involvement in the great Vedic epics defining the beginnings of Hinduism — the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Yet Clan Ravnos claims they inhabited the great Indus civilization of Harappa before the Aryan invasions, and that their bloodline's progenitor drove them from these lands, leaving no Cainites or beasts resembling the Kuei-jin behind. The hengeyokai Nagah and Khan claim likewise, saying it wasn't until the West invaded the pure lands of the sacred Ganges that the Centipede's (Wyrms) servants entered India.

Buddhist missionaries and Alexander the Great's invasion brought many Cainites and Kuei-jin to northern India. Intrigued by the new faith sweeping East Asia, numerous Kuei-jin followed Buddhist missionaries home while Alexander's army brought along a sizeable number of Macedonian and Persian Ventrue. Cainite and Kuei-jin found a land rich in culture, opportunities, blood and Chi. The Khan, Molokai and Nagah opposed both Cainite and Kuei-jin, but India was in turmoil following Alexander's invasion. Numerous dynastic wars crisscrossed the subcontinent, occupying the shapeshifters with other matters. In the midst of this chaos, another clan of Cainites arrived. The Setites came as well, seeking their ancient enemies in the Children of Osiris, who secretly entered India circa 500 BC after centuries of exile from Egypt.

The Mauryan Empire, India's first centralized and powerful state, arose from the blood and destruction that remained in Alexander's wake, building cities and encouraging culture. So long as the Mauryan Empire possessed strong rulers, like the famous Ashoka, the Cainite/Kuei-jin conflict had little effect. When the Empire broke up following the murder of its last king in 185 BC, however, the vampires threw their support behind different

factions and contributed to the Empire's demise. The Indian dynasties of the east and south were the cultural successors of the Mauryan and the exclusive domains of several Kuei-jin courts. The Kuei-jin then used the numerous successor states following the Mauryan to spread throughout southern and eastern India and Sri Lanka.

The Cainites eventually fell back to the rich northwest provinces, where they established domains in the petty kingdoms founded by Greek, Scythian and Parthian invaders (who had attacked the faltering Mauryan Empire). Like the Kuei-jin, they assumed the cultural identities of the surrounding mortals; the Ventruie became the Danava and the Setites the Daitya, the two clans constantly fighting for domain over a minor regional city. The Cainites and Kuei-jin also fought each other and the powerful Khan, their battles reflecting the mortal divide. So it continued, with the rise and fall of mortal kingdoms and empires allowing first Kuei-jin, then Kindred, to expand their domains.

The arrival of *Ashirra* (Arabic vampires) with Sultan Mahmud in AD 1001 overwhelmed the Indian Cainites and hurled the Kuei-jin back southward. The *Ashirra* nearly exterminated the Daitya while the Danava only survived by surrendering to the newcomers or hiding in the remote hills. *Ashirra* dominance, in turn, fell to the Kuei-jin accompanying the invading Mongols in 1221. Centuries of Islamic invasions followed from the northwest, as well peaceful conversions and settlement. During this time, the Kuei-jin held the high Himalayas, the island of Sri Lanka, the heights of the Deccan plateau and the jungles south of it.

By the time Britain became a power in India in the 1700s, the Cainites and Kuei-jin were under an uneasy truce; neither side had seriously fought the other for centuries, and it wasn't unusual to find the occasional Kuei-jin in a Cainite Court (or vice-versa) serving as ambassador, mercenary or merchant. Ideologues on both sides berated this accommodation as a betrayal of sacred principles, but it was convenient; only fanatics seemed interested in disrupting the detente.

The arrival of Europeans did not immediately disrupt the balance of power, especially since the Portuguese vampires seemed more interested in destroying the *Ashirra* than Kuei-jin. The Portuguese were outnumbered, however, and the *Ashirra* easily crushed them and any French Kindred entering their domains. Even when the British dominated Bengal in the late 18th century, Western Kindred could not establish a strong foothold there or in the south where Kuei-jin courts ruled the night. Even as Western dominance grew, the *Ashirra* continued ruling India's nights, ensuring that Western Cainites remained powerless to challenge their authority.

While most Western vampires concede India to the *Ashirra* at the start of the 19th century, the Tremere find India's rich magical traditions alluring, especially since their attempts to penetrate the Kuei-jin courts of East Asia were an unmitigated disaster. Using the East India

Company and various missionary groups, the Tremere manage to smuggle some agents into northern India but gain little initially, save the deaths of promising neonates and ancillae. Then, in 1829, the Tremere meet the Danava and Daitya, long hidden Indian Cainites flushed out of hiding when the mortal British suppress the Thuggee cult. In these ancient Hindu Ventruie and Setites, the Tremere uncover allies against the *Ashirra* and hatch a scheme to set India's nights alight.

RISE AND FALL OF THE NORTHERN COURTS

At the beginning of the Victorian Age, there are less than a dozen Kindred in all of India; most congregate in the northern EIC Presidencies of Calcutta and Bombay. The rest are Tremere agents flitting up and down the Ganges, meeting secretly with the isolated Danava and Daitya princes. The Kindred of Calcutta and Bombay lead a precarious existence, their every night at the mercy of the *Ashirra* and shapeshifters. While they know the Tremere are planning something (after all, when are the Tremere not planning something), they remain "nonpartisan" for fear the Tremere will incur the *Ashirra*'s fury.

The Tremere discover that the Hindu Cainites have allies and contacts within the *Ashirra* courts — Hindu vampires who kowtow to the *Ashirra* Princes and resent their humiliating role as well as younger *Ashirra* Cainites yearning for their own domains. Even with these resources, however, the Danava and Daitya lack the mortal allies and pawns necessary to overthrow the ancient Muslim vampires. It is the Tremere who convince them that the British can provide the necessary mortal power to depose the *Ashirra*, since the Muslim rulers underestimate the EIC's powers and misjudge their hold over local British officials.

Beginning in 1838, the Tremere move ghouls into key EIC positions in India, both by using contacts in the EIC's Board of Governors in London and by calling in favors from powerful British Kindred. With this increased influence, the Tremere encourage EIC reformers to undermine mortal Indian rulers of northern India, forcing changes on local culture. Simultaneously, the Danava and Daitya spread rumors of British intentions among the common people, inflaming tensions and sectarian paranoia. Throughout the 1840s, the Tremere and Hindu clans slowly build the tension, waiting patiently for their intrigues to bear fruit.

It isn't until 1856, however, that the Tremere plan reaches flashpoint when a simple mortal rumor about cartridges coated in pig and cow fat sets northern India aflame. Underestimating their mortal adversaries (especially with Britain distracted by the Crimean War), many *Ashirra* Princes immediately back the mutineers, encouraging mortal pawns to join the revolt. The *Ashirra* hope to expel the hated Christian mortals, thus reinstating the Mughal Empire.

Initially the British suffer beneath the punishing onslaught, but as the Tremere expected, the British rebound and take the offensive, felling city after city. In

the bloodshed, fire and chaos of the sieges of Delhi, Lucknow and Cawnpore, the Tremere, their Hindu Cainite conspirators and various Western vampire freebooters overthrow the cities' Ashirra rulers and extinguish Muslim Cainites by the dozen. Even as the mortal war ends, this shadow war continues in Peshawar, Agra and dozens of smaller cities from the Bay of Bengal to the Punjab. The Tremere don't lead all the fighting, letting many younger Ashirra improve their standings by destroying their sires and "betters." The Kuei-jin don't partake of this bloodshed, but carefully observe the power the British wield and the tactics of their Western counterparts.

The violence dies down quickly, leaving half of north India's courts in the hands of Western or Hindu Cainites. Traditional Ashirra princes lose almost every major city they held, except Lahore and Bombay. Younger Ashirra seize power in many smaller cities, but soon find themselves severely pressed by resurgent Hindu Cainites and by Kuei-jin from the south. The Hindu clans revel in their newfound power, purging Ashirra Cainites from their new domains and vastly increasing their numbers by mass Embrace of suitable Brahmin caste notables. Yet the Hindu clans are as unsuited to dealing with the British as the Ashirra Princes they replace; ambitious Western vampires quickly find important roles in many Danava and Daitya courts.

Only two cities fall under direct Western control: Delhi and Calcutta. Even with the Kindred streaming in during the Great Mutiny, there aren't enough Western Cainites in India to hold more cities. In Calcutta and Delhi, Cainites are merely the first among equals, who welcome both Hindu and Ashirra vampires. The Tremere, many of whom go 'native' and call themselves *Trimira*, open numerous Chantries and are easily the most influential clan in northern India. All Kindred, however, work together regardless their background to stem raids by both shapeshifters and Kuei-jin.

THE SERPENTS OF THE SOUTHERN COURTS

Initially, the Kuei-jin welcome British intervention in India. While as uncouth as all other white men, the British do not bring aggressive missionaries with them and aren't interested in overthrowing the local Hindu princes. Even as the Victorian Age progresses and the EIC becomes more aggressive, Kuei-jin attitudes remain positive since British aggression falls mostly on the Muslim states. Even better, in overthrowing Muslim states like Mysore and replacing them with minor Hindu Rajas, the British facilitate the Kuei-jin's growing influence. The Kuei-jin don't see the small British enclaves as a threat, especially when the Westerners are easy to manipulate as any other mortal. Western Cainites occasionally attempt to establish domains in Kuei-jin territory, especially in Madras, but the Cathayans treat these more as sport than threat.

The Kuei-jin's encouragement ends with the Great Mutiny. In the beginning, the Kuei-jin courts neither encourage or discourage their Scarlet Screens' involvements, since war provides a great deal of Chi. As

the battles to the north unfold, however, the Kuei-jin quickly realize just how much power these Europeans possess — and how little they truly understand them. The Kuei-jin are gripped with fear by the possibility of similar Cainite machinations against them. Some even argue for revolt, but most ancestors and mandarins believe they would fare as badly as the Ashirra and their mortal pawns. Instead, many courts direct their resources to wooing the new middle-class developing among the Western-educated Indians. Without the mortal caste limitations hindering Hindu vampires, the Kuei-jin have few scruples about this new class, especially considering the power they wield within the structure of British administration and business.

Over the century, the Kuei-jin courts grow stronger as the British hold over India strengthens, thanks to famines and other colonial-related atrocities that send more Indians into Yomi. These new Kuei-jin prove extremely troublesome to the courts, however, with both their caste restrictions and cross-class resentment lingering after death. Even though most are only *hin* and disciples, most newly emerged Kuei-jin are quick to establish power bases within India's evolving society. To counter this threat, ancestors and mandarins unleash low-caste *hin* on their rebellious peers. Their tactic backfires, though, when young disciples and *jina* side with the Westernized *hin*, sparking civil wars throughout several courts in the late 1860s.

The ancestors, mandarins and their allies are far more powerful than the young rebels, but are far less familiar with the intricacies of the colonial government. In many courts, the ancestors and mandarins successfully defeat the younger Kuei-jin, implementing draconian measures to ensure that new *hin* never challenge them again. In other courts, however, especially northeast in Sikkim, Assam and the Naga Hills, young Kuei-jin successfully use their influence with the colonial regime to defeat the ancestors and mandarins in a ballet of Scarlet Screens. In Sri Lanka, young Kuei-jin side with the large Tamil community developing during the colonial period, manipulating the antipathy between the Tamils and Sinhalese to allow them to dominate the north of the island.

By the 1880s the fighting ends, with the traditional courts bitterly resentful of the younger Kuei-jin's "betrayal." Shadows wars replace open fighting, and both sides spread their roots even further through mortal society in search of that ever-important "edge" over their rivals. It is through their mortal contacts in the nascent Nationalist Movement that the progressive Kuei-jin faction initiates their first contacts with young Hindu Cainites. Both groups have much in common, especially regarding troubles with ancient vampires out of touch with India's new society and a great dislike of the British.

END OF AN AGE

Throughout the 1890s, young Hindu Cainites and Kuei-jin grow increasingly close. The new members that the Danava and Daitya embrace following the Great Mutiny includes many educated Brahmins, who find the

religious restrictions of the princes and primogen particularly galling. Both sects, especially the Hindu Cainites who must deal with powerful Western vampires, despise the British, and develop close ties with one another through the growing Indian National Congress. There are tensions since elders on either side believe the other sect represents all that is evil. This stems the flow of information between the two sects, keeping Kuei-jin a mystery to Kin-jin, and vice-versa.

This plotting and scheming does not go unnoticed, but the younger Kuei-jin still rule their own courts while the Hindu princes and primogen lose control of their domains, mostly to the Western Cainites relying on the colonial regime to enforce policy. With few ancillae and neonates on which to rely, many Hindu elders retreat back to their ancient domains in the hills and jungles. At last, the Western vampires sense their opportunity.

As the elders retreat, the Western vampires launch strikes at the young Hindu Cainites while the Ashirra and shapeshifters take advantage of the infighting to undermine their enemies. The great communal riots and millennial cults at the end of the 1890s prove useful tools for hiding actions from Kine and vampire alike. The Western vampires do not fare as well as they had hoped, though, with the Ashirra taking full advantage of their distraction with the Hindu Cainites.

Despite losing many small cities in the bloodshed, Western vampires hold their own in Delhi and Calcutta as well as seeking refuge under the immensely powerful Ashirra Prince of Bombay, who holds the city against all usurpers during the Victorian Age. Through these long years, the Ashirra hold their peace, building power in much the same way Hindu Cainites had done. The Ashirra also maintain ties to the wider Islamic world, thanks to modern communications, preparing for the Jihad they believe inevitable.

With the Victorian Age in its dusk years, violence against Western Cainites reaches a head. Hindu Kuei-jin openly attack Delhi and Calcutta, as well as assaulting many small Ashirra-held cities in the Deccan Plateau. Violence flares across northern India as Ashirra pour in from the west to fight the Hindu vampires and Western Cainites struggle to hold their cities or stave off destruction. Increasing numbers of European vampires flee India or throw their support behind moderate Ashirra; Delhi and Calcutta both fall in the furious bloodshed, its Kin-jin extinguished to the last. The Ashirra continue holding Muslim cities, even against the Hindu Kuei-jin, but India's nights see greater and greater violence, finally culminating with Partition in the 1940s.

SHEN

The Khan, Molokai and Nagah have deep roots in India. Even after the appearance of vampires, the shapeshifters protect most of the countryside. Between the Hindu Vampires and the shapeshifters is a wary

respect, born from a shared culture and centuries of fighting. The hengeyokai offer no such regard for foreign vampires, however, leading to long, fruitless battles to keep Ashirra and Western Cainites from earning a foothold in India. Still, they manage to keep their territories vampire-free, especially the domains of the Rajputs and the Travancore coast.

It is the Europeans, not the vampires, who inevitably destroy the shapeshifters' power base through modernization and the accompanying Western Garou. For much of the Victorian Age, the Garou and Indian hengeyokai fight more bitterly than the vampires. These wars take such a toll that in the end, the Nagah exist only in secret while both the Molokai and Khan are at a fraction of their former strength. The Garou cannot replace them, however, lacking the necessary mortal ties, leaving Hindu vampires fill the vacuum. More than the Garou war, though, it was the Wyrms' corruption (and pollution) accompanying modern industry that undermines the Indian shapeshifters. By the end of the Victorian Age, entire districts are under Fomori control with worse yet to come.

Indian mages, collectively calling themselves *sadhus*, remain aloof from the problems besetting the subcontinent. The faith of common people and educated elites alike in magic keeps the Technocracy's power at bay. While the sadhus recognize the Technocracy's hand in British colonial policy, especially the massive railways and education initiatives, the nature of their rites and beliefs remains unknown to the European invaders. As such, much of the Technocracy's plans come to naught. By the end of the Victorian Age, the Technocracy is steeling itself for a more forceful push to drive India into the modern age. The sadhus remain calm in face of this coming storm, however, believing in the power of their Gods and in the land itself.

The spirits of the dead and of the land steer clear of vampires and shapeshifters. Their place in the heavenly cycle remains unaffected by modernization until well after the Victorian Age. The spirits play the role of sage, scholar and neutral observer to the struggles besetting this area of the World of Darkness.

THE HINDU KUEI-JIN AND KINDRED

The Kuei-jin and Kin-jin are not native to India, but the sub-continent's great religions have affected each significantly. Both adopted Indian faith in different, but, similar ways, and more so, without the mutual antagonism marking Kuei-jin and Kin-jin relations elsewhere in Asia. By the end of the 19th century, the Hindu ties grow increasingly stronger than any mutual hatred, even though both sects prefer their isolation and their secrets. A city is either Cainite or Kuei-jin, though there are no travel restrictions through the other's domains save a courtesy warning. Of course, there are ancient Kuei-jin and Kindred who remember the old ways, and insist on the "integrity" of their domains.

Hindu Kuei-jin beliefs remain discernible to other Kuei-jin, but are distorted to fit the Hindu ethos. They still adhere to the concepts of Dharma, though interpretation differs strongly. Internally, an ancestor rules courts, brahmins (mandarins) advise them, while ksatriyas (jina), vaisyas (disciples), and sudras (*hin*) obey and serve. Those outside the courts are called *dalits*, but are not inherently evil. A Kuei-jin's caste before death matters not when they rise; all must prove their worthiness through the pursuit of their Karmic destiny. The Hindu Kuei-jin do not oppose the Yama Kings the same way as in East Asia. Rather the Yama Kings are *asura*, those who oppose the *devi* or Gods. Thus, a Hindu Kuei-jin opposes the Yama Kings in service to their deity, not because the Yama Kings are evil. That said, a Kuei-jin serving the Yama Kings is following an equally valid path, and thus not treated as *akuma* as in East Asia. Needless to say, the Quincunx considers this view an apostasy.

Hindu Cainites are likewise different, Embracing only those of the appropriate caste. Thus a Danava or Daitya will likely Embrace mortal Brahmins (or perhaps Vaishya), the Indian Brujah prefer Ksatriyas, while the Nosferatu only accept Dalits. The Trimira stand outside this practice, happily Embracing any mortal with the appropriate skills and educated mien. Indian Kindred may also have borrowed many ideas of Dharmic advancement from the Kuei-jin. Some believe the notion of Golconda originated from the Danava; certainly many Hindu Kindred seemingly regard their vampiric state as an opportunity for mystical elevation... rising to serve in Heaven, as it were.

TOOLS

SOCIETY

Whether speaking ethnically, culturally or religiously, India has many different lands, under many different rulers, worshiping many Gods and speaking many tongues. At its height, the Mughal Empire never ruled more than half of India, nor did its rulers speak any Indian dialect (preferring Persian). With 179 languages and 544 dialects from 6 linguistic families, most Indians understand each other less well than an Englishman might a Spaniard. It is Britain who defines India as a single political unit, and most of its social and cultural impact revolves around how it forces so many disparate and often conflicting elements of India to live together in relative harmony.

Pre-Victorian India was a feudal society divided by class as well as caste, whose cultures were further split between the urban elite and the vast rural poor populace. To the masses, the rural village encompassed their reality. Sultans, rajas and residents might come and go, but the toil and hardship of village life continued regardless. In this green world of petty rivalries, caste friction and sectarian violence, the British were not initially a matter of concern, especially given the divide between Muslim

and Hindu or high and low caste. Peasant disputes revolved around these matters until the late 19th century.

To the elite, the British are either allies to manipulate or enemies to fear. Indian nobility is not hampered by the prejudices of peasants. Inter-marriage and alliances between Hindu and Muslim princes are common, as is betraying allies and oppressing the commoners. High culture is feudal in nature, and Britain's simple act of introducing landowners changes India forever. Suddenly, instead of holding land in the name of the emperor, sultan or raja in return for military service, the great nobles become landowners who owe nothing but land taxes in exchange for complete control over their domains. The landowners instantly ignore the traditional rights of peasants, though many senior nobles prove incapable of managing in the new money economy and subsequently lose their lands.

A new wealthy elite of once-powerful merchants and officials arises, making good use of their commerce and bureaucracy skills to prosper under the British. Of course, for peasants suddenly facing rent rather than a produce tithe, the changes are more alien still. Millions die of starvation during the 19th century, all because they can't afford to buy the rice they grew. It is these economic dislocations that mostly contribute to the Great Mutiny. The few Christian missionaries present have little impact, and the modernist reforms of the EIC to create a British-style yeomanry of educated and business-orientated peasants fails miserably. The reforms aren't even successful enough to worry the landowners, who are more concerned about the seemingly arbitrary land grabs of the British Governor-Generals.

The Great Mutiny illustrates two matters; the first is the fear of urban classes and landowners concerning the loss of benefits they accrued from British policies; the second is the lack of a cohesive Indian consciousness, given the sway of local and religious loyalties. Most Indians outside of the north-central region (especially Hindus and Sikhs) worry that the Mutiny will restore Muslim feudal rule. In the Mutiny's aftermath, the power of the feudal lords lays shattered though their wealth and privilege remains whole, while the old ruling class becomes increasingly irrelevant to the masses. Over time, their acquiescence to the British and disposal of tradition costs them popular respect as well.

Into the breach steps a new Indian middle-class. English speaking and with a modicum of Western education, this new breed steps across ethnic, religious and cultural boundaries. The Indian middle-class has as little time for traditional India as the British, and is mostly supportive of European rule as protection against the backward attitudes of nobles and peasants alike.

CULTURAL ASIDE: THUGS AND CULTS

A group of pilgrims makes its way home when a handful of travelers asks to join them; there is safety in numbers, after all. Later, the entourage grows larger, and larger still after more people join the caravan. Late at night,

one of the newcomers engages in song, and when the pilgrims raise their heads to partake of a particularly rousing chorus, the newcomers — all Thuggee — strike, whipping a coin-weighted sash around their victim's exposed neck. By now, in fact, the cult of assassins outnumber the original pilgrim party three to one, allowing few survivors to escape this ordeal. In a matter of minutes, it's all over; the Thuggee rob the caravan, offer sacrifices to the Goddess Kali Ma and dispose of the bodies in mass graves.

The Thuggee are an historical enigma, practically synonymous with India's seemingly alien and unfathomable exoticism. During the 1820s, Europeans and Indians know little of this cult, save that *dacoits* (robbers) operate along pilgrim routes, ensnaring the occasional group of unwary travelers. William Henry Sleeman, a magistrate and East India Company representative, encounters the Thuggee cult accidentally in the very early 1820s, and after turning one of its members against them, slowly unravels the thread holding the cult together.

While the East India Company is initially reticent to investigate this Thuggee threat (Europeans are never attacked, as they present too much risk), they eventually launch a full investigation in 1826, with Sleeman heading the entire subcontinent initiative by 1830. At this point, he manages to catch the reputed ringleader of the Thuggee movement, a man by the name of Feringheea, and convinces him to become an "Approver" or turncoat. Feringheea turns on his own organization, helping Sleeman unravel the cult and arrest 3,869 Thugs by 1840 and another 531 by 1850. In all, the authorities estimate (roughly, admittedly) the Thuggee murdered 40,000 people each year over a 300 year spree.

Regardless of their crimes, classifying the Thuggee as simple cutthroats is little more than cultural ignorance. The cult's prime motive in its murders is sating the Goddess Kali Ma from emerging and engaging in a frenzied killing spree that once destroyed her own husband Siva. The murders are sacrificial in nature, and always based on a series of omens; the Thugs choose their victims carefully, at least in the beginning, though some certainly murdered for greed when it came to rich caravans. The way birds and lizards act along the ambush path dictates the Thuggee's choice of victims. Most, save for the Hindustani Thugs, avoid strangling women (because Kali is female), as well as the crippled, blind and leprous, craftsman and even someone herding a cow or she-goat. The Thuggee also venerate tigers, and murder hundreds of miles from home to avoid being recognized.

The Thuggee's origins remain nebulous, but one of their greatest mysteries is why a group whose membership is predominantly Muslim worship the Hindu Goddess Kali. Some believe the goddess represents Fatima, the Prophet Muhammad's murdered daughter, while others say Kali gave two men the *rumal* (strangle cloth) to kill the demon horde of the demon-king, Raktavija. Still, a few wonder if the Thuggee are Muslim refugees affiliated with Hasan's Assassins, who may have penetrated the

Kali cult and eventually replaced it. This is certainly in keeping with allegations that the Assassins are actually beholden to the religion of the Grand Master, and thus not a Muslim institution.

THE STREETS OF VICTORIAN INDIA

INTRODUCTION

India's cities are both wondrous and terrible to European sensibilities: crowded and alive, colorful and dynamic, poor and desperate. The Victorian nights are much grimmer, the violence and poverty more starkly visible through the elegant glitter and swirl of colonial culture. To enrich an Indian setting requires a rough knowledge of those elements that create the bittersweet attractions of the subcontinent's great cities. As in all cases, Storytellers should add and mix as the game requires, remembering that authenticity should never exceed the chronicle's needs.

BASIC CITY STRUCTURE

Cities in India began as religious centers. Relatively small, they served as the hub of feudal government. Almost all of them existed in the subcontinent's fertile interior. The few coastal cities were smaller and of secondary concern.

The city core contained the palace and temple, while trade and crafts earned secondary consideration (if at all) in the surrounding areas. The Islamic invasion drastically changed the structure of coastal cities, bringing the marketplace into central importance alongside the palace and temple, even though the fundamental religious-governmental character of inland cities remained the same.

The importance of coastal cities grew through time, especially with the influx of Arab traders. Thus, coastal cities possessed a more dynamic character than those inland, while lacking their extravagant luxury and magnificent palaces and temples. The focus of these Islamic-inspired coastal cities was the port, making governmental functions subordinate to trade and the city rulers reliant on the powerful merchants. Populations remained relatively static, however, and the initial arrival of Europeans did not change the structure of the coastal ports except to add a different type of "temple" and better fortifications where the Europeans lived.

When the British exert their hegemony over India, however, they adapt the existing city structures instead of sweeping them aside. The coastal cities become the centers of attention thanks to Britain's fixation on trade and naval communications; Calcutta, Bombay and Madras turn into the economic and political hearts of the subcontinent. In this role, they become European cities in both design and construction, surrounded by growing Indian cities that support the European infrastructure at the center. This separation eventually enshrines British urban planning in India, with all cities having designated "black towns" and "white towns."

The British are the death knell for many inland cities whose only business is government and religion. The centralized politics reduce the rajas and sultans to their pensions and diminish their former capitals to penury and slow decay. Those inland cities chosen by the British as provincial centers have the European ideal forced on their existing structure, in some cases as a completely new city built inside or beside the existing one. These annexes become the white towns, and serve as the region's business and political hearts. The British also add new industrial areas to existing inland cities, attracting thousands of peasants displaced by famine or drought. Slums also appear throughout the 19th century.

As the cities grow throughout the 1800s, only the white towns receive proper sewerage and supervised building codes. The streets are wide and tree-lined, the buildings magnificent and monumental to better impress the natives. The British use thousands of native workers and heavy-handed policing to keep the streets clean, while the black towns grow into chaotic mixes of ancient Indian, modern Indian, European and slum. There is little or no separation of industrial, commercial and residential zones, or even of the wealthy and poor.

Slowly, the distinctions between coastal and interior city fade, even as cultural and ethnic differences diminish in the new developing megalopolis; cities cultivate cultures and identities all their own. This dynamism stimulates the intellectualism that spawns the urban middle-class backbone of the Nationalist Movement to come.

GOVERNMENT & SECURITY

British rule is governed by the rule of law, and its courts apply the law without fear or favor. Amusingly, the law is written for the specific benefit and protection of the British. A European can expect a trial under the same law as an Indian, but will never face the same consequences. His or her incarceration will even be spent in a separate jail. Indian merchants do receive fair treatment in disputes with European traders, but any Indian accused of a political crime may well face exile. The British rely greatly on a very extensive secret police and intelligence service to root out trouble before it proves too burdensome. There are also numerous police forces, most equally corrupt and brutal, some of which are recruited from specific ethnic groups like the Sikhs to ensure they are never caught up in sectarian conflicts.

POVERTY

The vast majority of India's populace have always been poor, but the 19th century sees the development of a huge class of urban poor. Street people and slum dwellers represent new deprivations of progress, and their numbers grow into the millions by the end of the Victorian Age. Aside from human suffering (missionary and charitable organizations alleviate some misery), the poor become fertile ground for other social ills. Slavery, sexual and otherwise, is perhaps the meanest fate of the urban and rural poor, and this

includes indentured servitude in some far corner of the British Empire. Opium addiction, mutilation to join a beggar gang, serious criminal activity and cult involvement all offer escape from the grim realities of poverty.

POWER & PRIVILEGE

The wealth of the British Raj is enormous. Indian aristocrats still live well thanks to their pensions, and the smart ones invest in the modern British infrastructure. Prominent merchants and members of the new middle-class also do well, becoming vastly wealthy on the backs of the poor. This small class joins the equally small class of Europeans living like kings on their European salaries or who amassed vast fortunes in Indian trade. In palaces built for the Mughals and those they build for themselves (often over old palaces, like a sheath) they party, play polo and indulge in petty gossip and backstabbing politics in a society the Mughal courts would have found familiar.

SECTARIANISM, ETHNICITY AND CASTE

Violent hatred between India's religions existed long before the arrival of the British, but progress stimulates sectarian conflicts to new heights, especially among the inhabitants of the growing cities. Poverty, ignorance, religious cults, crowded living conditions indifferent to religious differences and priestly demagogues all stir the religious hornet's nest. All this needs is a single spark, especially in the summer months when the heat adds to the tensions. Disrespecting a Muslim Imam, desecrating a temple, an ill-thought word at the wrong time, and suddenly the streets of the black town explode into religious riots that claim hundreds, even thousands. Unfortunately, most often these conflicts hide a vampire's influence, whether it is a Kuei-jin is hoping to strike back at an Ashirra or some European Cainite is looking to feed openly in the violence.

All major Indian cities also suffer from significant ethnic divisions and the ever-present Hindu caste system. Race, religion and caste are the three defining aspects of life in black towns, but white towns are no less immune, given their ignorance of local *faux pas*. The growing cities are not well equipped to handle different ethnic groups and castes living together. This creates conflicts, especially since some people seek escape from stifling traditions by converting to Islam or Christianity, or through Western education. Society's inability to maintain traditional restrictions and delineations feeds directly into crime, violence, and hatred of the colonial regime.

EUROPEANS AND EURASIANS

Due to the extensive and invasive nature of British intervention in India, there is a far wider range of Europeans in India than in most other colonial countries, including third and fourth generation European families who bridge the cultural gap. The British also show a remarkable interest in the local culture. While this is mostly a patronizing attitude, many British go "native," marrying into the Indian population and fostering Eurasian children who consider themselves Indian.

CHAPTER THREE: JAPAN

Japan stands out from other Victorian Age cultures in Asia. It goes from being the most isolationist country in Asia to becoming a player in world affairs. After resisting change for 200 years, it industrializes in mere decades. During this period, many Japanese feel angry, envious or bitter about the outside world. By the 19th century's end, however, that resentment makes them all the more determined that Japan shall face the Western powers as an equal.

MORTAL HISTORY

HEAVEN AND EARTH

The Japanese have a myth concerning their country's origin; when Heaven and Earth began, various deities came into being, including the god Izanagi and the goddess Izanami. Together, they birthed the islands of Japan. When Izanami died, however, Izanagi gave birth to three more deities while washing his face — Sun, Moon and Storm.

The goddess of the sun, Amaterasu Omikami, became ruler of the "Plain of High Heaven" while her brother Susanowo-no-Mikoto, the god of storm, received rule over the "Sea Plain." Susanowo's impetuous violence alarmed Amaterasu so greatly that she shut herself in a cave, plunging the world into darkness. Heaven's deities assembled to lure her out, creating a sacred tree and placing a mirror and a jewel in its branches. The deities then made much noise, drawing Amaterasu out of her cave to investigate the commotion. When she emerged,

she saw her reflection in the mirror. It was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen, and she left the cave to see herself more clearly. Light returned to the world, and the gods forbade her from hiding again.

For his part, Susanowo was exiled from Heaven and landed in Japan's Izumo province, where he embarked on many adventures. Among his exploits, he slew a monster carrying a sword in one of its eight tails. He made a gift of this sword to his sister, and ever since, the sword, mirror and jewel have been the chief treasures of the imperial regalia.

Amaterasu's grandson, the god Ninigi-no-Mikoto, received the "Central Land of Reed Plains" —that is, Japan — as his kingdom. Equipped with the sword, mirror and jewel and accompanied by other deities, Ninigi descended upon Mount Takachiho in Kyushu. Ninigi's great-grandson, Jimmu Tenno, became the first earthly emperor. He conquered the key province of Yamato, built a palace and celebrated his victory through ceremonies honoring his ancestor Amaterasu. The Japanese say this event marked the founding of their empire, and place it in 660 BCE. In legend, at least, the lineage of Jimmu Tenno and Amaterasu has ruled Japan ever since.

LONG EVE OF THE VICTORIAN AGES (1568-1600)

Although Japan's history before the 16th century is a rich tapestry of events and interests, it is at this point that the Western world reached Japan when, in 1543,

TIMELINE

- 1543 Firearms are introduced into Japan by shipwrecked Portuguese soldiers.
- 1549 Francis Xavier, a Jesuit, introduced Christianity into Japan. Oda Nobunaga courts him, hoping to use Christianity to weaken the influence of powerful Buddhist sects.
- 1573 Oda Nobunaga overruns Kyoto and unifies the home provinces, beginning the process of re-unification.
- 1582 Nobunaga is assassinated. His successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, continues his work.
- 1590 Hideyoshi gains (tentative) control of all Japan.
- 1595 Hideyoshi attempts an invasion of Korea with the ultimate aim of conquering China.
- 1597 Hideyoshi again attempts to invade Korea.
- 1598 Death of Hideyoshi.
- 1600 Tokugawa Ieyasu defeats his enemies at the Battle of Sekigahara and takes control of Japan.
- 1603 Ieyasu moves the capital to Edo (Tokyo), which becomes the largest city in the world.
- 1635 National isolation policy limits foreign (Chinese and Dutch) traders to Nagasaki.
- 1853 Commodore Matthew Perry arrives and forces the Shogunate to resume contact with the outside world.
- 1868 Meiji Restoration ends the rule of the shogun and restores the Emperor to power. The name of the capital is changed to Tokyo.
- 1872 Samurai class abolished by imperial decree.
- 1877 Saigo Rebellion
- 1889 New constitution comes into effect.
- 1895 Victory in the Sino-Japanese war greatly enhances Japan's international prestige.
- 1904-05 Russo-Japanese war; the first defeat of a European by an Asian power.
- 1910 Japan annexes Korea.
- 1912 Meiji emperor dies. Taisho period begins.

THE AINU

Japan's early inhabitants still survive in Hokkaido as the *Ainu*. Ethnically distinct from the Japanese, they possess lighter skin, heavy beards and thick, wavy hair. They practice little agriculture, but hunt a great deal. The Ainu's chief beliefs center on a cult of bear-worship. They raise bears from cubs to about three years old before sacrificing them as part of a yearly festival. Linguists can find no definite connection between the Ainu language and any other language in the world.

shipwrecked Portuguese sailors introduced firearms to the islands. The Japanese soon learned to make muskets of their own, and the art of the gunsmith spread rapidly throughout the country, thanks to Japanese nobility who adopted firearms with enthusiasm.

During the brief Momoyama Period, Oda Nobunaga rose to power and conquered the central provinces, razing the temples of militant Buddhist sects around Kyoto. He also courted Francis Xavier (the first Jesuit

missionary in Japan) and his order in hopes of using Christianity to weaken the Buddhists' powers. Nobunaga succeeded in unifying roughly one-third of Japan before a treacherous general assassinated him in 1582.

Nobunaga's chief lieutenant, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, swiftly punished the assassin and installed himself as Nobunaga's successor. Despite his questionable means of acquiring power, however, Hideyoshi proved himself outstanding in many respects. He tempered force with diplomacy and won many allies among those who had received nothing but hostility from Nobunaga. In the decade after Nobunaga's assassination, Hideyoshi brought Japan's turbulent pack of feudatories to heel and successfully unified the country.

Hideyoshi created a new bureaucracy and reshaped the map of feudal Japan, though his most far-reaching achievement was confiscating everyone's weapons except for the samurai, and introducing a rigid class system based a Chinese Confucian model. The new social order had four classes, in descending order of prestige: samurai, farmers, artisans and merchants. This placed wealthy landlords in a difficult position; they could declare themselves samurai (and assume the military responsibilities and costs this entailed) or remain a

commoner (thus becoming subservient to the samurai). Many chose to remain farmers, while others joined the merchant class.

Twice, in 1592 and 1597, Hideyoshi made two abortive (some would say megalomaniacal) attempts to invade Korea with the ultimate aim of conquering China; both attempts came to naught. Korea's King acknowledged the Ming Emperor as his suzerain, and China intervened to protect her vassal. The Korean people suffered greatly from the two wars, however, and would remember the invasions for centuries to come.

The political and military turbulence of the Momoyama period did not prevent the development of a rich cultural life, especially for Japan's aristocracy. This period saw a burst of artistic genius from Japan's swordsmiths, textile makers, potters and ceramicists, painters and other artisans. Japan also received many Christian missionaries, mostly Portuguese Jesuits and Spanish Franciscans and Dominicans from Manila. Despite some internal squabbling over profits from foreign trade and arguments over territory, the Christians mostly worked together to bring their God to the Japanese. An estimated 300,000 Japanese converted, increasing the intellectual ferment of the times.

EDO PERIOD (1600-1868)

Hideyoshi's heir was his young son, Hideyori. Before his death, Hideyoshi made elaborate arrangements for his five-year-old child's guardianship. His lieutenant and rival Tokugawa Ieyasu was chief among these guardians, but following Hideyoshi's death, Ieyasu decided to seize power for himself. Between 1600 and 1616, Ieyasu and his allies consolidated their positions, finally defeating the last of Hideyori's supporters in a siege against their Osaka fortress. Hideyori, his mother and their principal retainers all committed suicide, while Ieyasu caught and executed the last remaining family member, Hideyoshi's 8-year old grandson.

Tokugawa Ieyasu was scion of the Minamoto clan, and thus eligible for the office of shogun. He obtained this title in 1603, only to relinquish it in 1605 in favor of Hidetada, one of his sons. Ieyasu remained an architect of his clan's fortunes, however, and worked with his son to ensure that his family's position remained firm.

In 1600, some months before the fighting, Ieyasu showed favor to an Englishman stranded in Japan. Will Adams piloted a Dutch vessel that reached Japan with only 24 survivors out of a crew of 100. Adams impressed Ieyasu, teaching him about northern Europe, mathematics, navigation and maritime lore. He served as diplomatic agent when Dutch and English ships arrived and became a vassal of the shogun with estates in the country. The Jesuits in Japan tried discrediting Adams by denouncing him as a pirate, so in return, the Englishman told Ieyasu how some Europeans looked upon the Iberian Catholics as insidious enemies.

When the Japanese began trading with the Dutch in 1609 and the English in 1613, the religious bigotries of Europe soured relations with the Japanese. A bribery scandal involving Japanese Christians cast further suspicions on the Iberian priests, but more significantly, Ieyasu discovered what appeared to be a plot by Japanese Christians to overthrow the Shogunate with the help of foreign troops. In contrast, the Japanese barely regarded the Dutch and English traders as Christians at all, because they seemed so unconcerned with spreading their faith.

In 1612, and again in the following year, Ieyasu issued edicts prohibiting Christianity. These were not enforced, so in 1614 an edict ordered all foreign priests to gather in Nagasaki and leave the nation permanently. Ieyasu also ordered the destruction of all Christian churches and commanded Japanese Christians to renounce their faith, including a contingent of Christian warriors among Hideyori's troops in Osaka castle, whose battle flags displayed the cross and invocations to the saints. Ieyasu died in the summer of 1616, but his son Hidetada was even more severe, persecuting the Christians and rooting out their faith by force. Only in Nagasaki did Japanese Christianity survive as a secret faith, passed from father to son.

Europe's position in Japan was increasingly shaky. This culminated in 1637 with the Shimabara revolt. Hara Castle, on the Shimabara peninsula east of Nagasaki, became the center of a revolt against two local daimyo. The revolt took on a religious character after the locals barricaded themselves inside the castle and erected banners with Christian inscriptions in both Japanese and Portuguese. The siege dragged on for three months. The thirty thousand insurgents, including women and children, fought on even when it became clear their cause was hopeless. The military spared no one when the castle fell in 1638.

The English had already ceased trade in 1623 thanks to mismanagement and disappointing profits, but following the Shimabara revolt, the Shogunate also expelled all Portuguese. In 1640 when a ship arrived from Macao, the Japanese burnt the ship, beheaded all but 13 crew members and sent them back to Macao bearing a message not to return. Japan continued trade with the Dutch and Chinese only, confining that traffic to Deshima, a tiny island in Nagasaki Harbor.

The Tokugawa regime enforced this ban with cannons at Japan's ports. Furthermore, in 1637, the government decreed that no Japanese citizen should leave Japan, on pain of death. This proved inconvenient for Japanese fishermen blown off course into Russian or Chinese waters. The government rewarded two such lost fishermen who finally returned home from Russia after years of effort with life imprisonment — as a mercy.

It was not fear of foreign conquest that led to Japan's isolation, but rather, the desire to control dissatisfied elements within the state, especially the *ronin* and the *tozama daimyo*. The Tokugawa shoguns divided the

daimyo into three categories. The Tokugawa family itself formed the first class, while the *fudai* (hereditary) daimyo, who were loyal to Ieyasu, formed the second class. These categories received estates in the heart of Japan from Mito (north-east of Edo) to Wakayama (south-west of Kyoto). Some also received lands so they could act as a check on the third category: the *tozama*, or outer, daimyo.

