



Afakv's Memories

Never Forgotten

War in China: the Fall of Beijing (1/3)



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It is the 14th of August 1900, soldiers from all over the world have gathered in front of the City of the Khan. Its walls loom precariously over dry earth. The banners of the Empire wave atop the battlements... but not for much longer.



Muslim Chinese Hui troops of the Kansu braves of the Qing Imperial army, serving under General Dong Fuxiang during the Boxer Rebellion.

The Empress Dowager Cixi, in the most brazen attempt to remove the preying foreigners, declared war on 11 nations simultaneously in a secret missive to the Boxers. In her official Imperial decree, however, she never ordered such a thing and merely stated that the Qing state would not be able to guarantee the safety of any foreigners present in Beijing due to the local unrest. Nevertheless, Europe, the US and Japan answered the call to war and sailed its troops eagerly across the oceans; to punish, to plunder, to pillage.

The Eight Nations Alliance, after stalling for a period, not sure under whose leadership to besiege the city, finally came to a decision on the 14th of August. The armies, each seeking to outdo the others, entered the city in a race to see which army would get to pillaging first. The Russian and Japanese faced fierce resistance, but the British and the Americans nearly got away unscathed, save for one soldier who died of a heatstroke on the British side, one casualty and nine wounded on the American side. The city's defenses were eventually overrun.

This day marked the beginning of an occupied Beijing. In recent Chinese history, the capital had only been occupied by foreign troops three times:

- Beijing in 1860, at the end of the Second Opium War, when the political loss was the greatest.
- Nanjing in 1937-1938, when the loss of human life and human suffering was the greatest. (Known widely as the Rape of Nanking)
- Beijing in 1900, when the material loss was greatest.

Indeed, the Fall of Beijing marked the beginning of what the *Sidney Morning Herald* called a “**carnival of loot.**”

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Boxers about to be executed.

1. Pretext

China at the turn of the 19th to 20th century was in chaos. The price for the Empire's weakness was paid for from the blood and sweat of the people. Discontent was widespread, the unbridled transgressions of the Imperial powers unchecked and unprecedented. The people, in their fury, began a movement. This movement is known in the west as the Boxers, but in China they were known as the Yihequan 义和拳 (Fist of Righteous Harmony). Originally, these Yihequan members wished to expel foreigners such as the Qing government and the various Western hyenas. In 1899, however, the Qing government managed to co-opt the movement, and divert its Anti-Qing intentions wholly on resisting the Western transgressors. They would since also be known by the semi-official sounding Yihetuan 义和团 (Company of Righteous Harmony). It is at this time the slogan of **"Support the Qing, eliminate the Foreigners"** (fu qing mie yang 扶清灭洋) was born.



Young men and boys of the Yihetuan.

Why was the Yihetuan so angry?

Reason 1: Missionaries

The anger had mainly to do with the Christian missionaries who did not practise what they preached. Their brazen superiority complex and their indiscriminant dismissal of Chinese religions, customs and beliefs angered the people. The Christians attacked Confucian values and condemned the Chinese reverence for our ancestors. For these reasons, the Empire classified Christianity as heterodoxy. The missionaries claimed to bring the truth, but all they brought was insult and depravity, going against the core values of the faith they claim to represent. Generally, there were four kinds of evils wrought by the missionaries that angered the people most:

- *Atrocious Practises*: circumcision (the genital mutilation of newborn boys), cutting open pregnant women and to use the fetuses in medicine, desecrating corpses in autopsies and the extraction of vital organs in surgery.
- *Sorcery*: it was believed that the missionaries were using their medication to administer aphrodisiacs to women.
- *Kidnapping*: it was believed that the Christians were guilty of kidnapping children.

- *Immoral Licentiousness*: private confessions with women, secretive religious ceremonies and the ubiquity of boy's and girl's schools and orphanages led to the belief that the Christian missionaries were merely using faith as a facade for debauchery and pedophilia. (Fairbank, 500)

Generally, in legal disputes, these missionaries used their specially gained status (acquired through the unequal treaties) to pressure officials to side with Christian converts, regardless of whether justice would be served. These rights the missionaries had acquired grated the Chinese, for they were exclusive rights normally only reserved for Chinese literati. Here comes a band of haughty foreigners with their incomprehensible doctrine placing unreasonable and unjust demands upon the justice system. They were essentially unwelcome immigrants demanding the local culture to adapt to them, because they deemed their own culture and religion superior.

In May and June of 1870, the Governor-General of Nanjing received constant reports of kidnappings and confessions of kidnappers which all implicated the involvement of the Roman Catholics. A similar story unfolded in June 1870 in Tianjin also. After the Second Opium war, the influence of the French Roman Catholic church grew rapidly in Tianjin. The attitude of the French missionaries was typical of missionaries: snobbish, holier-than-thou and on top of that carried a sense of nationalist vanity which caused them to be disrespectful, dismissive and patronising in their interactions with the people of Tianjin. The educated literati of Tianjin were dismayed, and quickly developed a strong hatred for these up-jumped foreigners, and the common man soon followed suit in their animosity.



Boxer rebels, 1900 photograph. From Tōgō Shrine and Tōgō Association (東郷神社・東郷会), Togo Heihachiro in images, illustrated Meiji Navy (図説東郷平八郎、目で見る明治の海軍), (Japanese), "Photograph of Boxer rebels" (義和団).

the fury of the people reached a
boiling point

Rumours about missionary transgressions were quickly spread about. The literati's hand in incitement of the Tianjin mob can be seen in many places. Rumours of kidnappings were particularly widespread, it was believed that the French missionaries were kidnapping children and then vivisectioning them to take out their beating hearts and eyes (the French Sisters of Charity were gathering children in their orphanages; the mortality rate of these children was particularly high). As the fury of the people reached a boiling point, the public frequently gathered in front of the church and demanded the release of missing children. At one point, perhaps panicking, the French Consul Henri Fontanier opened fire on local representatives. The shot missed the District Magistrate, but killed his servant. The already excited mob overwhelmed the Consul and the twenty or so people with him, they were lynched.

The Tianjin Massacre was not an isolated case, yet, it was the most influential, well-known and spectacular case of a long series of attacks on missionaries and other Westerners.

While details of the Missionaries' worst perceived excesses either derived from misunderstanding or were exaggerated and embellished, there was still truth to the depravity of the Missionaries. Western clergymen have been known to molest children, and not just in Asia. Considering their natural inclination toward morally reprehensible behaviour, it would be a mistake to believe that they suddenly refrained from such practises in China. In fact, it is widely known that to this day many Westerners make their way to Asia to take advantage of minors and vulnerable women. There is little reason to doubt that they did so too in the past.

Motivated by the provocation of the missionaries and angered by their atrocities, the Yihetuan began to kill Chinese Christians and Missionaries on sight. During the infamous Taiyuan Massacre, which can be seen as the *spark raging flame* that lit the powder keg, a number of European missionaries were rounded up in the local Yamen (Courthouse/municipal building) and killed to the last. Fanciful accounts of their deaths mimicking certain novels of the time made martyrs of these people. The reporting on the incident sparked outrage in Europe and led many to believe that it was high time the "Yellow" barbarians be taught a lesson. Meanwhile in China, churches continued to be attacked and the legations were threatened. As a result, the Western powers sent their relief force from Tianjin to Beijing. The 2000 or so men were blocked by Imperial forces and sent back to Tianjin.