This third category consisted of the lords who submitted to Ieyasu only after his first victory at Sekigahara (where he defeated the rival daimyo in 1600, after successfully enticing some of his enemies to change sides during a critical point in the battle). Their numbers included some of the richest and most powerful daimyo in Japan, the ones whom the Shogunate feared would obtain foreign weapons or troops. By closing the nation, they effectively denied the *tozama* daimyo access to the resources for a rebellion, especially since trade with the Dutch and Chinese fell under the Shogunate's direct control.

The *ronin* (wave men) were another problem. The aftermath of Sekigahara and Shimabara left many samurai without an overlord. As with the *tozama* daimyo, the government feared the *ronin*, (especially those of the south-west, near the foreign merchants in Nagasaki) would invite foreign help in an uprising. To forestall revolt, the Tokugawa Shogunate erected a complicated but very effective control structure. In a system called *sankin kotai*, every daimyo had to reside in the shogunal capital of Edo every second year, and leave hostages behind in the alternate year. The constant journeys to and from Edo and the expense in upkeep kept the daimyo very busy. The Shogunate also established a very effective secret police.

The Shogunate prescribed meticulous rules for peasants and warriors alike, affecting most phases of their daily lives — their dwelling places, their dress and the principles governing their social intercourse. For two and a half centuries this system kept Japan firmly in the Tokugawa's grip, though historians estimate there were more than 1,500 peasant uprisings during the Edo period. The *Bakufu* (government) crushed them all without mercy.

In the 18th century, Japan settled down to long years of stability. Small numbers of scholars sought to learn about the world beyond Japan, however, relying chiefly upon whatever the Dutch and Chinese merchants willingly imparted. As early as 1716, Yoshimune, the eighth Tokugawa shogun, relaxed the ban on the import and study of Western books though the restrictions on Christianity remained firm. This led to a small cadre of Japanese specialists in European and world affairs, but what they learned second- or third-hand excited admiration from some and horror from others. Some scholars argued Japan should open itself to foreign trade, build its own merchant marine and search for overseas markets and colonies, but this remained the minority

view of a few academics, many of whom spent time in jail for their views.

THE BLACK SHIPS

Isolationism becomes steadily more problematic through the 19th century's early decades. More Russian, British and American ships enter Japanese waters, and the Shogunate grants requests for supplies as long as no one attempts to land. In 1824, however, an incursion by foraging mariners prompts the Shogunate to replace this charitable policy with orders to shoot foreigners on sight. Such is easier said, however, than done.

As early as 1808, the Japanese discover their country's vulnerability when the Napoleonic wars brush against them. After Napoleon conquers Holland, Dutch vessels become targets for British warships. Nagasaki harbor's defenses prove useless against the HMS *Phaeton*. Reports of the First Opium War further reveal the West's power and capacity, and more government officials accept that Japan needs to know more about the outside world... if only to improve their defense against it.

In the end, it is not the Russians or the British who break Japan's isolationist policy. In 1853, US Commodore Matthew C. Perry sails into Edo Bay with four ships and presents the shogun with a letter from US President Fillmore, requesting that Japan open several ports for trade. It is, effectively, an ultimatum. Perry tells the shogun he will return in a year to receive his answer... and he will bring a much larger squadron with him when he returns.

The "Black Ships," as they are known, create a tremendous sensation on shore. Perry's expedition burdens the Shogunate with a terrible dilemma. Resistance would be futile, as the American ships can blockade Edo with ease. The laughable disparity in power would ensure the Shogunate's defeat and mean colonial status for Japan if they do not accede to Perry's demands. The Opium Wars show what an Asian country can expect after such a defeat.

On the other hand, if the "Barbarian Suppressing Great General" does nothing but acquiesce to the barbarians, he makes a *de facto* declaration that he cannot exercise his power. In fact, the Shogunate already faces powerful new challenges in the forms of a growing nationalist sentiment centered on the emperor and the *tozama* daimyo gathering their strength. To simply give in could also spell the end for the Shogunate.

To extricate itself from this situation, the government takes an unprecedented (and unexpected) step: it translates President Fillmore's letter and invites the daimyo to express their opinions. The daimyo respond with mixed reactions. Most warn that concessions now will lead to more in the future, while others believe Japan should fight to the end. A few, however, say that Japan's best chance for independence is to open herself to the barbarians, then study and master their techniques in order to better turn the tables on them in later years.

The *Bakufu* fortify Edo bay as best they can, but in reality there is little they can accomplish. When Perry returns with eight ships, the *Bakufu* signs a treaty on March 31, 1854 in the fishing village of Yokohama. The Treaty of Kanagawa opens Hakodate and Shimoda to American ships and trade; it declares that shipwrecked sailors will receive assistance (a point the US specifically wanted to accomplish); and the United States sends a consul to Shimoda. Americans in Japan also receive the privilege of extraterritoriality and are bound only by American law rather than Japanese. Soon the Russians, British and Dutch arrange for similar agreements. An American consul arrives in 1857, and Japan's long period of isolation is conclusively ended.

The Treaty of Kanagawa launches a period of great tension and confusion. The concessions to foreigners provoke shrill and widespread opposition, expressed in the slogan *Sonnō Jōi*, or "Revere the Emperor, Repel the Barbarians." Unfortunately, the *Bakufu* signs the treaty against the wishes of the insulated and ignorant Emperor, thus attracting xenophobic ire to itself. Despite the complete impossibility of rebuffing the foreign powers completely, the Emperor becomes the people's hero by quietly opposing the Shogunate. The Emperor seems pure through his detachment, allowing political power to slide from Edo to Kyoto. Hotheaded young samurai murder foreigners and launch terrorist attacks on foreign businesses and Shogunate offices.

Finally, in 1862, the Emperor issues an edict instructing the Shogun to expel the foreigners by June 1863. On this date, batteries on the Shimonoseki Straits (Choshu province) fire on American, French and Dutch vessels. In response in September 1864, a combined fleet demolishes the batteries and re-opens the straits to Japan's inland sea. The British have already bombarded the Satsuma clan stronghold of Kagoshima because the local authorities failed to prosecute an Englishman's murderer. Events seem to be rapidly headed toward war.

In response, the Satsuma and Choshu clans, formerly rivals, reach an understanding in 1866 and form a secret alliance with the strong Tosa and Hizen clans. The actions of the Satsuma and Choshu show that the Shogunate can no longer protect Japan against the foreigners. In 1866 Shogun Iemochi dies and is succeeded by his guardian, Tokugawa Keiki. In 1867 the emperor Komei dies, allowing his 15-year-old son, Mutsuhito, to succeed the throne. He takes the reign name *Meiji*, meaning "Enlightened Rule."

THE MEIJI RESTORATION (1868-1912)

Tosa's lord sends the new shogun, Keiki, a memorandum suggesting the government be returned to the Emperor to "lay a foundation on which Japan may take her stand as the equal of all other countries." Satsuma and Choshu move warriors into Kyoto to attack

the Shogun, who flees to his castle at Osaka. Keiki's retainers do not believe their action disloyal to the emperor; rather, they see themselves fighting to restore a Shogun who will protect the Emperor from the control of a handful of self-serving *tozama*.

In January 1868, Keiki's army advances on Kyoto and engages the Imperialist forces at the small towns of Toba and Fushima. The battle lasts three days, but late on the second day of fighting, part of Tokugawa's forces switch sides, forcing Keiki to escape to Edo. He lives there for many years before the Emperor raises him to nobility's highest rank in 1902. Mutsuhito moves permanently to Edo, turning the Tokugawa palace into the imperial residence and renaming the city Tokyo.

Despite the outcry to expel the barbarians, Japan's new rulers have no such intentions. They realize that Japan must modernize to avoid China's humiliation and dismemberment, which requires the assistance, not enmity, of the West. Indeed, in 1868 the Emperor takes the Charter Oath: "Knowledge shall be sought for all over the world and thus shall be strengthened the foundation of the imperial polity." Although the *Sonnō Jōi* movement retains many adherents, the Meiji regime fosters the counter-slogan *Fukoku Kyohei*: "Wealthy Nation, Strong Military."

The new government employs Europeans and Americans as engineers, financial and legal advisors, agricultural experts, teachers and military instructors, while Japanese journey abroad to learn from the West. The government establishes a modern taxation system together with a new system of coinage and builds banks, roads, railways, dockyards, lighthouses and newspapers. Bread is introduced as an alternative to rice and rice fields are given over to growing wheat, barley or oats. In perhaps the most visible sign of Japan's new order, the government abolishes feudalism. Samurai may not wear their swords in public and the topknot is outlawed. Naturally, there is resistance to these new policies, but the samurai have little choice.

Despite the nominal restoration of the Emperor, the four western clans become Japan's real rulers. To smooth the way for the abolition of feudalism, they symbolically surrender their fiefs to the Emperor, for which they receive generous compensation from the government. The samurai and peasantry, however, endure great hardship. Rents increase, and while wages increased for city workers, the rural classes experiences no similar gains. This leads to a series of peasant uprisings in 1870s and several samurai riots, the most serious of which is in Kyushu in 1877.

The oligarchy ruling Japan soon divides, however, over the question of Korea. The Japanese try opening Korea to their commerce as the West did with them, but the Koreans rebuff the attempt. In 1873, some oligarchs propose sending a military force to deal with the situation, but after days of bitter debate, the voices advocating peace carry the argument. The leader of the war faction,

Saigo, withdraws to Satsuma, where he builds an almost autonomous mini-state within Japan.

In 1877, Saigo launches an armed rebellion. In response, the government sends a modern conscript force that defeats Saigo's forces after months of bitter fighting. At his own request, a close friend beheads Saigo on the battlefield. The conscript army's success demonstrates that the samurai have no monopoly on fighting, a point that goes some distance toward quieting those who opposed the modernization efforts. Ironically, Saigo's samurai rebellion only succeeds in discrediting him.

Meanwhile, the government draws up a constitution and prepares for party politics. The idea of a political party that does not govern, but whose function is to speak in opposition to those in power does not come easily to some Japanese. Advocates, however, successfully argue that modernization demands the institution of a two-party, democratic system of government. In 1881, the Emperor announces that a national representative assembly will be inaugurated in 1890. A delegation of Japanese travel abroad to study other nations' constitutions, and the document that is finally drafted begins with the essence of Japan's national policy... that Japan "shall be reigned over and governed by a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal."

"A LINE OF EMPERORS UNBROKEN FOR AGES ETERNAL"

The new constitution provides for a Diet composed of a House of Peers and a House of Representatives. This is an elected body, but suffrage is limited to the one percent of the population who meet the substantial property requirement (power is concentrated in the hands of those closest to the Emperor). Japan's government remains unstable for decades, with parties making and breaking coalitions. In particular, the House of Representatives remains at odds with the government because the oligarchs do not protect the lower house's constituents in agriculture and rural industry. Many power struggles unfold between civil and military factions as well.

The last decade of the 19th century sees Japan's industrial revolution bear fruit, though the merchant class, long dominant around Osaka and Edo, did not lead this revolution. The government does not intend to leave industrial development to the vagaries of private initiative. Rather, it entrusts men of the samurai class with modernizing Japan's economy, and the results are impressive. From 1868 to 1897, imports of raw materials increase fivefold while exports of finished goods increase more than twenty-fold. The Meiji regime fulfills its goal of becoming a rich nation, though very little of that wealth reaches the lower classes.

This period also sees the genesis of the *zaibatsu*, or financial clique. The Mitsubishi, Mitsui, Sumitomo and Yasuda firms became the foremost *zaibatsu* through the government's policy of developing new enterprises before

handing them over to private companies. This has the additional benefit of tying the company's success to both the government and the political oligarchy.

However rapid the pace of modernization — and it is rapid indeed, with a Western-style army and navy, railroads, banks, schools and industry established in a matter of years — the unequal provisions of its foreign treaties still rankle. Japanese elites want the West to treat their country as a true equal, and extraterritoriality becomes the main sticking point. The provisions keeping foreigners free from Japan's legal system seemingly implies that foreigners did not trust the Japanese to deal with them fairly. The legal system undergoes intense reform, and in 1894, the government signs a treaty with Great Britain to come into force in 1899, abolishing unequal clauses of the old treaty. Similar treaties with other foreign nations follow soon after, as Japan proves it can enforce its will.

WAR IN KOREA: (1894-1895)

In 1876, Japan's threats succeed in gaining trade and diplomatic concessions from Korea, inaugurating a series of political and military interventions. China, however, still regards Korea as its vassal. In the summer of 1894, a Korean religious cult called the Tong Hak (Eastern Learning) Society launches a rebellion against both the monarchy and foreigners. The Tong Hak particularly whips up resentment at Japan's exploitation of Korea. Both Chinese and Japanese troops enter the country to help quash the revolt, but both countries also insist the Korean government expel the other's troops. The Japanese government uses the impasse as a pretext for war, sinking a Chinese troopship and capturing an ironclad on July 25, 1894. Six days later, war was formally declared.

The fighting continues for nine months, during which time the Japanese expel the Chinese from Korea, defeat a Chinese fleet, capture the Liaotung Peninsula and Port Arthur in Manchuria and seize Wei-hai-wei, a port on the Shantung coast. China is forced into an armistice, and Japan insists on severe terms. The Treaty of Shimonoseki on April 17, 1895 incurs a large indemnity and forces China to cede Formosa and the Pescadores, Port Arthur and the Liaotung peninsula, as well as recognizing Korea's independence.

Japan's triumph turns sour, however, when only one week after China signs the treaty, the "Triple Intervention" by Russia, France and Germany forces Japan to hand back the Liaotung peninsula. The European states are concerned about the region's balance of power and believe that with its new territory, Japan would threaten Peking. Japan is in no position to resist and despite massive indignation, the Emperor tells his people to "bear the unbearable."

The Sino-Japanese War has two important results. The first is that the Japanese now distrust the Western nations as hypocrites. The next five years only cement

this view after Russia obtains control of the Liaotung peninsula and Port Arthur, France leases Kwangchow Bay, Germany seizes Tsingtau, Great Britain leases Weihai-wai as well as Hong Kong and the United States annexes Hawaii. The second lesson is that the use of force can bring good dividends. Despite the Triple Intervention, Japan earns new respect from the Western nations, still keeps some its spoils of war and enhances the prestige of Japan's armed forces.

The next opportunity to use the military comes in 1900, during China's Boxer Rebellion. Japanese troops play an important role in rescuing the legations at Peking. The troops are highly disciplined and do not engage in any looting, conduct that Western nations note with approval. Indeed, respect for the Japanese reaches something of a high-water mark, and the prevailing view is that they are not only a strong military power, but also civilized and advanced — nearly the Great Britain of the Far East.

The Koreans, however, have little sympathy for such views. In the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese war, a gang of Japanese and Korean thugs murders their queen. A Choshu general and prefecture, Miura Goro, is implicated in the plot, but is recalled to Japan and acquitted of involvement in the murder. He escapes punishment, sending the message that the most base behavior is permissible if appropriately patriotic.

The Russians seize this opportunity and ask the Chinese government to agree to the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway, connecting Vladivostok to the Lake Baikal region through Manchuria. In 1898, the Russians also gain Port Arthur under a lease agreement and build a railway connecting the port to Dairen, renamed Dalny. These two ports, and Manchuria as a consequence, give Russia an ice-free port in the Far East. This alarms Japan since it enables Russia to enter Korea in force (an area ripe for further Japanese exploitation). These concerns motivate the signature of a treaty with Great Britain in 1902.

THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR

Negotiations with the Russians continue into 1903, and the Japanese are entirely willing to accept a negotiated outcome. The Russians will not relinquish their influence in Manchuria, however, and demand the establishment of a neutral zone in Korea. The Japanese refuse these conditions and sever negotiations. On the very same day, a Japanese fleet sails from Sasebo and Russian forces cross Korea's Yalu River.

The Japanese fleet sails for Chemulpo and destroys three Russian vessels in harbor. The destroyers head to Port Arthur where they fight a brief, inconclusive engagement. The troop carriers unload their men and materiel, which travel by train to Seoul, occupying the city. The following day, February 10th, Japan declares war. The Russians complain that the Japanese struck before declaring war, but they receive little sympathy.

Indeed, the Japanese win praise in Great Britain. The London Times, for example, characterizes the surprise attack as "an act of daring which is destined to take a place of honor in naval annals."

The war itself lasts a comparatively short 18 months, with clear-cut victories and defeats on land and sea. Both sides fight with courage and treat war prisoners with humanity. The Japanese drive the Russians back across the Yalu, whereupon the fighting broadens across two fronts: the siege of Port Arthur and the skirmishes along the road and railway connecting Port Arthur and Dalny to Liaoyang and Mukden.

The siege of Port Arthur lasts for five months and severely tests the Japanese army. General Nogi Maresuke holds to samurai tradition, demanding discipline and honorable conduct from his fighting men. In all, sixty thousand Japanese lose their lives taking the port, but when it finally falls, the Russians receive gallant treatment. The Russian commander, Stoessel, even presents his white horse to General Nogi as a token of appreciation.

The second front campaign culminates in a victory for Japan in the Battle of Mukden. This is an effort on a massive scale; the fighting rages from February 23 to March 16, 1905 and involves almost three-quarters of a million men. Japan's casualties are in the vicinity of forty thousand troops.

The Japanese navy also fights successfully, harassing and hampering the Russian fleet. In May 1905, Admiral Togo wins a comprehensive victory at the Battle of Tsushima Straits, known to the Japanese as the Battle of the Sea of Japan (*Nihonkai kaisen*). A fleet of some forty Russian vessels set out from the Baltic in early October 1904, arriving in Japanese waters and engaging the enemy fleet on May 27. In two days, the Japanese destroy all but two Russian ships, in turn losing three torpedo boats and suffering 600 casualties (killed or wounded). It is the most decisive naval victory in almost a century.

Both sides are ready to sue for peace now; the Russians are defeated, but the Japanese military is stretched almost to its limit; it is in no position to continue the conflict. The war ends with the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905, in which Russia recognizes Japan's paramount interest in Korea and transfers the lease of the Liaotung Peninsula and railway connecting Port Arthur and Mukden, as well as the southern half of Sakhalin Island and certain fishing rights.

The Japanese public is unhappy with the treaty. The military had won several astounding victories, and most people do not know the military's tenuous state. Troops are even forced to quell riots in Tokyo over the decision. Japan still gains some great advantages from the war, though. The Russian threat to Korea is stymied and Russian interests turn from the Far East to Europe. The Japan tightens its grip on Korea, forcing her to become a Japanese colony in effect, if not in name.

More importantly, the world flatters Japan; such a rapid rise to international prominence is unprecedented. Japan is the first and only Asian nation to defeat a European nation in war, and by virtue of her gains in Manchuria, she joins the West in exploiting China. At the end of the Victorian era, Japan is riding high and seems to have achieved her goal of joining the international community as a respected equal — a rich country with a strong military. With the prospects for Japan seeming bright, no one can imagine the horrors Japan will inflict and receive in the 20th century; not even the Kuei-jin.

SHADOW LANDS

Unlike the other chapters where the history of regional Kuei-jin comes first, it is important here to discuss the outlook and structure of Japan's unique Wan Kuei before delving into their past.

THE KUEI-JIN

Japanese Kuei-jin call themselves *gaki* or *ketsuki*, and their courts differ in important ways from those of other Kuei-jin. The *gaki* fall into extended "families" or "Houses" called *uji*. Each *uji* may claim several cities as their territory, though small *uji* are restricted to a single urban area. This structure imitates the mortal aristocratic clans, like the Fujiwara or Minamoto, who dominate Japan for much of its history. Of course these vampiric "families" grow only through adoption.

A senior *gaki* called a *daimyo* heads each *uji*, and regardless of Dharma, *gaki* must pledge fealty to their *daimyo* and obey him as parent, lord and commanding officer. Although the *daimyo* are old and powerful creatures, comparable to ancestors, they are not *bodhisattvas*, who actually founded several *uji*.

New Kuei-jin traditionally join whatever *uji* claims the region where they took the Second Breath, though the tradition is not absolute since some *uji* pursue specializations leading them to recruit beyond their domains. Most *uji* permit new *gaki* to emigrate, especially if a *hin* finds herself drawn to a Dharma not widely popular in his family. Once a *gaki* swears fealty to an *uji*, however, she must obtain the *daimyo*'s permission to emigrate. Kuei-jin defecting without permission incur decades or centuries of hostility from their former House.

In the 19th century, the two largest and oldest *uji* are Bishamon and Genji, which claim between them more than half of Japan's Kuei-jin (including allied houses). Exactly which *uji* aligns with whom shifts from decade to decade, making a complete list of *uji* impossible. Genji and Bishamon both fathered sub-families with their own *daimyo*, while *uji* may merge or dissolve into a larger clan grouping. A particular group of vampires may be an independent but allied *uji*, a vassal clan or merely a collection of *wu* within Bishamon or Genji. Some *gaki*

INTELLIGENCE AND THE BLACK OCEAN SOCIETY

Japan's rapid transition from a traditional culture out of touch with the world around her to an Asian superpower is a remarkable testament to its collective will. Credit for that success lays at the feet of Japan's intelligence drive. Japan creates its intelligence agencies from scratch, just as it rebuilds her armies and navy from the ground up. To properly accomplish this, however, the government must know what other countries know.

The same groups traveling abroad to study the constitutions of various nations are merely part of a greater information gathering operation involving thousands of "agents." Whether openly or surreptitiously, the Japanese collect and efficiently organize reams of information from around the world through intelligent observation, open questioning, data collection and (as last resorts) bribery and blackmail. In fact, Japan is the only nation who doesn't consider spying disreputable work and even openly places its spies in high esteem.

One technique to building a highly effective spy network is the support of private societies to gather information. Funded by private sponsors, these societies encourage students and members to travel, if only to gain more information for Japan. Arguably the most successful is *Genyosha* or the Black Ocean Society, an organization created by a former samurai (nobleman). The *Genyosha* uses terrorism and subversion to undermine Japan's enemies, concentrating especially on many Chinese Secret Societies. They build beautiful bordellos (called Halls of Celestial Delight) in Chinese cities like Hankow, Shanghai and Tientsin, and use trained prostitutes to probe their customers' secrets. *Genyosha* also targets Secret Society and Triad treasurers and bosses, uncovering their sexual proclivities and vices and using that information to entice their victims into spending their organization's finances. When the victim is in great debt or trouble, *Genyosha* step in with loans to bring their victim under control or hangs them out to dry.

Genyosha also subsidizes the formation of the 15-man *Tenyukyo*, or the Society of the Celestial Salvation of the Oppressed. The *Tenyukyo* operates in pre-war Korea, where they support a local religious cult, the *Tonghaks*, and their fight against Western thought. *Tenyukyo* uses the Korean sect to launch disruptive terrorist attacks against their government. Both sects may even have been responsible for Queen Min's assassination in 1895.

say Japan has six or seven Houses; others list more than two dozen.

Kyoto, Osaka and Edo/Tokyo are the three exceptions to this rule. By 1840, all three are already enormous, large enough for multiple *wu* to find sustenance. More importantly, Kyoto holds the Imperial Court and Edo is the Shogunate's capital: Any *uji* claiming exclusive domain over such centers of power immediately provoke an alliance of all other *uji* against them. Osaka, Japan's most mercantile city, has a reputation for doing things its own way, while Edo begins the century under Bishamon dominance. By 1900, Bishamon, Genji and a few independent *uji* claim domains in each of the three great cities, while Tokyo also holds a few coteries of Western Cainites as well.

Note: The daimyo of the various *uji* remain unmentioned. This is deliberate. Bishamon and Genji appear in previous **Kindred of the East** publications, so chances are good Storytellers have already invented their own elders for these clans or are using those mentioned in supplements like **World of Darkness: Tokyo**. Many *uji* also experience leadership changes during the Victorian Age, allowing Storytellers to include daimyo-related struggles into Chronicles. In House of Taira's case, where we name the Daimyo who founded the *uji*, we do not specify whether Taira Antoku still leads the clan. These matters are the providence of each Storyteller.

BISHAMON

The House of Bishamon is Japan's oldest surviving *uji*. Its vampires have a reputation as traditionalists and mystics who sought for centuries to shield Japan from foreign influences. This *uji* shows equal zeal in protecting Japan's Dragon Nests. To hear some Bishamon elders talk, the shapeshifters, mortal mages and even other Kuei-jin are bumbler who shouldn't be trusted with such precious sources of Chi. For Bishamon, protecting the Dragon Lines and Nests also means preserving the wilderness, or at least minimizing humanity's disruptions. Many Bishamon prefer dwelling in villages, rural regions or complete wilderness, and members of this *uji* must show the proper respect to Japan's natural splendors.

Finally, Bishamon boasts a long tradition of celebrated Dharmic sages and teachers who claim House of Bishamon can guide all Kuei-jin back to redemption through the orthodox Dharmas. Only House of Bishamon, they say, can hold back the shadows of the Fifth Age and preserve the harmony of Heaven and Earth.

GENJI

The Genji are a looser confederation of families than the more hierarchical Bishamon. Most Genji are firmly urban, drawing their power from Japan's merchant, artisan and labor classes. Genji's leadership is comparatively young compared to most *uji*, a situation even more pronounced among its *jina* and disciples. Since its beginnings more than 2,500 years ago, this House has

changed radically. In fact only the name, derived from the Chinese *guanxi* by way of a common Japanese name, connects Genji to its ancient roots. For the last several centuries, Genji existed as a rallying standard for Bishamon's opponents, its coalition including *uji* with wildly divergent Dharmas and goals. In the Victorian Age and after, Genji supports the government's quest to industrialize Japan and make it a world power.

The Genji differ from all other *uji* in that they have more than one daimyo, though none are older or more powerful than the average Kuei-jin mandarin. Each daimyo leads a small *uji* of her own, consisting of just a few *wu*. The various daimyo are supposed to gather in a *wu* of leaders and act by consensus, but more often, each sub-*uji* does as it pleases within the broad limits set by Genji's common interests. House of Genji's daimyo fluctuate from three at the start of the 19th century to eight during the century's last quarter, but the usual range is from four to six daimyo.

Genji's federal structure gives the *uji* more flexibility than most other *uji*, and the clan's fluid nature also attracts ambitious gaki willing to risk alienating former *uji* by defecting to Genji. Conversely, Genji sometimes has difficulty mustering its full strength for endeavors because the daimyo disagree. Genji can also be slow responding to a crisis, because its scattered daimyo can't communicate quickly enough to agree on a plan.

IGA AND KOGA

These two *uji* began as special strike forces organized by Bishamon in the 13th century, and are named after the Iga and Koga mountain regions, from whence the mortal ninja clans come. Iga fought mortal demon hunters, while Koga fought *shen* and other supernatural threats to the gaki. Over the centuries, both groups suffered "mission creep" and now fight any foe — including other gaki, if the price is right. The two *uji* seceded from Bishamon centuries ago, so if Bishamon mandarins want Iga or Koga saboteurs, spies or assassins, they must pay just like any other Kuei-jin. The two "samurai" *uji* find plenty of business in the Victorian Age, thanks to Japan's thirst for knowledge.

SOTOGAWA NO

The name of this *uji* roughly translates as "Outsider." These Kuei-jin follow the heretical Dharma called the Spirit of the Living Earth, placing them beyond the bounds of acceptable Kuei-jin society. The *uji*'s founders accepted the label of "outsider" as a badge of pride, believing they had surpassed the errors of the orthodox Dharmas by recognizing that their only duty lay with the spirits.

The Sotogawa No eventually forced the other *uji* to accept them as a fact of unlife that wouldn't go away. The "outsiders" never became important players in gaki politics, though they did join the occasional alliance. Most importantly, other Kuei-jin used the Shinto/animist

Sotogawa No as a go-between with *kami* and *shen* (with whom they maintained strong relations). This friendship also curbs occasional attempts to suppress the “heretical” *uji* and its Dharma, since few want to fight Sotogawa No’s allies.

During the Victorian Age, the Sotogawa No becomes one of Japan’s most isolationist *uji*. The thought of foreigners treading on Japan’s god-haunted soil horrifies them almost as much as the roads and railways severing Dragon Lines. This traditional outlook doesn’t stop Bishamon from maintaining their old vendetta against the heretics, while Sotogawa No relentlessly opposes the progressive Genji.

NUKEKUBI

The Nukekubi reliably date their origin to the early Heian period (CE 794 to 1185) and at the Victorian Age’s inception, the *uji* is on its third daimyo. Its founder, the bodhisattva Nukekubi, appears once every few decades to examine their daimyo. Danrin-no-Nukekubi is one of Japan’s greatest mistresses of Flesh Shintai, as well as a profound exponent of the Way of the Resplendent Crane (even though the Nukekubi now practice all orthodox Dharmas).

Following their founder’s example, all Nukekubi strive to learn the Long-Neck power of Flesh Shintai at the very least. Their affinity for this Discipline is partly known even to mortals, who speak of legendary creatures called Nukekubi who look partly human, but sport impossibly long, flexible, gravity-defying necks. Gaki who cannot learn Flesh Shintai in their own *uji* sometimes travel south to the Nukekubi’s demesne in Kyushu and negotiate for tuition.

In the Victorian Age, Nukekubi’s leaders try finding a middle path for the gaki that skirts both rejection of the outer world and surrender to it. They seek guidance in Danrin-no-Nukekubi’s dictum that Heaven and Hell’s true servant acts without wrath or greed, leaving no trace of her influence. The Nukekubi try accommodating Japan’s metamorphosis, establishing railways along Dragon Lines instead of across them, for instance. They change sides in the Bishamon-Genji rivalry several times.

TAIRA

This relatively young and small *uji* receives its name after its founder and Daimyo, Taira Antoku, who claims mortal membership in one of Japan’s ancient aristocratic families. Other ancient gaki confirm his encyclopedic knowledge of courtly life from the Kofun period, even though Antoku founded his *uji* nine centuries later, in the Muromachi period (CE 1333–1466).

Taira is Japan’s foremost conservative *uji* who regards the Bishamon as dangerous innovators. Throughout his long existence, Antoku steadfastly championed Imperial rule and kept his *uji* in Kyoto, through all the centuries when the Emperor remained just a figurehead.

The Taira resist every change in Victorian Japan except for the resurgence of Imperial power. Even then, the Taira lobby for direct Imperial rule rather than a parliamentary government. The Meiji Restoration brings new prestige to Taira, though, and both the Bishamon and Genji factions court the clan’s favor. The Taira switch sides several times, with Antoku’s love of tradition conflicting with his desire to support the Emperor. Naturally, the Taira also support the *sonnō jōi* radicals, wielding great influence in the movement. Through the Victorian period they also promote the “Japanese Learning” movement that seeks to purify Japanese culture of foreign accretions — Chinese as well as Western.

More Taira gaki follow the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon than any other Dharma, but all Dharmas earn fair representation here. Obligation is by far the most popular Discipline, for it grants an aristocratic power of command.

ECHIZEN

The Echizen *uji* dates back to the Nara period (CE 710-794), when its founder (now destroyed) became interested in Buddhism. The House’s interest persists to the present nights. Over the centuries, the Echizen developed a strong curiosity in the practical application of mysticism through Chi-shaping. Tapestry is Echizen’s single most popular Discipline; many also learn sorcerous rituals as well, while Echizen gaki craft more talismans than any other *uji*. Song of the Shadow and Resplendent Crane are the most popular Dharmas in this clan, though the House does not discourage any Dharma. The Echizen also possess exceptional sympathy toward Japan’s mortal artisan and merchant classes, and relish the downfall of the Bakufu.

The Echizen maintain contact with the Green Courts and the Quincunx all throughout Japan’s isolation. Their chief interest lies in acquiring jade and keeping abreast of new sorceries, but they also study new developments in Buddhist philosophy. During the Sino-Japanese War, this places the Echizen in the minority that dissent against war with the continental courts, though up until that war, the Echizen support the Genji faction.

Echizen Chi-shapers receive Japan’s first Kin-jin visitors with more curiosity than suspicion. All Kuei-jin sense that Western vampires manipulate Chi in a different way than themselves, and while Echizen find this difference disturbing, they seek to describe this difference precisely as the first step in explaining it. Echizen savants do not always rely on Kin-jin volunteers for their studies, but they do develop contacts within certain Hellfire Clubs scattered across East Asia.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE UJI ORGANIZATION

The gaki speak of relationships within a clan in terms of *oyabun* (father-role) and *kobun* (son-role), using male terms regardless of the vampire’s actual gender. A nascent

THE BUNRAKU

Most, though not all, north-aspected followers of the Thousand Whispers join an organization called the *Bunraku*. This group takes its name from the Japanese puppet theater and the black-clad puppeteers whom the audience pretends they cannot see. This organization began in Japan and maintains its greatest strength there, serving both *uji* and the mainland courts as undercover investigators. Depending on the job and individual temperament, a *Bunraku* may be a ruthless secret police officer or a discreet counselor — whatever it takes to find the truth and restore harmony.

Bunraku *gaki* do not quite form an *uji* of their own. The Puppeteers belong to many *uji* and mainland courts, but maintain strong loyalties to their House as well. They do not, however, have their own daimyo. During the Victorian Age, the *Bunraku* act with unusual cohesion as a power bloc allied to the Bishamon; those who choose the Genji side are effectively outcast from the *Bunraku* main body. The mainland Puppeteers do not share this prejudice, though; in the remaining Middle Kingdom, Dharma is stronger than *gaki* politics.

gaki's first trainer — the one who pulls her from *chih-mei* frenzy and teaches her the rudiments of Dharma and civilized unlife — is her first *oyabun*, and she is his *kobun*. She owes this Kuei-jin her respect and obedience thereafter. Even if a *hin* or disciple moves to a different clan, her *oyabun* retains the right to command her. A *gaki* who openly defies her *oyabun* brings contempt upon herself and shame on her teacher, and disgraced *oyabun* are known to exterminate *kobun* who dishonor them. In return, an *oyabun* must guide his *kobun* thereafter as her mentor, though he receives far less contempt for neglecting this aspect of the relationship than the *kobun*. When *gaki* join a *wu*, they must address each other's *oyabun* as "uncle," displaying a modicum of respect. In return, the "uncles" generally treat their *kobun*'s *wu* with civility.

The *gaki*'s hoariest traditions recommend that all *oyabun* of a new *wu*'s vampires are themselves part of the same, older *wu*. In practice, this almost never happens. Instead, a daimyo appoints an older *wu* as a collective "father" for the new group, and as with individual *gaki*, the *oyabun-wu* serve as mentors and disciplinarians to their "sons" (though elder Cathayans may also neglect their mentorship with no social consequences). The daimyo may also change the *oyabun-wu* and *kobun-wu* relationships, assigning a *wu* an *oyabun-wu* based on the current interests or needs of the clan. During a midnight war, for example, the daimyo may assign all *wu* to a senior *wu* specializing in military affairs. Senior *wu* generally

assume specialist roles, with large clans maintaining several senior *wu* that take responsibility for midnight and twilight wars, relations with mortals or *shen*, diplomacy with other *uji* or foreign courts, finding and maintaining Dragon Nests, spying on rival clans and courts, learning and teaching magical rituals, preserving the clan's lore and heritage, adjudicating disputes between *wu* and even providing entertainment for meetings of the daimyo's court.

The daimyo acts as *oyabun* to the entire clan and demands unquestioning obedience. Unlike a Quincunx ancestor, a daimyo is not part of any *wu*. She stands alone, to avoid supposed favoritism to former *wu*-mates and their *kobun*. Actually, this custom may stem from Japan's smaller and more scattered population as compared to China: the *gaki* simply have fewer vampires of sufficient age and Dharmic advancement to claim ancestorship. Until recent centuries, any ancestor-grade *gaki* could establish her own clan and demesne by claiming territory too remote for other daimyo to hold. Indeed, many smaller *uji* daimyo in the further reaches of the Japanese islands are merely mandarins by Quincunx standards.

The bodhisattvas stand above all clans. Every vampire, from the youngest *hin* to the mightiest daimyo, stands as *kobun* to these ancient monster-sages, regardless of past or present affiliations. Clans claiming a bodhisattva as former or founding member gain prestige from the connection. The bodhisattvas, as *oyabun* to all, pass on as much of their wisdom as they choose and very seldom issue any commands. Most *gaki* believe their bodhisattvas aid them simply by existing.

KUEI-JIN HISTORY

The brief period of the 16th and 17th centuries when Japan received foreign merchants and missionaries had very little effect on the *gaki*. Japan's Kuei-jin paid little attention to the "barbarians" until a group of witch-hunters from the Society of Leopold rampaged through part of Honshu. Instead of acting, however, several mandarins waited for Tokugawa Ieyasu to expel the foreigners and suppress Christianity, thus eliminating their problem for them.

Very few Kin-jin visited Japan in these decades, and elder *gaki* don't talk much about them. If asked, daimyos and other elders claim Western vampires excited immediate revulsion in every *gaki* they met thanks to their barbaric customs and improper use of Chi. Kuei-jin diaries from this period suggest a greater diversity of views, but it would be improper to suggest that the mandarins and daimyos suffer memory lapses.

THE FLOATING WORLD

Many Bishamon now recall the centuries of Japan's isolation as a golden age. The Bishamon's coalition discouraged mainland Kuei-jin from visiting Japan, even as the mortal cannons foreign ships at bay. The Bishamon made peace with the other *shen* and the Kuei-jin

successfully conserved their Dragon Nests, slowing a decline worsening over the last two centuries. Since the Bishamon seemed to know what they were doing, other *uji* rarely dared challenging their leadership.

The Bishamon called their rule *ukiyo-e*, or “The Floating World,” a term from a school of wood-block prints featuring elegant illustrations of beautiful landscapes and pretty girls. Bishamon leaders thought the term captured the peace and beauty of existence in harmony with the *kami* and the will of Heaven.

By the 19th century’s inception, the Bishamon outlawed midnight war and rendered twilight war so stylized and formalized that it became an art form. The most popular form of twilight war was Living Puppet Theater, where each *wu* had to offer part of its Scarlet Screen as a pawn for the game. The competing Kuei-jin tried making an opponent’s mortal pawns act out a drama without knowing it. For instance, an attacking *wu* might declare its intent to create a love affair within the target’s Scarlet Screen then destroy it, ending the play with one lover committing *seppuku* in a designated location. Meanwhile, the target *wu* tried creating its own drama using its opponent’s Scarlet Screen.

The Living Puppet Theater’s referees judged the subtlety of the combatants’ methods as well as their success at creating specific events. As with other contests, the purpose was to show that one *wu* could have defeated its enemy in a real war, thereby forcing the loser to submit to the winner’s demand. Of course, some Kuei-jin sought retribution for their defeat through real war....

FORCED CONTACT

Most *gaki* ignore the Opium War and other disturbing news from China, believing mainland events do not affect them; their supernatural prowess will deal with any foreign human threat. The Bishamon fail to take the matter seriously even when Commodore Perry steams into Edo Bay. The old *gaki* do not appreciate how the West has surpassed Japan in technology, but young *uji* and Kuei-jin do not miss the importance of Perry’s ultimatum.

The debates among the undead mirror those between mortal daimyo and *Bakufu* officials. Some *gaki* chafe at Japan’s isolation and welcome outside contact, while others fear foreign subversion, but accept that Japan must know its enemies and learn from them. Many, including the Bishamon leadership, argue that the Kuei-jin can destroy Perry (and any other foreign expedition) if he dares return. The debates degenerate into several twilight wars between *wu*, and a few between entire *uji*.

The Quincunx ventures an opinion in the debate when Bishamon sends emissaries asking for its aid against Perry and Genji. The Blood Court’s August Ancestor sends an exquisite scroll commanding all *gaki* to resist Western incursion and considers the matter closed. The Flesh Court ancestor claims the foreigners are no great threat; the Flame Court is breaking up, the Jade Court is

too busy with the Taiping Rebellion and the Bone Court never receives the message.

The Tokugawa Shogunate, however, sets policy in 1854, opening a few ports to foreign merchants. Do the conservative *gaki* lack the power to shape the government’s policies? Or do they fail to predict events they cannot change, and accept them in a graceful manner? Either way, the Bishamon lose face by failing to keep Japan closed while the Genji, as their customary opposition, gain prestige as a result.

THE YEARS OF DANCING EARTH

In 1854 and 1855, several powerful earthquakes strike Japan, killing more than 100,000 people. More than a few people proclaim the earthquakes a divine judgment on the Shogunate for allowing foreigners on Japan’s holy soil, a cry carried by Bishamon and Sotogawa No against the Genji. Perhaps they are right.

Several potent bodhisattvas and ancestors dwell in Japan, and they might be able to rouse the vast and terrible *kami* sleeping beneath the mountains. While various Chi’n Ta and Hengeyokai can accomplish the same feat as well, there are also rumors the quakes are the machinations of Chinese Kuei-jin punishing the Japanese for “surrendering” without a fight. The truth is up to the Storyteller, but regardless, the event sparks several months of twilight wars that invariably involve most *uji*. The matter ends with no clear victor.

THE RESTORATION

Despite their rivalries, Kuei-jin from both Genji and Bishamon promote the transfer of power from the Shogunate to the Emperor. The oldest Bishamon never really liked the *Bakufu*; only the Emperor, they say, can rule by Heaven’s favor. The Genji coalition, meanwhile, has centuries’ worth of starved and executed commoners who still despise the military aristocrats. These *gaki* see Imperial power as a way to curb or destroy the samurai.

Not all *uji*, and not every Bishamon or Genji vampire, supports the Meiji Restoration. Some *gaki* oppose the Restoration simply because the *Bakufu*’s dissolution threatens their own political connections. The Iga and Koga *uji* fight hardest to preserve the Shogunate once they realize the new government will suppress the samurai class. The undead warriors feel solidarity toward their mortal counterparts — perhaps because they fear the same might happen to them — leaving many *gaki* to murmur quietly that these Kuei-jin act more like Running Monkeys, though not within earshot of any Iga or Koga. Iga and Koga vampires help orchestrate some of the Meiji

Restoration's samurai riots and rebellions, even adopting some slain samurai who return on the Second Breath.

Other *gaki* fight the new regime's industrial plans, striving to protect their resources from railways and new roads given the disruption of Dragon Lines and weakened Dragon Nests. Pious *Kuei-jin* try protecting rural *kami* from expanding cities, logging, mining and other human depredations, while some oppose industrialization for fear of incurring the Hengeyokai's rampaging ire. The Sotogawa No are foremost in the fight against industrialization, but are hamstrung by religious opposition from almost every other faction.

Over the Meiji regime's course, new *Kuei-jin* arise whose life and death gives them reason to hate it, since the slogan of "Wealthy Nation, Strong Military" promises nothing of wealthy commoners or strong civil rights. Peasants often starved during the Shogunate regimes; they continue starving when their landlords trade their samurai armor for Western business suits. Work in the new factories is no easier than work on the farm, and only a small, affluent minority can vote, leaving the Emperor as much an autocrat as the Shogun had been. The new professional army slaughters rebellious samurai and rioting commoners with fine impartiality. Those people killed by hunger, overwork, industrial accidents or government repression and take the Second Breath have little use for the Genji's dreams of reform.

The power struggles within the new Imperial government echoes the twilight and midnight wars between *uji*. Even *Kuei-jin* who agree to the Shogunate's abolition still fight over who possesses the most influence over the new regime. *Uji* strive to position mortal pawns among the oligarchs and to cast down officials serving their rivals. The power struggles work both ways, however; an *uji* might discover purely mortal intrigue caused the expulsion of a favored government minister or parliamentary delegate, resulting in loss of power and face for the supporting *Kuei-jin*.

In time, the Genji establish themselves as the dominant *gaki* faction, though their membership changes from year to year. In the turbulent years of the Restoration, whole *uji* join the Genji coalition, then drop out as their interests change or rivals force them out. Other *uji* fission when only part of the clan is expelled from the coalition. Regardless, most *uji* see rapid succession of daimyos, with one intriguer after another persuading her daimyo that renouncing worldly power and seeking greater Dharmic enlightenment will prove auspicious for his continued existence. By 1880, all the *gaki* know that the Floating World has ended and will never return.

WHAT IS TO COME

The Russo-Japanese War of 1905 and Korea's annexation in 1910 bolster Genji's imperial ambitions. The Genji successfully wrest several Dragon Nests and jade mines from the Green and Blood Courts. After that, only the Bishamon and Sotogawa No dare oppose

the House of Genji, who is so powerful that a Genji daimyo even takes the title of *Kanpaku*, Japan's monarch of the night.

When the Japan invades China in 1937, the *gaki* already plan to conquer the Quincunx and follow the Dragon Lines across the Pacific. They do not even bother declaring midnight war. As WWII progresses, the *gaki* invasion stalls fighting Shanghai's Flesh Court but defeats Beijing's Blood Court, Hong Kong's Flame Court, many Southeast Asia Golden Courts and the Kindred colonists of the Philippines. They also locate many new Dragon Nests on Pacific islands.

The Allies slowly reverse the mortal Japanese conquests, but the *gaki* hold their supernatural conquests... until the Burnings in 1945. The disruption to Japan's Chi flow temporarily cripples the *gaki* war machine. The Golden Courts counterattack from their jungle strongholds; the Quincunx, Green Courts and Kindred soon follow, while the Bishamon launch a rebellion in Japan itself. The Genji's war party collapses, with allied *uji* turning upon each other. The *Kanpaku* faces the Eye of Heaven, screaming curses as he burns, and is declared *akuma* "in absentia." The upheaval eventually settles with the Genji reduced in power and the Bishamon resurgent.

THE KIN-JIN

First the Shogunate, then the Meiji regime imports thousands of Westerners to help modernize Japan. With them arrive Western vampires. Both parties hail from mortal cultures steeped in bigotry. Some Kindred swagger into Japan thinking they can teach the funny little slant-eyed vampires a lesson, while some *gaki* believe any Westerner, alive or undead, must be a barbaric brute. Neither side, however, holds deep, ingrained grievances born from centuries of conflict and exploitation, not the way the mortals and undead of India, China and Southeast Asia had decades or centuries of experience with Western traders, soldiers and colonists. These latter countries developed a keep sense they were under attack and that their mortal societies always lost. The Japanese never do.

The Japanese may have opened their country under duress, but they never cede territory or political power to the Westerners. While the rest of Asia surrenders concession after concession, the Japanese reclaim each initial concession within a few decades. Many mortal Japanese hate the West with a vitriolic passion, but they never feel truly helpless before the foreigners.

The Europeans and Americans never learn to think of the Japanese as helpless, decadent or primitive, either. While the West hands the Indians, Chinese and Southeast Asians defeat after defeat, no Western power fights a real war with Japan until 1905. The West never abases Japan, and it respects Japan for this.

As a result, some *gaki* and *Kin-jin* can meet without immediate, murderous hatred. Just as some Japanese learn what they can gain from the West, some *Kuei-jin*

look for ways to conduct business with Cainites. The Kin-jin suffer a Darwinian selection based on their manners: Swaggering colonialists meet swift and sticky ends, while the cautious and polite at least stand a chance of surviving. Eventually, the Westerners learn that some Eastern vampires want them destroyed, while others merely seek private advantages... just like vampires back home.

Neither the Camarilla, Sabbat or independent clans launch any Jyhads to wrest Japan from the Kuei-jin, if only because China proves more appealing. The elders with the power and prestige to lead such an effort are not stupid enough to invade territory they know nothing about — not without overwhelming mortal backing, at least.

The Bishamon and their allies, as well as the Sotogawa No, fight the Kin-jin just as the Sabbat fights the Camarilla, while the Genji and unaligned *uji* often give new Kin-jin the benefit of the doubt. The Kin-jin soon learn that their caution is fully justified; Japan's elders are every bit as powerful as their European contemporaries, with powers unknown to Kindred and extensive networks of mortal pawns to work their will.

From the 1860s onward, the Japanese nights see a ballet of delicate diplomacy and secret wars between the various undead. In the two-decade twilight of the Victorian Age, some daimyo even exchange embassies with individual Western princes and archbishops. Each side in these exchanges strives to learn all it can about the other while keeping their own secrets. Eastern ambassadors easily find neonates willing to talk about the glories of Western and Cainite culture, while young gaki come from a culture that places more value on circumspection. Naturally, the various Eastern and Western elders do not pass on what they learn to their rivals at home.

By 1900, the Genji establish firm dominance over Japan's night. Some *wu* hold commercial partnerships with Western companies and Cainites, and the Genji feel secure enough to permit a few Kin-jin coteries within their cities. Several gaki — even a few complete *wu* — also establish permanent residence in Europe and the Americas. If any princes or archbishops obtain Kuei-jin allies, they keep their Cathayan resources secret. Most gaki emigrants stick to the Little Tokyos and keep low profiles. Nevertheless, by 1900 the gaki are already part of the Great Leap Outward — for themselves alone. They intend to colonize the rest of Asia, too....

IMPERIALISM

The Japanese Kuei-jin renounced any official fealty to mainland courts back in the 13th century, but the Quincunx retained great social influence for centuries thereafter. The Chinese courts overshadowed the Japanese *uji* through their age, numbers, jade reserves and Dharmic mentors. Even during the centuries of isolation, the gaki reflexively thought of China as the center of the Middle Kingdom.

All that changes in the 19th century.

During the House of Genji's rise to power, it seeks jade both for talismans and to buy favors from other *uji*. The Bishamon also want more jade for their struggle against the Genji, requiring both to deal with Korea's Green Courts. As usual, the Green Courts charge high prices in favors and Chi, and some gaki become tired of paying.

Through the 1870s and 80s, gaki on all sides become more aggressive in their dealings with the Green Courts. Time and again, *wu* or entire *uji* wage twilight wars in hopes of winning indemnities in Korean jade. Other *wu* simply try stealing talismans and jade, the affiliated *uji* always disavowing raiders who are caught. The assorted mortal Japanese "interventions" in Korea provide excellent covers for such raids, while Genji also sometimes employ coteries of duped Kin-jin as cat's-paws for their schemes.

By 1890, a group of influential Genji decides they can subjugate the Green Courts and extract tribute in jade. The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 provides them with their chance. Several *wu* invade Korea alongside the mortal troops, and while the mortals fight by day, the Kuei-jin battle by night.

In need of assistance, the Green Courts cash in boons to gain aid from the Quincunx. Beijing's Blood Court declares midnight war on the Genji, but the House's daimyo had planned for this possibility. Using their business and Kin-jin contacts, Genji arms its vampires with Western armaments; Kuei-jin expecting samurai swords face Maxim guns and high explosives. The Genji do not win easily, since the Blood Court mobilizes several old and potent mandarins for the war, but they do win. The gaki extort a huge indemnity in jade from both the Green and Blood Courts, but many Cathayans believe the gaki cheated by employing Western arms, and worse, sold out to the West. Accusations of *akuma* fly, which the Genji meet with unanswered challenges to resume the war.

The Chinese mystique steadily erodes through the remaining century, and China's repeated humiliation reflects badly on the Quincunx: Is the Quincunx as weak and inept as the mortal Chinese government? For the gaki, the Sino-Japanese War sweeps away the last trace of deference to the ancient mainland courts. As the century ends, Japanese vampires speak openly of replacing the Quincunx as the dominant power among the Kuei-jin.

JAPAN

ARCHITECTURE

Japanese architecture has several distinctive characteristics, most notably the use of wood and paper. Later in the Victorian period, the contrast between older, traditional buildings and the Westernized structures

of the burgeoning cities emphasize the radical changes in every sphere of Japanese life.

Wood is the favored construction material in Japan, which boasts the largest and oldest wooden buildings in the world. The basic structure of most buildings consists of a post-and-beam wooden box with a peaked roof attached, creating buildings dominated by straight lines. Japanese architecture never includes vaults or arches, and curved walls are rare. This is offset somewhat by the often elaborate decorations attached to roofs.

Because the posts bear the structure's entire weight, internal walls are not required to bear any load whatsoever. This lends tremendous flexibility to the internal layout, with paper screens for walls that are moved around to create different spaces. Gold leaf is an especially popular covering for screens since it reflects light back into a room.

The distinction between interior and exterior is also blurred, since exterior walls are often little more than a series of sliding wooden panels. The Japanese appreciate the ability to open the walls during the hot humid summers, giving buildings expansive views of their surroundings. Many buildings have tile roofs, though thatch and wooden shingles are also common. Piling tons of heavy fired clay on flimsy walls might seem insane in an earthquake-prone country, but the wooden posts and beams make buildings more flexible — and therefore more resistant — to shaking than a stone or brick structure.

Fire is a great danger, however, given that buildings of paper and resinous wood burn quickly. A fire can destroy large sections of a city, where the buildings are closely packed together. This makes arson the most hated of crimes. Under the Tokugawa regime, convicted arsonists are burned alive.

Fortunately, urban Japanese have three defenses against fire. The first occurs when the Shogunate widens some streets to serve as firebreaks. Secondly, merchants build special fireproof buildings called *kura*, with thick plaster walls and few doors or windows, to protect their goods from blazes. Finally, the Japanese can strip homes of its wood and paper panels, floors and ceilings in less than an hour, leaving nothing but a roof and some slow-burning timbers for the fire.

CITIES

In this period, Edo/Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka remain Japan's leading cities. Edo and Kyoto grow large through their association with the Imperial Court and the Shogunate, while Osaka has been Japan's commercial hub for centuries. Most other cities grew around castles, their economies remaining closely linked to the military government through the Edo period.

Most buildings are only one story tall, while the *kura* stand out because they are two stories high. Buddhist temples are often the city's tallest buildings after the castle, and only large businesses occupy structures of their own. Most artisans and lesser merchants conduct

business from their homes, with a *kura* off to one side to hold their goods.

Communal dwellings are seldom seen in the Tokugawa period. Buddhist monasteries form one notable exception, as do barracks for the daimyo's soldiers. During the Meiji period, however, Tokyo gains many cheap tenement or townhouse blocks, and each one-story dwelling has its own door to the street and its own small garden plot in back (though they all share a single roof).

Like islands in the sea, Kyoto and Edo/Tokyo each contain a walled park of palaces and gardens. The Imperial Court dwells in Kyoto until 1868, when it moves to Edo and takes over the palace compound of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Tokyo also boasts Ueno Park, formerly a private estate that held the Tokugawa family shrine.

Japan's city air is clean and clear through much of the Victorian Age, but as Japan industrializes, factory smoke gradually fouls the air. In 1900, however, the full horrors of city smog are still far in the future.

HOMES

Japanese homes often look quite dreary from the street. Even the wealthiest Japanese do not paint their homes, showing the black or white of plaster and the gray or brown hues of weathered wood. Away from the street, however, a single home or collection of domiciles might enclose a garden that receives all the care so absent from the facades. Interiors display the minimalist elegance associated with Zen esthetics, perfection of craftsmanship and, for most people, extreme poverty. The Japanese don't clutter their homes because they don't own very much, though the guest-room invariably contains a niche or open closet called the *tokonoma*. This niche holds a scroll-painting, a vase of flowers, a sword-rack or some other ornament.

The floors of Japanese homes are raised 18 to 24 inches above the ground, while trapdoors permit storage beneath. Mats of woven straw and grass, about three feet by six feet, cover the floor planks. The Japanese invariably scale their rooms so that these standardized mats cover the entire floor exactly, with six and eight mats being the most common room sizes. Shoes can destroy mats, so — as even ignorant Westerners learn shortly after Japan opens its doors — people remove their shoes before stepping into the matted areas.

Most people rely on fire for light and heat, with town gas and electricity being a common convenience only in the 20th century. The Japanese use a variety of lamps and candles, with lamp kerosene quickly becoming one of the most popular imports while many houses sport paper lanterns outside the front door. Stoves are made from clay, but often lack any sort of chimney. Smoke escapes through a simple hole in the ceiling. Particularly in the cities, people often receive their heat from braziers of charcoal, which burn without smoke or dangerous open flames.

Most homes contain a high shelf called the *kamidana* that serves as a household Shinto shrine. It may hold a tiny model shrine or simply a circular mirror, along with a votive lamp, trays for small offerings, little brass stands and miniature inscribed tablets of wood. A home Buddhist shrine consists of a cabinet holding a small painting or image of a Buddha, a brass lamp and vessels for offerings of food, wine or incense.

CASTLES

Japan has three kinds of castles. The mountain-top *yamajiro* generally lacks well-developed fortifications, relying instead on its inaccessible location for defense. The Japanese constructed and occupied them during times of war. The flatland *hirajiro* typically had the strongest fortifications and were popular towards the end of the Sengoku (CE 1467 to 1568) period and throughout the Edo periods. Finally, the "flatland-mountain" *hirayamajiro*, popular during the Sengoku period, were constructed on low hills overlooking plains, and have the advantage of commanding a good view of all approaches. All these castles remain in use as working fortresses throughout the Victorian period.

Japanese castles all have certain features in common. The main keep, called the *tenshukaku*, is built of wood on a high stone foundation. With their whitewashed walls between piled layers of gables, Japanese keeps look more like gigantic flower-buds or pine cones than the grim stone piles of medieval European castles. One or more baileys, or *maru*, surround the *tenshukaku*, with fully-developed castles holding three *maru*: the main, or inner *honmaru*, the second, or middle *ninomaru* and the third, or outer *sannomaru*. The *maru* are arranged irregularly around the *tenshukaku*, forcing attackers to wind their way towards the bailey and giving defenders time to regroup. Each bailey also has one or more *mon* (fortified gates), arranged like the bailey walls, to disrupt an attacker's advance by forcing him through narrow passages and around corners. The *hori*, or moat, forms the outermost defense ring. The *hori*'s innermost wall is always considerably higher than water level, forcing attackers to scale the wall before even reaching the castle.

RELIGION

In their millennia of history, the Japanese have followed Shinto, Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity. The first three faiths left deep imprints on *gaki* culture, but the fourth has been a problem for them, as it was for Japan's mortal authorities.

SHINTO

This religion's name simply means "The way of the gods," but it has no sacred texts or commandments. Its priests have no particular hierarchy uniting them, though the Emperor of Japan serves as the entire nation's high priest. Shinto holds no opinion on the validity or falsehood of other religions, and did not even have a

name until the sixth century, when devotees decided they needed some way to distinguish their faith from Buddhism and Confucianism. Shinto imposes no duty except honoring the gods and spirits called *kami*, but individuals may honor whatever *kami* they wish, as much or as little as they please.

Shintoists honor the *kami* in order to ask for favors, purify themselves of crime or spiritual defilement and to give thanks for good fortune, among other reasons. Some Shinto cults practice faith healing while others tell fortunes and peddle charms. Many Shinto cults incorporate Buddhist or Confucian ethics.

The Japanese consider Shinto shrines the dwelling-places of the *kami*. A worshiper thus visits the spirit at its own home, which may range in size from tiny roadside boxes (some of which are portable) to the grandest complexes. Large shrines generally follow a common, traditional plan starting with a *torii*, or gate, made of wood, stone, metal or even (recently) concrete. The *torii* delineates the sacred area from the profane world outside. The largest building in the shrine is the *honden*, or inner sanctum, which is usually elevated above the other buildings and accessible by stairs. This remains off-limits to visitors. The *honden* usually contains little except the *mitama-shiro* or *go-shintai*, sacred symbols representing the *kami* being worshiped.

In front of the *honden* is the *haiden* or worship hall. Generally quite spacious and open on all sides, a *haiden* typically consists of little more than pillars and a roof. Raked gravel paths connect the shrine complex's various buildings while white paper zigzags decorate the trees growing near a shrine.

A person entering a shrine first encounters a stone water basin, often with ladles balanced across it. Worshipers wash their hands and mouth as a form of purification before approaching the deity. The worshiper then tosses a small offering into a cashbox outside the *haiden* and uses a shaker to attract the *kami*'s attention (devout worshipers clap their hands twice to ensure the *kami* is listening). The worshiper bows while offering their prayers, sometimes giving gifts the *kami* consider valuable, such as swords or armor. Offerings may also be purely symbolic, however, like ornamental envelopes of folded paper enclosing a thin strip of dried meat, or even a strip of colored paper to symbolize the meat. Cloth is an extremely common gift.

Japan has no ruined Shinto shrines. Since all are built of wood, abandoned temples rot in Japan's wet climate. What's more, the Japanese rebuild shrines every 50 or 100 years, cutting down and using the trees growing around the old shrine to build a new *honden* to receive the sacred symbols. They then destroy the old shrine and plant new trees for the next shrine. The substance changes; the form endures.

The town of Ise holds Amaterasu Omikami's shrine and her legendary mirror. The Japanese rebuild Ise's

shrine every 20 years, which is the closest Shinto comes to a national temple. Pilgrims from throughout Japan visit Ise, paying their respects to the nation's divine mother. When poor villagers can't afford to make the pilgrimage themselves, they pool their funds to send a representative to Ise. The delegate delivers the entire village's prayers and receives charms and blessings to distribute upon his return.

Buddhism and Confucianism eclipsed Shinto for many centuries, forcing many Shinto cults to adopt Buddhist practices and Confucian philosophies. In the 18th century, however, nationalist scholars revived Shinto as part of a drive to purge foreign elements from Japanese culture.

In the Meiji Restoration, this trend culminates in State Shinto wherein, unlike ancient Shinto, it proclaims dogmas and commandments — chiefly to ensure the individual's complete submission to the Emperor and Japan's glory. State Shinto further declares the Japanese people superior to all others and their divine Emperor destined to rule the world.

Many *gaki* follow State Shinto or at least find it useful, linking it to an old legend among their kind that no *kami* or *gaki* can resist a direct command from the "God-blooded Emperor." Since *gaki* do not generally visit the Imperial Court (any more than *Kin-jin* enthral kings or presidents), no one is known to have tested this legend. State Shinto encourages obedience to authority, however, and most *gaki* prefer their mortals self-sacrificing and submissive.

Another legend says that Amaterasu's mirror still holds her reflection. *Gaki* who make the pilgrimage to Ise can sneak into the *honden* to see the goddess herself — and receive the True Death from the sun's own face. Among the *gaki*, "going to Ise" is a euphemism for suicide by sunlight.

Gaki approaching the spirits as humble supplicants do so through Shinto rites. These do not actually compel the *kami* in any supernatural way and simply entail good manners, enforced by the sheer weight of tradition (for *gaki* characters, the Rituals background includes knowledge of the ancient and correct formulas for invoking the *kami*).

Buddhism

Most Japanese are Buddhists as well as Shintoists. Buddhist temples exhibit a fair degree of variety in their design, but each also adheres to the symmetrical characteristic of their Chinese influences. The main hall or auditorium (*hondo*) has a flat ceiling sometimes painted with dragons in clouds, a traditional Zen theme. The temple also has a bell tower, or *shora*, to call the faithful to worship, while large temples maintain a library called a *bunko*. Each temple also contains one or more images of various Buddhas while many also have *nio*, fearsome images derived from the Hindu gods Brahma and Indra just beside the gates to frighten away evil.

Buddhism entered Japan long enough ago for home-grown sects to develop. Most Japanese Buddhism is of the *Mahayana* ("Great Vehicle") variety, which accepts good works, rituals and prayers to various gods and Buddhas as sources of merit and salvation. Much of Japanese Buddhism centers on the Amida Buddha — the Buddha of Compassion — rather than the historical Gautama Buddha. The Amida Buddha offers a conventional paradise of jewels, gardens and music, called the Pure Land, to those who pray to him and lead virtuous lives. The Pure Land sect goes further and claims that anyone who sincerely calls upon the Amida Buddha, even once, wins salvation and paradise.

Zen Buddhism originally stems from China, but the Japanese made it distinctly their own. Unlike the more ritualistic Amida sects, Zen maintains an austere focus on mental discipline, with its devotees striving to comprehend the nature of consciousness and overcome the snares of fear and desire. Devotees practice long meditations to clear their minds of extraneous thought, since Zen argues that one cannot apprehend the true nature of consciousness and reality through reason. *Koans* — enigmatic anecdotes, maxims or paradoxical questions like the famous "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" — baffle the nattering, questioning mind into silence, allowing the initiate to perceive the world without distraction.

During the Edo period, the samurai extolled Zen as a means to focus the mind and banish fear and other distracting emotions. In the Victorian Age, many *gaki* cultivate it for the same purpose. Zen's esoteric regimen obviously jibes well with cold-blooded Dharmas like the Song of the Shadow or the Way of the Resplendent Crane. Some Thrashing Dragon devotees also esteem Zen, however, for its emphasis on clear perception and living in the moment without hesitation or analysis. In fact, followers of any Dharma may find something useful in Zen.

Buddhism also maintains a long tradition of dealing with spirits, and Buddhists use their sutras to exorcize evil entities. In legend, Buddhist saints and sages often convert hostile spirits to become "Guardians of the Dharma," who then turn their wrath against the enemies of enlightenment. *Gaki* may use Buddhist rituals and sutras when dealing with the spirits, but such practices are more aggressive and coercive than Shinto rites.

Confucianism

Strictly speaking, Confucianism is a philosophy, not a religion, which says nothing about the gods except that one should worship them — not for any spiritual benefit, but as a ritual of social unity and tradition. Founder Kung-fu Tzu kept his focus firmly on social matters rather than on any supernatural world.

Confucius posited five basic social interactions of 1) Lord and subject, 2) Father and son, 3) Husband and wife, 4) Elder and younger brother and 5) Friend and

WANDERING PRIESTS

The Japan of the 19th century has many types of priests walking its roads with no fixed abodes. Most sell charms and blessings. The Buddhist *rokubu*, for instance, specializes in blessings to restore fertility in barren women and carries a long wooden box strapped to his back — a portable altar, whose compartments hold his ceremonial paraphernalia. An even lower grade of semi-religious performers overlaps with wandering entertainers. A certain class of self-proclaimed Buddhist nuns, for example, travels about singing hymns for alms, but also quite readily sings less spiritual songs.

peer. Only the last one is between equals. Otherwise, inferiors should obey their superiors. In return, superiors should set a good example through virtues like kindness, honesty, wisdom and, especially, filial piety. Through individual devotion to virtue and duty, the state becomes strong, just and prosperous.

The Tokugawa Shogunate uses Confucian ideology to support its rule, and Japan remains steeped in Confucianism through the Meiji Restoration and into the 20th century. From childhood, the Japanese hear that obedience to authority is the supreme good, and every *gaki* whose mortal life began after 1600 has heard the Confucian message.

This does not make mortals or *gaki* into mindless, obedient drones, but for more than two centuries, samurai would execute commoners for any insult or insubordination — a privilege justified by Confucian ideals. Thus, *gaki* may hesitate a bit more than other *Kuei-jin* in challenging their elders and superiors, who may be a bit quicker to punish younger *Kuei-jin* for disobedience or disrespect. *Gaki* meeting a *daimyo* or other equal luminary are well advised to observe every detail of etiquette. Conversely, *Gaki* who regard themselves superior to mortals likewise employ Confucius to justify their exploitation or subjugation. In the Victorian Age, Resplendent Cranes in particular proffer copious Confucian guidelines for the creation, care and use of Scarlet Screens.

CHRISTIANITY

The Meiji regime does not encourage the Japanese to accept Christianity, but does not prevent immigrants and visitors from building churches either. By the 1880s, for instance, Osaka has a Roman Catholic cathedral that Buddhist priests occasionally visit to pay their respects to the foreign religion.

Before the Edo period, Japan held about 300,000 Roman Catholics, many of whom died in the Shogunate's purge. A few of these took the Second Breath. Admittedly,

Christians are perhaps the rarest, smallest subset of Japanese *Kuei-jin*. The traditionalist *Bishamon* despise them and the *Genji* do not like them much better.

Christian *gaki* must thus renounce or hide their faith. The former course is easier, and Christian *gaki* are too few to form a real faction anyway. After Japan opens itself to the world, however, fears of a foreign religion revive. *Gaki* of Christian origin face renewed suspicion regarding their loyalty to the Western church or to the *Kin-jin*, a question Christian *gaki* often ask themselves.

SOCIAL CLASSES

Japan begins the Victorian Age with one of the world's more rigid social hierarchies. The Japanese divide themselves into samurai, farmers, artisans and merchants. The samurai, who define the system, justify all social ranks by their utility: The farmer grows rice to feed the samurai; the artisan makes his home, clothing, weapons, armor and other implements; and the merchant is a disgusting parasite on society because he makes nothing at all, but merely buys and sells other people's labors. Some groups fall outside these classes, like priests (who are above the system) and entertainers (who are below it). The two important distinctions, however, remain the samurai and merchant.

SAMURAI

In 1840, the samurai still rule Japan. They possess the right to carry long and short swords, a right they share with very few favored professions, like doctors. Only the samurai, however, may wield those weapons or, under many circumstances, perform summary executions on commoners. Although the samurai remain the hereditary military elite, they spend little time fighting since Japan hasn't seen war for two centuries. Samurai practice sword fighting as well as other combat skills, and many become very good at it — in the same spirit in that other samurai become proficient at jurisprudence, Chinese philosophy, writing haiku or flower arranging. Their actual duties, however, ran the gamut of government, from feudal lord to tax assessor to street officer.

Every samurai receives a stipend of rice from the state, ranging from over 100,000 bales per year for the greatest mortal *daimyo* to less than a single bale for the lowest samurai. Most samurai prefer cash instead, but the poorer samurai often take the rice to survive. A samurai's duties in government are officially "hobbies" while they keep themselves ready to fight. Some samurai settle into sinecures as minor functionaries or landowners or become pure drones, but others actually become skilled administrators. The 18th century samurai Ōoka, for instance, became famous as a judge who could untangle any mystery, as were the scholars studying foreign lore filtering through Nagasaki and the ambassadors and students sent by the Shogunate to see the world following the Treaty of Kanagawa.

Each samurai holds a place in a chain of command with the Shogun at its apex. A samurai who loses his place in the hierarchy, whether by personal disgrace, the loss of his master or by choice, becomes a *ronin* who must fend for himself. *Ronin* take occupations ranging from writers and schoolteachers to bodyguards and hired thugs.

Until their abolition, the samurai are easily recognizable by a number of factors. Their formal outerwear consists of broad, skirt-like trousers and an over-jacket with enormously broad, stiffened shoulders. The two swords are worn, thrust in the belt. Samurai also wear their hair partly shaved and twisted into a distinctive topknot.

Samurai women have very few options in life. They exist to serve as wives and mothers, spending much time with dressing and makeup to maintain their appearance in line with the complicated rules of etiquette. They may pursue mild diversions like flower arrangement, the tea ceremony, viewing cherry blossoms or reading poetry and novels. The wives of low-ranking samurai endure fewer restrictions since their etiquette is less stringent. The women of the Shogun's own household, however, may enjoy one active pursuit: training with the *naginata*, a sort of halberd, in case an assassin penetrates their lord's innermost sanctum.

The "outer lords" who help overthrow the Shogunate are samurai. Many poor samurai also gain little from the Tokugawa regime and support the Meiji Restoration instead, while samurai zealots constitute most of the *sonnō jōi* movement. Nevertheless, the Meiji regime progressively reduces the privileges of the class, permitting commoners to take family names in 1870, followed by a right of intermarriage between classes the next year. Commoners may also wear formal apparel and ride on horseback in 1871, while samurai lose the right to cut down impertinent commoners. By 1876, the government abolishes the entire class, commuting the state stipends as government bonds even though most of the money goes to the former daimyo and court aristocrats. The lower samurai receive almost nothing.

Through the 1870s and 80s, dispossessed samurai become the Meiji regime's most fervent enemy. The samurai who develop practical administrative skills, however, find new roles in business, government and the new regular army and navy. Their traditions of discipline and service to the state make many of them leaders once more.

MERCHANTS

The samurai despise the merchants, who do not fight boldly or serve the state, instead scheming for profit. Nevertheless, the mercantile class grows steadily more powerful through the Tokugawa period, and some merchant families became immensely rich. The apex of their profession arrives when a merchant receives a government contract to ship tax-rice or handle state financial accounts. Many of the largest business combines

of Victorian Japan and later actually begin in the Tokugawa period. The Mitsui family, for instance, started in the 17th century as *sake* merchants and pawnbrokers, then expanded into the cloth business and money-changing. These great merchant houses become the natural partners of the Meiji government in developing Japanese business and industry.

AMONG THE GAKI

Most *uji* ignore a Kuei-jin's mortal origin, taking in whatever *gaki* draw the Second Breath in their province, nor does becoming daimyo necessarily mean they regard themselves as military leaders. Iga and Koga Kuei-jin consider themselves warriors but use the much older word *bushi*, while *gaki* who call themselves "samurai" are relatively young, pretentious or identify with the aspects of service to a *wu*, *uji* or Dharma.

Some merchant families who build their fortunes generation after generation do not always rely on their own commercial skills; a few have a *gaki* as a silent partner. This might be someone who took the Second Breath and couldn't stand surrendering the family business, or a Genji vampire sensing an opportunity. Of the former, such *gaki* must balance paternal (or maternal) concern with an "inappropriate" close connection to their mortal family. *Gaki* magnates carefully construct enormous, corporate Scarlet Screens to mute any criticism from their daimyo.

SOME CULTURAL NOTES

The following are a few of Japan's more unusual institutions and practices, and how they relate to the *gaki*.

PROSTITUTES AND GEISHA

These groups are not actually the same, though they do overlap. Geisha are professional escorts and entertainers for wealthy and powerful men. They must dress and wear makeup like aristocratic ladies, play music, sing, dance and make witty conversation to help pass an evening pleasantly — skills not demanded of a wife.

Girls often become prostitutes because impoverished fathers sell them to brothels for a period of indentured servitude. In addition to sex, the better class of prostitute provides entertainment like a geisha, thus learning etiquette, music and other skills that may make them valued prospects for marriage when they finally return home. Some indentures last a very long time, however, because the parents need more money.

The Tokugawa regime recognized it could not eliminate prostitution, so instead it regulated the profession by designating official brothel districts in the great cities and along the main roads. In Tokyo, the Yoshiwara district becomes famous for its elegant and accomplished courtesans, while the "Yoshiwara girls" become leaders of fashion. Plays and novels romanticize them as epitomes of womanhood — even of fidelity and self-sacrifice for their favored lovers. A visit to Yoshiwara

itself becomes an exercise in courtly etiquette. The true connoisseur approaches the district by river-boat, then rides to his destination on horseback (at one period, white clothing and a white horse are *de rigueur* for true elegance). The guests and "hostesses" enjoy *sake*, music, dancing and party games like blind-man's bluff before finally pairing up for the evening and heading home the next morning.

A high-class brothel makes an extremely pleasant Scarlet Screen. A continuous stream of men passes through, and after the *sake*, revelry and attentions of the ladies, they sleep soundly and often mistake the dizziness of moderate blood loss for over-indulgence the previous night. Managing a brothel demands some work, though, and the market for the finer establishments is limited.

Ninja

The origins of Japan's famous assassin-spies vanish, appropriately enough, into legend. All that is certain is that the ninja hail from mountain-dwelling clans in the Iga and Koga provinces. They are masters of stealth, infiltration, deception and silent murder, and though the wilder legends speak of magical powers like walking through walls, the ninja's mundane skills are quite amazing enough.

Ninjas rarely hop over walls or skulk down corridors while shrouded in black, hooded pajamas. More often, they approach their targets while disguised as farmers or servants... people beneath the notice of an arrogant samurai. History attests to their combat skills, however, as well as their use of many clever devices to cross rivers and castle moats, scale walls and decoy guards and other enemies.

Japan's aristocrats sometimes hire ninja to assist them in their dynastic struggles, both to murder rivals and rescue captured allies. By the Victorian Age, however, ninjas supposedly die out: The Tokugawa regime does not need them and no one else dares incur its wrath. Anyone who can summon a ninja from their remote mountain villages has the most unusual allies indeed, but it is not *impossible* for a Kuei-jin to have ninja Contacts, Allies or even Retainers. Justifying this, however, is another matter entirely.

Suicide

Suicide to expiate shame or failure is another Japanese custom that attracts Western notice. It is, of course, exclusively a samurai tradition; the lower classes hold no honor except to work hard and pay their taxes. Honor-suicide, called *hari-kiri* or *seppuku*, is most common in a military context; a commander who loses a battle might kill himself from shame. If he does not, his own

superior might demand it of him, as an alternative to greater disgrace.

Traitors might be offered *seppuku* as a way to redeem some shred of honor and avert the scandal of a trial, while the loser in a civil war may choose suicide to avoid the humiliation of submitting to the winner. General Nogi, who commands the Japanese military throughout the Russo-Japanese War, kills himself when the Meiji Emperor dies to follow his master into death, just as Nogi's wife does the same to follow her husband. *Seppuku* can even serve as a drastic form of protest against a superior's policies, placing the burden of shame on them for driving you to the deed.

The classic method for *hari-kiri* is to stab oneself on the left side, from the waist upward, to strike as many vital organs as possible. Sometimes, a friend stands by, ready to behead the victim and mercifully cut short his suffering.

The *gaki* also employ *seppuku* to expiate shame. For the Kuei-jin, gutting oneself is merely a Little Death, though not entirely without risk. They consider *seppuku* appropriate for failures that harm the *uji*, significant crimes or serious loss of face. True Death, however, comes from facing the Eye of Heaven for crimes that cost a *wu-mate's* existence or some other major treachery, such as betraying one's *uji* to another House.

TEA CEREMONY

The *cha-no-yu*, or tea ceremony, baffles many Western observers, who don't understand making such a big production out of a cup of tea. The ceremony emerged from Zen Buddhism as an exercise in focusing attention and stilling the mind. When the Imperial Court and aristocracy took hold of the ceremony, they made its very simplicity a form of complication. Every detail of brewing and drinking the tea became the subject of an elaborate and precise etiquette. Different schools of tea ceremony developed, based on ways to hold the cup, ways to wipe the kettle rim, and other minutiae. A fully-elaborated, formal tea ceremony can continue for hours. Homes have special rooms for the *cha-no-yu*, or the wealthy might dedicate a small outbuilding specifically for that purpose.

It was inevitable that the *gaki* devise their own version of this sacred rite. *Gaki* masters have written whole libraries of ceremonial etiquette for the imbibing of blood, breath or other sources of Chi: the nature and appearance of the victim, the setting, the means of drawing blood (and from what body part), the incense to burn and a thousand other details. All this ritual serves two purposes. It heightens the participant's awareness of the Chi and its suffusion into the body, and it proclaims her exquisite good taste and ability to follow long and complicated instructions.

CHAPTER FOUR: SOUTHEAST ASIA

HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

Southeast Asia has always been a crossroads between the main trade routes between China and the West. As a result, wave upon wave of foreigners affected its various cultures. Numerous Chinese and Indian cultural and religious movements washed over the region and, from the 13th century onward, Islam and Arab traders added to the exotic mix of faiths and culture defining the region.

When the Portuguese arrived in the 16th century, they became just another player on an already crowded stage, as did the Dutch, English and French who followed. The Europeans remained equal players until the end of the 18th century, when technological progress and political will gave them the impetus to empire in Asia, turning their traders into colonialists.

Europe fulfills her colonial ambitions by 1850, leaving the last half of the 19th century to remold Southeast Asia to suit her own precepts and needs. They accomplish this with short wars, though people should never doubt the brutality and violence associated with colonial rule since low-level fighting plagues many countries throughout the period. In many cases, violence is a result of modernization rather than deliberate policy, but the results are the same.

DUTCH EAST INDIES

The Dutch East Indies falls into two almost completely separate regions: Java and the Outer Islands. The effects of colonialism on each area are quite different due to geography and economics.

OUTER ISLANDS

The jungle-clad mountains form the interior of most of the islands in the Malay Archipelago, which were never very hospitable places to live. As a consequence, most civilization grew on the coasts, turning the Malays into a seafaring, trading and mercantile people, culturally predisposed to new ideas and open to all they met. The few major civilizations and many tribes existing on the interior plateaus and valleys were just the opposite, as closed and isolated as their inhospitable homes. They used the coastal cities as their conduit to the outside world, thus reinforcing the trading monopolies of the coast dwellers.

The islands also grew a cornucopia of spices that drew a never-ending parade of traders from China, India, the Middle East, Africa and eventually Europe over the centuries. These traders and their cultures influenced the outer islands, bringing new religions and cultures, while many even settled permanently, creating an urban community of mixed Malay, Arab and Chinese extraction in the biggest cities.

Just before the Victorian Age, the great competition for the Spice Islands' rich trade was long since won by the Netherlands. The Dutch East Indies Company (VOC)

TIMELINE

1771–1802	Tayson Rebellion (Vietnam).
1787	Danang ceded to France (Vietnam).
1786	British East India Company occupies Penang (Malay Peninsula).
1800	Dutch East India Company dissolved and the Dutch East Indies (DEI) becomes a Dutch State possession.
1803	Founding of Nguyen Dynasty (Vietnam).
1809	British take control of the DEI.
1816	DEI returned to the Netherlands by Britain after the Napoleonic Wars.
1816–1849	Palembang Rebellion (Sumatra)
1819	Singapore founded.
1821–1838	Padri War (Sumatra)
1821	Siam occupies its tributary, the Sultanate of Kedah.
1822	Major British mission to Vietnam.
1823	Dutch take direct rule of southern Sumatra.
1824	Dutch cede Melaka and all other interests in the Malay Peninsula to Britain and open the DEI to British traders.
1824–1826	First Anglo-Burmese War
1825–1830	Java War; The Sultanate of Yogyakarta is defeated.
1826	Delineation of Thai-Burmese border; Treaty of Burney setting out Thai and British interests in Malaya.
1830	Dutch take direct rule of the whole of Java, including neutral Surakarta.
1834	Spain opens Manila to foreign traders.
1838	Start of the Dutch campaign to pacify Sulawesi, Siamese return the Sultanate of Kedah to local rule.
1840	Major famines on Java; large tin deposits found in central Malaya; first British settlement in North Borneo.
1841	Formation of the White Raja of Sarawak.
1845	American naval forces intervene on behalf of Christian missionaries in Vietnam.
1846	First Balinese Campaign
1847	Major British mission to Vietnam.
1848	Reformist pressures grow in Holland.
1848	Second Balinese Campaign

drove the non-European traders from all ports and taxed all European competitors out of business. Yet, the VOC did not exert strong control of the islands beyond the ports. All they needed control is trade; an empire would have been expensive.

Direct rule from Holland replaces the VOC in 1800 when corruption renders the company insolvent. Before the islands' new political rulers can accomplish anything, however, the British displace them after Napoleon occupies Holland in 1809. In this period of tenuous control, the outer islands reclaim independence; when the Dutch return in 1816, they must rebuild their control from the ground up. Yet, by this time, the economic value of many outer islands is limited, since Javanese plantations now grow the valuable spices and the Dutch colonial government is slow in expanding their rule to the outer islands or large coastal towns.

It is only from the 1840s onward that the Dutch turn their attention back to the outer islands. Since ruling the islands is fundamentally unprofitable, the conquest places increasing strain on the DEI's budget, forcing the wars to proceed slowly. The main reasons the DEI even bothers is a desire to stop piracy, prevent other European powers from occupying unconquered islands and (for local officials) for personal glory and profit.