Religion of pigs
(Christianity) pulling out
unborn children by cutting

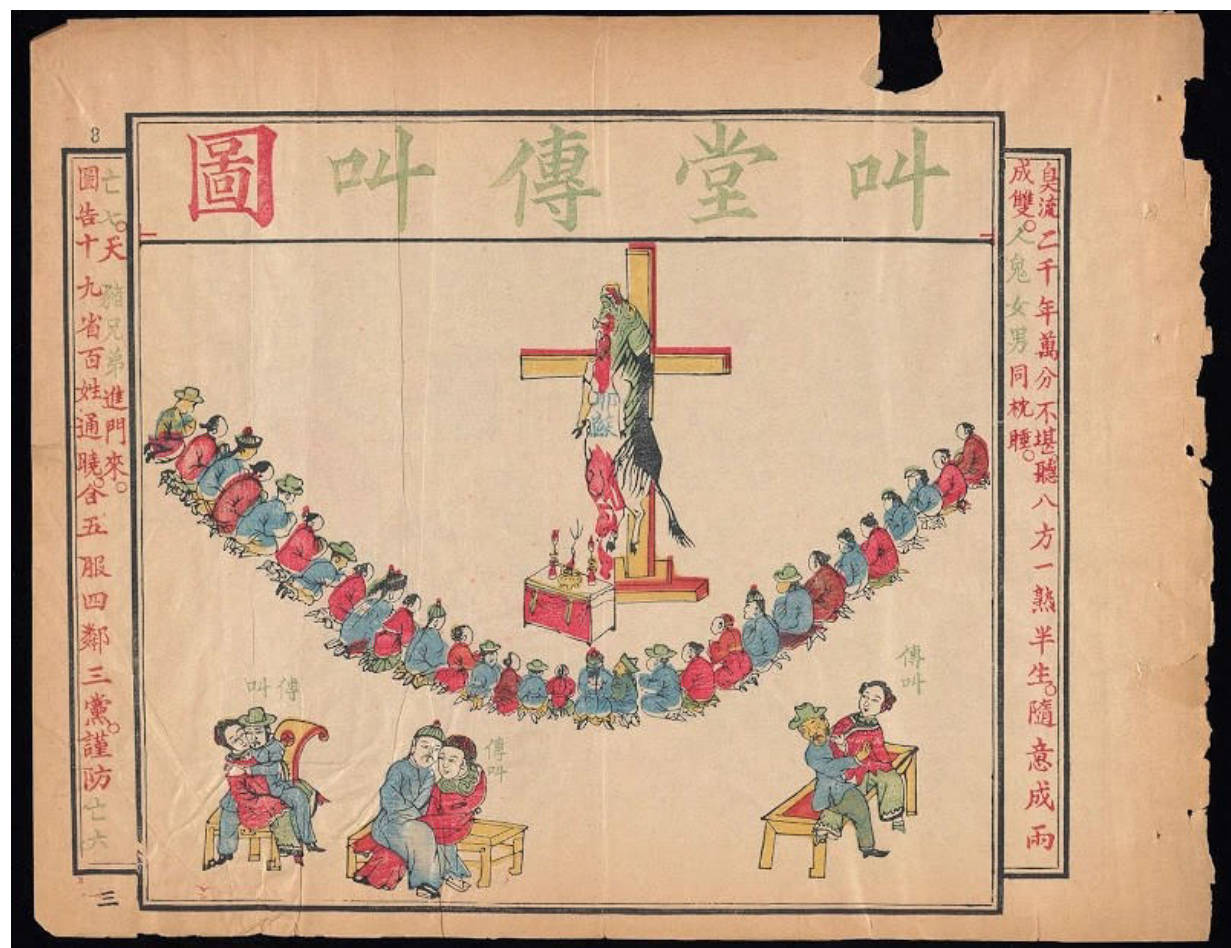


A condemnation of Western
Missionaries mutilating the



An exhortation to shoot pigs
(the Christian God) and to

Yuan (Jesus) a pig on the crucifix with Chinese converts around it. The foreign missionaries



Reason 2: Baron Clemens von Ketteler

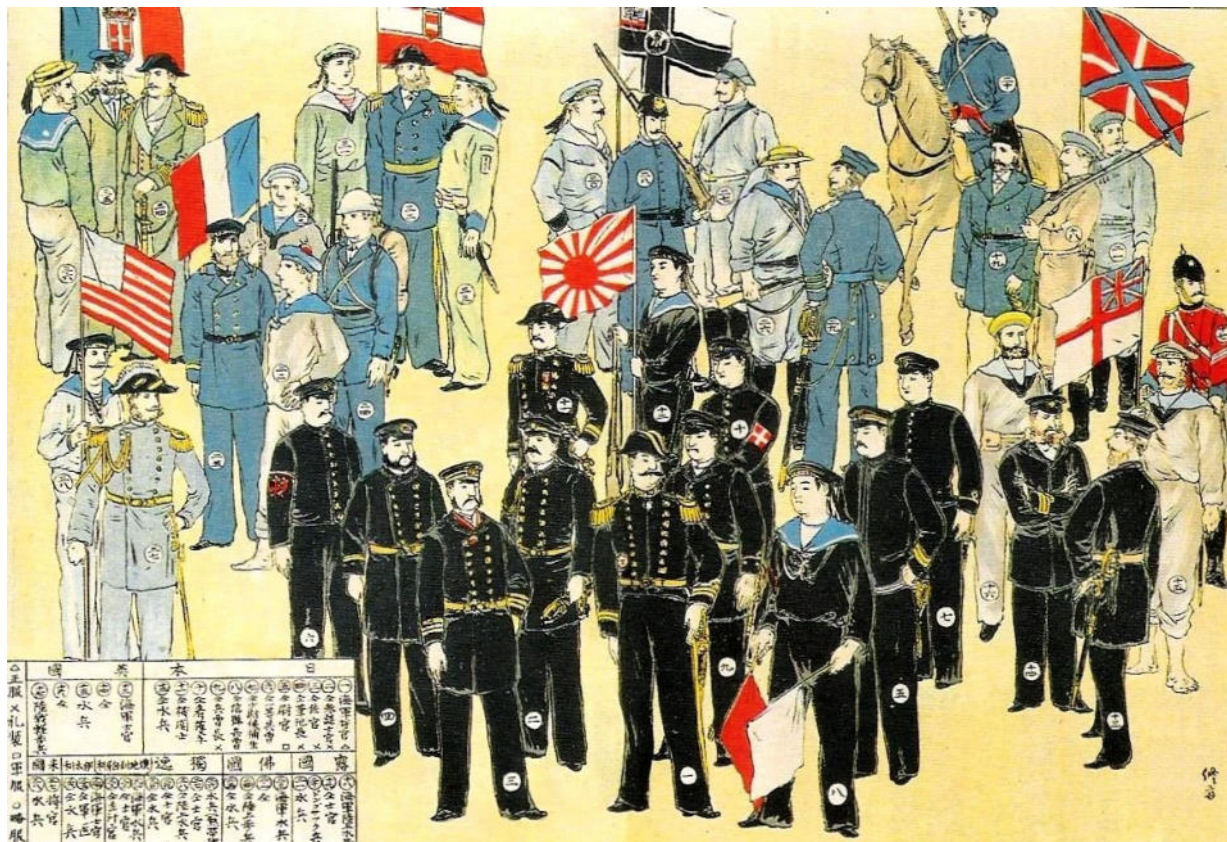
One particular case that sparked the ire of the Yihetuan was the German Baron Clemens von Ketteler. Von Ketteler was a bloody butcher whose hands were stained with Chinese blood. A major incident that incited violence against him was his merciless beating of a Chinese boy he suspected of being a member of the Yihetuan. After beating the young boy, he shot the child to death. The Yihetuan and the Muslims troops known as the Kansu Braves under Dong Fuxiang were outraged and responded by rioting and storming into the walled city of Beijing, killing Christians and burning churches. On the 22nd of June, 1900, on his way to the Zongli Yamen 總理衙門 (precursor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) to protest the offer Empress Dowager had given and the siege of the foreign legations, he encountered a Qing patrol. For some reason, perhaps thinking the soldiers had come to arrest him, he fired his pistol at the patrol from within his palanquin. Enhai, an officer of the Shenjiying 神機營 (Divine Engine Division, a.k.a. Peking Field Force) returned fire and killed Von Ketteler, avenging the boy.

After beating the young boy, he shot the child to death.

On the 20th of June, 2 days before the death of Von Ketteler, the legation had been besieged by the Yihetuan and the Imperial forces. In response, England, America, Russia, France, Japan, Germany, Italy and Austria-Hungary mustered some of their forces to go and lift the siege. This is the story of how Beijing came to be under attack.



„En-hai“, durch dessen Kugel Frhr. v. Ketteler fiel.
Janggin (rank) Enhai, the White Banner Manchu who killed Von Ketteler, captured and soon to be executed. Enhai faced his death with dignity and pride.



Western and Japanese Navy troops during the Boxer Rebellion. 1900, Japan (日本)、 Britain (英國), Russia (露國, 俄國), France (佛國, 法國), Germany (獨逸, 德國), Austria-Hungary (奧地利匈牙利, 奧匈帝國), Italy (伊太利, 意大利), USA (米國, 美國).

2. The Great Raid

This chapter will follow the structure of Hevia's article. I refer you to his article if a more detailed description of events is desired.

Phase 1: A looter's free-for-all

Immediately after the foreign troops lifted the siege on the legations and saved their countrymen they took to the looting of Beijing. Reports from each country try to diminish their own role in the looting by ascribing the brunt of the looting to other nations, yet the fact is that they all participated fully in the looting. That much was noted by "Gadhadar Singh, a soldier in the 7th Rajputs of the British India Army, whose book on the campaign found little to distinguish one group from another in their lust for plunder" (Hevia, 85). Indeed, the first stage of looting can be described like a pack of hungry dogs let loose in a fully stocked larder. The armies looted, stole and pillaged in a crazed frenzy. They scarce seemed human as they held nothing sacred, they listened to no one, all facades were torn down as they revealed their true shameless nature: thieves and robbers down to the very rotten core. It is an absolute disgrace and blemish upon the uniforms they wore and their self-proclaimed "sophisticated" and "civilised" Western military discipline to call these common thieves soldiers.

... a wild orgy of plunder ensued, one in which few if any could resist temptation.

Dr. James L. Hevia

Indeed, the looters had the gall to justify their barbarity by claiming their looting and stealing was a retribution for the barbarity of the Chinese for killing Christians and burning churches. Their self-righteous attitude was nothing more than a shoddy excuse to do what they really wanted all along. They envied China, they ever eyed it with a jealous eye, and lo, when the Chinese people could no longer abide by their unscrupulous colonial tyranny and lashed out at the vultures, their opportunity to plunder finally came.

The looting took place all across Beijing, and actually, already started in late July when the allied band of thieves occupied Tianjin. The looting continued for months until late October. Even worse, the looting continued outside Beijing for a long time. This is how prestigious Western museums acquire their precious artifacts; by shameless theft. Now, they display their proud, stolen possessions like trophies. We even have to pay entrance fees to enter these places. Isn't there something profoundly twisted and, dare I say, evil, that these practises are seen as

legal and normal in the world?

At any rate, much like a pack of hungry dogs, they were not co-ordinated in their looting. The thieves of the various nations stole loot from each other. Soldiers entered shops, private homes and any other place they could find loot and took it. There were even female thieves: “Lady Claude MacDonald, wife of the British minister, who was reported to have been at the head of one looting expedition, is said to have exclaimed, after having already filled eighty-seven cases with “valuable treasure,” that she “had not begun to pack”” (Hevia, 85).



The German victory parade at the Palace gates.

Phase 2: Regulated theft

Eventually, the British army established a prize commission, thereby regulating the looting of Beijing. The share of the stolen goods was apportioned according to the rank and race of the thieves. White British soldiers would receive one more share than Indian soldiers and all ethnically Chinese officers in the British army could only receive the share of up to a warrant officer, regardless of rank. The army sent out “search parties,” a very misleading and mild term for what should accurately be called “band of plunderers” to bring back stolen goods, which were to be sold at auctions every day from the 22nd of August onward. As is often the case with the fencing of stolen goods, very valuable items were sold for a scrap; fur coats of immense value would go to buyers for a few dollars.

[...] these men were offering for sale hundreds of rolls of splendid silks, which they had gathered on their way through the city. You could get them for nothing.

Putnam Weale, 328

I want you, the reader, to really think about what happened here. Family heirlooms, tokens of love, prized possessions, objects that the average Chinese person would have to work his entire life for, auctioned like so many pieces of garbage to those who could not even appreciate what they had acquired. At least when the Japanese came to loot, they could discern value, and they educated the soldiers to grade the quality of the stolen goods to determine which would go to the Imperial Household, which would go to museums and which would be displayed in schools.

At the time, observers were impressed by the British system, for their organisation and discipline. Yet, what does that really mean? Is a cold, orderly and calculated murderer not that much more threatening than one who murders on impulse? To contrast, Nazi Germany was unprecedented in their orderly extermination of so many “undesirables,” it is precisely this orderly and calculated commitment of crime that makes them all the more terrifying. I'd argue this is the case exactly with the British forces.

The American forces also attempted to regulate the looting, yet, it was to no avail. The inner-thief of the American soldiers, once surfaced, proved impossible to suppress. Only in September did the Americans manage to impose some kind of order, as all the looted property was collected and sold off. The profits were used to pay for the occupation of Beijing. In other words, it's akin to a thief entering your house, stealing and fencing off your valuables to pay for his stay in your house.

These looted objects stood for many things: among others, they stood for the humiliation of the Chinese empire and the “Yellow” race. Above all, they stood for the victory of the self-proclaimed “civilised” forces over the “barbarians” of China.

The Evil of Missionaries

Christian missionaries appeared to be the greatest hypocrites. While they preached virtue and modesty inside their churches, they participated with glee in the sprawling bazaars of looted goods. One reported method British missionaries used to acquire goods to sell was by seizing homes of Imperial princes and other rich Beijing residents, and then selling off all the contents. American missionaries went about it by organising rural punitive expeditions into the villages near Beijing.

They would occupy and loot the homes of those they deemed Yihequan aligned. Needless to say, this actually meant that they just robbed any home they liked the look of. Some American soldiers with a conscience actually refused to obey the commands of the missionaries, as their mission was to root out Yihetuan members, not to rob people blind.

Morally bankrupt men of the cloth, it's not the first time it has happened and it certainly was not the last. They had become the very evil that Jesus warned against. Here, we can see a discrepancy between what genuine faith entails, and what the church claiming to represent that faith actually does. True religion does not appear to be preached or practised in these corrupt institutions.

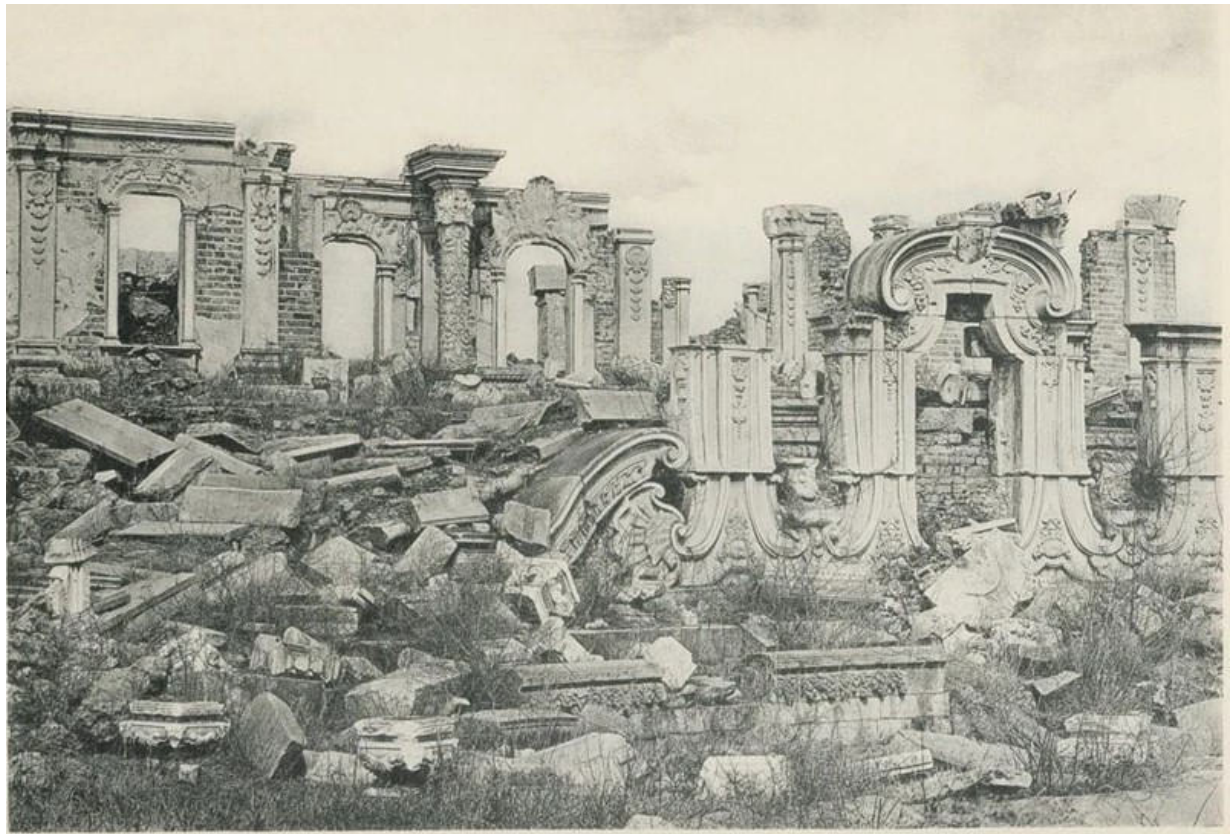
Punitive Expeditions

Akin to the rural expeditions of the American missionaries, the military itself had punitive expeditions that ran parallel to their plundering raids. Armies swept through villages under the pretense of punishing anyone involved with the Yihequan. As you might imagine, this raiding was paired with the usual horrors of military invasion. More information on the aspect of abject human suffering will come in the next part. In terms of material loss, the goods looted and and stolen as well as the devastation of material heritage were literally immeasurable due to the difficulty of determining where the stolen goods finally ended up. There were many cases where the plunderers circumvented army regulation by conducting private expeditions into the countryside. For example:

"[...] a story circulated about the theft of two golden bells from the Temple of Heaven by officers of the 16th Bengal Lancers. Claiming them as "trophy," the officers had spirited them off with other items ostensibly destined for the officers' mess. Sometime around 1905, they decided to melt down one of the bells and divide the spoils [...]" (Hevia, 89)

The Second Burning of the Summer Palace

In 1860, Lord Elgin famously ordered the burning of the Imperial Summer Palace on the outskirts of Beijing. The palace was looted and what was left behind was burnt, with intent to completely reduce the palace to plain grass fields. However, the Summer Palace was a large complex, so large, that it took the Franco-British forces several days to burn the buildings, and even then, they weren't successful in destroying everything. Between the end of the Second Opium war in 1860 and the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 the Qing court had plans to restore the Summer Palace to its former glory. Alas, in the summer of 1900, the Eight Nation Alliance of thieving arsonists came to finish the job the British had started. All the efforts made to restore the palace were once again made equal to the ground. This time, the pillagers made off with the 12 bronze heads of the Chinese zodiac animals.



The ruins of Summer Palace in 1900 photographed by Alfons Mumm von Schwarzenstein, Clemens von Ketteler's sucesor as German ambassador in Beijing.

Concluding Word

Evidently, the material loss of the war was enormous. The events that transpired tell us clearly that not all demons come with coiled horns and cloven hoofs. The more dangerous devil comes to you in modest guise, representing the divine and all that is good. He turns brother against brother, husband against wife and subject against ruler. The words he whispers poison and hymns he sings death. He lures you with food, then lulls you with salvation... Ah, the devils are disingenuous, for their true gods, all along, are Dionysus and Plutus.