Bali proves especially problematic, with violent internal politics and a tradition of interfering in Javanese disputes by hiring out its own soldiers as mercenaries. In 1846 the Dutch attack, and again in 1848 and 1849. Resistance is fierce, and the Dutch only manage to gain control of the north of the island along with securing promises of loyalty from the remaining Balinese Rajas. Small rebellions, banditry, piracy and violent intrigue remain part of Balinese life until 1908, when the Dutch

1849	Third Balinese Campaign; James Brooke negotiates alliance with Sulu Sultanate (Southern Philippines) only to have the British government reject it.
1852–1853	Second Anglo-Burmese War
1855	Central Sumatran Sultanates surrender to Dutch Rule; Spain opens the Philippines to foreign trade; Bowring Treaty between Siam and Britain.
1856	Britain recognizes Siam as an independent state.
1859–1863	Banjarmasin Rebellion (Borneo)
1862	Civil war in Pahang (Malaya) leads to general war between southern Malay sultanates; The Sultanate of Magindanao falls to the Spanish.
1871	Anglo-Dutch Treaty of Sumatra.
1873–1881	Acehnese War (DEI)
1874	Pangkor engagement leads to appointment of residents to Malay sultanates; The Perak War breaks out in response.
1875	Batak War (DEI)
1880	Sabah and Sarawak in North Borneo become a protectorate of the British Crown.
1882	France assumes control over Northern Vietnam.
1885	Berlin Conference delineates European spheres of influence in Asia.
1885–1886	Third Anglo-Burmese War
1890	DEI population hits 23.6 million, a fivefold increase within a century.
1891	Delineation of the DEI-North Borneo border
1893	Delineation of Thai-Laotian border
1895	Formation of the Federated Malay States under British protection.
1898	Dutch exert formal control over their half of New Guinea; the USA defeats Spain in the Spanish American war and occupies the Philippines, putting down the nationalist movement.
1901	USA conquers the Sulu Sultanate, completing its domination of the Philippines.
1904	France expands west of the Mekong into Siam's territory.
1905	Sultanate of Brunei (North Borneo) becomes a British Protectorate.
1906	Completion of Sulawesi pacification.
1907	Delineation of Thai-Cambodian border. Siam relinquishes its Cambodian provinces in return for France relinquishing its provinces west of the Mekong.
1908	Fourth, and final, Balinese Campaign.
1909	Delineation of Thai-Malaya border; Thailand abandons its claims south of the Sultanate of Pattani and the other Northern Malay Sultanates become British Protectorates.

are finally strong enough to bring the rest of the island in line. In the process, many Rajas, along with their entire families down to the youngest child, commit suicide by staging frontal attacks on the invading Dutch soldiers.

The islands to the east of Bali, the Lesser Sundas and the Dutch half of Papua, remain untouched save for operations against pirates and slavers until the 1900s. To the north, in the Sulawesi Islands, Christian missionaries precede official Dutch interests, competing with Javanese Muslim missionaries to convert the animist Bugis and Makarese inhabitants. Both indigenous groups fight each other as violently as they fight the Dutch who, despite launching a campaign in 1838 to pacify the Sulawesi Islands, don't control the islands until 1906. The most brutal fighting of all involves the suppression of Toraja headhunters in central Sulawesi, which kills thousands through disease alone.

In 1841, following the White Raj of Sarawak's creation in Northern Borneo (see below for more information), the Dutch suddenly grow concerned with their Borneo holdings. Over the next 20 years, they intervene in local affairs with increasing frequency. The discovery of coal in 1846 further heightens their interests and in 1859, Dutch intervention leads to a massive rebellion against them in Banjarmasin. While the Dutch repress the rebellion by 1863 and assume direct control over the whole of Dutch Borneo, they face minor revolts every few years until well into the 20th century.

In Sumatra, the Dutch contend with their most determined opponents. Because Sumatra possesses valuable agricultural lands and mineral deposits, the Dutch try retaking the island immediately following the departure of the British. Fearing British intervention, however, the Dutch are more cautious than they otherwise

might have been. Dutch forces occupy the Palembang Sultanate in the island's south in 1816, but a rebellion immediately breaks out. The Dutch assume direct rule over southern Sumatra in 1823 and exile the Sultan, but the fighting continues until 1849.

In central Sumatra, the Dutch easily take the coastal districts, but have difficulty extending their rule inland. By 1855, the Sultans of Jambi, Inderagiri, Panei, Siak and Bila surrender to Dutch rule, but violence and fighting continue until 1907 despite aristocratic subservience. In Minangkabau, the Dutch find ready allies in the local aristocrats trying to suppress the Padri, an Islamic revivalist movement based on the Arabian fundamentalist Wahhabi sect. A war starts in 1821 and continues to 1838, but the Dutch never succeed in re-establishing the aristocrats' power; the Padri movement remains a serious source of disturbances.

The highlands north of Minangkabau serve as home for the animist Batak people. Both the Dutch and Padri movement invade this area, intending to convert the Bataks and bring them in line. The Bataks resist both the Dutch and Padri, however, and in 1875, the Dutch launch a major offensive against the animists that continues until 1895.

On Sumatra's northern tip is the Sultanate of Aceh, an Arabian-style, vibrant trading power. The Dutch colonial government initially holds off moving north, fearing British reprisals should Aceh appeal to them for help. The Sultans of Aceh, however, despite their fractious government, realize the Dutch will eventually expand north and put significant effort into finding another sovereign nation to protect them and their interests in Batak territory. Worried by Aceh's diplomatic overtures to other countries, the Dutch sign a treaty with Britain in 1871 guaranteeing British trading interests in return for Britain's recognition of Dutch sovereignty over Aceh. In 1873 the Dutch invade, following reports the Sultan is negotiating with Singapore's American Consul.

By 1874, the Dutch have seized control of the coast. In 1881, after losing thousands of colonial soldiers, the Dutch declare the Aceh War over. The truth, however, is very different. By 1875, Aceh's religious leaders assume control of the resistance forces and declare the war a Jihad. Despite the ostensible Dutch victory, the Aceh continue a vicious guerrilla campaign and force the Dutch to abandon most of the inland areas by 1884 because of their heavy losses. Only after discovering oil in 1898 do the Dutch return to crush the rebels; even then, it takes 14 years and thousands more lives.

JAVA

Java stood alone in the richness of its interior plateaus and resulting rich civilizations. Like their outer island counterparts, however, these inland civilizations were isolationists, quite happy to deal with outside traders rather than trade themselves. The last traders who established shop on the malarial coast was the Dutch

East Indies Company (VOC), who founded Batavia (Jakarta) in 1619. After founding Batavia, the VOC controlled Javanese external trade completely, slowly becoming a major player in the politics of various interior Sultanates. It was by no means the most powerful or influential player, though. As in the case of the outer islands, this suited the VOC, who had little desire for anything but profitable trade.

With the imposition of control in 1800 by the Dutch state, the relatively cozy relationship between the Sultans and Europeans comes to an end. The Dutch colonial governors see the riches to be had in Java's fertile farmlands, ideal for coffee and sugar, while the Sultanates' tyrannical and anachronistic rituals and morals fire the Dutch reformist Christian indignation. From the very beginning the Dutch try imposing limits on the Sultans, but as in the outer islands, the Napoleonic Wars force the transfer of control to the British for seven years.

When Dutch governors return in 1816, they quickly retake Java save for the two greatest Sultanates of the interior, Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Opium, the introduction of a money economy and Dutch restriction on traditional Javanese rights contribute to increasing tensions. In 1825, the Sultan of Yogyakarta is overthrown by his brother, instigating a massive rebellion. The fighting continues until 1830, killing at least half Yogyakarta's populace in the process. Surakarta, however, remains neutral, while many of the smaller sultanates side with the Dutch, eventually helping to crush the rebellion.

This war is the last major revolt in Java; the island's aristocratic elite buckle under instead and become willing pawns in the Dutch colonial apparatus. The great cultural centers of Yogyakarta and Surakarta grow stagnant and ritualized, forcing many young Javanese toward European culture instead. Meanwhile, the Dutch's pivotal goal is to make Java profitable, since Holland has little money. They introduce the Cultivation System, whereby a village must allocate 40% of its land for export crops that the Colonial government would buy for a set low price.

This system dramatically undermines traditional culture, as well as turning vast profits for Holland and corrupt officials both here and in Europe. Colonial officers of Arab and Chinese extraction exploit the local villagers, leaving them impoverished. The degree of exploitation is such that by the 1840s, major famines erupt because villagers don't have enough money to buy their own rice. With famine comes plague and in the 1850s, disease kills almost as many as starvation, which by some estimates number in the millions. In 1848, the tales of horror are sufficient to push the Dutch government into instigating reforms to protect the natives.

In 1862, the Dutch eliminate the Cultivation System while in 1870, they open the DEI to free enterprise. Unfortunately, the result is not what they expect. Few Javanese have the education to succeed in a progressive economy and, instead, Arab, European and Chinese merchants quickly dominate the new

economy. By this time, the old aristocracy is a purely bureaucratic class working for the Dutch and losing the respect they once held.

One result of this breakdown of traditional social structures is increasing peasant protests. Without educated leadership, however, they achieve little. The new educated class, the *Priyaya*, are urbane and as disinterested in the peasants as the old aristocrats. The role of social agitator, therefore, falls to religious leaders and their students, the *Pesantran*. The increasingly messianic nature of peasant revolts disturbs the Dutch, but by 1890, their control of Java is so complete that they easily suppress all peasant uprisings.

STRAIGHTS SETTLEMENTS & NORTH BORNEO

The sultanates of the Malay Peninsula (Malaya) and the powerful Brunei sultanate in North Borneo were part of the same society as the sultanates of the Malay Archipelago, but they lacked their natural riches. The Peninsula sultanates, however, straddled the trade route to China, which made the coastal sultanates wealthy and influential. A desire to control China's trade led Portugal to conquer the area in the 17th century, followed by the Dutch who replaced the Portuguese in the early 18th century.

Finally, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the British East India Company (EIC) replaces the Dutch, occupying Penang in 1786, founding Singapore in 1819 and acquiring Malacca from the Dutch in 1824. The EIC's only goal is protecting their trade route to China, and upon securing the Peninsula's only good ports, shows no interest in expanding their influence further. The Peninsula's major political force is the Kingdom of Siam, with the northern sultanates being traditional tributaries of the Thai king. Despite requests by the Sultan of Kedah in 1814 for aid in throwing off the shackles of his Siamese masters, the EIC remains disinterested. In 1816, the Sultan of Kedah invades the Sultan of Perak on Siam's orders after Perak refuses tribute, and again, the EIC refuses to intervene. Then, in 1821, when Siam invades Kedah when it too refuses to provide tribute, the EIC enters negotiations with the Thai king to ensure Malaya's stability.

In 1826, the Treaty of Burney guarantees Siamese control and EIC influence in the Peninsula. Still, local EIC officials continue cajoling and supporting the Malay Sultans against the Siamese, especially those of Perak and Selangor, in hopes of increasing their own power and prestige within the East India Company. Except for anti-piracy and anti-slaving expeditions however, the EIC governors in Calcutta prefer leaving governance to the locals. This changes following the discovery of tin in the central Peninsula in 1840. A huge influx of Chinese immigrants and British commercial interests lead to increasing lawlessness and the near collapse of the central Sultanates.

Over the next 30 years, the British forcefully intervene to maintain the status quo, but still resist formal occupation. To further secure their sea route to China, the British establish the colony of Labuan in 1840, reversing the previous policy of acknowledging Dutch control in Borneo. Also, in 1840, the British trader James Brooke intervenes in a civil war in the Sultanate of Brunei and receives the Sarawak region as a reward. In 1841, he establishes a new princely state under his own rule called the White Raja of Sarawak, which exists for three generations before the British bring it under their protection in 1880. In 1905 a resident (also known as an advisor) is appointed to the Sultan of Brunei, completing British domination of North Borneo.

In the southern Peninsula, British relations with the sultans grow very close with the founding of a nobles school in Singapore in 1856. The sultans are still independent, however, as demonstrated by the 1862 civil war in the Sultanate of Pahang. The two closest British allies, the Sultans of Johor and Terengganu, intervene on opposite sides. After Britain sides with Johor, Terengganu turns to Siam for help, leading to a violent British reaction. After British naval vessels bombard Terengganu, Siam complains directly to the British government, leading to formal British recognition of Siam's control of Kelantan and Terengganu, in addition to Kedah; the British then discipline the local officials responsible for the bombardment. British influence remains, however, and Thai rulership remains a matter of tribute and ritual rather than true control.

In 1874, fear of growing German interest in acquiring Asian colonies forces Britain to appoint residents to the central and southern sultanates to ensure British control. This creates major problems when the sultans object to such direct British control, and instigates the Perak War, which formalizes British dominion over southern Malaya. The Residency System proves unworkable, however, and in 1895 the British form the Federated Malay States to formalize the borders and responsibility of the sultans, with Britain's role clearly defined in controlling their external relations. The northern sultanates remain functionally independent under Siam overlords until 1909, when they become British protectorates.

PHILIPPINES

At the start of the 19th century, the Philippines are split between three powers. In the north, along Luzon's coast and in the Visaya Islands, the Spanish control the colonies they founded in the 17th century. In the south, on Mindanao and in the Moro Islands, the northernmost Islamic sultanates remain independent with the powerful Sulu Sultanate, which extends into North Borneo, dominating but not controlling the others. The third power is the British, with whom the sultanates and Spanish both trade. In Spain's case, such trade is reluctant, but like the Dutch, they know they have no option outside of facing British intervention. Sulu, however, is

an eager participant, especially since Britain lacks Spain's religious intolerance.

While the other colonial powers in Southeast Asia are primarily interested in trade and profit, Spain's empire perpetuates the glory of God and King. As a result, converting natives to Catholicism is a central task, with violence an easy solution to ensure compliance. Jealous of Britain's power, the Spanish only reluctantly open Manila to the British in 1834, followed by their remaining ports in 1855. They realize contact with other Europeans might lead to trouble with the mestizo landowners who increasingly dominate Luzon, but the British trade brings wealth and development, helping colonize Luzon's interior and all of the Visayas by 1865. The British also introduce sugar to the Visayas, massively increasing the wealth of mestizo landowners.

Spain takes advantage of its increased power to push its control south, occupying areas in Mindanao and defeating the ancient Sultanate of Magindanao in 1862. The Sulu Sultanate resists several Spanish incursions and realizes that it must seek outside help to stop Spain. It therefore negotiates with the British in a bid to guarantee its independence. In particular, the Sultanate has close relations with James Brooke, the White Raja of Sarawak, and in 1849 signs a treaty with him whereby Britain recognizes their borders. The British government, however, rejects the treaty when Brooke presents it to them due to European political concerns, but strongly criticizes Spain's fierce intolerance toward Islam. Spain's violent attacks and massacres against Muslims produce a strong Islamic revivalist movement from 1850 onward, leading to even more stringent resistance against the Spanish.

By the 1870s, Spain's incursions in Sulu territory seriously threaten the Sultanate, which still manages to hold off the Spaniards. Unfortunately, the Sulu Sultanate must lease their holdings in Sarawak to the British North Borneo Company in order to raise money to fund their war efforts. In 1885, however, Britain decides that an independent Sulu risks German intervention. In a deal with Spain, Britain agrees to a final Spanish conquest in return for the Sultanate's lands in North Borneo.

Despite this agreement with Britain, the Spanish cannot defeat the Sulu Sultanate, especially since they face a growing nationalist movement in Luzon. Eventually, a major nationalist revolt coincides with the Spanish-American War in 1898. Even after America defeats the Spanish, it isn't until 1901 that the Spanish repress the mestizo nationalist movement and finally defeat the Sulu Sultanate; even then, Spain wins only after a bitter and bloody struggle.

INDOCHINA

Due to its proximity to China, Vietnam developed civilizations with a distinctly Chinese flavor, including antagonism to foreigners. Uninterested in the world at large, dynasties waxed and waned, occupied various territories and warred with their Thai, Laotian and

Cambodian neighbors. Excluded by the British from an influential position in China or India, France saw China's neighbor, Vietnam, as a rich land where they could grab a share of the Middle Kingdom's lucrative trade. In 1748, the French forced the foundation of a trading settlement in Danang, but increasing turmoil in the country limited further opportunities.

In 1773, the Tay Son Rebellion heralded the beginning of the end for Vietnam's ruling dynasty. Southern Vietnam's ruler, Nguyen Anh, sought French aid in 1787 to depose the Tay Son Dynasty, which had deposed the ruling Nguyen Dynasty to the south in 1776, and the Trinh Dynasty to the north in 1787. Under pressure from the Catholic Church, France agreed to help in return for ownership of Danang, though in reality it offered no substantial aid. The Catholic Church was long interested in Vietnam, especially given its proximity to their stronghold in the Spanish Philippines. Vietnamese aristocrats and mandarins, however, feared and resented their proximity; indeed, the presence of missionaries was one cause behind the Tay Son Rebellion.

In 1802, Nguyen Ahn emerges victorious and takes the name Gia-long, becoming Vietnam's new emperor and founding a dynamic new dynasty. He immediately sets about removing all foreign influences, especially the hated Catholic missionaries. While the Napoleonic Wars halts French interference, both Gia-long and his successor, Minh-mang, also resist British offers of an alliance against the French. They even reject meeting with British envoys, since dealing with missionaries leaves Vietnam's elite believing that any interaction with foreigners promotes disorder while isolation brings unity. Following Vietnam's last rejection of Britain's 1822 delegation, the British decide to leave Vietnam alone since France has not shown any renewed interest in the country.

In 1847 and 1848, the British again attempt treaty negotiations, under pressure from protestant missionary groups. Europe believes the reality of the new order is now clear to Asia after Britain has humbled China, therefore the Vietnamese should certainly be more open to "reason." Vietnam, however, believes that any foreign intervention inevitably means problems. American and French intervention in the 1840s on behalf of Christian missionaries working illegally in Vietnam simply reinforces the belief that Europeans cannot be trusted. French policy is also increasingly imperialistic in efforts to match British achievements in China, and uses the oppression of Catholics and missionaries in Vietnam to fuel their arguments for colonizing the country.

In 1848, Vietnamese Emperor Tu-duc beheads a Spanish Bishop to discourage the missionary activity he feels is undermining his rule. The Catholic Church is already exerting pressure on the French Emperor to act in Vietnam, and the execution provides the catalyst for action. Admittedly, however, the French government's interests are more commercial and conceited than religious. To ensure that there is no British opposition in

the matter, France announces their regime in Vietnam will open the entire country to European traders, regardless of nationality.

In 1858, French and Spanish forces land at Danang and capture the city. Poor roads and the monsoon, however, thwart attempts to reach the Imperial capital at Hué. Instead, the French turn south and capture Saigon in 1859. The Catholic Church then argues strongly for military intervention to the north, in the Red River Delta, believing the common people will rise up to overthrow the minions of the godless Emperor at Hué. Instead, the French government settles for building a commercial colony in the three southern coastal provinces they occupy, ignoring the Imperial government at Hué.

Slowly through the 1860s, the French move west, taking southern Vietnam's three inland provinces. Amusingly, it is local officials who make these moves on their own initiative rather than the French government. Regardless, the Emperor at Hué presents no opposition. Local mandarins and aristocrats, however, lead stubborn guerrilla campaigns with substantial popular support. In 1862, the French colonial government adopts the old Vietnamese claim to Cambodia, which Vietnam and Siam has fought over for decades. With Siam distracted by their dispute with Britain over Terengganu's bombardment, France offers the beleaguered King of Cambodia their protection. Facing a potential French invasion either way, the Cambodian king agrees for the more peaceful offer. In 1867, under British pressure, Siam agrees to forego its claims on Cambodia in return for Cambodia's Battambang and Siemreap provinces.

Even as the guerrilla campaign continues in the south, ambitious local bureaucrats, backed by commercial interests and the Catholic Church, slowly encroach on North Vietnam in the 1870s. Initially the French government objects, but fears that another European power might pre-empt them eventually forces France into launching a formal intervention of the Church's behalf in 1882. While the Emperor at Hué appeals to the Chinese, China is in no position to help and, despite some violent rhetoric from Peking, does nothing to oppose the establishment of a French protectorate in Vietnam. While there is substantial resistance to colonial occupation, the French use a mix of brutality and co-option to quickly enforce their rule. Only in the hill country does resistance amongst the Hmong and other "barbarian" hill people continue to prove a serious threat after the 1880s.

The French co-opt the Vietnamese Emperor and many mandarins to lend the colonial regime legitimacy, but France's most important allies are the Vietnamese Catholics who quickly become the privileged class, both socially and financially. In "accepting" the legitimacy of the Vietnamese Emperor, France also takes up his long-lapsed claim to the Kingdom of Laos. In 1893, they move to occupy all territory east of the Mekong, and stage naval demonstrations off Bangkok to cow the Siamese into agreement. Again, Britain encourages Siam's acceptance

while negotiating a border agreement to ensure northern Burma is not subject to future French claims.

In 1904, the French expand west of the Mekong, occupying Luang Prabang. In 1907, under constant Siamese and British diplomatic pressure, the French return its western gains in exchange for Siam's remaining Cambodian provinces, Battambang and Siemreap. With these territories, French Indochina is complete. With the rubber boom bringing the colony massive returns, the French turn their full attention to modernizing the colony's infrastructure and converting its populace.

Siam (Thailand)

In the mid-18th century, after a long period of turmoil and invasion by the Burmese and Cambodians, a strong, new dynasty emerged in Siam. Based in Bangkok, the new dynasty quickly established control over the heartland of the Thai people before pushing south against the Malays, west against the Burmese and east against the Laotians and Cambodians. Eventually, their military successes brought them into conflict with Vietnam over control of Laos and Cambodia. Wars with Burma and Vietnam occupied Siam's attention until the early 19th century, when European intervention in Malaya forced Siam's king to confront the growing reality of Western power.

Without any important resources or ports along China's lucrative trade routes, Siam manages to steer clear of Europe's initial wave of imperialism. Despite their relative isolation, however, Siam's kings show a better appreciation of Europe's power than either their Burmese or Vietnamese opposition. In 1826, Siam receives a British East Indies Company envoy after a series of disputes with British officials in Penang and, by treaty, agrees to British control over the southern Malay Peninsula and British influence in the northern Peninsula (even though the area's sultanates are Siamese tributaries).

This acquiescence to the British and willingness to trade, allows Siam to pursue its own devices for almost three decades. During this period, significant Western knowledge passes into Siam, and the king ensures that his sons receive a Western education. In 1849, Britain again sends an envoy to Bangkok in response to complaints by Singaporean merchants. The visit's main thrust is to further open Siam to British trade, but Britain's colonial Board of Governors makes it very clear to local EIC officials that territorial encroachment on Siam will not be tolerated. Maintaining an empire is expensive, and Siam offers no commercial gain likely to offset the costs of conquest and government. Understandably, the Thai king, Rana III, also sees no reason to sign a new treaty, especially since the British envoy's attitude and disposition proves insulting.

Although the envoy recommends military action to bring Siam in line, the Board of Governors declines. Aside from cost and the small likelihood that any European power would intervene, the main reason for Britain's open-minded policy in this matter is Siam's willingness

to trade. Because Siam welcomes many merchants, even if it applies duties and monopolies, the British have access to significant amounts of information concerning Siamese court politics. This makes it very difficult for greedy traders and ambitious local officials to start wars. The Board also knows that the heir to Siam's throne, along with other young aristocrats, all have European educations and are likely predisposed to good relations.

When Mongkut becomes king in 1851, Britain launches into new negotiations. Mongkut proves every bit as savvy as is expected and, in 1855, signs a new treaty imposing set duties, ending the king's rice trade monopoly, establishing a permanent British envoy in Bangkok and granting British subjects extraterritorial rights (excluding British citizens from Thai law). As a result of this treaty, Mongkut grants similar privileges to the other European powers, especially the French. None, however, dare infringe on Siam's independence given that it would bring them into conflict with Britain.

In 1856, Siam's amicable dealings with Britain have another positive effect; direct diplomatic relations with the British government in London. This is a deliberate goal of the Siamese Court, to have European governments recognize Siam as an independent power. Once Britain acknowledges Siam as a sovereign nation, other states quickly follow suit, protecting Siam from the local ambitions of European colonial officials. Having a British envoy in Bangkok who communicates directly to London gives Siam significant leverage. This becomes evidently clear in northern Malaya, where Siam stops the ambitions of local British officials to bring the Siam-ruled sultanates under British control.

In the incident of 1862, local British officials order the bombardment of the Sultanate of Terengganu in Malaya, even though it is a Siamese tributary state. This results in a temporary cooling of relations with Britain, who makes a determined effort to repair the damage and prevent Siam from seeking French assistance. Britain formally recognizes Siam's control over northern Malaya and punishes the officials responsible for the bombardment. Meanwhile, the French lose their opportunity to sway Siam after taking Cambodia and putting pressure on Siam's eastern border. In 1867, Siam recognizes France's dominant position in Cambodia. This, combined with the fact that Britain is no longer so powerful as to totally protect Siam from foreign encroachment, drives the Siam government to act to protect their own interests.

The result is a massive drive to modernize Siam's military and bureaucracy, requiring the centralization of power and a formal end to the feudal system. Such change is a slow process, however, given Siam's lack of an industrial base. The difficulties are aptly demonstrated by France's move into Laos in 1893. Again, Britain counsels acceptance and Siam reluctantly agrees, but Britain now worries about German or French intervention in Northern Malaya, which is in Siam's initiative for centralization

and modernization. Thus, in 1897, Siam and Britain sign a secret treaty whereby Siam promises not to grant any foreign power rights in northern Malaya, while giving Britain certain exclusive commercial concessions in return for its assistance in protecting Siam's borders.

Britain then offers Siam significant aid in modernizing, including help in establishing a resident system in northern Malaya similar to the one Britain employs in southern Malaya. Encouraging Siam to treat its Malay tributary states as colonial possessions stirs significant unrest, and the Sultan of Terengganu refuses the Thai-based resident advisor, turning instead to Britain for help. Meanwhile, in 1904, the French move west of the Mekong, into Siamese territory. Siam launches its own negotiations and, in 1907, returns its last Cambodian provinces to France in return for the French withdrawal back east of the Mekong (as well as surrendering their extraterritorial rights in Siam).

Having finally dealt with the French threat, Siam removes the last unequal elements in its relationship with Britain. In 1908, Siam relinquishes its claims to the north Malay sultanates, except Pattani, and in return, Britain gives up extraterritoriality and its exclusive commercial concessions in Siam. With this done, Siam loses all its old external possessions, but the heartland of the Thai nation is safe, birthing the modern nation of Thailand.

BURMA

The lands surrounding the Irrawaddy River had little to tempt European colonial interests. Through to the beginning of the 19th century, the Burmese were almost completely ignored. This allowed a strong new dynasty to revitalize the ancient Burmese Kingdom in the mid-1700s. Problems begin, however, when the expanding and aggressive Burmese reached British India's borders. Britain initially responded peacefully, given that the Napoleonic wars are raging; they are more concerned about securing India from French threats with as little violence as possible rather than dealing with remote border disputes.

Attempts to find a diplomatic solution that gives India security, encourages trade and leaves Burma to the Burmese (and hence at no cost to Britain) fails. The fiasco stems from the Mandalay court's refusal to see beyond the highly insular reality defining Burmese court life. Burma's king insists on treating Britain as a minor power begging the favor of a superior, an attitude that does not rest well with Britain. The insult itself is annoying, but beyond the mere insult is the British fear that allowing any native power to defy them might lead to trouble in India.

In 1824, Britain declares war to demonstrate to Burma's king that there is a new reality, one in which Burma is subordinate to British power. The object is not conquest; Burma offers no economic incentive for that. The Burmese surprise the British with their determination, however, and it isn't until 1826 that the British force a treaty on the nation. Burma loses three western provinces,

must pay a huge indemnity and, even more humiliating, accept a British resident in Mandalay to advise the king. Despite this, the British soon discover the Burmese aren't any more accepting of a subordinate station than they were before the war. Proud, aggressive and with a worldview shaped wholly by their own customs and beliefs, the Burmese continue acting as a sovereign power.

Still unwilling to occupy Burma, Britain tries improving relations with the Burmese through commercial treaties and a degree of tolerance they never show in India. Eventually, however, Britain decides it cannot tolerate Burma's snubs any longer, launching the Second Anglo-Burmese war in 1852. The war is brief; in the resulting treaty in 1853, Burma loses all its coastal provinces as Britain hopes to isolate the troublesome nation.

Unfortunately, Britain's unwillingness to rule Burma delays further action to stem problems. The Burmese king Mindon Min (r. 1853-78) displays a sharp diplomatic tact and an understanding of his European adversaries, keeps matters under control. Yet even under Mindon, the Burmese continually try to act with a degree of independence they do not possess. Burma seeks treaties with France, the US and Russia throughout the mid-19th century, eventually forcing the British to invade again in 1885. Bitter fighting continues for five years before the British exile the last Burmese king. Even in 1900, however, most of Burma's hill country is still ruled by traditional princes, with only the slightest British influence apparent.

SHADOW LANDS

INTRODUCTION

Geography splits Southeast Asia into two distinct zones, continental and Malay. Nowhere is this division starker than amongst the Kuei-jin, and the tensions it fosters plays a major role in the fall of the Scarlet Phoenix Court. The region falls into two opposing camps in the Victorian Age, both of whom are initially more intent on fighting each other than opposing the Europeans until far too late. Likewise the Kin-jin are also split, with the long established Ashirra courts competing most heavily with newly arrived European vampires. Shifting alliances, wars and social upheaval threatening all sides add to the turmoil and violence wracking the Victorian Southeast Asian nights.

CONTINENTAL COURTS

For centuries, the Kuei-jin hailing from Southeast Asia's mainland (those of Burmese, Shan, Laotian, Thai, Cambodian and Vietnamese extraction) were closely monitored and influenced by China's Great Courts. Even as the mortal realms around them paid tribute and proclaimed their allegiance to China's emperor, the Kuei-jin of continental Southeast Asia looked to China's courts for guidance. While the penangallan ancestors did not adopt every idea promulgated by the Chinese,

they adopted enough that their courts and laws mirrored the Middle Kingdom's courts in most important matters; they maintained their power emanated from the Mandate of Hell, they enforced the Great Principle and they organized their courts to follow the ways of karma and China's social hierarchy.

The Scarlet Phoenix Court's heart lay in the ancient Cambodian realm of Angkor, and its ancestor and mandarins were great supporters of Chinese ideals. Many Chinese Kuei-jin also flocked south, following not just human kin migrations, but on the invitation of local ancestors to help civilize their courts. The Malay courts, however, influenced more by India than China, resisted adopting the ways and mannerisms of China's Courts. These disputes developed into deeper rifts, eventually leading to the Scarlet Phoenix Court's collapse following a series of attempted coups by Chinese mandarins against the penangallan.

The split between the mainland and Malay courts that began under the Scarlet Phoenix Court solidified with the Golden Courts. While still ruled by the penangallan, the mainland Golden Courts followed the Great Principle to the letter, though they were now far more reluctant to accept Chinese Kuei-jin into their inner circles. Like the Chinese Courts, the mainland Golden Courts disdained outside influences, encouraging their mortal allies to do likewise. Aside from a few forward-thinking jina, the Golden Courts took little interest in the spattering of coastal trading ports (save for the influx of fresh Chi) and instead focused inward. As a result, the mainland courts ignored the arrival of the Arabs and Europeans into Asia, only exterminating any intruding Kin-jin (Arab or European) who entered their realms.

The fall of the Malay Golden Courts of Luzon and the Visayas to European Kin-jin and the formation of various Kin-jin courts in Java, Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula reinforce the views of the mainland Golden Courts concerning foreigners. Unfortunately, in mostly paying heed to the Kin-jin, the Golden Courts ignore warnings that the real danger stems from the growing influx of traders and their mother nations. The mainland ancestors and mandarins felt they had handled mortals for centuries and could continue doing so for centuries to come. When the Victorian Age begins, however, the mainland Golden Courts suffer a series of shocks that quickly cripple them, opening them to attack from internal and external enemies.

BURMESE COURTS

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the local Kuei-jin are divided and mutually hostile, split between the aggressive ethnic Burmese courts of the river lowlands and the Shan, Karen and Mon Courts in the hills fighting to maintain their independence. While the small Burmese courts owe allegiance to Mandalay's Golden Court, the Burma penangallan refuse fealty to anyone and war both among themselves and with the

Lowland Golden Courts. While Burma's mortal rulers dealt with the British for decades prior to the first Anglo-Burmese war, the Kuei-jin had ignored them completely, fixated on their own conflicts and intrigues.

The loss of three provinces to the British seriously undermines the strength of Mandalay's Golden Court, along with respect for its ancestor. While the minor courts in the west continue operating, agents of British Kin-jin and Indian Kuei-jin soon press in upon them. Within a decade, most are swept away by invading *shen* and Indian Kuei-jin, the refugees fleeing to Mandalay where their dissatisfaction undermines the ancestor there. The Golden Court of Mandalay also faces increased threats from its traditional enemies in the hills and from a handful of Kin-jin trying their hand in Burma; the aggressive local Kuei-jin and their mortal allies, however, deter all but a few foolish ancillae who meet swift final deaths.

Unrest amongst Burmese jina and mandarins reaches a flashpoint during the Second Anglo-Burmese war in 1852, resulting in a vicious palace coup that overthrows the ancestor and sees her and her supporters massacred. In the midst of the chaos, the hill courts act, launching a series of initiatives to overtake Mandalay's Court. The fighting in Mandalay continues for decades, with an influx of Kuei-jin refugees from the British-controlled coastal provinces adding to the turmoil and Golden Court power grab. Even before the British finally conquer all of Burma in 1885, the power of the local Golden Courts is shattered, with the new Indian-dominated Rangoon Court dealing almost exclusively with the hill courts.

After British occupation gives the Court at Rangoon overwhelming regional superiority, the Indian Kuei-jin hunt down Burma's contentious and arrogant Kuei-jin (save for their hill court allies) until only a few small exile courts exist in the inaccessible Burmese mountains. The hill courts retain their independence, warring both among themselves and occasionally with the Rangoon Court. Mostly, however, hill court Kuei-jin concentrate on securing their hold over the river lowlands, enslaving Burmese *hin* and jina.

INDOCHINESE COURTS

Closely allied with southern China's powerful courts, the Golden Courts of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia constantly fought among themselves, ignoring the world around them save for the Middle Kingdom itself. With the 18th century's arrival, the Kin-jin Court of Manila shattered their isolation with increasingly predatory activities. Through the Danang trading post and using Catholic missionaries as cover, the Kin-jin tried expanding their influence into Vietnam. Their intrigues were for naught, however, until the French invasion in 1858.

The French incursion quickly overwhelms south Vietnam, throwing local affairs into turmoil. The Kuei-jin, in their isolation and arrogance, do not expect a European invasion, let alone the power these rude mortals wield (as well the weakness of their own Scarlet Screens,

a concession the Vietnamese Wan Kuei only make in private). The Kuei-jin who survive the fall of their towns and cities flee either into the wilderness or north into the surviving courts. Additionally, while the French occupation suits the Kin-jin, it is not of their making; the slow pace of colonization only serves to fortify the northern Kuei-jin courts and allows them to continually harass Kin-jin strongholds in the south until well into the 1880s.

Despite the attacks, the Kin-jin secure south Vietnam's major towns thanks to the flood of European Kin-jin following the French invasion. After establishing one of his childer as Prince of Saigon, the Prince of Manila abandons Indochina's ancillae to their own devices and turns his attention back to the Philippines. Following the withdrawal of Filipino Kin-jin, south Vietnam's resident Cainites go on an Embracing spree of locals, mostly to provide expendable foot soldiers in the fight against northern Vietnamese Golden Courts.

While the inevitable French conquest of north and central Vietnam occurs in 1882, the northern Golden Courts are ready with their countryside sanctuaries and hidden redoubts in the towns and cities. The Kin-jin fight the Kuei-jin for one violent decade before admitting defeat, then retreat from the north. The same bloody fate awaits them in Cambodia and Laos as well, thanks to ancient and brutal penangallan of the impenetrable jungles who strike at any invading Kin-jin without warning or mercy.

The resulting stalemate between north and south Vietnam is not a peaceful one, but lasts well past the Victorian Age. The Kuei-jin continue attacking and assassinating Kin-jin by using the rebellious Hmong and other hill people tribes as cover, but the Cainite courts in Saigon, Danang, Pleiku, Nha Trang, Phan Thiet and Can Tho survive and prosper. In return, the Kin-jin use their influences in the French colonial regime to harass suspected Kuei-jin Scarlet Screens to the north, and make great sport of hunting down any *chih-mei* appearing in their territory.

THAI COURTS

While numerous Golden Courts exist in Siam, their individual power rose and fell with the mortal districts with which they were associated. Thus, the rise of Bangkok's new dynasty assured the local Kuei-jin court increased power and prestige. Strangely (at least for a mainland court), Bangkok was a coastal city that saw and readily accepted numerous traders, and it maintained a strained, but cordial, relationship with the Malay Golden Courts. This relationship grew following Siam's conquest of the mortal sultanates of the Malay Peninsula, but Bangkok's mandarins feared that closer interaction with Malay's Golden Courts would also bring European Kin-jin to Siam, who were growing in presence in the Malay Archipelago.

The penangallan ancestors of the various Thai Golden Courts push for isolation and military expansion.

Siam's mortal king, however, chooses the opposite route, engaging the Europeans, especially the British, as equals and placating them where necessary with portions of Siam's outlying territories. The Thai Golden Courts encourage their merchant and noble Scarlet Screens to oppose this policy, resulting in a growing divide between most progressive jina and mandarins and the traditionalist ancestors and their camp.

The young faction calls themselves Progressives, using a term coined by the mortal king to describe his policy. The Progressives argue that only by keeping the kingdom strong can they hope to exclude the Kin-jin, a policy that requires the courts to support the king, not undermine him. The arguments spin back and forth for decades while European colonial expansion slowly passes Siam by and increased European trade brings some Kin-jin into Bangkok. The Kuei-jin quickly destroy the Kin-jin they catch, but their mere presence riles the Traditionalists into even greater opposition of the king's policies.

In the 1860s the two factions come to blows, as Siam's king moves to modernize Siam. In the new educated bureaucracy and military, the Traditionalists have few pawns, while the full benefits of the new railways and telegraphs never occur to them. The Progressive faction quickly consolidates their hold over the new centers of power and, in 1904, stages multiple coups across Siam. They overthrow all the urban and lowland court ancestors, and replace them with Progressive Kuei-jin, most of whom are male. Only in the backward hill regions are the proud penangallan too strong to displace, but in the modern era, they find themselves isolated — unable to do much more than howl in the wilderness.

MALAY COURTS

The first Kin-jin who arrived in Malay's courts were Indians who followed the mortal traders, long before the birth of Christ. The Scarlet Phoenix courts in Malay had always been separated by culture and distance, as well as their own isolationist natures. Despite the supposed proscription against Kin-jin as servants of the Yama Kings, some established themselves in coastal ports long ignored by inland Kuei-jin courts. Malay's coasts and its stream of foreigners did not interest the penangallan, who preferred the jungles and highlands as well as the worship of its indigenous civilizations.

Over time, the Kuei-jin destroyed the Kin-jin outposts they discovered, allowing only a handful of Cainites to exist if only to serve the self-interest of the local penangallan ancestor. Some penangallan worried that the trading ports would enable Chinese Kuei-jin to enter their domains and challenge their authority, so they used Kin-jin as both protection from intrusion and as spies. The Kin-jin also proved useful in managing the lowlands, however, and more than one Malay penangallan allowed Indian Kin-jin to act as their agents

in much the same way native rulers used Indian merchants as intermediaries with the alien outside world.

Following the Scarlet Phoenix Court's collapse, the Kuei-jin used Kin-jin intermediaries more frequently. This was because many Kuei-jin went deeper into hiding, using the Kin-jin as both their outside contact and as fodder when *akuma*-hunting Devil-Tigers came after them. When Ashirra arrived with Arab merchants in the 12th century, they fit neatly into the same role as the Indian Kin-jin, most of whom were extinguished in fights to control the coastal ports. Like the Kin-jin before them, the smart Ashirra kept to the coastal ports, not following their mortal Islamic brethren inland for fear of provoking the powerful penangallan or their enemies, the shapeshifters. Those foolish Kin-jin who breached the interior, however, perished horribly and painfully.

When European Kin-jin slowly made their way east during the 17th century, they found powerful and territorial Ashirra princes awaiting their arrival. The two exceptions were Merlaka and Luzon, where Spanish and Portuguese Kin-jin brought their crusading fanaticism to bear against the Ashirra. The new Portuguese Kin-jin Prince of Merlaka immediately tried the patience of Ledang's Golden Court, and it didn't take long for the Penangallan to eliminate the city's Kin-jin and restore an Ashirra as their lackey. In Luzon, however, the Kin-jin allowed the Catholic Church to slowly weaken and distract the local vampires while they picked off their opposition one by one. It took almost two centuries, but by the Victorian Age, a Kin-jin Prince rules unopposed in Manila, and is trying to export his crusade to the Sulu Sultanate and Indochina.

In Java, Holland's conquest of the great cultural centers of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, as well as all its minor sultanates, has little effect on the island's Golden Courts. Few Kin-jin dare the island's alien interior and the penangallan ancestors care little for the Islamic sultanates that had usurped the ancient Hindu empires of Java's glorious past. With a huge and growing population and unassailable fortresses in the island's jungle-covered interior, the penangallan remain aloof from the Dutch and the new local elites prospering under colonialism. If anything, Kin-jin usefulness grows after the Golden Court ancestors use them (under the threat of wiping out all local Kin-jin) to influence the Dutch colonial state without dirtying their own hands.