There have been several succesful attempts retaking the stolen artifacts. Some people see the injustice of the theft, and have bought artifacts to return them from the land whence these objects came. The road, however, is long and difficult. The damage has been done and the recovery of these artifacts is but a tiny, tiny fraction of what was stolen. The best way to go forward is to learn from this piece of history. Not to harbour hatred, but to know the facts. History is not only the story of the past viewed through our lense, it is quite literally a guidebook for the future.

Some estimate that it would take modern China 3 years of its entire GDP to cover all the wealth that was stolen in 1900, that excludes everything that was burnt, broken and... of course, killed. Earlier in this post I mentioned that the loss of material heritage was greatest in of the three times the Chinese capital city had

been captured in recent history. Yet, one should not be misled into thinking that human suffering and loss of life did not occur. On the contrary, it happened on a large scale. It would be remiss of me to ignore this topic, and therefore, the second part to this three-part post shall cover the topic of rape and mass-murder.



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3 thoughts on “War in China: the Fall of Beijing (1/3)”

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Afakv's Memories

Never Forgotten

War in China: the Ravishment of the North (2/3)



This is the second part of the article "War in China."

If you haven't read the first one, please do so.

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Today is January 15th and marks the day that the 12 demands of 11 Imperialist nations were c

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hiyooxungga gingguji iletu hvwangheo

Her Imperial Majesty Xingzhen of the Yehe Nara clan, a.k.a. Empress Dowager Cixi.

This article is much longer than my usual articles. Split it up in parts, read it how you like, I trust the clickable contents menu here will be of some assistance.

3. The Battle for Tianjin

The taking of Tianjin was a violent affair. Tianjin is a coastal city that, once taken,

serves as a vital staging point which provides a direct connection to Beijing and the rest of Northern China. Simultaneous to the Tianjin-Beijing Campaign, the Russians were also invading Manchuria ([read about the Manchurian Campaign here](#)).



A depiction of Tianjin. The stone walls in the centre, built in 1415, formed the walled city of Tianjin. The mud wall on the outskirts protected the suburbs from assault.

There were foreign troops in China before any real hostilities commenced. The Opium Wars granted England and France concessions in Tianjin, which were therefore garrisoned beforehand. Tianjin, at this point in time, was divided into two parts, the historical walled city, which was governed by the Chinese Empire with a million Chinese inhabitants and the foreign concession area which was inhabited by 700 foreign merchants and missionaries with about 10,000 Chinese workers. When the foreign legations were besieged by the boxers, the foreign powers reacted by dispatching a portion of the Tianjin garrison to relieve Beijing. This force of roughly 2000 men, led by Admiral Sir Michael Seymour, left for Beijing on the 10th of June. On the 16th however, it became clear that he would not be able to proceed much further than the city of Langfang due to being blocked and harassed by Chinese defenders. On the 18th, Seymour clashed against the Gansu Braves, the Muslim-Chinese troops led by Dong Fuxiang. Clearly, more men were needed to breach Beijing to reach the foreign legations, reinforcements needed to come from overseas.

The First Shots: Battle of the Dagu Forts

This section draws from Xiang Lanxin's chapter "Dagu: The Undeclared War," Myakishev's "The Capture of the Taku Fort" and Peter Fleming's The Siege at Peking.

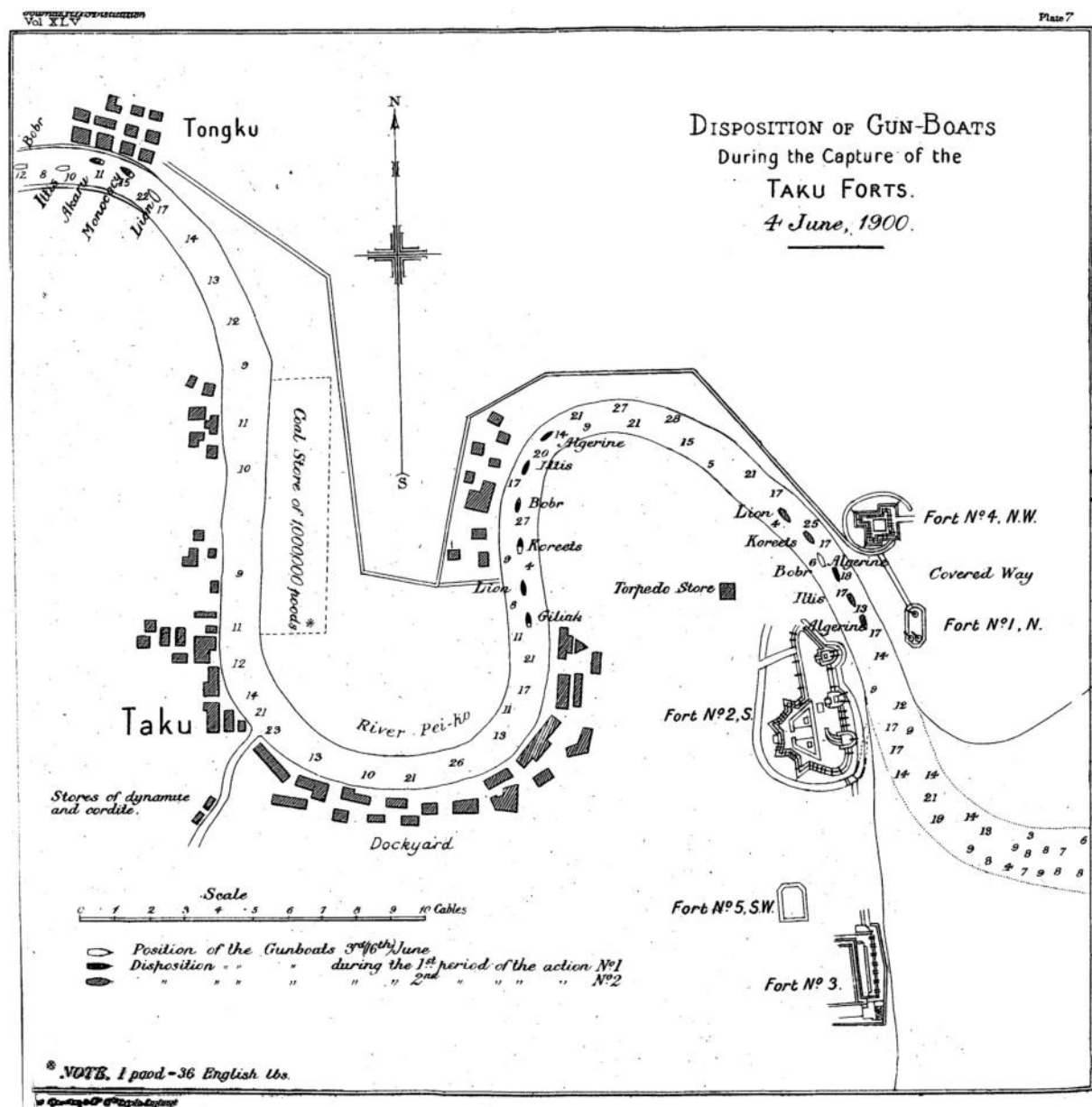
The entrance of China, however, was guarded by the heavily reinforced Dagu

forts. These forts were built in the 16th century against Japanese Wako pirates, but were expanded, redesigned and modernised in response to the loss of the First Opium War in order to defend against modern pirates in the form of the Imperialist powers. The forts were state-of-the-art, armed with rapid firing Krupp guns and built with the latest German technology. 3,000 of China's finest soldiers were garrisoned there. The forts were widely considered impregnable (Xiang 283). So, in order to land more troops in China, and to ensure Seymour's foray to Beijing would not be cut off, it would be necessary for the invading navies to take control of the forts, but it would not be an easy task.

At 9 o'clock in the evening on the 16th of June, the invading navies issued an ultimatum to surrender the forts or be attacked directly to the commander of the Dagu forts, Luo Rongguang (罗荣光). General Luo Rongguang tried to reason with the Russian Lieutenant Bakhmetieff, who delivered the ultimatum, and told him he would not be able to come up with an answer before the deadline of 2 a.m. past midnight, since General Luo would have to contact his superiors. The Russian officer refused to budge. The ultimatum was delivered and the Bakhmetieff returned to his ship.

The invading navy consisted of 30 ships. 20 of which could not sail in the shallow waters at the mouth of the river. Of the remaining 10 ships that could sail in those shallow waters the American *Monocacy*, an obsolete wooden ship, decided not to participate in the battle. The Japanese *Atago*, an old iron gunboat with obsolete guns and was filled with explosives, decided not to participate due to the danger involved with having its explosive caches exploded. The eight vessels that participated in the battle are enumerated in the list below.

1. H.M.S. *Fame* (British), a modern destroyer with a speed of 30 knots.
2. H.M.S. *Whiting* (British), "
3. H.M.S. *Algerine* (British), a slow three-masted sloop.
4. The *Iltis* (German), similar to the *Algerine* with a slightly higher speed.
5. The *Giliak* (Russian), a small but modern gunboat.
6. The *Bobre* (Russian), an old steel gunboat.
7. The *Koreets* (Russian), similar to the *Bobre* with heavier armaments.
8. The *Lion* (French), an ancient gunboat with two cannons.



Note: the date above says 4 June, 1900. This map was translated from a Russian source from 1901, when they still used the Julian Calendar. June 4th is therefore actually June 17th in the Gregorian calendar.

Source: Myakishev. "The Capture of the Taku Fort." *Royal United Services Institution. Journal* 45, no. 280 (1901): 744

By 12:50 a.m. past midnight of the 17th, an hour before the deadline, the first shot was fired from Fort No. 4 (please refer to the plan above), upon which all other forts opened fire too. The gunboats returned fire, the battle for the Dagu forts had begun. Two Russian vessels, the *Giliak* and the *Koreets* drew heavy fire from the forts. The fortune of battle favoured the Chinese in the early morning until dawn came. By 3:45 a.m. the invaders had landed a storming column on the Northern banks of the river, in order to storm Fort No. 4. During their assault on the fort, the invading navies managed to explode a gunpowder magazine in Fort No. 3.

With a violent explosion, the tide of the battle turned in favour of the invaders. At 5 a.m., invader flags were flown from Fort No. 4. The Dagu forts fell one by one as more and more gunpowder magazines were exploded until, finally, by 6:45 all the



The remnants of a Dagu Fort (a.k.a. Taku) in 2006 as viewed from below. Only a few smaller forts remain as of today, since the Imperialist powers demanded the destruction of the forts after the war.

forts had fallen to the invaders. On 7:20 a.m. German ship *Hansa* signalled the successful capture of all the forts. Most casualties on the Chinese side fell due to the many explosions. The battle was hard fought, and the invading navies won a costly victory with 172 dead. The Chinese suffered a heavy defeat with an estimated 1,000 dead or wounded men (600 to 800 dead according to Myakishev). The Battle of the Dagu Forts marked the beginning of the Boxer War.

The fact that such a hastily assembled naval force, with but a mere 900 marines, could take a fortified position that was considered impregnable is surprising to say the least. Xiang accredits this military success of the invading navies to a combination of the dirty diplomatic trick concerning the nature of the ultimatum, "incredible luck" and "blind audacity" (Xiang 286).

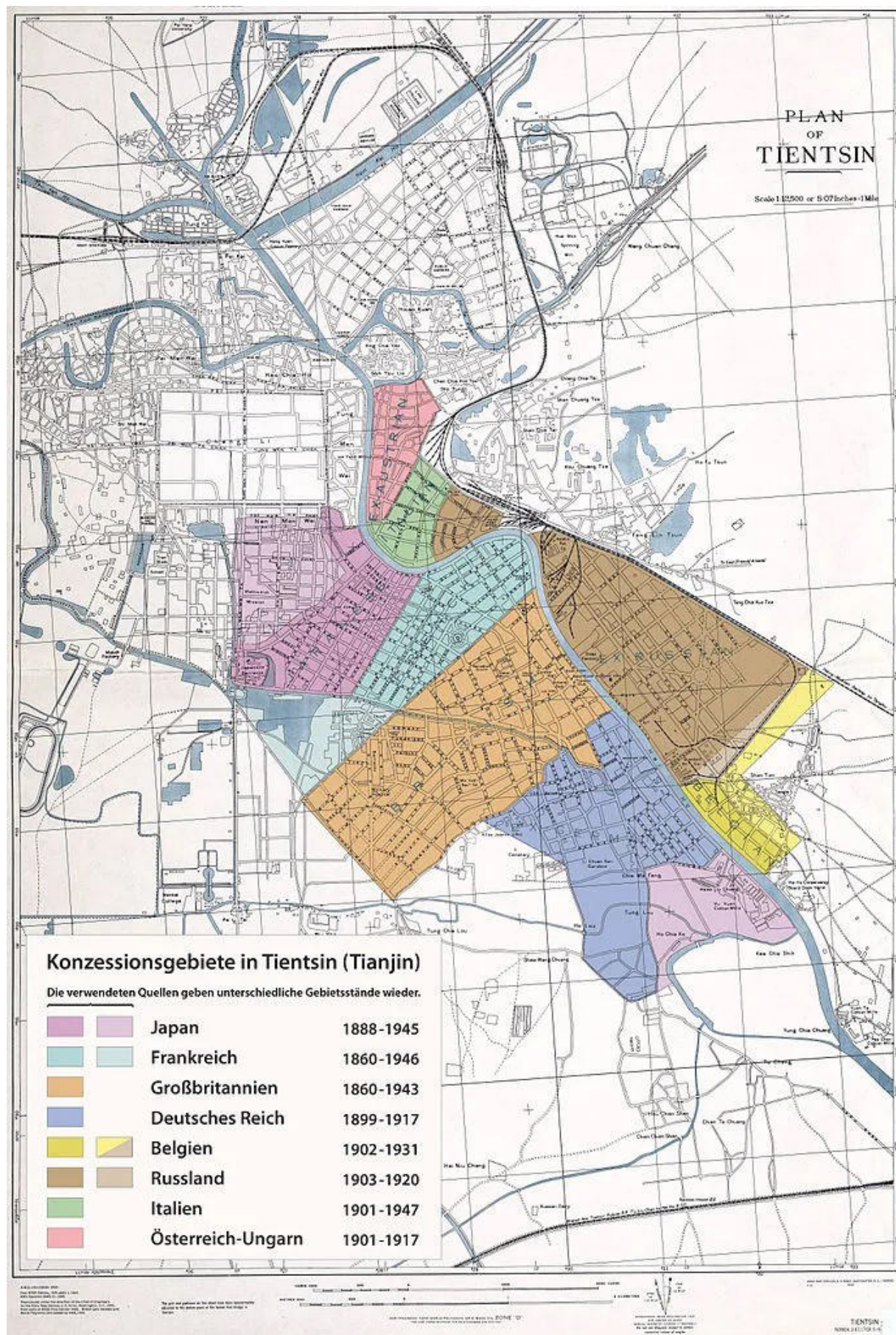
The Siege of Tianjin

Early in the morning of July 15th, the Yihequan warriors (a.k.a. Boxers) had begun to attack the foreign concessions of Tianjin. During this attack, a group of Yihequan warriors had begun to attack the railway station. The station was guarded by a large number of Russians. The Yihequan, famous for their rejection of modern weaponry, attempted to face the Russian gunners armed with spears and swords. The casualties were high among the Yihequan. The Russians shot at the crowd indiscriminately, and, not surprisingly, shot and killed many innocent Chinese bystanders who were just curious about the situation.

At this time, the Imperial Chinese troops were standing by, awaiting orders whether to support the Boxers or to defend the foreign legations. This consideration existed because the Boxers were being used by the Manchu Court to put pressure on the Imperialist powers, but were careful not to allow the Boxers to grow too powerful as to be a threat to themselves (Ouellet 513). Upon receiving news that the invaders had assaulted the Dagu forts and that Russian were shooting unarmed and innocent Chinese denizens, the choice was quickly made. It had become clear that the invading armies did not intend to stop at quelling the Boxers, and that the clean-up of Boxers was a mere excuse to force China into

another war. The Imperial Chinese armies, even though they had been fighting the Boxers up until this point, reacted by supporting the Boxers in assaulting the Tianjin foreign concessions.

Adjacent to the foreign concessions was a Chinese military academy (The Wubeitang 武备堂). The academy housed some two hundred students and possessed such an amount of munition and weapons, eight large Krupp guns, that it posed a threat to the concessions. The authorities in the concessions decided to strike the academy pre-emptively. On the 17th of June at 3 p.m. the concessions launched an attack on the academy. The fifty Chinese military cadets inside the academy refused to surrender. They were promptly executed. (Shagren 25)



Map of Concessions in Tientsin (Tianjin) – German
Source: Maximilian Dörbbecker

The Chinese commander Nie Shicheng 聂士成, the infamous butcher of many Boxers, now having arrived on scene, began to bombard the foreign concession area with his artillery. He commanded a well-trained army and carried out the bombardments with precision. The concession remained under bombardment until reinforcements arrived. Many Chinese lived in the concessions during the time of the siege, and in fact, the Chinese had been of great help to the foreign communities as the women sewed clothes and pillows for the sick and wounded and the men washed 400 articles a day. They also helped, under heavy fire from the Yihetuan and Nie Shicheng's troops, to place and set up machine guns for the foreign troops. Furthermore, the Chinese in the foreign legation built barricades against Imperial and boxer fire. Needless to say, the Chinese were a tremendous service to the Tianjin concessions. The foreigners, however, with all their prejudices, had become hysterical and were not only ungrateful for this help, they even grew suspicious of all Chinese. A court was set up to try these Chinese, and during the siege of the concessions, many Chinese were put behind bars (Shagren 30). After all, to these colonisers an Oriental is **nothing more than an Oriental**, and no matter how hard they try to help them, to signal friendship or submission, they remain but **a tool to be used and discarded**.



Dong Fuxiang, Commander of the Rear Division of the Wuwei Corps. His army was known as the Gan Jun: the Kansu Braves.



Ronglu, Supreme Commander of the Wuwei Corps and Commander of the Centre Division.