In the remaining archipelago, nightly resistance to Dutch expansion stems not from the penangallan, but from established coastal port Kin-jin. Whether Indian, Arabic, Portuguese or ancient Dutch Cainites, the old princes resist the Prince of Batavia's agents. In some cases they win autonomy for themselves, but in most cities, the Prince of Batavia manages to place one of his lackeys in power. In the surrounding hills and jungles, the Golden Courts and their penangallan ancestors watch with little interest. One lackey is much the same

as another, and those who refuse to serve penangallan interests meet a very difficult end.

Similar conditions exist in the Malay Peninsula and Borneo. There is substantial change and strife over pryncedom of the coastal ports, but the interior Golden Courts continue about their business unchanged. Only in the south of the Philippines is this coexistence of a different nature. Here the Prince of Manila, in concert with the same martial political and religious forces that allow the Kin-jin conquest of Luzon, presses the Golden Courts of Magindanao and Sulu. While the Kin-jin overrun Magindanao in 1865, the Sulu court continues struggling well past the Victorian Age, even after their mortal pawns fall to the Americans.

As the Victorian Age continues, more Kuei-jin take the Second Breath as a result of colonial-inflicted atrocities, chaos and violence. The mortal population booms, as does that of the Kuei-jin. Disaffected jina move to the thriving coastal port cities in defiance of the penangallan ancestors, contesting Kin-jin rule. From the 1890s onward, a three-way war emerges across the Malay Archipelago between the new Golden Courts, the penangallan and the Kin-jin. The war continues unabated until the Japanese invade in the 1940s, eliminating many Kin-jin in power.

KIN-JIN IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Indian and Arabian Cainites traveled east with the mortal caravans, seeking new domains and wealth. Like the mortal traders they accompanied, they felt no inherent superiority over the Kuei-jin or the societies they discovered. Indeed, India's Cainites had a long history of accommodating India's Kuei-jin and thus easily forged similar relations with Malay's Golden Courts. The Kin-jin made few if any similar attempts with the mainland courts, however, simply because fewer Indian and Arabian traders visited them. As in so many situations, the Cainites did not create anything... they merely capitalized on opportunities created by the Kine.

Similarly, European vampires explored Asia in the 16th century onward on the coattails of mortal traders. Most were minor ancillae or even autarkis seeking refuge, with the exception of a powerful Sabbat pack of Lasombra and Brujah *antitribu* called *El Hidalgo Rojo* (The Blood Nobles, *hidalgo* being imported slang for nobles) who left Spain to continue their crusade in the Philippines. Instead of the mysterious Kuei-jin confronting the European vampires, it was the Ashirra who had been dwelling in the Malay Archipelago's port cities for centuries.

The Ashirra existed in the same uneasy symbiotic relationship with the Kuei-jin as their mortal herds did with the native rulers. While most Arabian vampires easily crushed challengers to their rule, some fell to the ambitious Europeans. In turn, many of those Cainites then fell to a local Kuei-jin court when they proved impolite or refused to pay the expected tribute. Naturally,

the smarter Cainites survived, learning from the Ashirra or few Indian vampire princes and going native.

VICTORIAN AGE KIN-JIN

With the growth of European influence across Southeast Asia comes new European immigrants in the form of elders and ancillae seeking domains in the new colonial states. Most find nothing but a quick death, the existing princes mercilessly manipulating newcomers who threaten them into conflicts with the Kuei-jin. With the population boom accompanying the Victorian Age, there are plenty of mortals to support large vampire populations in the port cities, however, giving way to Cainite courts. Many of these new courts also utilize the faster communication methods of telegraph, becoming part of the vampiric mainstream by networking with the Camarilla (or Sabbat) and enforcing its edicts in their cities.

Strict police states, endemic corruption and poverty provides Southeast Asia's Kin-jin with a veritable golden age, if one avoids the jungles or kowtows to the inscrutable Kuei-jin. The coastal cities are a feast of blood and debauchery, yet that "paradise" is reliant on the Golden Courts' good will. The continual bloodshed existing in southern Vietnam, and to a lesser extent in the Philippines, is a good indicator of what is to come. It is only as the Victorian Age draws to a close and angry young Kuei-jin contest European and Arabian control of coastal cities that many Kin-jin discover the precariousness of their position.

SHEN

While Malay's Golden Courts may develop a useful, if distant, relationship with the Kin-jin infesting its coastal cities, many of the region's other inhabitants do not prove so forgiving. Throughout the Victorian Age, the hengeyokai prove themselves unpleasant neighbors to both Wan Kuei and Kin-jin. In the Malay Archipelago, the Mokole, Khan, Same-Bito and Nagah are especially aggressive foes. More than the local ancestors and mandarins, however, the shapeshifters are ill equipped to handle the side effects of progress.

As mortals clear mangroves, fell forests and dam rivers, the hengeyokai's habitats and animal kin diminish greatly. Attempts to stop or sabotage these modernization efforts attract the attention of well-armed colonial forces that mistake the hengeyokai's attacks for the work of subversives. The Kin-jin, in turn, use mortal screens to contend with the shapeshifters by directing them against suspected animal and human kin of disruptive hengeyokai breeds. Thus, traders bombard fishing villages for "piracy," or hunt tigers and crocodiles to near extinction (among numerous other atrocities).

Not all hengeyokai fare badly, however. The Kumo and Nezumi find it easier to nest in the growing slums of the burgeoning cities in the mainland and Malay Archipelago. Conversely, on the mainland the Kin-jin do not greatly affect the shapeshifter breeds outside of

southern Vietnam, though colonialism and modernization still incur their tolls. The huge mortality rates from famine and war, along with the destruction of ancient traditions, end many human kin lineages and much of the support network the *hengeyokai* once received from local peasants.

The failure of tradition and accompanying reverence also angers and eventually undermines the power of many of the Ten Thousand Spirits. In later years, the malevolence of neglected or corrupt spirits will add greatly to the suffering of the common people. The *Kin-jin* don't bother the spirits for the most part; only the *Tremere* dare interfere with the East's powerful spirits. The Eastern Magi, the *ch'in ta*, and Changelings, the *hsien*, also suffer at *Tremere* hands, but neither spirit, nor *ch'in ta* nor *hsien* are defenseless, as many young and arrogant *Kin-jin* wizards discover. Understandably, the *Tremere* establish very few chantries in this area.

Perhaps the *Kin-jin*'s best protection against the various *shen* is the unabated warfare amongst their enemies. Throughout the Victorian Age, the *hengeyokai* fight each other, the Golden Courts and *ch'in ta*. The *ch'in ta*, in turn, hunt spirits and *hsien*, while occasionally colliding with the Golden Courts. In the late 19th century, the *Kin-jin* also gain unwitting allies against the *shen* in the form of Western Lupines, who bring their crusade against their fellow shapeshifters to the East. Suddenly conflicts on multiple fronts besiege the *hengeyokai* and many Yang spirits, driving both deep into the thickest jungle. This only serves to rob the forest of her protectors, allowing industry to rape Asia's forests and wilderness with unimpeded speed.

TOOLS

INTRODUCTION

With an understanding of Southeast Asia's history and its World of Darkness facade in the 19th century, Storytellers can now fashion stories centered in the region. The following section contains two tools to expedite the Storytellers' job: An overview of Southeast Asian society throughout the period and a study of the basic elements constituting a coastal trading city. Both allow the Storyteller to breathe life into chronicles. While there are academic works (often dry dissertations) on most major cities, they often contain little of what the Storyteller actually needs to run games. With this material, a good cultural introduction to the proposed setting and a bit of imagination is all Storytellers need to kick start a game.

SOCIETY

Prior to the Victorian Age, Europe's interaction with Southeast Asia was merely one of several external influences on regional politics and culture. Southeast Asia remained fundamentally unchanged, the lives of its mortal majority unaffected by wider events. The 19th

century's great colonial expansion, however, intrudes into the very heart of every Southeast Asian society. In less than three generations, Europe drags Southeast Asia kicking and screaming into a modern Western world, a world that took Europe over five hundred years to build and with which to come to terms. It is a period of change more dramatic than any seen at any other time in history up to that point. The certainties of centuries are swept away and little or nothing replaces them. The 20th century's nationalist movements opposing the colonial regimes eventually fill this vacuum, but in the 1900s, Southeast Asian society remains shattered and leaderless.

Messianic cults, uncritical admiration for all things Western and cultural revival movements come and go across Asia during this period. All are attempts to define new meaning in the absence of ancestral tradition. Of course, society doesn't throw out tradition in an instant; as with all aspects of European dominance, it is a slow process advancing through the Victorian Age. The technology and modern political and bureaucratic structures allowing Victorian Europe to dominate Asia also contribute to tradition's collapse. The European powers themselves only barely understand the social forces they wield.

For many decades, Europe props up Asia's old aristocratic elites, hoping to benefit from their traditional authority over the natives and to stem modernization's negative effects. Attempts to Westernize the native populace also fail. The sheer numbers involved, the economic costs, fears of revolt and local religious opposition all persuade the colonial governments that westernization isn't feasible for the "natives." Some Asians do benefit from Western educations, however, becoming the new middle-class, but theirs is not an easy life; their own people ostracize them while the Europeans deny them equality. It is from these ranks that effective opposition to colonialism arises, eventually leading to the nationalist movements of the 20th century. The "uppity" natives are also first to endure the European control mechanisms keeping the shattered societies kowtowed; these are the first police states.

There are several reasons why the Europeans can't fill the vacuum they create to any positive degree, the first of which is their limited numbers. Even at the dusk of the Victorian Age, there are no more than a quarter of a million Europeans in the whole of Southeast Asia. Europe came to rule and to exploit, not to settle. Early in the Victorian period, the physical realities of travel and life in Southeast Asia limit the trip East to only the most adventurous or desperate Europeans. Until the development of steamships and the Suez Canal, communication and travel to Southeast Asia takes months, while the dangers of shipboard life and tropical diseases claim as many as three quarters of all travelers.

The Victorian Age's technical advances, especially the steamship and the telegraph, work to reinforce the reasons for Southeast Asia's low European head count,

not reverse it. The risks of tropical disease and native rebellions have not changed, while new technology and improved communications allow for the development of stronger colonial governments without large numbers of Europeans. Additionally, there are always many locals willing to help the Europeans in return for financial and social advantages. Whether Arab, Chinese or Indian merchants willing to act as provincial tax collectors, or the sons of minor native nobles eager to become doctors, lawyers and bureaucrats, the colonial governments face no shortage of functionaries.

This is also true of the armies ultimately enforcing European dominance. Very few Western troops serve in Asia. In fact, from the very beginning, locales or troops from Africa and India do most of the dying for their European masters. The colonial governments also become very adept at recruiting from culturally or religiously segregated communities. Playing traditional enemies against each other is an effective and cheap way of policing a colonial empire. The quest for cost-effective means to control chaotic and alien populations also leads to the development of unique instruments of oppression. The new methods of governing born in the Victorian Age, ranging from police forces and professional bureaucracies to mundane developments like filing and indexing, allow the colonial powers to operate the world's first police states.

Many control techniques that see later use by dictators (European or otherwise) first emerge in colonial states as policy. Secret police, kidnapping and detention without trial, political terror against opponents and even death squads all enjoy some success in various Southeast Asian colonial states. Fear of change and fear of chaos is joined by a new fear; fear of the overlord and his toadies.

As in any police state, colonial regimes are extremely hypocritical; Europeans and their allies (especially foreigners like the Chinese) are tried under different courts, by different laws and afforded considerably greater human rights. Not all Europeans approve of such hypocrisy, but their voices are minor notes of discord in an era when most Europeans do not doubt their superiority and many Southeast Asians accept their inferiority.

BUILDING A TRADING PORT

INTRODUCTION

Whether it is Singapore, Batavia, Manila, Saigon, Bangkok or some minor city, chances are the majority of campaigns set in Southeast Asia during this period will unfold in a coastal port. These cities exhibit certain common structures and ideas that Storyteller can use to lend their game an authentic feel. This section touches upon the fundamental structures (geographic, architectural and social) that define a colonial Southeast Asian port city. To further develop a city, Storyteller need only add the specific cultural details of the setting's country; it is important to remember, however, that the colonial nature of cities means they share a degree of commonality.

NEW CITIES, OLD CITIES

Southeast Asia had little tradition of large cities, except in the Philippines. What cities existed filled one of two basic functions, as centers of either religion or of trade. Religious cities like Angkor Wat were built around large temple complexes and were mostly inland. Trading cities were built on the coast or navigable rivers, but they only really date back to the 14th century, supplying commodities and slaves to East Asian and Indian merchants. The primary drive behind their development, however, was Chinese immigrants. Because of this, indigenous cultures saw trading cities as somehow foreign to Southeast Asia from the very beginning. Later, Indian and Arab merchants continued providing the dominant foreign influences. The arrival of Europeans and their conquest of coastal cities was simply the latest in a long line of foreign influences and rulers.

Trade cities have two defining architectural points present from their very beginning: ports and fortifications. While a port seems obvious, there are a limited number of places where a city can build its port (accounting for sea depth, weather patterns, tidal flows and natural obstructions like coral reefs). Also, over the course of the Victorian Age, ships become larger, rendering many small ports unusable because they're suddenly too shallow. More than one vibrant city dies because of its port, while many a minor village becomes a massive city within decades because the Europeans can afford to properly develop its natural harbor.

Fortifications are almost equally important (and obvious), for with wealth come pirates and bandits. Fortifications are also useful in keeping foreign influences kowtowed and, under European rule, often keep the locals under control as much as the undesirables away. It's also common to place fortifications in the original city's most strategic points, like the port and the market. Often, European forts are so large as to have complete European-style towns built within them, while commercial activities are located outside the castle. Later in the Victorian Age, most of these forts have been destroyed or turned into barracks, with new fortifications built further out along the city to deter other Europeans. By this time, the colonial regimes feel more secure in their domination over the locals, and thus less in fear of them.

Once the Europeans feel confident of their position, they add a third defining feature to the trading cities: segregation. In the interests of "peace and security," the colonial regimes segregate residential and commercial areas, though often these are one and the same. There are usually four ill-defined districts in colonial trading cities separating the Europeans, the Chinese, other foreigners (like Indians or Arabs) and the native populace. Religion often further splits these divisions, so the foreigner district might have a Muslim quarter where all Muslims live around their mosque, regardless of race. With Christian missionary activity it's also common, especially late in the Victorian Age, for educated Christian natives to have their own districts near the Europeans.

Modernization also affects the cities, introducing modern sewerage, trams, electricity (very late in this

period, and even well-after), schools and the other accoutrements associated with European urban existence. Thus, cities during the Victorian period undergo almost continual change with new building projects, civil works and constant expansion trying to keep apace with the growing population. The economy's dynamic booms and busts, along with the constant change and influxes of fortune seekers, make the coastal trading ports into the exotic oriental cities of legend. Great culture and great debauchery, great wealth and great poverty; almost every extreme one can conjure, existing side by side.

GOVERNMENT AND SECURITY

Southeast Asia's colonial regimes are police states. The city police can arrest you, beat you and detain you without trial — all legally. Informants and repressive laws regarding political activity, free speech and religious freedom all dominate everyday life. Unless one is European, that is.

Europeans enjoy the same rights they can expect back in Europe. While this is not as great as the 21st century's civil liberties, it still means that white citizens of a trade city enjoy far greater freedom than natives or non-white foreigners. This, of course, allows Europeans to cheat, mistreat and indeed murder natives with a fair chance of being acquitted of the crime. In most cases, some receive a slap on the wrist at worst.

The trade city's government is highly centralized because there are few Europeans in the region. They probably include a government house, a court building, police headquarters and the chief barracks. In large cities there are numerous police stations, perhaps with adjoining minor courts for trying lesser offenses. Few cities have prisons, with the colonial tendency being to ship prisoners off to isolated locales to serve out their sentences (usually laboring away to enrich the colonial regime). The port also includes a naval base, while surrounding the city are forts equipped to defend it against other European powers. Overall, the infrastructure of colonial governments is thinly spread. This results in the creation of official structures built in a grand style to impress and overawe the natives.

Because locals provide cheap labor, the police are numerous and often foreign or of a particular ethnic group, like Sikhs, Ambonese or Africans. The same is true of bureaucrats; before one can meet a European official, there are layer upon layer of locals and non-white foreigners one must convince as to why the boss should be disturbed. Of course, no native bureaucrat will dare delay a European, since all Europeans are the ruling class and demand treatment as such. Locals, however, must use money and favors to move a government official into action (corruption being endemic at all levels). Even most Europeans expect to pay some gratuities to get what they want done, though less often than locals.

TRADE

The exchange of commodities is the whole point and focus of a trading city; everything revolves around the port and its associated businesses. People eagerly

await new ships and fresh deliveries of goods; new people (European and otherwise) enter or pass through the city constantly, while exotic luxuries, the necessities of life, and every other conceivable cargo flow in and out of ports. This includes illegal merchandise such as weapons bound for remote native lords, opium for the local dens and even slaves for brothels and factories. With all this wealth and traffic, all elements of a city are found in or around its ports. European bosses, Chinese merchants, native coolies and everyone in-between help keep the city's lifeblood flowing.

NATIVES

In slums and moldering palaces, the natives are third-class citizens. While the colonial regimes treat some nobles as caged songbirds, the rest have fewer rights and usually less food and education than Europe's meanest beggars. There is an educated class among natives, but they are so Westernized as to remain estranged from their native brothers as other non-white foreigners. Yet, the hope of succeeding, of giving their children a proper education and breaking the cycle of poverty brings many natives out of their villages and into the trading cities. Many more fail than succeed, however, filling the new factories and warehouses with cheap labor and falling prey to the new escapes of alcohol and opium.

FOREIGNERS

Arabs, Chinese and Indians, constituting the non-white foreigners, have usually lived in trading cities for generations, though new waves of immigrants are always arriving. In their own settlements and districts, they speak their native tongues, worship their homeland's gods and treat the natives with the same disdain expected of Europeans. While many are better educated and wealthier than the natives, this doesn't hold true for all. Still, the small shops and minor posts in the colonial regime are theirs by dint of both effort and precedence. Native hatred is a constant threat, as it is common in any riot for natives to kill, rape and loot the homes and businesses of foreigners. Still, foreigners can reach a level of success through trade where the Europeans will almost treat them with respect... if they are wealthy enough.

EUROPEANS

In elegant and luxurious houses, surrounded by servants and enjoying a busy social life, the Europeans of a trading city live a privileged, idyllic life. Yet, the ever-present fear of local rebellion, tropical diseases and the alien society surrounding them keeps the Europeans on edge. The frenetic social life reflects these silent fears and the temporary nature of European existence, for after a few years they will return home, hopefully wealthier than when they arrived. Day after day, the Europeans interact with the locals; after all, natives fill the ranks of the servants, bureaucrats and workers who run the European business and government machinery. A European, however, never treats a non-white as an equal; not even one's mistress.

CHAPTER FIVE: CHARACTER CREATION

INTRODUCTION

Building a character for the Sunset Empires is a subtle variation on doing the same for the modern era. All the same elements must be taken into account and the Dharmas remain central, but the way Kuei-jin approach the Great Principle is slightly different, as is the world-view a character brings from her mortal days. Tradition has more bearing on a vampire's existence. Though it isn't yet in tatters, the winds of change are tossing it about violently.

How this affects characters and their views about the Westerners responsible for this storm of change is key to **Sunset Empires**. The old ways may be stronger in the 19th century than in the 20th, but they will still fall before the West's onslaught and the march of progress. The challenge, therefore, is building characters with a stake in these changes for good or ill who stand at the maelstrom's center. A Victorian Age character can be anything a player desires, but never at peace.

THE SECOND BREATH

The reasons leading some souls to fight their way back from Yomi haven't changed for thousands of years and, in the Victorian Age, many cultures remain close to their ancient roots. This makes the Second Breath somewhat less traumatic, for the practicalities associated with societies of cold reason have yet to penetrate the Asian psyche; becoming a creature of myth isn't so outrageous. This outlook drastically affects the first steps

of a new character's Dharmic journey, though. This, in turn, may dramatically change a character's perception of himself and his position in the world of the courts.

FIRST STEPS

Games set in the 20th and 21st centuries tend to gloss over a Kuei-jin's early steps in his Dharmic journey; perhaps this best represents Asia's frenetic and more practical nature when the ancient ways have been undermined. In the Victorian Age, however, this isn't the case... at least, not yet. While tensions between progress and tradition grow, the rites and beliefs of the ancient world still hold sway. Demonstrating this to characters helps set the feel for a Sunset Empires story.

SATAA: NEW WAYS TO DIE; NEW HELLS TO ESCAPE

During the Victorian Age, many more souls are taking the Second Breath. The easiest explanation for this is the massive population boom throughout Asia coupled with the violence of the colonial period, especially in China. This is a time of great uncertainty and cruelty, especially for Asians who go from the unwavering belief in their own superiority to the realization that they are fodder for cultures they still consider barbaric. More so, previous invaders eventually settled and married into the local cultures, adopting the ways of their conquered domains and perpetuating the traditions comfortably familiar to the indigenous society.

The Europeans, however, care little for foreign traditions and instead unravel Asia's societies at every level. Christian missionaries aggressively besiege popular faith while progress eliminates feudal policies and caste restrictions that once protected the commoners from the depredations of their superiors; at the same time, the best one can now aspire to is the role of second-class citizen in one's own home. All these changes send Asian cultures into a tailspin, making it easier for the numerous lost and confused souls to fall into Yomi. There are also new Hells, with terror and the progress-born corruptions birthing domains like the Wicked City. It's hardly surprising many ancestors and bodhisattvas believe the Fifth Age is drawing to a close, or that they see the increasing number of *chih-mei* drawing the Second Breath as ill omens.

K'NAA: FREE REIGN

With a rapidly shifting society, many mortals flock to the big cities to escape the extreme poverty and social abuses endemic across the local countryside. This also draws Kuei-jin to the cities, if only because survival necessitates them going where the greatest reservoirs of Chi lay. While this creates stronger city courts, it leaves the rural landscape sparsely populated by Kuei-jin, and thus less protected against newly risen *chih-mei*, who have almost unlimited opportunities for carnage and cannibalism.

Hindered travel and communications also means it's possible for *chih-mei* to haunt isolated regions for years before a Kuei-jin takes them in hand or some other *shen* extinguishes them. Still, local courts are not completely oblivious to the problem, and occasionally make an event of organizing hunting *wu* for safaris against potentially infested regions. This is more a social occasion, however, that rarely does anything more than drive area *chih-mei* deeper underground.

RÉ: AT THE FEET OF THE MISTRESS

Instructing new Kuei-jin in the ways of the Courts and Heaven is substantially longer during the Victorian Age, much as it was in past millennia. The impatience associated with progress has yet to infect Asian society fully, and a more sedate attitude governs matters. A Kuei-jin remains in *ré* until she masters all the required skills, thus often acting as a servant and messenger for her mistress. This period also represents the transition from the tradition-burdened society of yesteryear to the chrome polish and Internet savvy Asia of the 21st century. With a widening gap growing between progressive and status quo Kuei-jin, many forward-thinking vampires are dispensing with certain traditions in favor of bringing more Wan Kuei into their camp faster. Their first change toward this effort is streamlining the duration of *ré*, which progressives claim "is too long and functionally worthless without experience; it's the experience that matters."

Storytellers wishing to run a truly different Victorian chronicle may start characters in *ré*, struggling to prove

themselves loyal and learning all they can before earning the freedom of *kôa*.

KÔA: DISCRETION AND CHAOS

The freedom and expectation accompanying a Kuei-jin's activities during *kôa* are nearly the same when comparing the Victorian Age to the 21st century. *Kôa* must discover and establish their identity while remaining within the bounds of proprietary behavior. Again, harkening back to the age-old traditions not yet dead, the ancestors and mandarins expect *kôa* to show respect to mortals; they also frown upon flashy public displays of power. Naturally, mortals must show the appropriate respect as well.

Undergoing *kôa* in the Victorian Ages is a definite adventure for Storytellers beginning chronicles here. How does one define one's place in a society that changes with the rhythm of each year? Nobody knows, but many Kuei-jin are more than willing to find out. At the very least, the presence of foreign vampires provides an extra allure for Kuei-jin in this stage of their development, and while many courts prohibit independent interaction with Kin-jin, they turn a blind eye to any Kuei-jin in *kôa* who may wish to "toy" with their opponents.

In fact, many anti-Kin-jin activities during this age are more matters of personal initiative than any specific court mandate. During this century, Kuei-jin in *kôa* enjoy the support, advice and sponsorship of jina and mandarins who use the characters to accomplish what they cannot. They know the courts are far more lenient with Wan Kuei at this stage of exploring their natures. Characters in *kôa* may receive such helpful hints as "The Indian Kin-jin of Calcutta are meeting tomorrow night; one wonders what urgent matter draws them together, and in such haste?"

DHARMA

While the lash of the Infant Devil Civilizers can bring momentary lucidity, only Dharma transforms savage *chih-mei* into *hin*. Dharma is the source of stability, serenity and sanity for all Kuei-jin. Without it, a Kuei-jin is a rampaging monster at worst and a dangerous malcontent at best.

For thousands of years, the Kuei-jin pursued their Dharmas secure in the knowledge they dedicated themselves to proven avenues of enlightenment. The journey to the Hundred Clouds could take centuries for even the most devout, but no one doubted they strove for a sacred and ultimately worthwhile endeavor. Those who questioned the veracity of their Dharma's tenets had only to spend a moment in a bodhisattva's presence to regain their confidence. With the arrival of the Westerners and their gweilo Kin-jin, however, the bedrock of trust in Xue's teachings experienced a significant tremor.

During the Victorian Era, Kuei-jin contact with the Kin-jin and the West has been relatively *laissez faire*, simply because the Kin-jin never pose a real threat to the Cathayans — an annoyance, perhaps, but rarely a threat. Many Kuei-jin possess a myopic view of the dangers the West signifies to many Eastern cultural and social institutions. After all, European science and thought steadily trickles into Asia for decades, never really taking root.

It's only when the West suddenly dominates the region, making vigorous use of their knowledge and abilities, that many Kuei-jin are simply dumbstruck. Victory is seemingly effortless for the foreigners, leaving many Kuei-jin in tremendous crises of confidence. Is their learning inferior? Have the Grand Arhat's teachings failed to protect the Kuei-jin, or have they been following lesser paths to enlightenment? Perhaps the Kin-jin, with their superior strength, possess the secrets of enlightenment?

Each Dharma faces severe spiritual uncertainty during this era. If the Sixth Age is fast approaching as some seers claim, then it is more vital now than ever that the Kuei-jin follow the correct teachings.

QUICK MENTION

In the Victorian Age, uncertainty and fear create the Dharmas' largest internal disparities ever. The progressive or more mercenary elements of a Dharma inevitably view the West as a singular opportunity or with great curiosity. Regardless, there is a push to emulate the habits of the conqueror, if only because subconsciously might makes right during this period, meaning something about the powerful Europeans must be right (a philosophy the Japanese pursue to great effect). These Kuei-jin best illustrate where the Dharma is heading in the modern nights, and Storytellers may use the Dharma's templates in the **Kindred of the East** sourcebook (pp. 63-73) as guidelines for character design and outlook.

Conversely, the conservative Kuei-jin hold to their traditions and beliefs with fierce conviction, to the point of ignoring the benefits of Western society entirely because they believe Europeans to be barbarians. Nothing measures up against the accomplishments and refined nature of Asian society: nothing. Storytellers may wish to use **Blood & Silk's** Dharma templates (pp. 50-61) for tradition-saddled Kuei-jin to cement the philosophical disparities between moderates and status quo vampires.

THE HOWL OF THE DEVIL-TIGER

More than the other orthodox Dharmas, the Devil-Tigers are always vigilant for signs of Yomi's growing influence. The Yama Kings abandoned their Heavenly duties long ago, and now the Heavenly Devils assume their forgotten posts. In turn, the Lords of Yomi have become debased corrupters with dangerously skewed goals, forcing the Devil-Tigers to watch the Middle Kingdom to stem that flow of evil whenever possible.

In the eyes of most Devil-Tigers, this influx of Western ideas and barbarians is plainly a new corruption. The gweilo are cultural savages, without respect or understanding for the functions of a proper society. They are also greedy, voraciously draining Asia's wealth. They display gross ignorance of spiritual matters and geomantic truths. Worse still, they carry with them an insidious religion that celebrates the poor and miserable, that tells mortals to submit in this world if they wish for reward in the next. These Western notions of equality and individuality bring disharmony to the Devil-Tigers' cities.

It's obvious this new and dangerous form of corruption unravels the fabric of Asian culture. Since all Devil-Tigers know that corruption stems from Yomi's maw, it seems clear to most Black Axis Scholars that one or more Yama Kings are backing the Western powers. Most agree that this support is covert and that Westerners are too ignorant to realize they are Hell's pawns. Unfortunately, the lack of any solid evidence scatters the Devil-Tigers into dozens of investigative avenues that overlap and often conflict.

Devil-Tigers spend much of their time trying to uncover which Yama King has lent his or her support to the West. Some mandarins theorize there might be several Yama Kings involved, each trying to manipulate the West against both the Kuei-jin and other Yama Kings. Thus, most Devil-Tigers study both captured mortals and Kin-jin, torturing them as a matter of routine. The Dharma's luminaries are certain there is an infernal connection between Westerners and Yomi, but their frustration grows with each aborted attempt to find the required evidence.

Some Devil-Tigers believe Tou Mu or perhaps Emma-O is the strength behind the foreign invaders. Emma-O's patience and devious nature are renowned, while Tou Mu's boundless hatred seems a match for the voracious Western conquerors. Devil-Tiger speculation from Angkor Wat to Beijing usually mentions one or the other, but all remains conjecture. In an effort to prove their suppositions, stalwart and experienced Heavenly Devils undertake dangerous expeditions to Kakuri and the Hell of Being Skinned Alive to try to gather some scrap of solid evidence linking Yomi and the gweilo.

More radical Devil-Tigers, however, propose a disturbing hypothesis: Perhaps there is a previously unknown Yama King or Queen who is only now rising to prominence? Many within the August Body of Sagacious Devils declare the hypothesis "unlikely" and "unharmonious," but they stop short of pronouncing it outright heresy. This censure is enough to keep most Devil-Tigers from publicly endorsing it, but private speculation and investigation is rife.

Known as the Ongoing Crusade of Fire and Lies, the theory is based entirely on a rather literal study of the Bible. Some Black Axis Scholars, discovering repeated mention of Satan, believe he must be a Western Yama King. Renaming him Za-tan, they envision a Yama King

who is a deceiver, living in a Hell of fire and torment. Some scholars cannot conceive of a “Western” Yama King, and scour demonological libraries for descriptions of an obscure Yama King who might match the Bible’s Za-tan. Others dispatch seasoned explorers of the Yin, Yang and Yomi Worlds to search for Za-tan’s Hell.

Not all Devil-Tigers feel comfortable reading books or leaving this world to find their answers, though, so instead they kidnap and mercilessly torture the occasional Kindred Hellfire Club member. Only in rare cases do the Devil-Tigers find some connection between club members and known Yama Kings, in which case, it remains up to particularly enlightened Devil-Tigers to eat the soul of the suspected Yomi thrall to learn more of Za-tan. More often, however, Kindred questioned about Za-tan are confused or shocked by the Devil-Tigers’ literal interpretation of the Bible. Most Christian Kindred give Satan little thought, so the idea that such a hellish being might actually exist (or that Cathayans are searching for him) is fundamentally and spiritually astounding.

THE RISE AND FALL OF MIKABOSHI?

Storytellers familiar with Yomi’s modern luminaries are no doubt wondering why the Devil-Tigers don’t pursue Mikaboshi as a prime suspect in the West’s rise. Mikaboshi’s strong position in the 21st century is founded on his rapid adoption of Western technology and artifacts in the 19th century. Don’t the Black Axis Scholars see this taking place?

The short answer is that they do spot it, but far too late. Prior to Mikaboshi’s change in tactics, most observers believe Emma-O’s victory over Mikaboshi is inevitable. This notion is so ingrained that the Kuei-jin all but ignore Mikaboshi, but this doesn’t have to be the case.

Storytellers playing out a long-term chronicle have the perfect antagonist in Mikaboshi. Like the *wu*, Mikaboshi begins the 19th century weak and vulnerable, but with each passing year, he gains strength and influence. By the dusk of the Victorian Age, Mikaboshi assumes his place among the strongest of the Yama Kings, growing more powerful throughout the next century until he becomes the odds-on favorite to ascend to the Demon Throne. Mikaboshi embodies the fundamental changes incurred by the West, and in the eyes of conservative characters, he symbolizes their beloved culture’s disintegration. For progressive characters, he is emblematic of the dangers surrounding embracing the new at the expense of the old.

At the chronicle’s beginning, the characters have the chance to fight Mikaboshi’s demons and *akuma* before he exploits technology. Lore regarding Mikaboshi is difficult to find, but as the years pass his minions slowly resemble the nightmarish blend of spirit and technology expected of them in the 21st century. Mikaboshi’s recent victories against Emma-O also catch the notice of scholars, who then consult the characters as the foremost

experts on Mikaboshi and his schemes. Over the 20th century’s progress, Mikaboshi’s fate and that of the characters become permanently entangled. When Mikaboshi makes his bid for Demon Emperor, it is the characters who lead the battle against him.

It is also possible that Mikaboshi never survives to see the 21st century. Kuei-jin who recognize his rapid rise in power might take steps in the 19th century to prevent it. Perhaps Emma-O approaches the characters to destroy Mikaboshi. Storytellers who want to tell tales of high adventure can cast the characters in the roles of Mikaboshi’s eventual executioners. Others might design stories allowing the characters to slow or sabotage Mikaboshi’s plans, giving other Yama Kings time to marshal their strength and quash the upstart.

THE WAY OF THE RESPLENDENT CRANE

For many Kuei-jin, the Resplendent Cranes are synonymous with tradition. The Shining Ice Guardians shoulder the heavy sins of the Wan Xian and the Third Age, for were it not for the Wan Xian’s corruption, the Middle Kingdom might still be enjoying the Age of Legends rather than the Age of Darkness. The Resplendent Cranes are determined not to repeat the mistakes of the past, and the Kuei-jin will not ignore the laws of Heaven a second time. As Westerners spread across the Middle Kingdom, however, the Cranes search for a sign from the August Personage that this change is what Heaven actually wants.

The Crane debate concerning the West’s inexplicable strength divides the Dharma into two broad camps. The first theory, known as Heaven-Approaches-From-Behind, postulates that the wave of Western colonialism is a warning that society is stagnating and unable to rouse itself from its lassitude. For those who know where to look, the omens of the Sixth Age are blooming, with the West’s encroachment serving as the strongest and clearest warning to date. Unless Kuei-jin and mortal society reinvigorate themselves, some Shining Ice Guardians predict the arrival of the Demon Emperor before the 19th century ends.

Although supporters for Heaven-Approaches-From-Behind agree change is necessary, typical Crane sectarianism inhibits widespread agreement and action. Inspired by the Temple at Three Mountains Village, some orthodox and Empty Throne Cranes create experimental villages to test new social ideas. Most of these experiments, however, implement changes consistent with traditional values, like implementing stricter or looser interpretations of Confucianism or strengthening a greater love for Shinto over Buddhism. In some isolated cases, the Cranes explicitly design changes to embrace new Western science and thought. These Westernized villages often garner support from Bone Flowers, who are generally interested in the experimental synthesis of Occidental and Oriental ideas.

Some proponents of Heaven-Approaches-From-Behind point to stagnation in Kuei-jin society as the root of the problem. Some Shining Ice Guardians use this excuse to launch shadow wars within courts ruled by non-Crane ancestors. Members of the Eight Lotus Blooming are particularly vocal in their calls for a reduction in all shadow wars and a return to the contemplative climate underpinning the Fourth Age.

Even among supporters of Heaven-Approaches-From-Behind, the Crane tendency toward sectarianism creates a radical and contentious splinter sect called the Gatherers of Discarded Lotus Cuttings. They argue that it is the persecution of so-called heretical Dharmas that has led to the current dilemma. While Crane philosophers and theologians scour the same old scrolls for new slivers of wisdom, the Gatherers suggest that perhaps the answer lies with those branded as heretics. Unfortunately, the Shining Ice Guardians quickly declare the Gatherers of Discarded Lotus Cuttings as Those Who Turn The Face. The few members who survive the subsequent midnight war operate in secrecy, trying to establish contact with heretics to see if they know a way to keep the Great Wheel from turning.

Critics of Heaven-Approaches-From-Behind take a different approach to the Western threat. Their theory, known as Heaven-Puts-Down-The-Brush, argues that Heaven is angry. Both the Middle Kingdom and Kuei-jin have drifted from Heaven's righteous and true path, and unless they redeem themselves, Heaven will turn away from them altogether.

Theologians of Heaven-Puts-Down-The-Brush explain Western dominance in terms reminiscent of the Devil-Tigers. Heaven is withdrawing its support of the Middle Kingdom as conditions drift further and further away from the Heavenly ideal. In China, for example, rampant opium abuse is one reason for Heaven's anger. As the Middle Kingdom spirals away from righteousness, Yomi's forces slither through the cracks in the Wall. The Yama Kings see the effect the West has on the Middle Kingdom and lend their putrid strength to the foreigners. Rather than taking the fight to Yomi as the Devil-Tigers advocate, these Resplendent Cranes trust that by returning to Heaven's favor, balance will naturally return to the Middle Kingdom. Orthodox Shining Ice Guardians and members of the Two-Li Road sect are the most fervent supporters of Heaven-Puts-Down-The-Brush.

THE LIBERATORS OF THE WHEEL

This dangerous and secretive heretical sect of the Resplendent Cranes has its roots in this era. For millennia, the Wheel of Ages was comfortably situated in the Fourth Age, the Age of Beautiful Sadness. Now, in just a couple of centuries, the Kuei-jin have witnessed the dawn of the Fifth Age and the Middle Kingdom's enfeeblement at the hands of white-devil barbarians. These desperate conditions suit the Liberators of the Wheel's genesis perfectly. Storytellers can take advantage

of this apocalyptic undercurrent in Kuei-jin society to weave a major story arc (or an entire chronicle) around stopping the Liberators of the Wheel. The Liberators' earnest desire to destroy the world makes them perfect villains for a Kuei-jin *wu*, a Kindred coterie, or a mixed group of Cainites and Cathayans.

THE SONG OF THE SHADOW

From within the Black Metal Egg, the Bone Flowers gather their lore and attend their families' ghosts. Unlike other orthodox Dharma, the Quiet Songs wield their detachment to uncover all of Heaven and Earth's secrets. Ch'ing shih, who rely on their Cold Mind to insulate them from corruption, even catalogue and study Hell's lore.

The West's arrival and dominance sparks considerable interest for many Bone Flowers. While a few Quiet Songs absorb the West's mundane knowledge, the majority find themselves drawn to the Kin-jin. Insatiable thirst for supernatural lore leads to countless questions about Cainite physiology, blood, Thaumaturgy, history, myths and especially necromancy, but many Bone Flowers find such information difficult to locate. The vast majority of Kin-jin are Westerners and protected by various forms of extraterritorial treaties. Kidnapping a Kin-jin often gives other local Kin-jin an excuse to seize more wealth and influence, under the guise of mortal colonial reprisals. This doesn't mean, of course, that such situations don't happen. The Bone Flowers know the Devil-Tigers are unafraid of kidnapping and torturing Kin-jin, but they are unwilling to assume that risk (especially if it backfires).

Instead, Quiet Songs rely on covert means of gathering information, like attending Devil-Tiger torture sessions of Western vampires. Still, this is but one means of learning secrets, and the Quiet Songs have many such devices. General Kin-jin ignorance of the Yin World makes spying on them using ghosts an uncomplicated but haphazard, means of collecting data, for example. In other instances, a few Bone Flower-dominated courts form diplomatic *wu* in their attempts to glean information through carefully controlled secret talks with Cainites.

Those Bone Flowers most familiar with the Bone Library and other repositories of lore do unearth ancient and forgotten scrolls containing Kin-jin references from time to time. Most of these scrolls only refer to Kin-jin in passing, but the diligent do manage to collect some useful information. Scrolls recovered from the former Black Tortoise and White Tiger Courts are the most informative, as are some archived mortal texts from the Yuan Dynasty. The prestige accompanying the discovery of new information, however, is source for more than one shadow war between rival *wu* who claim the information was stolen from them.

Eventually, the Bone Flowers develop an unflattering opinion of the Kin-jin. Unable to harvest Chi except through blood, ignorant of the spirit worlds and the

Tapestry, the Kin-jin fall alongside *hin* on the scale of spiritual development. This picture of the Kin-jin doesn't fully emerge until the end of the 19th century, however, and is a major factor in the future mistakes of the Great Leap Outward.

The Bone Flowers would have arrived at their assessment sooner if not for the revelation that some Kin-jin pursue "Paths of Enlightenment." Exposed to the Kin-jin Paths mostly through captured Sabbat, the entire Dharma galvanizes around the notion that there might be Western Dharmas. Bone Flower spies rapidly sift through Kin-jin society, searching for those who follow a Path. When they do find one, the Quiet Songs spare no effort to seamlessly abduct her for study. Kin-jin captured by the Bone Flowers suffer unimaginably horrible fates as the Yin-infused Kuei-jin pry every secret from their unliving minds.