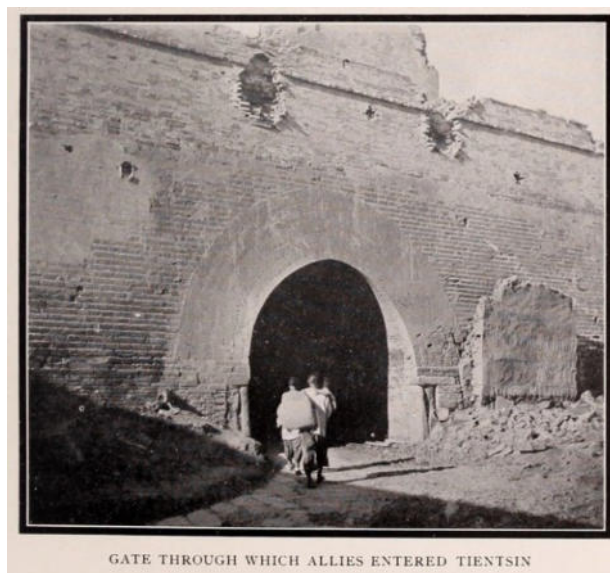


Nie Shicheng, Commander of the Front Division. His army was known as the Wuyi Jun: Tenacious Army.

The French, seeing the course of the wind, thought it was a good idea to clear the path ahead by setting fire to the suburbs of Tianjin located outside the city walls. The wind carried the flames further toward the city, the raging fires lasted the entire night from the 17th upon the 18th of June. Innocents were “sacrificed in hundreds if not thousands,” thousands of other civilians, who managed to escape the fires were seen fleeing away, with what belongings they could stuff in wheelbarrows in “the last extremity of panic.” For what purpose? It is perhaps akin to clearing a forest before a castle, to remove any cover for the enemy and to provide a clear line of sight, only this forest was home to thousands of people. Such disregard for Chinese lives, for human lives, is nothing short of monstrous and the very **pinnacle of barbarity**.

The now bolstered forces had the power to sally out and force the Chinese Imperial forces and the Boxers to lay off the siege of the concessions. The Imperial forces retreated into the ancient walled city of Tianjin. On July 9th, in one of the

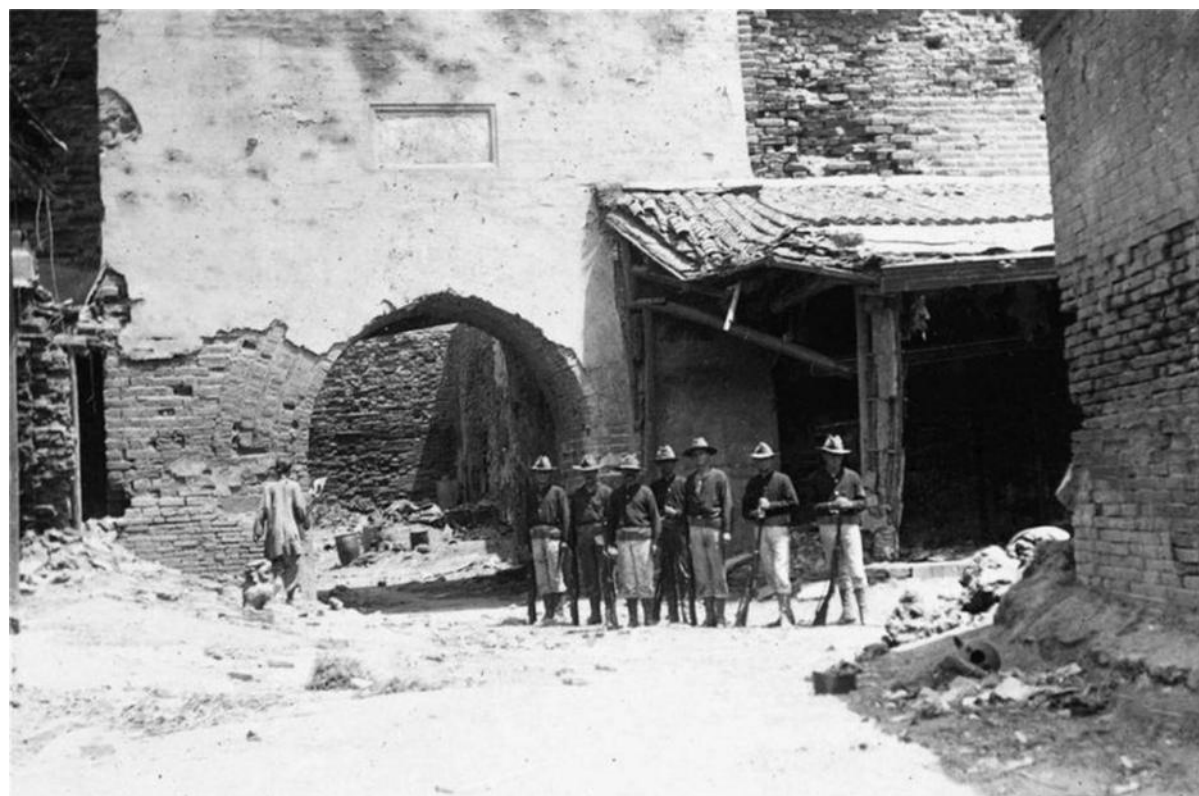
various skirmishes around Tianjin for strategic locations General Nie Shicheng gave his life protecting his nation. As the foreign armies gained more favourable positions, they also gathered enough strength to carry out an assault against the walls on the morning of July 13th. Based on the experiences of their previous wars in China, they did not expect to face much capable resistance during their assault on Tianjin. They were mistaken.



These walls were manned by competent artillerists from the Imperial Navy, Chinese regulars equipped with Mausers and Remington rifles as well as numerous Boxers using obsolete weapons such as matchlocks. The Chinese resistance was heavy. It appeared the Chinese forces had increased in effectiveness and was "fighting well and more skillfully than ever before" (Shagren 29). During the assault for the walls of Tianjin, the Chinese resistance had on several occasion managed to pin down the siege forces. For example, the Americans, including Herbert Hoover, were pinned down in the open and used Chinese graves as cover (Shagren 37). The Japanese and the British faced similar heavy fire from the walls of Tianjin as they approached the city (Shagren 37). They got as close to the wall as they could by 9 a.m. of the 13th. They advanced slowly under fire until eventually, by 2 a.m. deep in the night from the 13th upon the 14th, the foreign troops reached the walls and the gate. They opened the first gates of the barbican with explosive charges. The Japanese sappers scaled the walls and opened the second gate of the barbican from within. The valiant defense of the city was to no avail. With a loud explosion, the way into the walled city of Tianjin was wide open, and the onslaught began.

By this time, one third of the city was on fire, another good portion was destroyed through the structural damage caused to the city by the explosives. Thousands of dead littered the streets, Boxers, Imperial soldiers, but also women, children and non-combative men. According to accounts of elderly survivors only an hour after the Western invaders entered Tianjin the dead must have been in the thousands. The western forces had also employed poisonous shells and the gas was killing many. There was many a house where the poison gas entered and the entire family, clutched together in fear, young, old, man, woman, died where they huddled. There were many Imperial Qing soldiers, lying in position, as if aiming their rifles, ready to fire at a moment's notice. Yet, upon closer inspection, they had already been gassed to death. The riverside near the legations had the most corpses. The pontoon bridge had to be opened so that the corpses could float

away. (Sun 168)



American soldiers standing guard at a Tianjin gate.

The Desolation of Tianjin

The city of Tianjin fell to the invaders on July 14, 1900. Tianjin surrendered, after which many civilians were raped, more were killed. The Qing government never made an estimate on how many civilians died, the Allied forces have kept these numbers hidden. Only the Russians have given a rough estimate and claim that after the fall of Tianjin about a 100,000 residents of the original 1,000,000 remain. 90% percent of the city either fled or perished (Sun 167).

When Tianjin fell, the women were conquered twice, first as Chinese, then as women. The unbridled bestial lust of the Western soldiery cannot be understated. They barged into random homes and began raping. Women above the age of sixty, girls just past puberty, all were targets of this rapist alliance. Many women committed suicide by jumping into deep wells. After the fighting was over, they discovered one well which contained the remains of as many as six women. When the allied rapists could not find any women, they would proceed to rape young boys. The raping was not limited to the city, most certainly not. Young women were captured and brought onto ships to be gang raped. One ship was reported one time to have captured "20 Tianjin beauties alive" (Sun 169-170).

Unsurprisingly, if you have read part 1 of this article, the looting that took place was of epic proportions. Not only did the invading soldiers loot, but the foreign

civilians who lived in the concessions came to take their pick, and the Chinese labourers and workers who felt disadvantaged by the wealthier citizens of Tianjin took their pick. The most heinous were perhaps the soldiers, who even forced many of these Chinese labourers to do their looting for them.

Do you see the pure hypocrisy of the "civilised" West to come to Qing China to tell the Boxers how to behave? The world criticises Japan for the Nanking Massacre, but conveniently forgets their own role in the desolation of Tianjin.



The devastation of Tianjin.

Tianjin remained under occupation until its liberation in August 15, 1902. During this period of occupation, the invading forces set up temporary institutions such as the Tianjin Provisional Government (天津都統衙門/天津都统衙门). The T.P.G. is the greatest example of the utter disregard for the Chinese customs, Empire and the ultimately, the Chinese people.