Initially, the Bone Flowers assume that those Kin-jin who follow a Path of Enlightenment, dubbed the Dharmas of the Unexamined Horizon, have the potential of reaching the Hundred Clouds. The very notion, in fact, that "Western Dharmas" might exist spurs tremendous debate within the Bone Flowers. Did Xue travel to the West at one point? Are the Dharmas of the Unexamined Horizon somehow related to Zao-lat? Are they superior to the known teachings of the Grand Arhat? Devil-Tigers or Resplendent Cranes who hear of these theological quandaries almost reflexively denounce them, but the detachment of Cold Mind allows the Bone Flowers to discuss these nearly blasphemous theories without incident.

For most, the legitimacy of the Dharmas of the Unexamined Horizon weakens once the Bone Flowers find no spiritually advanced Kin-jin. Many Bone Flower *wu* fight deliberate battles against powerful Kin-jin to see what or whom they can draw out, but they all report an absence of the aura surrounding enlightened Kuei-jin. Eventually, the Bone Flowers decide that the Paths of Enlightenment are lesser avenues to enrichment, while some Quiet Song scholars quibble about placing them in the same category as the heretical Dharmas — or one even lower than that. Once the Kuei-jin discredit the Dharmas of the Unexamined Horizon, they quickly equate Kin-jin with *hin* until the practice spreads to most other Kuei-jin.

Unlike their inquiries into the Kin-jin, the Bone Flowers' gathering of mortal European knowledge proves rapid and thorough. The Quiet Songs' libraries are generally considered the finest repositories of Western science and thought, even before the Victorian Age. These collections are the result of gathering a spare book here or a stray folio there over the centuries. The sudden Western inundation into the Middle Kingdom brings a flood of information with it, but the Bone Flowers are well prepared. It is the Dharma's young members, eager to make a name for themselves, who absorb the new material the most quickly. They stand at the vanguard of

those wishing to mix Eastern tradition with Western thought, but their sometimes zealous advocacy of some Western ideas brings more than one young Quiet Song to the edge of denouncement as *akuma*.

THE SCROLLS OF ZAO-LAT

At the dawn of the 19th century, as Bone Flower scholars comb the libraries for existing text on the Kin-jin, one young Bone Library disciple makes a startling discovery. While sweeping the antechamber of the Impregnable Vault, he is shocked to see the solid jade door ajar. Unable to contain his curiosity, he peers inside. The walls hold a honeycomb of stone scroll niches, each containing ancient Kuei-jin secrets. A single hanging lamp burns near a reading pedestal. Drawn to the only light in the room, the Bone Flower looks down at the unfurled scroll lying atop the stand. The text is a collision of ancient Chinese and a peculiar script. After skimming the visible portion of the scroll, the disciple shakes in wonder and fear. Although he can't read the unusual letters, the Chinese portion speaks of conversations between the Grand Arhat and the writer, pertaining to the latter's difficulty in mastering the Dragon Tear. The scroll is penned by Zao-lat before his exile to the West.

Storytellers wishing to introduce Zao-lat and his connection to the East can use the scrolls as a hook for their stories. The scroll in the Bone Library is only one of several whose locations remain unknown. A *wu* of Kuei-jin can discover the other scrolls or pursue the disciple who stole the scroll from the vault in a moment of weakness. Perhaps the scrolls hold forgotten secrets of interest to Kin-jin. For a coterie of Kindred, the mere rumor of lost writings of Saulot would be enough to generate a flurry of activity. Tremere characters, specifically, would emerge as heroes in their clan if they could recover even one scroll. Perhaps the Wu Zao know the location of one or more scrolls, or are they searching for them as well?

THE PATH OF A THOUSAND WHISPERS

The Rootless Trees are the most enigmatic and rare of all Kuei-jin. Rather than concentrate on a single aspect of the Second Breath, they embrace them all in hopes of finding enlightenment. For the Rootless Trees, the dilemma of the West ties back to their Dharma's core teaching: the Broken Mask technique. Enlightenment will not come to the Wise Centipedes until they have worn many facades. A crucial facet of the Broken Mask is that a Kuei-jin can't wear the same one over and over again. This is rarely a problem for Running Monkeys, but mandarins have fewer options. That is, until the arrival of the barbarians.

Regardless of whether the Wise Centipede dons her first mask or hundredth, opinion regarding the adoption of Western guises divides the Dharma. Until this point in time, there are no recorded examples of a Wise

Centipede assuming a European or North American facade. Prevailing wisdom among many Rootless Trees dictates that Western barbarians are inferior and that to wear a Western mask is tantamount to assuming an animal's guise. The success and vigor with which foreigners dominate Asia, however, forces some Dharma members to rethink their entrenched notions.

The very idea of wearing a Western mask disgusts and dismays traditionalists. The foreigners are corrupt and debased; in fact, one might as well adopt a Yomi mask, for Westerners are surely *akuma* harbingers of the Sixth Age. Centipede zealots who espouse this stance sometimes take it upon themselves to spy on their compatriots, quietly assassinating Rootless Trees found wearing Western facades (to protect both the Middle Kingdom and the Dharma's reputation, of course). Despite their vocal presence, however, traditionalists are in the minority.

The majority of Thousand Whispers find the West intriguing, as most Middle Kingdom societies were quite insular before the Europeans' arrival. Consequently, most Rootless Trees have had a fairly narrow worldview, making the intricacy and exoticness of Western culture irresistible. This results in many Centipedes, including a disproportionate number of jina and mandarins, crafting and wearing Western masks in quick succession.

Despite seemingly adopting Western persona, however, most Wise Centipedes remain leery of the foreigners. Few Trees dispute the danger the West poses to the Middle Kingdom, while most Thousand Whispers' seers believe conflict with the Occidental hemisphere is inevitable. Still, the Wise Centipedes are never ones to study a problem from the outside. They adopt Western masks, examine the danger and prepare for it. This has led to a number of startling situations, in which other Kuei-jin often discover that a particularly crafty or intractable Western vampire is, in fact, a mask for a Wise Centipede.

CENTIPEDE RIDES ACROSS THE SEA ON CARP'S BACK

For some maverick Rootless Trees, one or two Western masks won't suffice. In some cases, these eccentrics are mandarins or even ancestors who, for inexplicable reasons, believe their path to the Hundred Clouds might actually lie in the West. Those who espouse this belief often underwent an auspicious occasion while wearing a Western mask.

These rogue Centipedes, known as Peculiar Lovers of Upside-Down Masks, hide themselves in the Asian masses emigrating to Europe and the United States. Peculiar Lovers have little difficulty integrating themselves into their new cities, with many of them avoiding the ethnic neighborhoods and ghettos in favor of new Western homes and families. Back in their homeland, the Dharma often declares most Peculiar Lovers lost or *akuma*.

The result of this small diaspora is that several Kuei-jin "sleepers" might still exist in modern European or American cities. Some might still wear the same mask as when they arrived, while others are on their third or fourth. It's possible that some Wise Centipedes even have influence in local Kindred circles, impersonating Kindred in the ultimate game of skill.

THE DANCE OF THE THRASHING DRAGON

Thrashing Dragons are more sensitive to changes in the Middle Kingdom than members of other Dharmas. Their exploration of the maya attunes them to mortal culture, since the secrets of enlightenment lie hidden in the world and spirits around them. The complexity of the maya makes it easy to overlook enlightenment, so most Dragons err on the side of excess to avoid lost opportunities. Thus, opinions on the arrival of Westerners differ, but all Dragons agree that new opportunities have been revealed at the very least.

According to most Kuei-jin historians, Asia's first encounters with Western explorers mark the beginning of the Fifth Age. Like all other Wan Kuei, the Thrashing Dragons felt the Wheel of Ages turning in their souls. As the Middle Kingdom changed, however, so did the Dragons, who felt the differences of the new Age more keenly than other Kuei-jin. The maya transformed in countless ways, and more than one Dragon bodhisattva experienced a moment of blindness as a result. The Wall to the Yang World proved harder to cross and old Yang spirit allies mutated as well. In time the Thrashing Dragons adjusted to the new Age, but it was clear to the Dharma's teachers that Dharmic progress had slowed significantly for most.

The Thrashing Dragons initially put up stiff resistance to the sudden influx of Westerners streaming into the Middle Kingdom. Much like the Devil-Tigers, the typical response of most Dragons to these foreigners (supernatural or otherwise) was to arrange their immediate destruction, if possible. They equated the mortals with barbarians and the Kin-jin with *chih-mei*. Whereas the Devil-Tigers slew the Westerner Kin-jin for religious reasons, the Thrashing Dragons simply viewed it as part of their Dharmic duty to free the Middle Kingdom of dying things.

The mindset of virtually all Thrashing Dragons dramatically changes soon after the start of the 19th century. In a meditation titled *Revelations of the Tides*, a Laughing Rainbow bodhisattva suggests that the answer to the Fifth Age's limitations might lie in the West and its peoples. The new difficulty in Dharmic understanding is due to previous ignorance and indifference concerning the West. The maya has changed significantly, but no Dragon has bothered studying its new elements. If the Dragons examine and devour the new ideas and creatures

of the West, the path to the Hundred Clouds will lose some of its newer twists and knots.

The *Revelations* enjoys wide dissemination among Thrashing Dragons from all regions. Some resist the notion that the Westerners contain any spiritual lessons, notably members of the Passion Bloodflower sect. Most Dragons latch onto the *Revelations*, however, and change their attitude concerning Westerners, studying and interacting with them much as they'd done with the rest of the Middle Kingdom for millennia. This new outlook doesn't spare Westerners from the same grisly fate accompanying most mortals who annoy a Thrashing Dragon, but it does change the relationship from outright slaughter to that of an interesting toy.

Some Thrashing Dragons discover that their interaction with Westerners leads to auspicious occasions. These reports fuel Dragon competitions to "claim" various groups of Westerners as the territory of one *wu* or another, since no Thrashing Dragon wants to lose any spiritual insight that a particular mortal or Kin-jin might offer. In cities with active resistance against Western influences, some Thrashing Dragons find themselves engaging in shadow wars to protect the foreigners who interest them (but haven't been studied yet). It is often Ten Seasons Sect members who find themselves in this predicament, having tied their gardens too closely to foreigners.

Despite some initial success for those Dragons interacting with the foreigners, it becomes apparent that the swell in spiritual development promised in the *Revelations of the Tides* fails to materialize. Some of the *Revelations'* strongest supporters face exile or the Eye of Heaven to expiate their disgrace.

WAVES UPON THE ROCKS

For centuries prior to the Victorian Age, the pace of change in Asia had been incremental. The life of most people in 1840 differs only slightly from their ancestors in 1440 — that is, until colonialism and Western intervention sends tremors through every aspect of society. The effects of these changes hit the Kuei-jin hardest, since their society relies on millennia-old principles; it is also the first time that mortals affect the Wan Kuei to this significant a degree. Progress attacks the very foundations of the ancient ways... that which the Kuei-jin regard as sacred, unchanging or both.

New Kuei-jin who take the Second Breath in the Victorian Ages feel the gulf opening between the Wan Kuei and the mortal world more keenly than older vampires; it is they who face the disparities between the mortal society they leave behind and the undead society that adopts them. Yet, the changes aren't so great as to offer new Kuei-jin an edge over their elders; indeed the fissures and pressures facing the Kuei-jin mirror those confronting mortals.

The difference is that mortals are far more flexible than Kuei-jin, and they can also measure their self worth

against a wider range of aspirations and ideas. The Dharmas, with their mythic roots and spiritual goals, render the Kuei-jin susceptible to changes affecting the ancient beliefs upon which their own self-image derives. Thus the changes that come with Westernization and modernization reach into the very heart of what it means to be a Kuei-jin.

It is important that Storytellers make players aware of this tension, that they not act like Connecticut Yankees surrounded by backward yokels. By forcing players to take the major questions raised by colonialism in account, Storytellers can help build their characters with the essence of the conflicts defining Asia's brush with the Victorian Age. While some of these issues may not affect some characters, Storytellers shouldn't allow players to escape the West's heavy touch unscarred. The 19th century is so traumatic that its memories still affect the region today, more than a hundred years later. How can any character who exists in those times remain untouched?

FAITH AND RELIGION

The great faiths of the East... Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Shinto, Taoism and Confucianism all waver under Victorian Age pressures, which are twofold. On one hand, progress and colonialism undermine the social, political and theological certainties of the past, forcing the religions to redefine themselves in a modern world that has little patience for them. On the other hand, many mortals seek religion's solace to shield themselves as those same forces rip apart everything they know and hold dear. Most religions therefore suffer schisms between reformers and conservatives, a matter complicated by numerous resistance movements that adopt cloaks of religious fundamentalism to bolster support against the mighty and unforgiving colonial governments.

Following in the wake of Western domination comes a flood of Christian missionaries. In the Victorian Age, the Christians do not face resistance from local governments in keeping the natives kowtowed and passive; indeed many colonial regimes encourage missionary activity (while for natives, becoming Christian offers many social, economic and political advantages). Christianity undermines virtually every social tradition in most Asian cultures, and the missionaries go out of their way to attack the indigenous faiths. Unfortunately, despite the fact that openly attacking these "blasphemous missionaries" only invites a crackdown by the local colonial regimes, they are a regular occurrence nonetheless.

For creatures whose very reason for existing revolves around faith and whose actions follow a religious worldview, all this turmoil is very disturbing. While mandarins may discount mortal concerns as of little consequence, it is unlikely new Kuei-jin can be so blasé. They haven't yet forgotten what it means to be human, and they can't forget the tribulations of the world they leave behind. So how does a character new to the Second Breath see his existence? Is she a Westernized

progressive who discovers the dogmas she rejected in life have followed her beyond death? Is he a conservative who finds affirmation in the old ways? How does a Christian Kuei-jin reconcile her new state with her faith? These are obviously extremes, but no character can ignore the gnawing concerns eating at the very meaning of her existence.

TECHNOLOGY AND TRADITION

For generations, most Asians followed in their predecessors' footsteps. The pace of cultural and political change was slow, measured in decades and only occasionally cataclysmic rather than evolutionary. Innate conservatism was one reason for this, while the other was a lack of technological change. Progress in Europe, while slow, was appreciable following the Renaissance, but in Asia, the pace and nature of life changed very little. Colonialism is therefore a cataclysmic *and* evolutionary shock that strips away centuries of traditions by making them redundant, illegal or by exposing them for frauds maintained by corrupt or complacent elites.

The bewildering speed of these changes and the way colonial regimes shape them entirely to their benefit makes the Victorian Age a time of great turmoil. It is a period of hectic transformations, even for Europeans — and they are even ready for it, to some extent. In Asia, it seems that every year reveals a new tool reinforcing European superiority and dominance. Yet more closely held traditions become superfluous (the feudal and caste system, to name two), with colonial society merely ignoring them, deliberately uprooting them or twisting them to serve oppression and economic exploitation (such as using native rulers as figureheads to maintain colonial authority).

Kuei-jin new to the Second Breath, or at the very least familiar with the new technology and colonial organizations, are very much in demand by the courts. This is a double-edged sword, however, for some Kuei-jin learn about the West by moving beyond the old traditions, discarding them as primitive superstitions holding Asia back. Such attitudes will hardly win a disciple or *kôa* the regard of his ancestor or mandarins. Conversely, newly risen tradition-minded Kuei-jin may find themselves in much better standing with mandarins and ancestors, but face just as many difficulties dealing with mortal society.

The courts must adapt to the new industries, but they do not wish to change their traditions. This imbalance is a microcosm of what is unfolding across a wider Asian panorama. Players must decide where their characters stand: for progress, for tradition or for a middle ground where they adapt modern technology to the social concerns of the ancient cultures they still admire. Regardless, they will make enemies and allies within their court because of their decision. No matter where they stand, someone will disagree with them — vehemently.

GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICS

Asia's pre-colonial borders were flexible, undefined and of no real importance to the peasants. Certainly, various kings and emperors claimed this land or that, but for the commoner, the person who mattered the most was the local village headman or noble. Colonial rule sunders these old links, however, or worse, creates new ones between peoples who hated each other for generations. Suddenly journeys once commonplace become dangerous and illegal, thanks to corrupt customs officials, trigger-happy border police and indiscriminate armies and navies who do care about borders. In many colonial states, natives cannot move around without identity papers and permission from local officials.

It is therefore essential that players decide where their characters were born, lived, died and took their Second Breath. Characters may well find themselves cut off from their homeland, illegal aliens in the city they died in or, as is often the case with Chinese and Indians, living as registered foreigners. This can present characters with potential official difficulties as well as emotional and spiritual hardship if their Dharmic path requires them to return to the country of their forefathers.

Storytellers must take the wars and violent politics surrounding the Victorian Age into account during character creation. While it's obvious that major wars have an impact, the Storyteller should also factor in everyday violence in the colonial regimes. This is especially important if a character was politically active; if so, what opinion the colonial secret police had of him must also be determined. After all, if officials don't know a character is dead, they may still be looking to arrest him. Worse yet, if they know he's dead, they'll want to know why he's up and about.

Political violence may also affect a character's family; a father murdered, a sister raped, relatives starved to death... regardless of the situation, most characters will not remain untouched by the repressive society in which they exist. Even local collaborators are touched by their betrayals, perhaps more so than those who suffer. People invariably discover their identity while the police rarely offer them their full trust.

RACE AND IDENTITY

The whole concept of race is a Victorian Age creation. In Asia prior to the colonial period, people never knew the term, much less used it to define someone. Even China was a patchwork of ethnic and racial groups of limited importance compared to the politics, wealth, social status and religion of the region. The same was true throughout Asia; people might recognize someone as hailing from a particular region, but they directed little, if any, animosity toward that person unless he was of a rival clan or tribe. Colonialism and the slow development of national consciousness changed all that.

Players should define their character according to various ethnic groups but refrain from delineating themselves by any particular nationality (unless the Storyteller wishes to forego this portion of the process). Even in a country like Japan, people still call themselves by their local region, not some overarching nation that means nothing to their daily existence. The same is true of race; character ethnicity will define many things, but it is mostly “civilized” Europeans who use it to discriminate.

Over the course of the Victorian Age, however, early social discriminations and new concepts of race will go hand in hand to oppress entire population segments. Thus, people will despise a *dalit* not just for her caste, but also for the darkness of her skin. The same holds true for the Chinese living in Southeast Asia and Japan’s attitude toward everyone else in Asia. Eventually, all Asia will suffer under the effects of racism, thanks to the Europeans.

For players, the development of racism can affect their characters in many ways. Perhaps their mortal kin are targets of communal violence because of their “race,” or because people identify their ethnic group with those serving the colonial regime as toadies. Then again, if characters draw their Second Breath after 1860, they may find the concept of race takes on a whole new set of problems after death. How will they handle an Uigher mandarin demanding their respect when they, as Manchus, were brought up despising the “lesser” Uigher? What of tribal penangallan who despise them for being Chinese or Arabian? Characters cannot avoid this issue unless the Storyteller chooses to ignore it. Otherwise, no matter what ethnic group the players choose for their characters, the violence and chaos endemic to the Victorian Age ensures that their characters will suffer some torment and confrontation for it.

SMALL LAUNDRY LIST

Unfortunately, Asia is too large a continent to offer Storytellers a complete list of various ethnic groups and tribes from which players may draw inspiration. The Philippines, for example, has one hundred groups by itself (though admittedly the differences are more dialect based). The following groups, however, are hopefully a good start to provide characters with a little background kick start.

Akha: (China, Indochina, northern Siam) The Akha are of Tibetan origin and are deeply superstitious. Involved in spirit worship, their religion dictates how to perform every action precisely.

Bodos: (Assam/India) Tribe living north of Burma, in the Assam region under British India’s control.

Hmong: (China, Indochina, Siam) Devoutly animist mountain dwellers with very few Christian or Buddhist converts. Some support themselves by growing and selling opium poppy to traders.

Igorrote: (Philippines) Semi-settled tribe with metal-smithing abilities. They are also warlike, circumventing Spain’s attempts to conquer them and successfully resisting Christian conversion.

Kachin: (Burma) Animists of Tibeto-Burman descent who immigrated into northern Burma from China.

Karen: (Burma) Predominantly animist tribe with some Buddhist and Christian converts.

Lahu: (China, Burma, northern Siam) Animist tribes that believe in a principle spirit controlling the remainder. They are excellent hunters and trappers.

Lawa: (Siam) Settled agricultural tribe with sophisticated system for crop rotation. Most are animists, but some follow Buddhism. Possibly of Micronesian descent.

Lisus: (Burma, northern Siam) Good-looking if not arrogant, the Lisus believe strongly in the Spirit Worlds. They also adapt well to change.

Moro: (Philippines) Various tribes practicing Islam (may include Arabs) who now fight Spanish missionary efforts in the region.

Molucca: (Dutch East Indies) From the island of Ambon, they have steady contact with ethnic Chinese. There is some intermarriage.

Negritos: (Philippines) Tribesmen with a mixed aboriginal and imported slave (brought to the area by Islamic Moro) heritage. Mostly nomadic or gypsy like.

Yao: (China, Indochina, Siam) Only hill tribe with a written language; they also follow medieval Chinese Taoism. Some grow opium poppy, but most are friendly and businesslike.

Zamboanga: (Philippines) A trading port in the Southern Philippines that also serves as a port for pirates. A Zamboanga won’t be an ethnic group as much as a Filipino pirate of that area. The same applies for Sulu pirates of the Sulu and Visayan Island groups.

CHARACTER CREATION

INTRODUCTION

The process behind creating a **Sunset Empires** character is nominally different from building a modern KoE character. Like designing *Kindred* for **Victorian Age: Vampire**, the main difference is one of approach. Some Abilities aren't available, while players can only purchase other Abilities at increased cost or with a solid explanation as to why their character learned that Ability. The changes herein are a deliberate decision to maintain similarities with **Victorian Age: Vampire** and **Kindred of the East**. Naturally, if a Storyteller wishes to modify certain suggestions or add house rules, she should feel free to do so. Please note, however, that **Sunset Empires** is less about crunching rules and more about the nature of Victorian Asia and the quandaries it provides for roleplaying one of the Ten Thousand Demon People.

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

The most important difference in building a **Sunset Empires** character rests in its first steps. As mentioned above, while numbers haven't changed, the character's focus is radically different from that of a modern KoE chronicle because of the exotic social environment and time period. The key to addressing a character's principal issues is a matter for each step of the creation process. Players should therefore discuss with their Storyteller how she sees 19th century Asia, as well as the chronicle's degree of accuracy. The more authentic the Storyteller crafts a chronicle to be, the more work a player needs to invest creating a character concept that fits the game's milieu.

Who were you before you died?

This is the foundation for your entire character, especially in the Victorian period where even after the Second Breath, your character's mortal life (ethnically, religiously and socially) will have repercussions everywhere. There is no limit on a character's identity save those demanded by the Storyteller. Migration is a major force during the 19th century, allowing players to chose almost any ethnic group for their characters except for those hailing from the most isolated geographic locales.

All the great religions exist in Asia, allowing characters to fill the social gamut ranging from Sultan to beggar. The amount of detail players must provide for their characters will depend on their Storyteller's inclinations. In some games, simply claiming Chinese ancestry will suffice, but in others, players may need to specify which particular sub-group to which their character belongs, whether they are Hakka or Cantonese, for example. Before finalizing your concept, sit down with the Storyteller and ensure your level of detail matches what the chronicle requires.

Perhaps the most important element in a concept is defining a character's standing and level of education. Social status affects this to some degree; the richer you are, the better your education. In a progressive society,

however, the key question becomes how Western is the character's education? A mortal noble may have attended a fine classical Confucian school, but he would be less adept at handling the colonial world than a beggar at a missionary-run school. Remember, traditional Asia is in turmoil, and it is possible for a nobleman to become a pauper while a beggar becomes a wealthy merchant in a single decade. Is your character a winner in this game of chance and wits, or just another victim?

That brings us to the last key question. Did your character resist or collaborate with the colonial regime as a mortal? No one has the luxury of sitting on the fence in 19th century Asia unless they live in remote isolation. Neither of these options is necessarily extreme, however; maybe your character resisted the regime by charging gaijin with higher fees than locals, or perhaps he collaborated with gaijin trade by serving as go-between with other merchants. Your character doesn't have to be hiding in the hills with a gun or holding a cog in the colonial bureaucracy to take sides.

Answering these questions, along with determining his educational opportunities, will define a character's familiarity with the trappings of the West, and thus what skills he possesses after taking the Second Breath. The less Westernized the character, the less chance he has at learning modern Abilities (see below) and, depending on the Storyteller, the greater difficulty he has learning modern skills in death.

Now that you're dead?

Players should have a clear idea of their character's Dharma before crafting the fine details of their unlife. Don't limit yourself by preconceptions concerning Dharma, however, especially since most are in a period of flux and currently encapsulate a wide field of views. The key here is realizing that a character's Second Breath is defined as much by how and why she died as by how she lived. This will likely give the character some inconsistencies that are often necessary for interesting roleplaying opportunities (as well as providing Storytellers with potential hooks). For instance, the stern and sober Westernized schoolteacher who dies and becomes Thrashing Dragon because she repressed her innermost desires as a mortal will have problems. To best illustrate this dichotomy, the player should express a degree of that conflict when choosing Dharma, Nature and Demeanor, as well as assigning Attributes and Abilities. An uptight schoolteacher is far more interesting to play as a Thrashing Dragon or Devil-Tiger if she's uncomfortable with Torture or Seduction, for example. Don't be afraid of contradictions. Conflicting elements are key to **Sunset Empires**, and if a character concept, personality, Dharma and Abilities are offset or discordant, it offer players a great place to start developing a more interesting character.

Who are you really?

All the standard **Vampire: The Masquerade** (pp. 112-115) personality archetypes are available in **Sunset Empires**. While most remain intact, the particulars for

some need finessing. The archetypes in **Victorian Age: Vampire** are not recommended for Kuei-jin since they bear a distinctly European bent to them, one incongruous with Asia.

In regards to existing archetypes, players should remember that the Asian perception of an archetype is quite different from the West's perspective (which in itself is a generalization since there's never been a singular "Asian" perspective). As example, while the West views Traditionalist as a flaw, Asia's traditional-minded cultures would actually have a negative view of Visionary as someone seeking to disrupt the harmony of traditional life. Is he a wise elder or stubborn old man; the difference lies purely in the eye of the beholder. In **Sunset Empires**, the players must remember that the beholders are the undead children of cultures thousands of years old (whose views remain the same from those offered in **Blood & Silk**). Obviously, representing this can be difficult, but it offers plenty of unique roleplaying opportunities. Storytellers and players trying to recreate as near an authentic "Asian" roleplaying experience as possible should consider the various archetypes in light of the characters' surrounding world.

What Direction do you face and how do you Balance?

Kindred of the East (pp. 80-82) carries two particular Asian ideas into character creation and development: Balance and Direction. These concepts do not change in **Sunset Empires**, except that Storytellers striving for a more authentic game may wish to stress the importance of these choices to players, more so than in the case of modern Asian settings. After all, Asians (and some Westerners) in the Victorian Ages still believe in and follow astrology, traditional magic and other such mystical pursuits with the utmost devotion. It isn't too far fetched for a mandarin to believe a Southern-facing Kuei-jin balanced to Yang unsuitable for a mission to speak with the Dark Kingdom of Jade's Guardians, regardless of her other qualities. Past experiences and skill sets are merely superficial things to the traditional Wan Kuei. Emphasizing these conceptual elements is one easy way to reinforce the alien nature of ancient Asian societies, and to encourage players to leave their Western preconceptions behind.

STEP TWO: ATTRIBUTES

This process is identical to that described in **Vampire: The Masquerade**. Given the generally poor health conditions of so many Asians during colonial times, Storytellers may wish to restrict characters with a low-class concept to a maximum of three dots in any one Physical Attribute, unless players wish to spend bonus points to raise them. Players more interested in roleplaying than roleplaying can easily circumnavigate such caps, but such restrictions for the right group of players help add to **Sunset Empires**' unique feel.

STEP THREE: ABILITIES

Kindred of the East (pp. 82-86) introduces or modifies certain Abilities, and while **Sunset Empires** neither changes or adds to this list, the omissions and additions listed in **Victorian Age: Vampire** are obviously applicable here as well. Traditional Skills and Knowledges like Martial Arts, Meditation, Portents, Enigmas and Rituals play a much larger role in the 19th century's courts. Storytellers should encourage players with traditionally oriented characters to take some levels in these Abilities to represent their pre-Western education. All Abilities should also be modified according to **Victorian Age: Vampire**, which contains excellent advice about adapting existing Abilities to the 19th century while being flexible about it.

To give standard Abilities a unique flavor, Storytellers may give players one of two options. At the most basic level, players can emphasize the differences in the same Ability through unique specialties. A Skill is just a Skill; what matters, however, is how the character applies it. For example, firearms covers guns, any type of guns, but a Specialty in muskets (widely used in China and India) gives the character an added dimension and helps define him further (commoners can't carry guns, so having one might be a status symbol). Specialties can also highlight the repressive nature of colonial regimes with Law: Native Law (as opposed to European Law, which is for whites), for example, or their innate bias with such options as Academics: Ethnography, which is the study of non-European cultures (which are far beneath white civilization and, thus, deserving of a separate skill). The new Abilities introduced in **Victorian Age: Vampire** are also applicable to **Sunset Empires**, with some minor differences noted below.

There is one glaring dichotomy between **Victorian Age: Vampire** and **Sunset Empires** — much of Asia remains "backward" compared to Europe. While some Storytellers may wish to ignore this for the sake of ease, others may desire to drive these differences home to their players. The choice is understandably difficult for Storytellers, since the setting already demands players make a difficult culture leap. Forcing them to juggle Abilities according to their concept adds a layer of complexity that may deter players from enjoying the game.

Adjusted Skills

Craft: Widely practiced, Crafts form the basis for all Asian economies until the very end of the Victorian Ages. A Storyteller should ensure players are taking appropriate crafts according to the characters' cultural background, social position and their society's technical level. For example, nobles do not learn peasant Crafts; outside China, Japan and India gunsmiths are virtually non-existent and tanning is an Untouchable Skill in both Japan and India.

Firearms: Guns are neither widespread nor very advanced outside India and China during this period.

While large gun shipments enter China over the 19th century thanks to various wars and rebellions, the rest of Asia remains very gun poor, since colonial and native regimes are not interested in arming the populace against them. If a player wants her character to have Firearms, she should offer a valid reason why her character knows how to operate them. Storytellers may also force characters to specialize in culturally appropriate guns, like muskets. Nobles subservient to the colonial regime, former members of the colonial armies (both of whom are the regime's most loyal servants) and perhaps some bandits will be the most likely to own Firearms and know how to use them properly. Even if a player justifies possessing this Skill, the Storyteller may double its cost or require the character buy it using freebie points to reinforce the fact it sits outside the populace's normal frame of experience.

Etiquette: This Skill bears far more importance in Asian society than in European. While a Chinese peasant isn't familiar with Manchu Court etiquette, she does know how to address the local headman or various imperial officials. Ignorance of such necessities risks a sound beating and perhaps even more serious sanctions (caning, imprisonment or beheading) depending on the insult. Colonial regimes also introduce a new form of Etiquette as well: European. One needs to know how to address the local Priest or European Resident. All characters should possess at least one point in this Skill, but if they come from nobility or rich merchant families, their Etiquette should be as high as two or three dots with multiple specialties.

Ride: As per **Victorian Age: Vampire**, but players should justify their characters' Skill according to social class and background. For instance, horse riding is known to Java's nobility and Japanese military officers, while among commoners it remains virtually unknown.

Security: This Western Skill remains the purview of the colonial regimes' security apparatus or those of organized native governments such as Siam and Japan. Even if a player justifies possessing this Skill, the Storyteller may double its cost or require the character buy it using freebie points to reinforce the fact it sits outside the populace's normal frame of experience.

Adjusted Knowledges

Academics: Divides neatly into Traditional and Western. Players who can justify a European education for their characters should treat this skill as per **Victorian Age: Vampire**. For those with traditional educations, be it a Confucian College or Buddhist Monastery, the skill represents a significantly different information set. A Chinese Confucian scholar, for example, will know the entire works of Confucius by heart and be able to recite Imperial law on the most diverse topics. A Buddhist-educated official in Burma knows the illustrious and sacred history of every dynasty and the prescribed manner to calculate tribute due from each district. Eastern education is introverted and entirely culturally biased,

focusing on the realities of pre-colonial life in their region. Free thought is discouraged, and much of what Westerners consider superstition (like astrology) is considered science.

Enigmas: As with Academics, Western Enigmas are very different from those Enigmas set forth in **Kindred of the East** (p. 85). One is a product of the scientific age, the other of millennial old traditions of magic and superstition. Possessing Western Enigmas should preclude knowing the Eastern variants (or vice versa), since science and superstition are uneasy bedfellows under most circumstances. Only very unusual people will be at home in both the Spirit World and with the pseudoscience of phrenology. The Storyteller should also require characters to be highly Westernized (in education and upbringing) to possess the Western variant of Enigmas, and demand a damn good explanation as to why a character should have both.

Linguistics: The 19th century is a time of ignorance and illiteracy, but the Eastern hemisphere has some strange exceptions. Many places have a relatively high level of literacy, especially those following the Buddhist faith in Siam, Indochina and Burma. Typically, a character only needs one dot in Linguistics to read and write his native tongue. Most individuals involved with or against the local regime will also know a European tongue. In India and China, this might entail English; in Indochina it would be French; while in the Philippines, it would either be Spanish or even Arabic (from the Islamic Sultanates who would know Koranic Arabic). Beyond that, however, it is doubtful the indigenous population would learn anything beyond their colonial master's language, unless the character is a well-traveled trader or merchant.

Medicine: Much of Asian medicine in the 19th century is far more advanced than Western practices, but arrogance and a misunderstanding of the ritualized language used by Asian "physicians" means the colonial authorities usually dismiss Oriental doctors out of hand. A player should decide which tradition his character possesses, with a Western medical education indicating extensive schooling in that part of the world (or society). If a player wishes to know both traditions, Storytellers can use Medicine to indicate the principal school of thought influencing the character's practices and use a specialty to handle the other.

Politics: Local and colonial politics are quite different from one another in 19th century Asia. Only China, Siam and Japan retain independent political systems, despite significant European meddling. As with Academics, players should decide which political system the character understands, though the separation between the two is not as absolute as with those Knowledges mentioned previously. If a player wishes to know both sides of regional politics he can handle both as specialties, but a strong familiarity with colonial politics indicates some Westernization.

Science: Traditional Asian sciences best fall under those Skills and Knowledges mentioned previously, or with Abilities like Portents and Rituals. The reason is simple; Western science is a completely new way of thinking and looking at the world, even in Europe. In Asia, “Science” is undermining ways of life that have existed since before Christ’s birth. Characters with any dots in Science are exceedingly Westernized and probably furthest from the traditional Asian superstitions of their contemporaries. Naturally, the Second Breath would be a psychological shock of the most profound and probably shattering kind for these individuals, but then hey, everything has its cost.

STEP FOUR: CHOOSING ADVANTAGES

The major changes introduced by **Sunset Empires** are differences in the fundamental nature of the world rather than any differences in rules.

Backgrounds

All standard Backgrounds are available, but those presented in **Kindred of the East** (pp. 86-87) have greater importance here than they do in modern times, if only as marks of one’s connection to traditions and the old ways. The difference between modern Backgrounds and their 19th century counterparts is that some are only applicable to Westernized Asians, like widespread Fame or extensive Resources. The rest of Asia still exists as it did decades, centuries or even millennia ago. As long as the Backgrounds remain relative to all the other supporting characters inhabiting the game, then the specific differences in economics, society and so on are immaterial. The difficulty is in bringing Victorian Kindred eastward. In many instances, a wealthy European will be wealthier than an equivalent Asian, or the nature of his Contacts might be more important or his Retainers may be more plentiful. By virtue of being white, a Victorian Kindred will enjoy a one or two dot equivalent advantage over Kuei-jin in certain matters; this comes, however, with an obvious geographic limitation. One wrong turn and the Kindred could find himself in the wrong district, where his advantages vanish. Conversely, a Kuei-jin with many Contacts may find they’re for naught after encountering a bigoted officer. A Storyteller should play up these differences, since they are at the heart of the friction between East and West.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Merits & Flaws

Merits and Flaws remain as given in **Vampire: The Masquerade** (pp. 295-302), **Kindred of the East** (pp. 94-95) and **Victorian Age: Vampire**, but players should not use them to simply represent cultural or social elements of a character; they are defining and intensely personal elements of your character. For instance, a traditional character shouldn’t necessarily have the Archaic Flaw since he isn’t primitive, but rather someone revolted by the changes wrought by progress.

Some Merits and Flaws listed in **Victorian Age: Vampire**, like Frail Stomach, Harbinger of Gehenna and Hypersensitive Palate, are Kindred-specific and therefore not applicable to Kuei-jin.

Prelude

More so than any other Vampire game, **Sunset Empires** is affected by events in the mortal sphere in the form of the turmoil, oppression, violence and cataclysmic changes gripping Asia. Here, characters have the opportunity to participate in sweeping events and sway future Kuei-jin policies in its approach to the world. Before they can do so, however, they must make their mark and earn the attention of their elders.

Designing a Court & Wu

The Hundred Corpse Families and the Five August Courts remain central to any **Sunset Empires** game. The information presented in **Kindred of the East** (pp. 96-97) remains germane to creating a *wu* for the characters as well as determining their interactions with their court. Storytellers should remember, however, that the 19th century courts are generally even more hidebound and intolerant of dissent than those of the 21st century. Additionally, the number of *wu* pushing the ancestors’ and mandarins’ limits is very limited and the Bamboo Princes have yet to arise (as products of colonialism’s fall). Storytellers may wish to keep the ancestors’ and mandarins’ powers comparable to those of **Kindred of the East**, since players may grow easily frustrated at being constantly checked and punished for their inevitable transgressions. As always, this remains the purview of the Storyteller.

OTHER OPTIONS

Depending on how the Storyteller approaches his game, there are other chronicle options besides creating Kuei-jin from scratch. The Eastern nights are an eclectic time when other beasts lurk in the shadows. While **Kindred of the East** canon says some groups may not play well together, the Storyteller has final say over her game and can do what she pleases.

SHEN

The World of Darkness’ Asian inhabitants accept that they have a role to play under Heaven. While that doesn’t mean they have to like each other, it does mean alliances are possible. Whether you wish to run spirits, *hsien*, *hengeyokai* or a mix of the three, it will require some work. The Storyteller will probably need **Hengeyokai**, **Dark Kingdom of Jade** and **Land of Eight Million Dreams** for their basic systems before adjusting them to the cultural, social and historical information presented in this sourcebook. Since *shen* follow different agendas, Storytellers will need to determine how the various groups act/react to colonialism and so-called “progress.”

The *shen*, especially the *hengeyokai*, will likely more actively resist the changes ripping Asia apart. After all,

industrialization, massive deforestation, urbanization and the neglect of nature spirits are all very clearly aspects of the Weaver run amuck and the Wyrms' corruption. Additionally, the hengeyokai are mortal, and thus more closely effected by colonialism than the Kuei-jin... they cannot afford to wait it out. For shapeshifter characters, then, the major issues are the mortal ones and not related to the World of Darkness' other denizens. Certainly the Kin-jin and Western Garou pose a serious problem, but the Europeans are blindly violating both hengeyokai territory and kinfolk, damaging the very earth itself.

Wraiths are disaffected from the mortal world by their very natures, but the slow failure of traditions affects the rituals and respect these hungry ghosts expect to receive from the living. In this manner, the *hsien* face similar problems... the desecration of sacred sites and the flagging reverence displayed by mortals. Additionally, the religious revivals of the Victorian Age pose a problem for spirits; suddenly, many mortals are not only refusing to follow traditions, but actively regard the *hsien* and wraiths as unnatural. When faced by these problems, it appears as though all three factions have a common enemy in Europe's industrial push and clergy.

Kin-jin

While **Sunset Empires** focuses primarily on Kuei-jin, there's no reason Storytellers can't bring Kindred into play. Storytellers should still stress to players, however, that outside South and Southeast Asia, Kin-Jin may likely have a short and violent existence. If a Storyteller wishes to run a Kin-Jin coterie, she may consider lessening the Kuei-jin antipathy as needed. Perhaps the local ancestor needs some impious help, or there's a shadow war for the control of a local Kuei-jin court that precludes any organized attacks against Cainites. Asia should remain dangerous ground for Kin-Jin, but not completely inaccessible for Western characters.

Western Kindred offer a great chance to play up the cross-cultural divides defining colonialism and the Victorian Age in particular. How do characters handle the local World of Darkness' inhabitants? Are they appalled, attracted or lost by what they witness? As the Storyteller, it is important to impart players with a sense of isolation and alienism. When using **Victorian Age: Vampire** to build European characters in an Asian setting, Storytellers should remember that few Westerners have a familiarity with local customs, cultures and languages. The mysterious East is still an undiscovered country for most Europeans... especially Kindred.

Asians Kindred face even more problems. The Embrace cannot fail but to exacerbate the sense of alienation afflicting so many natives, thanks to colonialism. More so, with the August Courts seeking answers about the Kin-jin, Asian Kindred present the perfect opportunity for questioning and experimentation. Meanwhile, local European vampires may look down upon their Oriental clanmates, whom they may have

Embraced for the sheer cruelty and pleasure of it all. Regardless, however, Storytellers should prevent players from creating undead stereotypes; a Kindred Gunga-din or Dr. Lao will only serve as an object of derision and detract from the story's atmosphere.