The draconic laws they established to catch any and all potential boxers caused the death of many innocent civilians. The tyrants would see the slightest evidence of insurgency as reason to execute the suspect. For example, men who had marks on their shoulders, which they would allegedly have gotten from the recoil of their rifles, were rounded up and shot. Women who were found wearing red clothes, a colour adored by Tianjin women, were accused of being Red Lanterns (a division of female boxers who always wore red) and subsequently tried and shot (Sun 167). While many Yihetuan members had already retreated, there were those who stayed behind. They removed their red sash or red clothes and blended in with the non-combatants. Those who were discovered by the Western invaders were dragged out and executed, along with any family who dared to harbour the Yihetuan members (Sun 169).

An anecdote speaks of a marriage in a village in the Hedong area. A T.P.G. patrol was curious and entered venue where the marriage was taking place. The Western soldiers, perhaps unaware of Chinese customs, were convinced that the bride was a Red Lantern and the groom was a Boxer due to their red clothes (traditional Chinese marriage attire is red). Following brief argument, neither side understanding the other, the soldiers shot the bride and bridegroom to death, turning their marriage turned into their funeral (Sun 168).

The T.P.G. made “improvements” to the city that benefited not the locals or the Chinese Empire, but to ease commerce with the West, much like what these Western Imperialist powers did elsewhere in the world in exploitation colonies. They also destroyed the ancient walls of Tianjin as they claimed the lean-to slums around the walls were a fire hazard. If they wanted to prevent fires, they could have simply demolished the slums, yet they removed the entire stone wall. It appears it was an act of spite, since the wall caused them so much trouble during their assault on Tianjin. Incredibly, despite all the horrors they wrought upon Tianjin, the Western Imperialist powers still had the **sheer gall** to claim that the T.P.G. was meant to represent the interests of the Chinese Empire and the Chinese people.



A Japanese invader leading a Yihetuan warrior by the leash

4. The Ravishment of the North

Allow me to preface this section with a brief summary, from my limited understanding, of Claudia Card's article to understand why the invading forces did what they did, what the long-term effects are of large scale, weaponised rape that occurred in the North of China.

Rape as a Weapon

Martial rape domesticates not only the women survivors who were its immediate victims but also the men socially connected to them, and men who were socially connected to those who did not survive.

Dr. Claudia Card

Rape is a weapon of war. Mass martial rape first targets the women who are brutalised as objects of pleasure and serve the purpose of recreation. Martial rape also targets the countrymen of the raped women, it is a threat, a warning to the rest of the country. In essence, it is terrorism. The terrorist then seeks compliance from these people, in order to acquiesce to his demands.

Mass martial rape, at its core, is targeted against entire peoples. It communicates dominance, not only to the women and girls raped, but also to her male associates. Children born out of forcible impregnation in martial rape will take on the identity of his rapist father and undermine familial solidarity; this is an example of genetic domination. Even if no child results from the rape, the act of rape is often enough for a husband, son or father to reject her. Therefore, martial rape undermines “national, political, and cultural solidarity, changing the next generation’s identity, confusing the loyalties of all victimized survivors.”

As can be seen, killing people with steel, famine and disease are not the only way to commit genocide. The other method is by destroying a group’s identity by perverting its cultural and social bonds, as in the previous paragraph. Card argues that martial rape does both kinds of genocide, as “many women and girls are killed when rapists are finished with them.” Those who are not killed either become pregnant or become known as rape survivors, as a result, “cultural, political, and national unity may be thrown into chaos.”

The section above is based entirely on Claudia Card’s article. I refer you to her article if you wish to gain more understanding on the topic of martial rape.

War, rape, genocide are no joke. Could those who glorify war, idolise killers and propagate violence raise their heads if faced by a victim of all of these? I hope the reader can keep this in mind as you read through the rest of the article. I’m not going to lie, it will not be a pleasant morning read.

The Fate of Beijing and Surroundings

This section will be written with material from Sawara Tokusuke’s Miscellaneous Notes about the Boxers, Chai E’s Gengxin Chronicle, Peter Fleming’s the Siege at Peking, the

Qing Shigao 清史稿 (Draft History of the Qing) by Zhao Erxun.

Suicide before the Storm

It is August 14th, the people of Beijing wait anxiously as the armies of the West stand at the gates. The sound of Mausers and Maxims resonate against the stifling walls of the capital. The people, acutely aware of what happened to Tianjin, prepare for the worst. Some officials, fearing they would face retribution for their steadfast loyalty to the Emperor and



Westerners posing on the Dragon Throne (source unknown)

refusal to acquiesce to Western demands, decided to take matters into their own hands. It was better to die with your honour than to die at the mercy of invading troops. Xu Tong 徐桐, the Imperial Tutor, and his whole household wished not to endure the humiliation of capture. They chose honour. Him, his wife, children, concubines and servants swayed, like the leaves of a weeping willow, from the rafters of his manor. Stools were kicked about in the room, no doubt some had regretted their decision to hang themselves and had violently tried to regain a footing, but could not (Zhao section 465).

When the Capital fell, aside from the innumerable commoners who died, countless officials committed suicide with their families as well.

Sawara Tokusuke in an excerpt from "the Miscellaneous Notes About the Boxers" (266)

Near the Eastern Gate of Beijing, the preferred method was to cast oneself into the well of the house. Each well was filled with dead women and dead girls. So many wells, in fact, that there was a real fear for the poisoning of the Beijing water supply. This is how much they feared what would happen if the Europeans entered Beijing.

Captain Francis Brinkley wrote that when Tongzhou fell, no less than 573 women committed suicide to prevent their honour from being sullied. Aside from those who chose death by their own hands, on their own accord, many others died at the hands of the invaders.

Some Horrifying Accounts

Reader's discretion is advised for this section due to graphic descriptions.

The Allied forces would capture women, no matter virtuous, wretched, old or young, and would, as much as they could, displace them to Biaobei alleys and to live in row houses there as prostitutes for the soldiery. To the West end of this alley the path would have been blocked off, in order to prevent escape, the East end was the only way in or out. This way was guarded. Any person from the Allied forces could enter for pleasure and rape to his heart's desire.

Sawara Tokusuke in an excerpt from "the Miscellaneous Notes About the Boxers"

Sadly, it appears those who hanged themselves could be counted among the lucky. The citizens of Beijing were subject to three days of unbridled savagery after the fall of the Beijing. The demonic behaviour of the armies was apparent, rape was ubiquitous, so much so that among the soldiery "venereal diseases were rampant" (Fleming). There are claims it was in the interest of both the Qing Imperials and the Eight Nation Alliance that the most excessive horrors and abominable actions would be kept a secret. According to these numerous sources (the veracity of which I have been unable to verify) the military advisor and journalist known as Captain Francis (Frank) Brinkley would expose the truth in the Japan Mail editorial.

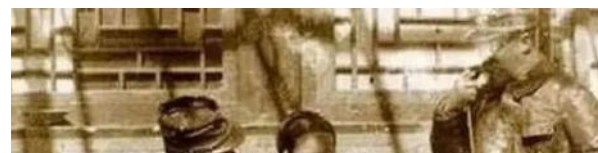


Source of this image is unknown, hundreds of websites use this image and all agree this was taken during the occupation of Beijing or at least during the Boxer War.

One of Brinkley's accounts relays the story of a marauding soldier who entered a palace complex. Upon entering some chambers he spotted one of the maids, naked and scratching at something. The soldier immediately proceeded to assail the maid. Upon penetration, he stubbed his genitals on a hard object inside the maid. It appears that the complex had been raided beforehand, and another soldier, having taken so many priceless artifacts with him that he could no longer carry them all, found it humorous perhaps to insert a golden buddha statue into the maid's privates. Upon discovering this, he cut open the maid, took the statue, and left.

Author's Note:

A few questions: with whom did the soldier communicate to find out about the previous soldier who inserted the golden buddha? It seems unlikely that the maid or the soldier could communicate effectively due to the language barrier. Moreover, it seems highly unlikely a newspaper from 1900 publish such a vulgar act in graphic detail. A somewhat questionable account, yet nonetheless one widely spread.





Western soldiers capturing and forcing a child to take this picture.

It is also said that during the indiscriminate killings in Beijing and its surrounding areas, the soldiers were curious about the lotus feet of Chinese women. So curious, in fact, that some soldiers would cut off the feet of some women in order to take them home as a souvenir. Though, such a macabre account is too extraordinary to be believed without concrete evidence.

Another account tells of a Japanese officer by the name of Aoki (perhaps referring to Colonel Aoki) who would sever breasts from women and cook those breasts in his rice congee, which he would proceed to eat. There is, however, no way to verify this account, and shall therefore be treated as an urban legend.



It is hard to imagine a woman in an exceedingly conservative society would agree to be eternalised with bare breasts.

It is speculated that the photographer coerced her to take this photograph.