BACK FROM THE FUTURE

If you're already running a **Kindred of the East** game and would like to use **Sunset Empires**, there are several options available other than starting a chronicle from scratch. Of course, there's nothing wrong with creating a whole new game, but if you already have a campaign, why lose all that work and player-developed interaction?

One way is to take your favorite mid-range supporting characters and turn them into characters in the **Sunset Empires**. This can provide excellent opportunities for campaigns that carry across the decades, while offering players the chance to understand the supporting characters that always intrigued them. This requires some work on the Storyteller's part, but the results can be enjoyable. A variation on this option allows players to build **Sunset Empires** characters who then become supporting characters in a modern chronicle, or who meet a grisly end or disappear along the way (creating an ongoing mystery in the modern era).

Storytellers may also create **Sunset Empires** characters, then carry them forward into the modern era. To do this without playing through all the successive decades, the Storyteller may want to create a reasonable mechanism to increase character's powers based on the passage of time. A good rule of thumb is characters gain an experience point for each month (or every other month), but this will produce prodigiously powerful characters in the modern era. The same holds true for the characters' contemporaries, however; time benefits everyone, including the character's enemies.

ODDS AND ENDS

P'O ARCHETYPES

All the P'o archetypes from the various **Kindred of the East** (pp 92-93) sourcebooks work just as well in the Victorian Age, and nothing stops you from using these new archetypes in a contemporary game. These archetypes carry particular relevance for a Victorian game, however, because they relate to the social issues of the time or to Asian societies' most traditional aspects.

THE BARBARIAN REVISITED

For millennia, civilized Kuei-jin felt the horror of a Demon who would rather be a barbarian outlander. Over the centuries, however, who constitutes a "barbarian" has changed. China's Wan Kuei once feared and scorned the Mongols and Manchurians who invaded from the north. Their "barbarian" was a pillaging bandit on a horse. Even earlier, Han Chinese looked down on ethnic

groups within present-day China, while P'os drew their character from cultures long subsumed into the Middle Kingdom. Indian Kuei-jin similarly bore Demons modeling themselves on primitive "hill tribes."

By the Victorian period, however, the European has largely replaced these other "barbarian" archetypes. The Europeans present Asian civilizations with their greatest cultural challenge since... well, ever. For the first time, the Far East's many peoples face an alien culture that is stronger than any of their own — one that could change them instead of being changed. China and India each suffered numerous invasions, but the conquerors quickly fitted themselves to the native culture. China's northern invaders settled down to become Chinese. India's conquerors let the Brahmins define them as the new Kshatriya caste. Even the Muslim Mughals who abolished caste distinctions among converts ended up as a caste of their own. The Europeans, however, stay European.

A few pragmatists work for the invaders; the white devils' money is as good as anyone else's. Some people respond to the missionaries' appeals, while other Asians decide that if you can't beat the "Hairy People," join them. They wear frock coats and top hats instead of kimonos or turbans. They speak of schools to teach their children European languages, science and government. They call their own ancient cultures "backward."

Each fresh humiliation of an Asian country brings another wave of new Kuei-jin whose Demons emulate the West. The Kin-jin are incidental: At first, most Kuei-jin don't know enough of the Kin-jin for their Demons to imitate them. Instead, a Kuei-jin's P'o needles the vampire with Europe's greater power. The foreign devils are stronger; they must be wiser as well. Take the winning side.... A specifically Cainite identity for the P'o develops only when a Kuei-jin learns more about the Western vampires.

In the Victorian Age, therefore, Kuei-jin Demons draw little distinction between Western vampires and Western mortals. Either way, when a Barbarian P'o takes over a Kuei-jin, it transforms his body into a parody of a foreign devil: most likely a bristling beard, a complexion either pasty-white or sunburned red as a beet, and hair and eyes in some unnatural shade. The Barbarian P'o also chooses appropriate garb, like a black frock coat and trousers, a military uniform and helmet or a missionary's habit. None of this prevents the P'o from retaining more conventional demonic traits like horns, jutting fangs or tentacles, however.

THE ADDICT

Every Cathayan knows the hunger for Chi and the pleasure of satisfying that hunger. Likewise, every age sees mortals who flee the trials of life for a drugged stupor. When the British prove they will go to war to flood China with opium, however, the drug addict emerges as a social issue. A Kuei-jin's P'o can draw upon both the urge for pleasure and the fear of enslavement to create

the Addict. This archetype sees no use in the pursuit of Dharma or anything else, except numbing its eternal hunger. The Addict craves blood, but also alcohol, opium, hashish or any other drug that can stupefy the mind — and if conventional drugs do not affect the undead as strongly as mortals, the Demon will keep trying with either larger doses or stranger and more powerful drugs. Anything to forget the horror of existing in a corpse's body and Yomi's torments.... A Kuei-jin ruled by an Addict P'o cares for nothing except slaking its cravings as quickly as possible.

Conditions for Takeover: The Addict can force a shadow nature roll whenever the Kuei-jin suffers grief, disappointment, self-disgust or some other emotional stress that seems suitable. A Kuei-jin's Nature and Demeanor can supply clues for selecting what stresses provoke a binge, while exposure to intoxicants can also rouse the Addict.

THE COMPRADOR

In the Victorian Age, the Comprador is easily confused with the Barbarian, but this Demon operates for quite different motivations. The Barbarian *believes* in the superiority of the foreign devils (or at least, that what it pretends). The Comprador simply works for whoever pays; Kin-jin, rival courts, *akuma*, shapeshifters... anyone. It abandons Dharma and the Mandates of Heaven and Hell to seek its own profit in jade, mortal coin or other sorts of wealth and power. The Comprador asks the Hun: "Why strive for a distant, elusive and probably mythical enlightenment? Get what you can, while you have the chance!" Beyond mere wealth, such a Demon tempts the character with the prospect of *rising above her station*. All she has to do is renounce virtue and tradition and sell out. A Cathayan afflicted with a Comprador may revive from shadow soul to discover she's made deals and commitments with the most appalling people... who still expect the Kuei-jin to keep her side of the bargain.

Conditions for Takeover: The Comprador can force a shadow nature roll whenever the character feels particularly unappreciated or unrewarded for his efforts, or in the face of great opportunities for profit (if the character will only betray his ideals and allies). The Comprador may also rouse when following one's Dharma seems particularly arduous or confusing.

THE DOG-COOKER

Hinduism sets great store on its taboos of ritual purity, and just about the worst, most defiling thing a person can do is eat dog meat. The Dog-Cooker P'o loathes the effort that purity and caste require, and wallows in every sort of self-degradation. It seeks defilement because it is forbidden, and revels in the awful joy of shameless abandon. Feeding from improper sources, whoring or whoring oneself, smearing oneself with filth... a *chih-mei* is a model of restraint compared to a Dog-Cooker.

Conditions for Takeover: The Dog-Cooker can force a shadow nature roll when duties, desires and Dharma conflict, or the Hun suffers shame or loss of face. The Dog-Cooker strives to do whatever will shock the sensibilities of the Hun or the people close to him.

THE SAMURAI

The name is Japanese, but any Cathayan can suffer from a Samurai Demon. The Samurai obsesses on respect and glory. Any hint of shame or disrespect whips the Samurai into murderous rage. It demands the Hun seek satisfaction for insults, and it sees insults everywhere. Unlike the Legalist, which it resembles at times, the Samurai does not actually care for decorum and procedure, only that others bow and scrape and flatter it.

Conditions for Takeover: The Samurai can force a shadow nature roll when the character suffers embarrassment or humiliation; or conversely, when the character receives great praise.

MARTIAL ARTS

The Western world first learns about Eastern martial arts in the Victorian Age. In particular, the Righteous and Harmonious Fists introduce the West to the mythology of the Asian martial artist with mysterious powers. Japanese swordplay and stick-fighting also impress Western observers, and a few Westerners try learning these fighting arts themselves. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle could have Sherlock Holmes defeat Moriarty through “superior knowledge of Baritsu” with fair confidence that his audience knew what he meant.

The **Kindred of the East Companion** (pp. 131-134) mentions several martial arts styles, chiefly from China and Japan. Most of these styles also exist in the Victorian Age, but not all of them. In fact, quite a few are actually 20th-century inventions. Many more styles also exist. Here we describe six more, all from countries whose martial traditions are less known to the West.

As the styles described in the **Kindred of the East Companion**, these styles are “hard” (tending toward linear motion, concentration of force and hitting the target directly) or “soft” (placing greater emphasis on circular motion, redirection of force and grappling or throwing the target). Hard and soft martial arts grant different difficulties to the basic martial combat maneuvers of Strike, Kick, Grapple and Throw. Practitioners can also learn various “Special Maneuvers,” which are also divided into “hard” and “soft” classes. Each of these maneuvers has its own difficulty and damage rating. For each dot in the Martial Arts Skill after the first, a character can choose one special maneuver available to practitioners of her style.

STYLE DESCRIPTIONS

Like the martial arts given in the **Kindred of the East Companion**, these martial arts are described as

“hard” or “soft.” Unlike the **Companion’s** examples, the arts herein can draw from both the hard and soft lists of special maneuvers. This does not affect the difficulty ratings for the basic combat maneuvers, it simply illustrates that some martial arts place great emphasis on specific techniques that are usually associated with other fighting styles. For instance, Bando is one of the “hardest,” most linear fighting arts ever devised, but it also teaches chokeholds best represented by the Cataleptic Grapple.

- **Arnis:** This martial art from the Philippines is also called Kali and Escrima. Kali, the oldest form, is a style of fighting with knife and sword. Arnis and Escrima, the later forms, adapt Kali’s techniques to fighting with batons or barehanded. Arnis does not demand proficiency with Melee because the batons merely direct the damage from strikes and increase the fighter’s reach. Kali, however, does require the character also possess the Melee Skill.

- **Bando:** This Burmese fighting art combines strikes with hands, feet, elbows, knees, hips and head with powerful wrestling and chokeholds. Bando has a weapons counterpart called Bانشay; together, the complete fighting system is called Thaing. A character who practices Bانشay needs the Melee Skill; all practitioners of Thaing should have at least one dot of Athletics to represent their training in leaping, maintaining their balance and general agility. The British outlawed Bando in 1885. This is the martial art for *dacoits* (Burmese bandits).

- **Hwarang-Do:** This martial art claims to date back to the second century AD, to the *hwarang* or knights of ancient Korea, though documentation is scant. Hwarang-Do combines punches and kicks, joint locks, nerve strikes, blocks and many other techniques with intensive study of “internal” power; hence its classification as a “soft” style even though it includes powerful, direct strikes. Practitioners study weapons combat (Melee), the human body (Medicine) and mental discipline (Meditation) as well as unarmed fighting.

- **Kalaripayit:** This martial art hails from southern India and is very old; some students believe it influenced Shaolin Kung Fu. Kalaripayit combines wrestling techniques with strikes to pressure points, while advanced practitioners may learn weapons combat. Kalaripayit draws its theory from Ayurvedic medicine, and training centers double as hospitals (practitioners must have at least one dot in Medicine). Kalaripayit also places great emphasis on evasion, so Dodge is highly appropriate as well.

- **Muay Thai:** “Thai Kickboxing” is one of the most purely “external” styles ever invented, with no throws or grappling maneuvers... just beat the tar out of opponents with fast, powerful kicks and punches. Fighters may wrap their hands in horsehair stiffened with glue and ground glass to make an improvised cestus. Muay Thai has a weapons analog called Krabi-Krabong.

- **Than Vo Dao:** Vietnam's oldest fighting art employs circular movements and both "internal" and "external" techniques. Masters are said to "place the mind in the fist," anticipating an enemy's attacks by sensing his energy. A high Alertness rating to raise a character's initiative can represent this knack.

RELATED SKILLS

Martial arts mastery demands more from a character than a high rating in the Martial Arts Trait. Athletics represents a master's ability to leap, tumble, balance and perform other acrobatic feats. Many martial arts include training at evading an opponent's attacks, so Dodge is also highly appropriate. Most martial arts include weapons training as well, so Melee is necessary for characters trying to learn that aspect of an art. Internal styles may also involve a degree of Meditation so the practitioner can tap her inner power. Some styles teach healing and first aid, which can justify Medicine.

SPECIAL MANEUVERS WITH WEAPONS

A martial artist can perform his art's special maneuvers with weapons as well as with bare hands. In this case, the maneuver inflicts lethal damage. For instance, a Dragon Tail Sweep performed with a sword could represent hamstringing an opponent.

To perform martial maneuvers or special maneuvers with a weapon, the character needs both the Martial Arts Skill and the Melee Skill. The player's dice pool for the attack consists of the character's Dexterity plus the *lower-rated Skill*. The difficulty stays the same as for the unarmed form of the attack, while the damage is as per the weapon's, plus whatever bonus the maneuver supplies. For instance, that Dragon Tail Sweep-hamstringing attack would be difficulty 8, and inflict damage equal to a normal sword strike (the attacker's Strength +2 dice in lethal damage).

WILD MARTIAL ARTS

Throughout Asia, the martial arts have attracted a vast mass of legendary tales concerning the practitioners and their wonderful powers. China produces the most extravagant legends: The claim that Boxers could learn to fly after 400 days was notable only for the short training period. Flight, walking through walls, superhuman speed, invulnerability, a "death touch" that could slay a victim without any obvious attack... these are only a few of the powers ascribed to martial masters.

Such tales are quite true in the World of Darkness. Some martial artists do possess supernatural abilities, most of them simply *shen* who learn combat forms and combine them with their innate powers. For instance, a Kuei-jin martial artist is innately tougher than any mortal and can display superhuman speed through Black Wind or fly using Jade Shintai. One important faction of Lightning People specializes in the martial arts, while *hsien* and *hengeyokai* can perform wondrous feats of their own. Secret orders of demon hunters called *shih* also learn a mystical martial art called Om Chi Kung Fu that lets them perform certain Chi-powered magical feats. (See **Demon Hunter X** for a description of the *shih* and their powers.)

It can be hard to tell, though, whether an amazing feat is magic or simply amazing. If a Boxer charges into machine-gun fire and lives, is he protected by magic... or just very agile and very lucky? To speak in game mechanics, a master martial artist can possess Physical Attributes and relevant Abilities of four or five dots, with specialties. Large dice pools can mean lots of successes, and lots of successes represent astounding, nigh-superhuman feats like dodging machine-gun fire, climbing sheer walls or hiding so quickly that you seem to vanish. Any Kuei-jin who assumes a martial artist is no danger because he is a "mere mortal" may be in for a nasty surprise.

Martial Arts Styles	Technique	Typical Maneuvers
Arnis (Philippines)	Hard	Blow to Pressure Point, Damaging Block, Elbow Strike, Withering Grasp
Bando (Burma)	Hard	Blow to Pressure Point, Cataleptic Grapple, Elbow Strike, Ripping Strike, Spinning Kick
Hwarang-Do (Korea)	Soft	Cataleptic Grapple, Elbow Strike, Joint Lock, Mantis Strike, Thunder Kick
Kalaripayit (India)	Soft	Deflecting Block, Blow to Pressure Point, Counter Throw, Jump Kick, Killing Blows
Muay Thai (Thailand)	Hard	Damaging Block, Elbow Strike, Jump Kick, Killing Blows, Spinning Kick
Than Vo Dao (Vietnam)	Soft	Counter Throw, Deflecting Block, Joint Lock, Mantis Strike, Thunder Kick

CHAPTER SIX: STORYTELLING SUNSET EMPIRES

So, now that you have a stack of ideas concerning the Sunset Empires setting, how do you incorporate them into an chronicle? Several elements make this setting unique, chief among them the clash of cultures. The Victorian Age is a time of enormous upheaval throughout Asia, and the clashes are as often between Asian societies as between Asian and European cultures.

This has implications for your chronicle. For starters, it means you don't need to include any Kin-jin in your stories if you don't want to, but the nuts and bolts of that earn mention in the "Suggested Chronicles" section that follows. Before diving into the specifics, however, it's worth going over the basics of establishing a chronicle.

THE SUNSET EMPIRES CHRONICLE

The Victorian era is an age of great contrasts. European civilization is expansionistic and aggressive. The 19th century sees rapid technological advancement and social experimentation that belies the era's staid reputation. European nations, with economies heavily dependent on trade, seek new markets, new products for existing markets and new sources of raw materials.

Europeans further believe in their manifest destiny to civilize and convert the rest of the world, ending the isolationism of their perceived inferiors.

The Asian civilizations, for their part, are more static (especially in China and Japan), and emphasize order and stability. Japan tries shielding itself from any foreign influence; the Indian caste system defines each person's occupation, associations, marriage potential and even diet; Southeast Asian tribal members hunt and gather like their ancestors did thousands of years before; and finally, Chinese government looks to Confucius as the last word in political theory. Nevertheless, strong undercurrents of resentment and stronger desires for change affects entire social strata hitherto excluded from power. Ancient pomp and tradition mask social stresses that the West unwittingly detonates.

The European invasions also provide ample opportunities for aggressive and ambitious individuals to grab wealth and power. At the time, Asia contains many minorities denied access to such considerations. Several such groups ally with the Europeans to gain influence and prestige over their erstwhile oppressors.

When such different cultures meet, they cannot help but clash. Unfortunately, Europe's superior firepower turned the meeting of cultures into a race to destruction.

The Kin-jin and Kuei-jin play out the same drama, and even they know they aren't driving the conflict, but rather are swept along by it.

FOR THE KUEI-JIN

Many Kuei-jin find these very confusing times. The influx of foreign mortals places their Scarlet Screens and the mortal institutions of their native cultures under severe strain. Still, the Western Kin-jin never pose a serious threat to the mandarins. The Cainites soon discover that challenging the Cathayans directly is dangerous. Instead, they strive to influence mortal events. The Cainites can press their Western culture's technological and organizational advantages, thereby changing the nature of the Eastern cultures. Against the forces of economics and industry, the Kuei-jin find no answer except in Japan, where the *gaki* struggle to master these forces for themselves.

The most tradition-bound Kuei-jin cannot grasp what is happening and cannot compete the brash foreigners, who don't understand what they destroy. Some particularly enlightened elders comprehend what is transpiring surprisingly well, but realize there is no short-term answer to the West's challenges. Instead, they retreat behind their deteriorating Scarlet Screens and adjust their well-laid, long-term plans. They feel confident of their victory, and remain patient enough to wait for it.

Young Kuei-jin, however, are split between those who want to defend their native cultures to the bitter end and those who understand that if Asia does not modernize, she will forever remain the West's servant. The contest continues into the 20th century and beyond. Young Kuei-jin on both sides feel their elders have failed and must be replaced, but their haste and impatience makes some Cathayans easy to manipulate; others, it makes into even more dangerous opponents.

FOR THE KIN-JIN

The Kin-jin believe the Victorian era something of a golden age. Elders with established domains can send troublesome childer to Asia. If they fail, the Elder has disposed of a potential rival with surprisingly little fuss. If the childer succeeds, however, then the elder gains a new power-base and a chance to examine the methods and ideas of a potential rival. The ancillae and neonates flocking to Asia find a new world with exotic cultures and strange natives. Freed from the oppressive yoke of their elders, ambitious Cainites seize the opportunity to carve out new domains and dream new dreams. These dreams, however, can sour quickly. Unlike their mortal counterparts, European Kindred are patently unsuccessful at carving up Asia's bounty. The Kuei-jin enjoy a tremendous "home ground advantage;" they know the land, the mortals and the spirits, and can travel along the Dragon Lines. What's more, most Kindred cannot resist the Cathayans' strange powers.

As a result, prudent Kindred act through mortal intermediaries. They concentrate on setting up favorable trade and military arrangements in attempts to curry favor with elders back in Europe and America. With some notable exceptions, the Kin-jin "help" conquer the East by backing and encouraging the efforts of their mortal charges and countrymen. At least, that's what they believe. The truth is, if it weren't the Cainites backing the mortals, it would be someone else riding the coattails of the colonial empires. Meanwhile, many Cainites see a stint in the East as an ordeal to survive, if only to earn the respect of others back home. Ultimately, it is politics, economics and technology that change Asia, not supernatural machinations.

HOW THEY MIX

These sharply contrasting attitudes form a potent and volatile mix. The most memorable games are usually built around a small number of interesting characters, so consider carefully how the chronicle's protagonists and antagonists approach their situations. Play with the stereotypes, but don't be too concerned with creating radically new ideas for characters and situations. A familiar idea, well executed, makes for a more satisfying game than a poorly realized radical idea. Stereotyped characters are enjoyable to deal with since players understand them immediately and know how to react to them. The key is to make them well-rounded and unique paragons of their archetype.

For example, you may want to create an ancestor who is a true modernist, eager to learn the West's methods and technologies. This is a promising idea for a supporting character, since the attitudes of such an individual contrast sharply with his expected role in Kuei-jin society; it gives the Storyteller plenty of scope with which to play. Once you take a familiar idea like this and twist it, you'll surprise your players no matter what you come up with. On the other hand, the stereotypical "scheming mandarin" is also full of dramatic potential. Your players' familiarity with this basic concept of a supporting character will only enhance their enjoyment of your portrayal.

The key is to utilize a number of supporting characters, each of whom embodies one (or more) of the hopes, fears and goals of the various factions inhabiting your chronicle. As they interact with the characters, they demonstrate the challenges and difficulties facing Asia's denizens during this difficult time.

SETTING UP YOUR CHRONICLE

There are as many ways to build a chronicle as there are Storytellers. Some practices are of universal application, however, no matter what your approach or preferences.

GATHER YOUR IDEAS

Before starting on the chronicle's specifics, you should mull over the basic ideas that will bring it form.

It also helps to write some very rough notes while reading through your source material. What setting elements interest you the most? Do you want to build a story around a particular historical event or person?

Go beyond the game material and consider other sources of inspiration. Have you seen a film or read a book that inspired you? Consider what grabbed your interest. Great characters? Exotic and interesting locations? A fantastic plot? No matter what inspires you, annotate it so you can reference it as needed. It doesn't matter what the source is — anything from a historical documentary to a teen soap can supply moments and scenes to inspire you. At this stage, your goal should be blocking out the rough outlines of your chronicle — the concepts, characters, settings and plot threads that you'll weave into stories. Think of chronicle creation as akin to pottery: Before you can make a finished product, you need to throw the clay onto the wheel. That's what this stage is all about, so throw in all your ideas and thoughts.

Don't worry too much about being original, at least not at first. It can be quite useful to draw on the basic plot of a favorite movie or book for your starting point. As you blend in ideas drawn from other sources, your plot will diverge from its source material. This is one of the great pleasures of being the Storyteller... watching your stories grow from a collection of ideas into some greater, larger whole.

Now that you have your clay on the wheel, you can start working it into a rough shape. Start looking for possible connections and associations between the elements you like. As you connect characters with other characters, locations and events, ideas for stories will emerge. Remember, there is nothing new under the sun: Creativity, it has been suggested, lies in hiding your sources.

CONSIDER YOUR PLAYERS

Once you gather your basic ideas, give some thought to the people who will play in your chronicle. If you issue an open call to interested players, make sure your story can accommodate whatever the players throw at it. That is, you need to leave room in your plans for players who like lots of combat, those into character development, lovers of intrigue, those who explore settings and every possibility (and combination) in between.

If you know your players, then tailor your chronicle to the sort of stories they prefer. On the other hand, you may want to build a story that challenges them to play against type, so they won't feel they're in a rut or that your games have become predictable.

You might also consider the types of characters who function best in your game. There's no point in telling your players to create whatever they want to play, and then spending extra time and effort bending your combat-heavy servants-of-the-penangallan chronicle out of shape to fit in a pacifist Lasombra missionary who wants to convert the Japanese. It is far better either to wait until

players finish their character designs before finalizing details, or to offer your players some rough guidelines before they invest their time and energy into character creation. You could incorporate that pacifist Lasombra, but it might take some work. After all, you can theoretically accommodate anything in a Storytelling game... just make sure the payoff is worth the extra effort. This is meant to be fun, not Storyteller's purgatory.

Offering some instruction to your players about suitable character types can save you a lot of headaches, but be careful you don't force anyone to play a character they won't enjoy. All sides must be flexible during this process.

CONSIDER YOUR SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Most great stories revolve around great (or at least memorable and interesting) supporting characters. Never waste an opportunity to bring in supporting characters by making them uninteresting. Players, regardless their preferred story types, love interacting with other characters. The opportunities for dialogue and interaction give them a direct "in" to your game world. Other in-game experiences (like combat) are mediated by dice and rules, but dialogue and conversation with other characters are not, thus having a much more of an immediate impact.

Never introduce a major (named) supporting character without having some idea of her goals and basic personality. This need not go beyond a few notes, but for major characters, you should develop their background in some detail. Filling out a character sheet also helps crystallize your ideas. Again, the purpose of all this work is to create a game world that lives and breathes even when the player characters are doing nothing.

Supporting characters are the ideal medium for world building because you control them directly. It's hard to impart the effect of broad social change in abstract terms. It's much more visceral to show your players a supporting character who experiences those changes, like a revered, traditionalist elder overwhelmed by changes he cannot comprehend. Show, don't tell, and your players will appreciate what's going on much more.

Well-drawn, supporting characters also do much of your plotting for you. Once you define a supporting character in some detail, put yourself in her place and consider how she would react to her situation. You should find that certain courses of action will suggest themselves immediately. Start by defining long-term goals, then work backward. Think of some intermediate goals that need fulfilling, then choose one and envision which immediate actions will bring it to fruition. More importantly, consider what plans and actions bring your character into contact with the players' characters. In this way, you can build coherent plots around your supporting characters that will make sense when viewed over time, and show your players that other characters have agendas of their own.

Do Your Homework

Sunset Empires is a historical game, but don't let that intimidate you. You don't need to be an expert on 19th century socio-politics and historical geography to run a good chronicle set in China, Japan or any other territory in Southeast Asia. All you need is this book and some imagination.

That said, extra reading can only enhance your chronicle. You can easily find popular (i.e., non-academic) histories of the region and the specific countries within it. They're a great source of names, places and events that can add to your game. Not only does this give you "game-fodder" and ideas, it helps your chronicle feel more authentic and alive to your players, especially if they also know the period's history. It goes without saying, however, that this is a *fantasy* game and the Storyteller has every right to change history. Never get into an argument over historical minutia with a player; it's your game. So long as you consider the repercussions of the actions you portray, its internal logic remains intact (even if it does diverge from real-world history).

Current events are also great fodder for story ideas, since the early 21st century is also a time of globalized commerce, clashing civilizations and uncertainty about the future. Part of what makes the Victorian Age interesting is the extent to which it mirrors our own, so simply translate events back into period-appropriate terms and go to town.

You can also pick up a simple tourist's phrase book and annotate a few greetings and phrases you think will come into play a lot. Give copies to your players; using a bit of the lingo can help immerse you and your players further into the game. Great sources of accurate information are the travel guides sold at most bookstores. These combine maps, history, local details, common phrases and information on famous or notable locations in an easy-to-read format. They're usually not too expensive and, for a gamer, there are few better resources.

Theme & Mood

Theme and mood are two of the most important intangibles in your chronicle. One thing that sets truly excellent films, television programs, books, comics and roleplaying game chronicles apart is consistency in theme and mood. They're crucial if Storytellers want their chronicles to have their own unique feel or flavor. That doesn't mean they're set-in-stone hindrances that lock you in place creatively. As with all rules, they exist to be broken, but you can't shock, surprise or delight players with a sudden change of mood or a new theme if you haven't already established a baseline for the chronicle.

Think of your favorite TV show. If it's good, you should be able to describe its overall theme and mood without too much effort. Your favorite cop drama, for example, might be about whether one good man can make a difference, while its overall mood could be of

grim resignation with flashes of hope. Both techniques simply provide something for the writers to work against. By inserting episodes with different motifs and pacing, they emphasize the "regular" theme and mood by providing contrast. Your chronicle should work the same way. This kind of framework gives you the freedom to deviate from your usual style without radically breaking the thematic and emotional continuity already established in the chronicle.

THEME

What is your chronicle about? The answer to this question provides your theme. Note that the question is not about your specific plots; you need to think a little more generally about the meaning behind the individual stories. For instance, suppose you set your chronicle in Thailand. The stories might be about Western incursions into the jungle, allowing you to link the stories into a plot about rivalries between jungle queens who both fight the Europeans and try redirecting them at one another. This plot could illustrate themes like the clash between science and tradition, or the need to set aside petty disputes in the face of a common foe.

A theme gives chronicles overall direction and also provides a handy yardstick when you devise specific scenarios or supporting characters. You should be able to relate them back to your theme, or to understand how they work as a counter to it.

Forexample, you might decide your Okinawa chronicle is about the struggle for control of the island (which both Japan and China claim, for different reasons). Your theme might be the struggle within smaller nations to come to grips with more powerful, expansionist rivals. Once you decide the theme, however, you can evaluate your stories and characters accordingly: How do they advance or illustrate the struggle around which you build your game?

Unlike mood, theme should remain consistent throughout your chronicle or the chronicle may seem scattered: a collection of scenarios and game sessions rather than a coherent story.

Mood

The game's mood is its overall emotional tone. This is distinct from genre: **Sunset Empires** is a horror game, but you may decide to shoot for brooding terror, naked fear or sudden violence. This is especially important in a "genre" game like **Victorian Age: Vampire** because a strongly developed mood helps your players find their bearings, even if they're unfamiliar with the setting.

What moods are apt for **Sunset Empires**? The game takes place during enormous social and political upheaval, so any moods concerning fear (of change, of being left behind by change, of the West, of losing personal and cultural ascendancy), alienation (from the new societies emerging or from old societies that are crumbling), anger (at foreigners, at the rapid pace of change, at mortal society) are all appropriate.

Storytellers may want to run the occasional session or scenario that contrasts sharply from the overall mood of their chronicle. This helps prevent games from becoming monotonous and can heighten the tension nicely. The classic example is the humorous (or, at least, light-hearted) episode in a serious TV series. It provides a nice break from the routine and shows the characters and setting in a new light; the contrasting mood also gives the subsequent serious episodes a little more punch.

How To Use Them In Your Stories

Once you decide upon the game's overall theme and mood, you need to express them to your players. There's no point in telling them, "tonight our theme is the survival of traditional ways and our mood is anger;" the old adage to show, not tell, holds true.

You can show your players what you're up to in a number of ways, but the best technique is using the supporting characters to carry your message across. To portray alienation, present some supporting characters who are lost and disillusioned with the course of events. If your theme is the mandarins' short-sighted nature, bring some mandarins into the action who are rife with mutual pettiness and distrust. Have them ignore warnings from other characters — especially player characters — because they're too busy scheming against each other. When disaster catches the mandarins flat-footed and the characters are the only Kuei-jin prepared for it, you've made your point and illustrated your theme.

When you show your players the chronicle's theme, be sure they can interact with the plot and characters in a direct and meaningful way. This makes it easier to draw your players into your stories, thus enhancing the dramatic impact. Nothing is worse for a game than supporting characters doing all sorts of interesting things that the players cannot affect.

The chronicle's setting can reinforce its mood. For example, you can suggest brooding terror and mystery through scenes and settings where the characters have very limited information or sensory input. Secret meetings in isolated locations full of ambiguous sounds; public meetings in places full of strangers (or people speaking foreign languages); obscure warnings muttered by passing strangers and combats in dark, confusing locations can all emphasize mood.

STYLES OF PLAY

You may also want to consider the style of game you're Storytelling. Mood and theme are the emotional tone of your chronicle and what your game is about. Style is the kind of action you set the characters through. You might decide to run an action game, or one based on exploration, intrigue, mystery, interpersonal relationships or any of several other styles.

You should talk to your players about the style of chronicle you plan to run. You can adjust your game's theme and mood on the fly without much trouble, since

PROPS AND SUCH

Some Storytellers use music, pictures, props and other devices to convey information and set the game's mood. This may require a lot of work for an uncertain result, but you might want to consider it in some cases. Illustrations are the easiest props. You probably don't have an Oriental potentate's crown or a samurai sword handy, but you can copy pictures from books, magazines or the Internet. Pictures representing the characters' surroundings are even better. Instead of wasting time on description, just show your players the picture and say, "Okay, you're at the pagoda and *this* is what it looks like."

Cheap and simple props can enliven a character or scene. Suppose the characters meet their contact at an opium den, for example. You can mime the way the character interrupts his speech to draw on his opium pipe, or use a plastic bubble-pipe that costs hardly anything and can make your portrayal more vivid.

Storytellers can also easily find music from just about every Asian culture: Chinese opera, Indian ragas, Japanese court music, Javanese gong ensembles, you name it. Avoid anything with intelligible lyrics, however; you don't want the song's words distracting your players from what you're saying. You might also find recordings of jungle sounds or other environments, but beware. Not every group likes "theme music" for games, so ask your players beforehand.

Especially ambitious Storytellers can even provide snacks appropriate to the scene's setting. If the characters mostly deal with the Quincunx's mandarins, serve Chinese tea and sesame buns. If they face off against Westerners and you want to portray the Europeans' disregard for tradition, serve up soda and chips (sure, it's anachronistic, but that's kind of the point).

Always remember that props and music are to *enhance* the story. If your players don't care, don't bother.

they're fairly subtle background elements. Conversely, it's harder to change a combat-fest into political intrigue without some fairly major work.

To help trigger ideas, here are a few possible **Sunset Empires** chronicle styles:

EXPLORATION

The Victorian Age is a great backdrop for exploration. Asia provides explorers, cartographers, fortune hunters, preachers, traders and soldiers with countless reasons to investigate, invade and exploit new lands. Ambitious

and usually unscrupulous, Westerners are keen to penetrate the Orient and lay bare her secrets. Locals often aid them to curry favor, gain advantage for their own schemes or simply to survive.

You could build an exploration chronicle around an expedition into the jungles of Cambodia, Laos or Siam, searching for lost temples and the lairs of the jungle queens. It might be based around an expedition into the heart of China, where Westerners remain little more than a rumor, searching for ancient texts that might reveal how the Kuei-jin can survive the current age. The highlands of Sumatra, Borneo or Indochina, warded by dense jungle and pestilential swamp, hold mysterious tribes with their own secrets.

Exploration generally involves danger, whether from wildlife, bandits or native tribes, so combat-oriented characters will fit right in. Scholarly (or, at least, well-educated) characters have parts to play as well. The great Victorian explorers like Sir Richard Burton did not think of themselves as vulgar looters; they sought knowledge, too, whether it was the source of the Nile or a lost city called Angkor. Cartographers, linguists, missionaries and naturalists all participated in exploration's journeys, and many of them genuinely cared about the cultures they encountered. If word of an expedition leaks out, however, rivals may join the chase to discover its objective. Explorers may face sabotage or betrayal, or find assistance in unlikely places.

Player characters can be a coterie of Kin-jin eager to uncover Oriental secrets and mysteries or a *wu* of Kuei-jin racing to preserve their culture's secrets (or to exploit them) before the Westerners can. Turnabout is fair play, though; Kuei-jin characters may attempt dangerous expeditions into the distant, barbaric lands of Europe and America, to uncover the secrets of the foreign devils.

Exploration chronicles are filled with fast-paced action, thrills and wonder. Characters encounter natural wonders, lost temples, strange flora and fauna as well as other surprises. Every discovery, however, carries consequences for both the discoverer and the discovered. Anthropologists sought remote tribal cultures to compare them to the other societies they knew, but by bringing them into contact with the outside world, they destroyed the very uniqueness they sought. Philosophers argue that the West's determination to exploit Japan led directly to its near-destruction barely a century later... and then to its reconstruction as a world power. European scholars eagerly sought the myths and philosophies of India, and learned the concept of an Aryan *herrenvolk* that later spurred men like Adolph Hitler into action. All exploration is a journey into the unknown... and that includes an unknown future. As Kuei-jin and Kin-jin discover each other's societies, each may find themselves changed in ways they do not expect... or want.

INTRIGUE

Intrigue-based chronicles are a staple of **Vampire**, but their apparent complexity can deter many Storytellers. They do require a little more preparation than most other styles of games, but the extra effort required is not that extensive while the pay-off is well worth the enterprise.

The key to putting together such chronicles is to prepare the supporting characters with care. Make sure you understand the goals, resources and plans of each major supporting character. That way, when players do something unexpected (at *least* once per game session by most experiences), you can determine how each supporting character will react based on a clear appraisal of their means and abilities.

It helps to create a timeline for each major character and a rough outline of how their plans will progress and intersect if the players' characters do nothing. This gives you a blueprint to guide your improvised decisions concerning how someone responds to player characters' actions. Don't ignore the attitudes of the supporting characters' minions and henchmen, either. The disgruntled lieutenant, the loyal soldier and the ambitious novice are all staples of this kind of story. They will give your players plenty of opportunities to plot and scheme, blackmail, bribe and betray.

Beware of overly intricate plots, however. If your players are totally stumped, they'll only grow more frustrated with each turn. Conversely, if you make leads too easy, the players may well feel railroaded. The best method is to start with a simple scheme or two, at first. Then, depending on how your players handle that, you can adjust the complexity and balance of the next plot. In tales of intrigue, it often turns out that a simple scheme is only a sideshow or red herring for some deeper plot.

Pacing matters significantly for a chronicle of intrigue. If characters reveal too many hidden agendas too quickly, the chronicle seems farcical or frantic. Too many layers of hidden motives and secret agendas can have an equally pernicious effect, when players come to expect that *everyone* is *always* lying to them, and they can never know anyone's real goals. The shock of understanding — of seeing how actions that seemingly serve one purpose actually serve another — is one of the charms of this style of chronicle.

HORROR

Fundamentally, **Vampire** is a horror game. It's good to remind your players of that fact from time to time. It can be tricky to scare players (as opposed to their characters), but again, you can make it easier by preparing ahead of time.

Mood is very important to creating an atmosphere of horror. Quite often, the difference between a horror story and an action, mystery, fantasy or some other genre story lies in the presentation. Outside any supernatural element, a horror story distinguishes itself by a sense that

the world has gone profoundly wrong. That “wrongness” may be loud and obvious, like maggoty corpses that walk, or quiet and subtle, like sudden changes in your friends’ personalities; regardless, it’s always present.

Anxiety helps create a sense of wrongness. Divorce the characters from the game’s familiar trappings — the anchors they’ve come to rely upon (trusted allies betray them, an enemy proves immune to their powers, and so on). When the characters feel uncertain about dealing with a situation through physical, social or intellectual acumen, you put the players on edge and make them more responsive to the other emotional cues you provide. If you force the characters to fight without their usual array of Disciplines, allies and rituals, you’ll only enhance the players’ sense of triumph when they eventually prevail (or helplessness when they fail).

Horror subsists on feelings of isolation and alienation. Splitting the party can be a Storytelling nightmare, but in the case of a horror game it may be well worth the effort. Cut between players or groups of players quickly and skimp a little on the details; it’s much scarier if players interpolate details for themselves than rely on your descriptions.

Above all, make sure your story is genuinely scary. Turning an otherwise-mundane character, event or location into something suddenly alien and horrifying is an excellent way to demonstrate the invasive nature of the horror your characters face.

ACTION-ADVENTURE

Never discount the value of the action-adventure game. Far from being unsophisticated, these games offer great potential for roleplaying and immediate gratification in the form of in-your-face action.

The key to keeping this kind of game fresh is avoiding the pitfall of simply providing an endless litany of combat. Make sure that in every fight, the characters are limited or constrained in some way, protecting hostages or innocents, stripped of weapons or abilities, needing to escape, on a fast approaching deadline, etc. This helps keep the challenge of combat fresh.

You should also confront players with hard choices as they fight. Save the innocent or kill your enemy? Save your friends or save yourself? Obey your master’s orders or adopt your own methods? In this way, your action game lifts itself beyond a collection of combats. Most of the great action movies actually use their set pieces to advance the story, not to bring it to a screeching halt while the heroes strut their stuff. By forcing characters to confront such choices during action sequences, you give them meaning beyond ass-kicking and a chance to use their cool powers.

It’s especially important to include some crucial non-combat tasks. Not only does this encourage players to diversify their characters’ abilities, it provides them (and you) with the opportunity to flex those role-playing muscles. Pacing is the crucial element of an action game,

not combat. So throw in lots of chases, short scenes and brief social encounters, but remember, your goals should be velocity, not violence.

RUNNING YOUR CHRONICLE

Every Storyteller has her own techniques for actually running game sessions, but there are some constants. Managing a chronicle normally requires you to strike a balance between preparing your game in advance and improvising situations. As they say in the military, no plan survives contact with the enemy....

Some Storytellers pride themselves on running games completely off the top of their heads with no prior preparation. It takes an exceptionally talented combination of Storyteller and players to pull this off regularly, but for everyone else, some preparation helps games run better and last longer. Admittedly, preparation might consist of jotting down a few names, locations and plot fragments, but other Storytellers are comfortable detailing sequences and actions ahead of time. If you prefer meticulous planning, use it as a prop to support your improvisations, because the chances of your players sticking to the laid out course of events you’ve crafted are pretty slim.

The following suggestions can help you squeeze the most out of your preparation and the best out of your improvisations. The balance you strike between them is entirely personal style and taste... there are no right or wrong ways to run a game, beyond the desire to provide a satisfying experience for everyone involved. It’s important to remember that you, the Storyteller, should also enjoy the game; while you provide entertainment and challenges for others, you should also challenge yourself and have a good time doing it.

A BRAVE MAN DOESN’T FEAR GETTING RAIN IN HIS FACE

Fortune favors the bold. Once your game is underway, it’s inevitable that somewhere along the line, events will take an unexpected twist. After all, if you could plan for every possibility or permutation of your storylines, there would be little point in actually running your chronicle. You’d be better off writing a novel.

That said, when your players venture off in an unexpected direction or foil their antagonist’s plans with a well-executed scheme of their own that you didn’t anticipate, you’ll need to come up with new material on the spot. The best way to ensure your improvisations are good and true to the chronicle’s spirit is to create a true “game world.” Unfortunately, if your preparations haven’t gone beyond the antagonist, her minions and the few locations they operate in, you’ll have a hard time improvising beyond this sketchy backdrop. Be sure to keep track of your on-the-fly inventions. Jotting down a few notes, either as you play or immediately after the session, will help you incorporate new ideas and events into your overall game more smoothly.

Above all, don't panic. Take a leaf from the pulp writers... when in doubt, start a fight. As you run the combat, you can decide on the identity of the mystery attackers, their goals and with whom they're in league. If that's inappropriate for your chronicle, throw the players some other kind of bomb. Bring in a character with some kind of shock revelation or new information. The point is to kick off a dramatic event that distracts your players from the fact that you're suddenly working without a net; that gives you time to come up with your next move. The shock event should also take up your players' attention. While they deal with it, you win yourself some breathing room to consider your next move.

If you're really, truly, totally stumped, call a break in the game. In the long term, it's far better to pause and then re-start with some confidence than to keep going and end up with a collection of new characters and plot elements that you don't like and that don't work.

BUT A WISE MAN KNOWS WHEN TO CARRY AN UMBRELLA

The best way to make your improvisations good is to have prepared for them. The best chronicles impart the sense that the world exists without the characters. That is, things happen even when they're "off stage." The players' characters have an effect — after all, they are the most important characters in their own stories — but supporting characters and events move forward regardless of what actions the players take.

This is mostly a matter of establishing your characters. If you know what the city's five ancestors are up to as individuals and as a court, you can create simple plans and time-lines for them. This provides a rich vein of background events for your chronicle and may well inspire your players to investigate other potential storylines and situations. Most importantly, it means that when the antagonists' plans are disrupted or are going well, you can incorporate the characters into them without too much fuss. If the characters unexpectedly kill a major henchman and decide to go after your major villain immediately, it's good to know where the villain has lairs, her rough defenses and some inkling as to how she'll react and defend herself.

Beyond this, you can make several basic pre-game preparations that streamline your sessions. Keeping a list of names is very handy, especially if you don't speak Mandarin (or Japanese, or Indonesian...). Few things break the mood quicker than introducing a quick character and then stalling when it comes time to name her. "Honorable ancestors, I am... err... aah... umm... Fred?" is not a dialogue that fills your players with confidence about your abilities.

Plan for the session ahead and make sure you have maps, pictures, or at least a clear mental picture of the main locations you want to use. You don't want to be stuck when a character suddenly wants to find the local inn, or a secret passageway. It's also worthwhile keeping

a reference book or two on hand to provide pictures of towns, fortresses, fishing villages, inns, etc. You can give your players a clear picture of the places they're visiting and use them for templates when you need a new location on the spot. The same applies for pictures of period costume, armor and weapons.

OTHER CHRONICLE IDEAS

TREASURE HUNT REDUX: GO EAST, YOUNG CAINITE!

One of the easiest ways to incorporate setting elements of *Sunset Empires* into an existing chronicle is to send your player's existing European or American characters to the East. This gives both you and your players a chance to sample the setting and its more distinctive elements. It also serves as an entry into a full-blown chronicle, with your players taking on Kuei-jin characters.

A short, "treasure hunters" story provides a relatively simple way to involve current characters. The West has just opened the Orient, and Western elders rush to establish claims and grab anything valuable, from mystic artifacts to mining concessions. Many young Kindred venture to the Orient to establish territory, search for treasure and discover what the various lands and cultures have to offer. Some travel at the behest of their sires, princes and bishops. Others go East to escape those very same elders.

Because the setting is somewhat complex, it's probably best to make your initial adventures straightforward. Your players (and their characters) will be busy enough coming to terms with the setting; a simple plot gives them a clear direction, and a treasure hunt is close to ideal for this purpose. Think of it as a late-Victorian era Indiana Jones adventure, and you have a winning formula.

Just about any type of character is useful in a treasure hunt. Combatants have plenty of enemies to battle, from jungle beasts to the inevitable treasure guardians; scholars help puzzle out inscriptions and cryptic clues; tomb robbers can try reaching the treasure without a big battle; socializers use their skills to gain information of benefit to the coterie's quest.

Jewel-studded golden gewgaws form the most obvious target of a treasure hunt, but not the only ones. For an explorer, the knowledge and glory gained from uncovering a lost temple may matter as much as any gem-studded idol. Knowledge of ancient history and the origins of the Kuei-jin or Kindred are also worthy goals for fortune seekers.

For a different but related plot, the characters may seek knowledge of the Kuei-jin themselves. For example, a coterie might try to learn one of the Kuei-jin's Disciplines (they don't know it's impossible yet) or settle for learning about the Kuei-jin and their society. Anyone who could bring back knowledge of these powers, whether practical or theoretical, would receive a hero's welcome.

THEME, MOOD, STYLE

For a one-shot story, a treasure hunt might not require a theme; the characters simply try to find the loot, grab it and escape. If you incorporate a treasure hunt into an ongoing chronicle, you may want to adjust your story to reflect those themes. For a straightforward and relatively brief story, you should probably stick to fairly simple themes like the clash of cultures. You might want to contrast the differences, for example, between Western expansionism and Eastern isolationism. Alternatively, you can also demonstrate the similarities between the cultures. Both Cainite and Cathayan societies, after all, consist of scheming, undead, immortal beings of vast power, who take delight in influencing mortal affairs from behind the scenes.

In terms of mood, the possibilities are many. The usual adventure story's brash and fairly optimistic mood does not work well if you want to maintain a horror chronicle feel. Fear, however, works very well indeed. Westerners find the Orient a strange and mysterious place full of myth, rumor and unknown danger. The Kuei-jin's unusual powers only add to this atmosphere.

Regardless the mood, however, a fast-paced and active style serves a treasure-hunt story arc well. Don't let a scene pass without some new thrill.

LOCATIONS

Locations are crucial for treasure hunts, and exploring an exotic location is an important part of such a story's appeal. Do not ignore the genre staples, though, even when placing your own twists on them:

- **Tombs and Temples:** Whether in Burma's steaming jungles, Japan's isolated mountains or China's vast plains, the ancient, abandoned temple replete with traps and supernatural guardians is perhaps the archetypal element of any such story. Feel free to indulge in dungeon-crawl stereotypes here: They're practically a necessity.

- **Caves and Catacombs:** Cave complexes also fit into the "treacherous dungeon" category while giving you a host of geological and natural traps and hazards with which to play. You might want them to lead to underground monasteries of forgotten orders, libraries and other hidden repositories of lore. The opening sequence in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is a classic combination of temple and catacomb, while the tomb sequence in *The Mummy Returns* provides a more modern interpretation. Steal from them without shame and your players will love you for it.

- **Lost Cities:** The lost city or monastery is another favorite, especially if you're going for a pulp action feel. A living culture may still inhabit the lost city, or it may be an abandoned ruin. Conveniently, 19th century Asia had real-life lost cities like Angkor, as well as legendary hidden realms such as Shamballah, Agharti and Mount Meru. These provide still further opportunities for characters to explore their own motivations and actions while attempting to explain their presence and purpose to the locals.

CIRCLE OF BLOOD, CIRCLE OF IRON

For another variation on the "treasure hunter" plot, Storytellers can build a fun and fascinating chronicle around the quest to learn the Asian fighting skills. About a zillion martial arts movies follow this plot, so Storytellers have plenty of source material.

Such a plot involves much more than fighting. To find a teacher, the characters must not only face the dangers of an unknown land, they must puzzle out foreign customs and persuade a martial arts' master to see them. Actually winning the right to study with the master should be even more difficult, especially for those of the undead variety. The sensei certainly tests the characters' determination and loyalty, and will not waste his time on mere dabblers, nor pass his secrets to traitors. The characters may need to reject all prior and future allegiance to Western sects, and demonstrate their loyalty by sabotaging an elder's plans or murdering the teacher's enemy.

Once the characters find a willing sensei, new plot threads emerge. The characters must compete with rival students; the master has enemies who attack his school (for undead dojos, such vendettas could last millennia); the sensei constantly tests the characters' qualities or tempts them with power, etc. Even just trying to comprehend the philosophies of the Dharmas provides characters with nightly tribulations.

It's something of a tradition that Westerners who master the East's martial secrets can never really go home again. Their knowledge sets them apart. They may have started this quest believing they'd learn some secretive martial arts (or Eastern sorcery) to teach the Cainites back home. Upon returning, however, they find they no longer care about their former motives or cannot separate the combat techniques from the esoteric philosophy. The elders want deadly fighting skills for their sheriffs, archons and templars, but they don't want the "ignorant" pseudo-mysticism attached with it. The characters may win honor for their Asian skills, but at best, they become lone-wolf agents whom the elders exploit but never trust entirely. Once more, movies and TV shows provide any number of stories about such characters.

MIXED CHRONICLES

Combining Kuei-jin and Kin-jin characters in the same chronicle might seem insane. After all, every Cathayan hates Kin-jin and every Cainite wants to conquer and destroy the Kuei-jin, right?

Doesn't that sound kind of... well... one-dimensional?

"Kill Whitey" may be the dominant Cathayan attitude in contemporary **Kindred of the East**, but for **Sunset Empires**, everything happens in the 19th century, not the early 21st. This is when the Kuei-jin acquire their grievances (or private shames) that they hope to avenge in the Great Leap Outward.

More importantly, neither East nor West consist of hive-minds. Historically, some Asian mortals of the Victorian period saw advantages to Western culture while some Europeans and Americans found beauty and wisdom in Eastern society. Whatever attitudes may be the norm for Cathayans and Cainites, the characters can hold beliefs of their own.

From a practical standpoint, bear in mind that a Cainite-Cathayan team-up goes beyond what either society considers "respectable." Business partnerships carry relatively little onus because Asian cultures (and some Westerners) regard all commerce as intrinsically tainted. Society considers a Frenchman or Briton who wears Chinese garb or converts to Buddhism, however, more than a touch eccentric — and marrying a native certainly bans one from polite society. Many Asians hold similar attitudes to their fellows who convert to Christianity or send their children to European schools. The Quincunx's mandarins will not look kindly on a *wu* that accepts Kin-jin members, just as Western elders will question a coterie or Hellfire Club that invites Cathayans to join.

THEME, MOOD, STYLE

Themes like overcoming social pressure and prejudice (or failing to) and trying to understand a different culture are fairly obvious choices for a mixed chronicle. That does not mean that other themes won't work. Storytellers don't *have* to restrict chronicle to themes that highlight the combination of Kuei-jin and Cainites. Unfortunately, you can't avoid them, either, so you might as well consider how to use them to greatest effect.

A mixed chronicle does suffer some restrictions on its mood. It's hard to create a mood of Eastern (or Western) exoticism, xenophobic anxiety or the thrill of encountering the unknown when the players' characters include the people who are supposed to be exotic, foreign or unknown.

Any style works given a suitable storyline, including a hack-and-slash adventure if the Kuei-jin and Cainite characters share an enemy. A military action story, for instance, could pit a group of Cathayans and Sabbat vampires against a ruthless gang of Camarilla *Kindred* out to seize domains for some degenerate elder. Exploration, intrigue or relationship-based chronicles — just to list some common examples — merely gain a little added complexity from combining *Kindred of the East* and *West*.

OTHER CROSSOVERS

The Kuei-jin enjoy somewhat more amicable relationships with other Asian *shen* than Western vampires do with wraiths, mages, changelings, Changing Breeds and such ilk. The Western invasions provide a suitable common enemy to draw different *shen* together. Kuei-jin and hengeyokai may find common interest in protecting Dragon Nests and spirit allies from Western forestry, mining and rail-building. Mages might team up with the undead to protect their home societies from European invaders.

Sunset Empires crossover chronicles — like all *World of Darkness* crossovers — are not for the faint of heart. Never mind the different themes running through each game; a clever Storyteller can find themes accommodating both games. A crossover requires knowing the rules, supernatural cultures and backgrounds for more than one game, and that can be a significant amount of material. If you want to try a crossover chronicle, we commend your bravery but you're on your own.

HISTORICAL CHRONICLES

In the Victorian Age, the Middle Kingdom sees many events that shape the history of nations for decades to come. Such events naturally possess great dramatic potential. Here are a few ways you can involve your troupe in the great incidents that rock 19th century Asia.

Each event has a brief recap of the mortal and Kuei-jin history that earlier chapters described in more detail, followed by suggestions for specific stories you can base on the incidents. In some cases, we include suggestions concerning theme, mood or style, but they are merely options. Use them, abuse them or ignore them as you will. In particular, note that the prevalence of war stories is only because wars are the most dramatic mileposts of mortal history. This doesn't preclude you from running stories in times of peace, or stories about political intrigue, love, Dharmic advancement or any other subject.

THE FIRST OPIUM WAR

In 1839, tensions run high between China and Great Britain; China forbids most British goods; British companies turn to smuggling opium to pay for their tea purchases. The British government also refuses to help the Chinese government curb the trade. When British officials don't surrender a gang of Chinese sailors accused of murder, the Chinese send warships to press their point. Matters escalate from there. The Chinese military vastly outnumbers the British forces, but they have inferior weapons, training and morale. Neither side honors an 1840 treaty to stop the war. When the Qing government surrenders in 1842, it grants Britain a huge financial indemnity, several trade concessions, legal privileges and Hong Kong.

The Flame Court throws its own considerable might behind the Chinese war effort. It dedicates most of its

power, however, to protecting Canton from British attacks. The *wu* that the Court can spare prove sufficient to place the Kindred of Macao under a counter-siege. When the Qing surrender, the sheer culture shock throws the Flame Court into chaos at least as much as the loss of cohong Scarlet Screens.

This is an excellent period and setting for a chronicle pitting Quincunx against Kin-jin, especially for a troupe of Cainite characters. The Quincunx is stronger than it will ever be again during the Victorian Age, making the Flame Court a fearsome adversary. The mortal forces are also more evenly matched than they will be in any subsequent conflict, so a single coterie or *wu* can hope to affect the night war's outcome and the fate of sects.

To make the scenario even better, neither vampire faction knows much about the other's strategies or powers. Even though the Flame Court has dealt with Kin-jin for about 200 years, it kept the foreign barbarians at a discreet distance. The Cainites, for their part, never felt strong enough to defy the mysterious and powerful Cathayans. Each side will spring numerous surprises on the other.

As a war story, an Opium War chronicle demands a fast-paced style with lots of action. The Storyteller must spin scenes of Flame Court ritual or intrigue to advance the plot. For instance, you can illustrate the pomp and splendor of the Flame Court through a convocation to discuss the war plans against the British and the Kin-jin, where the players' characters have some first-hand knowledge that necessitates their participation. As for intrigue? Have a mandarin order the troupe to work with a rival *wu*, and let the backstabbing begin.

War stories generally feature fairly grim moods. If the story proceeds from the Kuei-jin side, the mood probably goes from patriotic enthusiasm, to surprise, to grim determination and ends in a bleak and somber mood when the characters realize that China, and the Quincunx, have lost. From the Cainite side, the mood follows a contrary progression. The Cainites begin with a war they don't want against a more powerful enemy they don't understand. That's a situation that breeds fear, and the Flame Court's ability to strike down Cainites within Macao reinforces that mood. As the battle turns, however, the mood becomes fiercer until it ends triumphantly, with the Flame Court suing for peace under the mistaken impression that the Kin-jin have some sway over the British armies.

All **Sunset Empires** stories mention or include the theme of culture clash, so that won't earn mention here. For a war story, consider themes like patriotism, the power of self-sacrifice or nobility in defeat; or conversely, the futility of war, the evanescence of power or the folly of leaders. The First Opium War lends itself to many sorts of stories. Here are a few examples:

- **Raid on Macao:** The Kuei-jin characters sneak into Macao to murder a prominent Kin-jin... or, at least,

a Kin-jin who offended the characters or a prominent jina or mandarin. The Western vampire may have more and better protection than the characters expect, or perhaps the Tremere of Macao have set up a trap. Regardless, the characters are in for fast-paced commando action.

- **Water Devils:** Mortal rumors of "water-devils" who could hold their breath for hours appeared throughout the conflicts. These water-devils would wait patiently on the bottom of the bay until a British ship came near; then they'd sabotage it from below. Despite the popularity of this rumor, British captains never substantiated any reports of unexplained sabotage. For a variation, the characters try sabotaging the British ships in Macao harbor, or to stop them from reaching Canton. As vampires, the characters don't need to breathe... but have the Kin-jin posted underwater guards? Can the characters find a way to attack the ships during the day?

- **In the Enemy Camp:** The characters try infiltrating the British forces besieging Canton. They may seek to learn the British battle plans or change them through Obligation. They could also try sabotaging British artillery or assassinating the British commanders. The Kuei-jin must be careful not to blow their cover; as vampires they are much more powerful than any single British soldier, but they are surrounded by many British soldiers.

- **Strategy and Tactics:** The characters can try to raise and train their own militia or guerilla group to fight the British. Such a scenario presents a wide variety of challenges. Do the characters pose as mortal recruiters or try to pass themselves off as gods? How do they keep their militia secret until they're ready to strike? How do they train their fighters and ensure their loyalty? If the characters can arrange a night battle, they can take part directly.

Do your players also enjoy war games? You may be able to find a simulation game that provides rules for British troops of the period. Grid out a map of the area between Macao and Canton, let the players double as generals, and play out the battle between their irregulars and the British Army.

- **Deflect the Battle:** For this story, the British forces move toward a Dragon Nest or the home of an important spirit — perhaps the *wu*'s own *nushi*. A battle in that location would defile the Dragon Nest or banish the spirit, forcing the characters to find a way to prevent the battle or shift it somewhere else.

- **Social Work:** Not all stories have to take place during the war itself. Before or after the war, characters could assist Chinese efforts to stop the opium trade. This demands social graces as much as combat powers. Perhaps the scourge of opium addiction is decimating the *wu*'s mortal servants, forcing the characters to fight the smugglers to preserve their own Scarlet Screens.

- **Diplomacy:** The Quincunx leaves the Flame Court to fight the invasion by itself. A Flame Court mandarin sends the characters' *wu* on a diplomatic mission to beg another August Court for help. They must

not beg too abjectly, though, or the Flame Court will lose face. Can they convince the other court's leaders of the British danger? The other courts' elders have no experience with Westerners in this capacity, however, and don't believe that barbarians from a distant land could ever endanger China.

- **Double Chronicle:** An exceptionally brave Storyteller might try running two Opium War chronicles at once, one with Wan Kuei characters and one with Cainites, to show the war from both sides.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HONG KONG

This topic is a place, not a specific event. It is available during the entire period from 1840 to 1900. It also differs from most of the other chronicle premises in that it is not a war story. The Kuei-jin do not like Hong Kong's growth, but they can't do much about it. You can run a Kin-jin chronicle set in Hong Kong itself, or Kuei-jin characters in a South China chronicle might visit the island on occasion.

Before the British came, Hong Kong was a small island holding a Chinese fishing village. When Lin Zexu expelled the British from the Thirteen Factories enclave near Canton, they settled on Hong Kong. In the aftermath of the First Opium War, Britain makes the settlement permanent, using it as a trading outpost and way station for Southeast Asian shipping. The colony grows steadily when famines and wars send Chinese refugees seeking their fortune to the British colony.

Among the Kin-jin, the Ventrue Robert Pedder claims with some justice, that he made Hong Kong since one of his mortal thralls included the island in the list of British demands. As the island's first Kin-jin resident, he proclaims himself its Taipan. More importantly, he keeps the title despite challenges from other young and ambitious Kindred. If he did not engineer Hong Kong's growth, neither did he get in its way.

Hong Kong is an excellent setting for a **Victorian Age: Vampire** chronicle set in the East. The Kindred hold Hong Kong, but the Kuei-jin are never far away. Kindred characters can brush against a bit of the mysterious Orient without being overwhelmed by it.

- **Raids:** Hong Kong is not likely to see sustained attacks by the Cathayans (except, perhaps, as an extension of wider conflicts like the Taiping Rebellion or Second Opium War). A single *wu* or individual Kuei-jin might attempt to murder Westerners, though. The Cathayans might target especially hated Kindred or kine, or use terrorism in hopes of driving out the British.

- **Espionage:** The Quincunx keeps *spies* in Hong Kong full-time. Even if the Cathayans do nothing but watch and learn, Robert Pedder might deputize the characters to hunt the spies — either to destroy them or to spy on their activities. To turn the scenario about, the characters could be a *wu* of spies trying to learn about the Kin-jin while avoiding their notice.

- **Secret Deals:** Someone is always willing to cut a deal with the enemy. Characters embroiled in Cainite intrigue might discover a coterie's rival secretly trades favors with certain Cathayans. Or perhaps the characters try making secret deals of their own. Another option is the local Hellfire Club shows a special interest in the Cathayans. A Hong Kong Hellfire Club could try to establish peaceful relations with the Cathayans.

- **Home Base:** Eventually, the Storyteller should force the characters to visit the mainland. Perhaps they must rescue someone who is important to them. Perhaps they need something of interest that's only available on the mainland. Perhaps they have to spy on the Kuei-jin. Regardless of the reason, Hong Kong becomes their gateway to China, and the safe haven to which they flee.

THE KANAGAWA TREATY OF 1854

In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry sails four ships into Edo Bay with a politely phrased demand that Japan's Shogunate government permit trade between itself and the United States. After a year of unprecedented debate within Japan's ruling elite, the government accepts America's terms when Perry returns, granting some concessions to buy time and strengthen Japan.

The ultimatum catches the *gaki* flat-footed, and their arguments echo the mortal disputes. The Storyteller can build an intensely political chronicle around Perry's visit, with different Kuei-jin factions scheming to muster support for their views. The intrigue continues after 1854, when the *gaki* try accommodating, exploiting or expelling the Western Kindred and kine.

Political themes like the need for compromise — or, conversely, the need for intransigent resolution — naturally arise from a Treaty of Kanagawa chronicle. Most stories probably emphasize social interaction rather than combat, unless the Storyteller wants to embroil the *gaki* in full-scale civil war. Since the *gaki* know nothing about the Americans, the Storyteller can easily create a mood of mystery and foreboding that only grows stronger after Kin-jin follow the mortals into Japan.

- **Political Hardball:** Some *gaki* do not restrict themselves to sweet reason in their attempts to gather backing. From the night Perry delivers the American ultimatum, *gaki* start calling in favors and opening their blackmail files. If anyone has dirt on the characters, she will threaten to shame them if they do not speak in support of her views. Now let *two* Kuei-jin, from opposed *uji*, attempt to blackmail the characters....

Other *wu* might try to extort pledges of support through twilight war. They challenge the characters' *wu* to some sort of contest, and the loser must support whatever position the winner declares. Naturally, the challenging *wu* does its best to rig the contest.

The intrigue could easily escalate into murder. If a Kuei-jin close to the characters meets a sudden, violent and unexplained Final Death, their attempts to uncover the culprit could lead them into a viper's nest of bribery,

blackmail and old vendettas recently revived by the current crisis.

- **Mission to the Quincunx:** The Bishamon sends an embassy — the characters — to ask the Blood Court for its aid against the foreigners and its Genji rivals. The characters seek to convince the Blood Court's self-involved mandarins and ancestors to help Japan without giving away *gaki* independence.

- **Night Riders:** The first Kin-jin prove even more of a shock than the first Western mortals. The characters hunt a gang of Kin-jin who escape one of the treaty ports. The Kin-jin include a Tremere of some power who seeks to assay Japan's spirits and magic. He could stir up the *kami* something fierce.... Plus, of course, the Kin-jin are vile abominations against the order of Heaven by their very nature.

- **Earthshaker:** Someone is causing the earthquakes of 1854 and 1855, and their attempt to punish Japanese mortals has slain the characters' daimyo. It's time for a good old-fashioned samurai revenge epic.

- **Journey to the West:** Some years after the Treaty, the characters' daimyo sends them to Europe. They might be an embassy to a foreign prince or archbishop, but they're definitely spies who must learn all they can about Western mortals and the Kin-jin.

THE SECOND OPIUM WAR AND ASSORTED REBELLIONS

The costs of the First Opium War almost bankrupt China's Imperial government, which forces provincial governors to raise taxes. Famines impose further hardships on the people. Hong Xiuquan, self-proclaimed younger brother of Jesus Christ, launches a mystical and communistic cult that conquers a swath of southern China. Although some Western powers initially support the quasi-Christian Taiping movement, they later decide that they prefer the weak and predictable Qing. Since the Imperial government lacks the funds for a military campaign, it delegates that responsibility to the provincial governors, turning them into autonomous warlords.

The Second Opium War coincides with the Taiping Rebellion. The British and French use fairly minor incidents as pretexts to inflict another defeat on China, extorting more reparations and concessions. The Nian Rebellion in northern China and the Muslim Rebellions of western China also overlap the Taiping Rebellion.

For the Kuei-jin and Cainites, the various conflicts merge to form a single war touching every August Court. Throughout south and central China, European Kin-jin neonates invade domains in hopes of wresting territory from China. They don't specifically destroy or usurp Kuei-jin; they want China for its mortal vessels, its opportunities for wealth and possibly leadership of childer and later arrivals. The Cathayans, however, defend their turf.

A significant minority of Kin-jin arrive as Christian missionaries, who hope to steer the Taiping into their

vision of orthodoxy. The largest and most coherent bloc of missionary Kin-jin are Catholic Lasombra *antitribu*, who seek to save mortal souls to expiate their own damnation. The remainder are a hodgepodge of clans and faiths.

Muslim vampires, chiefly but not exclusively Assamites, succor the rebels in China's western provinces out of religious and ethnic solidarity. Many of them hope to split the provinces from China to form sovereign Sultanates.

The religious character of the Taiping and Muslim Rebellions make this period quite suitable for stories of faith, as well as the usual war stories and intrigues.

- **Crisis of Faith:** The characters encounter a known, even notorious, *akuma* who says that Taiping Christianity freed him from the Yama Kings. Certainly, he seems to be a changed Kuei-jin, and he passes every test the characters can devise to detect Yomi's binding influences. Is this just an especially deep and cunning deception? If the Taiping can actually break Yomi's grip, what does this mean for the Wan Kuei?

- **Embraced:** The Kin-jin Embraced a mortal of great value to one of the characters — she was an especially valued retainer, a mortal lover or family member — but she escaped before the foreign devil could enthrall her through the unclean power of his blood. What do the characters do with the new Kin-jin? Can they protect her from overeager Devil-Tigers and Bone Flowers looking for their next dissection victim?

- **Rescue:** A coterie of potent Kin-jin invaders capture something of great value to the Kuei-jin. It might be a revered ancestor, a library of esoteric lore, a potent talisman or whatever else matters greatly to the characters. The characters have a clear duty to rescue whatever it is from the foreign devils.

For a related story, perhaps the characters must save a valued temple from Taiping zealots who want it destroyed. The temple might hold a Dragon Nest or serve as the home of a valued spirit ally.

- **Secret Society:** The Nian and Taiping serve as prototypes for dozens of secret societies, most of which advocate overthrowing the Qing and restoring the Ming Dynasty. Many of them engage in banditry, terrorism or other crime. The characters try to take over one such society and turn it into a Scarlet Screen, or they might try founding a secret society of their own.

The Kuei-jin have other not-quite-so-secret societies of their own, like the Society of Brigands and Decadent Dynasty-Toppling Devils. The character might try to join such a society, either because they agree with its goals or to spy on it for a patron mandarin. The secret societies demand various tests of loyalty, however, before they grant membership, while some others also restrict membership to certain Dharmas; the Society of Brigands, for example, only admits Devil-Tigers. If characters can proffer sufficient incentives, however, a society might make exceptions.

THE INDIAN MUTINY OF 1857

A rumor that new ammunition contains pig and cow fat catalyzes paranoia and resentment growing among Britain's native Indian troops over the years. Muslim Sepoys revolt *en masse* in Delhi, and the rebellion quickly spreads through northern India. The mutineers massacre Europeans and Indian Christians, then declare a revival of the Mughal Empire. The Hindu princes of south and central India do not support the rebellion, however, and the British mobilizes Hindu and Sikh soldiers against the mutineers. After the British force the rebels to retreat from Delhi, the British soldiers burn and sack the city in a display of uncharacteristic savagery. The colonial forces gradually quash the rebels district by district in months of brutal fighting and hideous retribution against rebels and civilians alike. The Indian Mutiny trails off into a guerilla conflict that lasts until its leader's capture in 1859.

The Indian Kuei-jin do not involve themselves in the Mutiny to any great degree. Rather, a conspiracy of Western and Hindu Kin-jin — especially a “magic triangle” of European Tremere and Indian Daitya and Danava — encourages the Mutiny for their own sting operation. They expect northern India's Muslim princes, Kindred and kine, to side with the mutineers and suffer their fate when the British inevitably quash the rebellion. The rebellion grows even larger than the conspirators predict, but overall the plan succeeds without a hitch. Naturally, it isn't actually that simple, and stories emerge from the complications.

- **Innocent Bystanders:** The conspirators certainly don't tell the other Indian Kindred their plan; the Ashirra would hear about it if they did. For many other Kindred in the northern portion of the subcontinent, the Indian Mutiny is a catastrophe. Hindu Kindred dwelling in shrines or tombs will likely find zealous Muslim soldiers trying to destroy their havens. Western Kindred face attack because they are Western and the mutineers don't know they're undead. If a displaced Cainite discovers his fellow vampires partook of the Great Mutiny, those Kindred gain a permanent enemy.

- **Exploitation:** Other Kindred or Kuei-jin might try exploiting the Great Mutiny for their own ends, since urban warfare makes a good cover for murder. Cainites or Kuei-jin with contacts among the mutiny's officers might try aiming battalions of rebels at their enemies. The characters can even participate in the action if they can look non-European.

- **Interference:** Vampires who find the Indian Mutiny inconvenient might try stopping it themselves, at least in their own town. While neither a coterie nor a *wu* can probably defeat hundreds of faith-crazed Sepoys in battle, they can attempt clever schemes like enthralling officers through Dominate or Obligation, or scaring the soldiers away with ersatz curses or demons.

- **Handlers:** On the other hand, the characters could be part of the conspiracy and travel among the

mutineers to keep the insurrection on track. First, they work to curtail interference from other vampires, then they help to sabotage the mutineers and ensure a British victory. The latter phase is more dangerous, since numerous Muslim vampires join the rebels and the stage-managed mutiny has grown out of control.

THE ANNEXATION OF BURMA (1885)

Britain seizes bits of Burma in 1826 and 1853 as a stopgap measure against Burmese raids into British India. After years of continued Burmese agitation against the British in India and Southeast Asia, however, the British march in, take the rest of Burma and depose King Thebaw in 1885.

Burma's Golden Courts do almost nothing to stop any of this — not that they can. They are too busy fighting each other... the large Golden Court in Mandalay against the smaller Golden Courts of the Shan, Karen and other hill peoples (who also happen to be fighting each other). Penangallan from the hill courts assassinate the Mandalay Court's Ancestor in 1852; the resulting chaos enables Indian Kuei-jin to push most lowland Burmese Kuei-jin out and establish a new court at Rangoon.

The Kin-jin are hardly involved in this plot thread at all. The Annexation of Burma sees the lowland Kuei-jin caught between the hill courts, the Indian invaders and the mortal British; when the Kuei-jin factions fight, the British vampires take everything.

Chaos, nihilism and black irony seem appropriate for a Burmese story arc. The mortal Burmese government plays a lunatic game of “chicken” with the British Empire and no Kuei-jin puppet masters are involved; the Mandalay court is dissolved in 1885 and the Indian invaders have yet to establish any great influence. The parallels between Burma's blindness and the Kuei-jin's blindness should be obvious. The great danger to the Burmese Kuei-jin stems not from the Kin-jin everyone fears, but from their Indian and hill tribe cousins; so much for solidarity against the West. In the aimless violence between Cathayan factions and sub-factions, anyone faces attack at any time without ever knowing the reason why.

Characters who try thwarting the British invasion find the task hopeless. The British replace each slain officer, and the soldiers just keep coming, like army ants. For added humiliation, the characters discover the British don't actually want Burma. For the world-spanning British Empire, the proud kingdom is a minor itch to be scratched. The conquest is not even managed from Britain itself, but from the colonial office in India.

Possible goals for such a story arc include:

- **Getting out:** The characters simply try escaping the murderous chaos with their unlives. Their enemies include Kuei-jin from other, automatically rival Golden courts; the new Indian court in Rangoon, which is trying to clear out other lowland Kuei-jin; and a British Army that sees characters as just more Burmese to flatten if the characters prove a nuisance.

• **Getting in:** The annexation of Burma provides a dangerous setting for a grim treasure hunt story. This is a great excuse to pull out your *Apocalypse Now* and *Heart of Darkness* riffs. The characters may come to Burma searching for a lost treasure, a hidden temple or an elder no one has seen in decades, but they also find themselves dragged into savagery by the battles sweeping the region.

• **Order from Chaos:** The characters could try to end the strife and bring the Kuei-jin together — whether they use diplomacy or try defeating every other faction is up to them. For instance, the hill courts could expel the Indian invaders if they band together... but what would make them band together? Even if the characters gain power and exert their will, have they genuinely restored harmony, or merely found a way to reign in Hell?

THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR

In 1894, Japan sends troops into Korea to suppress a cult rebellion threatening Japanese interests. China does the same, an event that Japan uses as a pretext to declare war on the Middle Kingdom. Japan defeats China on land and sea and seizes territory in Manchuria; it also gains Formosa in the negotiations after the armistice. France, Germany and Russia, however, immediately force Japan to return its Manchurian conquests.

The Genji faction of Japan's Kuei-jin have no control over the Sino-Japanese War, save encouraging it through their influence in the Japanese government. The Genji want Korea's Dragon Nests, jade and a successful war to cement their leadership of the gaki. For years before the war, the gaki pushed against the Green Courts through covert raids, twilight wars for stakes of jade or talismans and harassment through mortal Japanese operating in Korea. The Genji use the war as cover to attack the Green Courts in force.

In two years of fighting, they defeat the Green Courts along with the Bishamon and Blood Court vampires who side with them, extorting tribute in jade and control of Dragon Nests. This is colonialism from within Asia itself. Japanese mortals and Kuei-jin learn so much from the hated Westerners that they become them. Themes of irony and betrayal seem appropriate for a chronicle or story arc centering on the Sino-Japanese war.

Like any colonial venture, war benefits the leaders back home more than the fighting soldiers. The mood is cynical and brutal despite the aggressive, patriotic and triumphant rhetoric that both living and undead leaders espouse. That holds for the Green Court alliance as well; leaders prefer to send *him* to fight and die rather than risk their own immortal existence. The pacing should be as rapid as possible, with high-intensity violence.

Some story options include:

• **Dragon Nest Hill:** Gaki characters try to capture a powerful but well-defended Dragon Nest; or the Storyteller can turn it about and have the characters defend a Dragon Nest against the gaki.

• **The Great Escape:** The characters are captured by the enemy and held for ransom. If their side does not pay, they meet the Eye of Heaven. To avoid this, they must try to escape from their captivity.

• **The Only Rule is to Win:** The Yama Kings do not ignore the midnight conflict in Korea. Agents of Yomi cozy up to both sides, promising victory, revenge or simple survival to whoever turns *akuma*.

THE BOXER REBELLION

The Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists blames China's repeated famines and defeats upon Europeans and Chinese Christian converts. Although the Dowager Empress initially supports the "Boxers" because they fight European influence, the rebels soon turn against the Qing government as well. The Imperial government has to be rescued by a combined military force from several countries, including Japan. Among other indemnities and concessions, the Western powers place Beijing under permanent military occupation.

The Opium Wars and assorted mortal rebellions leave the Quincunx in disarray. The Flame Court collapsed decades before, and grievances and lack of confidence from past failures — especially ones to provide aid — divide the surviving August Courts. The Blood Court's dominant faction, called the Virtuous Magistrates, exhorts the entire Quincunx to help the Boxers, and many Wan Kuei comply. Other Gui Ren believe the Boxers a threat to their local interests, or they want to see the Virtuous Magistrates humiliated, or they simply don't see how the rebellion affects them one way or another.

The Kin-jin should certainly play a major role in a Boxer Rebellion chronicle. This is a golden opportunity to establish the grievances fueling the Great Leap Outward a century hence. As they did in the Taiping Rebellion, the Camarilla, Sabbat and independent clans could all send vampires into China to seize domains in the chaos. Gangs of howling, blood-mad Sabbat forcibly "recruit" for a few nights before staking their claims, as do cunning Camarilla manipulators who use enthralled Chinese minions like pieces on a bloodstained chessboard. The characters face the full, unbridled menace of Kin-jin invasion, subversion, conspiracy and brutality.

The Boxer Rebellion's outcome is mixed. For mortals, the Rebellion ends in utter failure, with the Boxers crushed and China a virtual vassal of Western powers. The Kuei-jin, however, succeed in rooting the Kin-jin infiltrators from China, but at a terrible cost. Every Kuei-jin in China has seen the Five August Courts divided against themselves when they most needed unity. Kin-jin survivors, meanwhile, travel with the mortal colonial military and threaten to resume the war unless the Quincunx pays indemnities for their "losses;" the battered August Ancestors see no alternative but to submit... vowing a terrible revenge in return.

The Boxer Rebellion spans a wide area of China, and a chronicle set in this period should do so as well. Epic

events demand an epic scale. This is the East's last significant challenge to the West until World War II, so Storytellers should go all-out with burning cities, massive battles, fantastic duels, tremendous magic, grand passions, horrible fates and larger-than-life heroism and villainy.

The prevailing moods, however, are desperate fury and abandon — the rage and despair that drive mortal men to charge machine guns. The Boxers and their supernatural supporters know the Middle Kingdom slips into the West's clutches a little more with each passing month. The infections of foreign money and foreign faith sicken China, and the rebels truly believe that if they fail, all they hold sacred will be lost. Storytellers can thus create an end-of-the-world feel through images of death and desolation, like corpses in the street, ruined temples, burned farms and troops of ragged and hungry refugees.

As a final note, the Boxer Rebellion provides an excellent excuse for “guest star” appearances by other *shen*. The Kuei-jin are not the only supernaturals who might join the Boxers. The deeds of *hsien*, *chi'n ta* and *shih* can explain the reports of Boxers who fly or perform other magical feats. There's no reason why the occasional *hengeyokai* or Chinese wraith might not join the rebellion too, in the name of purging Western influence from the Middle Kingdom.

Most of the previous war or espionage story seeds work for the Boxer Rebellion too. Other potential premises for stories include:

- **Affairs of Wizards:** The characters try recruiting a reclusive group of Lightning People to the Boxer cause, and thus entangle themselves in the unfathomable intrigues of the mages.

- **Witch-Hunting:** The characters discover that foreign Kin-jin now rule a city and are out to destroy them. The harder the characters work to ferret out the foreign vampires, however, the further and deeper the Kin-jin's reach extends. These foreign vampires cemented their power during the Taiping Rebellion, and have built layers of Scarlet Screens using dozens of Chinese ghouls as their buffers. The character must uproot these Kin-jin before they defile more Chinese with their blood — and before they destroy the characters.

- **A Meeting of Hunters:** A group of *shih* support one faction of Righteous and Harmonious Fists; the characters support another. They meet. Even though the *shih* and the characters are on the same side, they are still demons and demon hunters. Can they possibly work together?

- **The Demon Emperor:** A secret cult of *akuma* has labored a thousand years to create a way to call the Yama Kings into the Middle Kingdom. Now the fortunes of war place their terrible device in the characters' hands. This talisman grants awesome power — perhaps enough to defeat the Qing and the foreign armies — but each use widens a Broken Mirror portal to Yomi. What's more, a Yama King can talk to the characters through their

Demons. It promises that if they call it through to become the Demon Emperor, it will guarantee them that China rules the world. The characters, of course, can become its most favored lieutenants. Can the characters resist temptation, or does the Sixth Age begin now?

CAN WE CHANGE HISTORY?

Can the characters alter historical events? On the supernatural side, sure! The characters and events in **Sunset Empires** are just starting points for your own imagination, so feel free to change them. If you kill off Robert Pedder, for example, have some other Kin-jin lead Hong Kong's development.

Mortal events are a bit trickier. Should the characters help the Indian Mutiny succeed, or can they murder the Meiji Emperor at the height of the Restoration? Tricky. It's bad form to crush the players' plans and force them to fail. That turns the game into Players Versus Storyteller, and that's no fun. Fortunately, you have alternatives.

One option is to let history change in small ways. The West's ascendance over Asia stemmed from massive forces that began centuries before, so changing the outcome of an incident might not change history drastically. Hence, in your personal World of Darkness, the Sepoy mutineers won... at least for a while, before the British sent in more troops. The Kuei-jin sank Commodore Perry's ships, but the next expedition forced Japan to admit foreign merchants with greater indemnities against the Japanese.

Another alternative is to adjust events so the characters' actions produce the historical result. For instance, the British won the First Opium War, but lost some of the battles. Perhaps China's victories in this case were thanks to the characters' actions against the British and their Kin-jin supporters. If not for the characters, the British victory would have been more crushing and complete.

Then again, this is an imaginary world. Why shouldn't your World of Darkness have a different history, especially if your **Sunset Empires** chronicle stands alone from those set in the present night? Maybe the Sixth Age arrives early, or the Great Leap Outward takes 19th century America by complete surprise. Don't worry about keeping your world in lockstep with real history. This is *your* universe. Nothing that makes a story good is wrong.