The horrors don't end here. There are two striking anecdotes described in the Gengxin Chronicle. In the first, a family's home was occupied by European invaders. They raped women there day and night. After they left, numerous volumes of pornography were strewn about on the floor. Chai E also reports that foreign soldiers are extraordinarily lustful. In their skirmishes against the Boxers, they had captured a number of young women of remarkable beauty. Three foreign soldiers waited until they returned to their camp before questioning these women. They found out the women had been abducted by the Boxers for the same reasons they were captured here now. Indeed, the foreign soldiers did attempt to rape them, but the women resisted with everything they had, until their clothes were torn to shreds. The soldiers asked them: "You have been ruined by the bandits already, so how can you even consider your own chastity?" The women replied in the same voice: "Even though Boxers are ruffians, they are still Chinese. You are devils, how dare you violate women from the noble lands?" The enraged soldiers beat the women to death and disposed of their bodies on the streets (Chai 317-318).

Indeed, it appeared common practise for the invading soldiers to capture women, regardless of class or creed, to rape them. This was done by forcing them to work

as sex slaves in rape-manors they had established in the Beijing hutongs (alleys formed by siheyuan residences). This excerpt from the “Miscellaneous Notes about the Boxers,” written by Japanese journalist Sawara Tokusuke, describes one such rape-manor:

“The Allied forces would frequently capture women, no matter virtuous, wretched, old or young, and would, as much as they could, displace them to Biaobei alleys and to live in row houses there as prostitutes for the soldiery. The West end of this alley the path would have been blocked off, in order to prevent escape, the East end was the only way in or out. This way was guarded. Any person from the Allied forces could enter for pleasure and rape to his heart’s desire.” (Sawara 268)

Sawara also reports on the seven daughters of Yulu 裕禄, the Viceroy of the province of Zhili (present day Hebei). Yulu was on good terms with the invaders. He was a man who always sought to create good impressions, and due to this, the British Consul at Tianjin offered him asylum on board of one of Her Majesty’s ships for his loyalty to the British (Fleming 84). Later in the war Yulu perished in the battle for Yangcun. When Beijing fell, the Allies abducted all seven of his daughters and then sent them to the Heavenly Palace in Beijing where they were violated repeatedly. Then they were held captive as sex slaves for the soldiers in one of the rape-manors mentioned above (Sawara 268). His efforts to please the British ultimately exploded in his face which his daughters paid the price for; **no good deed goes unpunished.**

Another story relays the fate that befell the women of Chongqi’s household. Chongqi 崇绮 was a nobleman from the Mongolian Alute clan and scholar of high standing in the Imperial Manchu court. He was also the father-in-law of the previous Emperor. His wife and one of his daughters, much like Yulu’s daughters, were captured by the invading soldiers. They were taken to the Heavenly Temple, held captive and were then brutally raped by dozens of Eight Nations Alliance soldiers during the entire course of the Beijing occupation. Only after the Eight Nations Alliance’s retreat did the mother and daughter return home, only to hang themselves from the rafters. Upon this discovery, Chongqi, out of despair, soon followed suit (Sawara 266). He hanged himself on August 26st, 1900. His son, Baochu, and many other family members committed suicide shortly after (Fang 75).



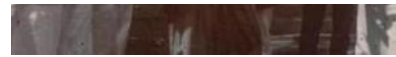
A group of Western soldiers posing with prostitutes.

Deploying Death Squads in “Punitive Expeditions”

Then there were the Punitive Expedition. These death squads were routinely sent into the Chinese countryside. The main perpetrators of these atrocities were the German and Italian forces, who were relatively new to the game of Imperialism in China as compared to France, Britain and the United States. It would seem that the two nations had something to prove. Count Alfred von Waldersee reportedly worked with “feverish activity” by ordering 75 punitive expeditions, ergo: death squads, into the countryside (Mombauer 109).

These death squads murdered thousands of innocents, as “it is safe to say that where one real Boxer has been killed since the capture of Peking [Beijing], fifty harmless coolies or laborers on the farms, including not a few women and children, have been slain” (Lynch). Mombauer also confirms this as she writes that in these expedition “countless Chinese, including many women and children, met their deaths” (Mombauer 109). It appears Alfred von Waldersee was ahead of his time, as his countrymen some 40 years later would send their *Einsatzgruppen* into the Polish countryside with “feverish activity” as well.





A Boxer facing death.

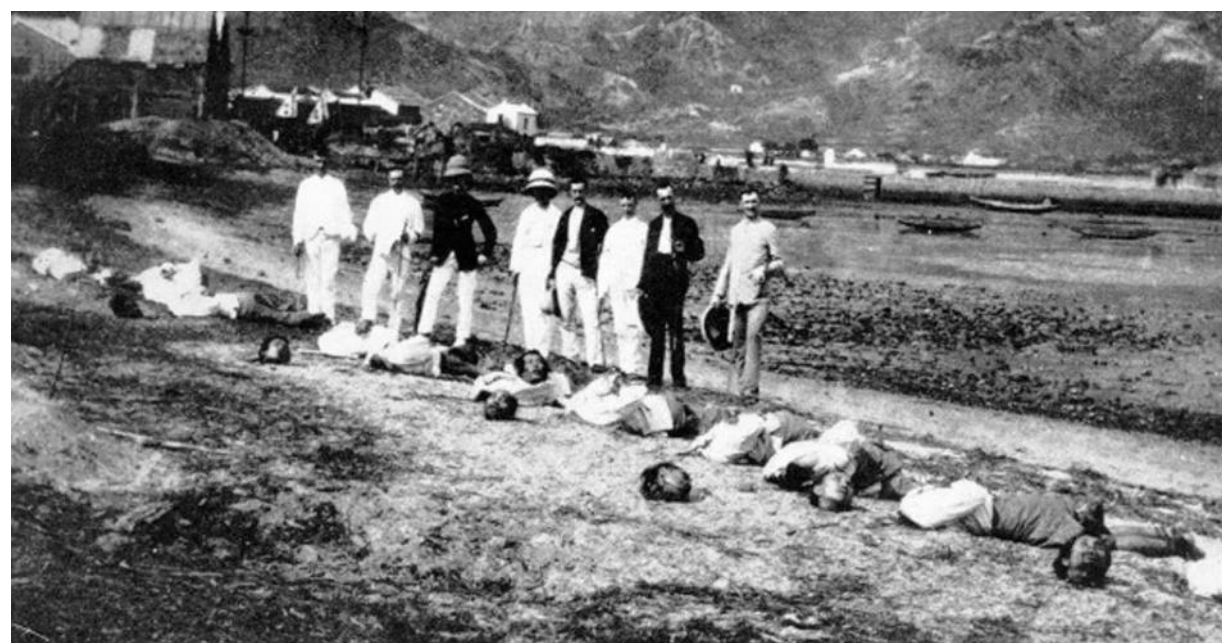


A soldier led by the queue, a common way to transport captives.

The German way of ensuring that no potential Boxer escaped their grasp was to kill every living Chinese they could see. Entire villages were shot, put to the torch and massacred, even villages who were cooperative with the Germans were brutalised by the German soldiery. The German method can be likened to a crazed inmate who attempts to appear impressive by beating everyone in his vicinity to prove he is the strongest, and to be feared. The French way was different, but not much better. They enforced their will by offering the villages they visited an ultimatum, either they would comply to every demand, or the entire village would be put to the sword, the choice, as it were, was given to the villagers. The more calculated French approach, which is the equivalent of a schoolyard bully who will threaten to beat you to a pulp if he doesn't get your lunch money, was reportedly more effective in getting the villagers to comply as opposed to the German approach.

Should you encounter the enemy, he will be defeated!
No quarter will be given! Prisoners will not be taken!
Whoever falls into your hands is forfeited. Just as a
thousand years ago the Huns under their
King Attila made a name for themselves, one that even
today makes them seem mighty in history and legend,
may the name German be affirmed by you in such a
way in China that no Chinese will ever again dare to
look cross-eyed at a German.

Kaiser Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany, an excerpt from the "Hun Speech" on July 2nd, 1900



German postcards and various Chinese websites claim this was an image taken of executed Boxers.
(More reliable sources claim that this was the highly publicised execution of Namoa pirates by British authorities on
May 11th, 1891, in Kowloon City)

5. The Weakness of China

The invading forces of the West were small armies by any measure. So, how was it possible that this hastily assembled and badly co-operating invasion force, which did not even have its *Generalfeldmarschall* (Field Marshall) with it during most of the fighting, was able to breach China's defenses and take the capital city, the impregnable Dagu forts and Manchuria, the *heimat* (homeland) of the ruling class of Manchus, so easily?

A Nation Divided

Firstly, part of the reason was the decentralised nature of the Chinese forces by this point of the Qing Dynasty. Due to the many rebellions and revolts since the Taiping Rebellion of the 1850's the Manchu court had given many generals and governors permission to raise their own armies in order to quell these revolts. This policy had allowed the dying Qing Dynasty to continue existing for half a century longer, but it was a double edged sword. This was the rise of regionalism in the Late Qing Dynasty. The decentralised forces meant in reality that the governal-generals who commanded large and formidable armies, each in their own corner of China, enjoyed immense autonomy. So much autonomy that, when Empress Dowager Cixi declared war on the 11 of the most powerful nations at the time, half of China refused to heed the call of duty and signed an agreement with the Western nations instead.

坐擁東南，死不奉詔

I will sit securely in the Southeast and die before I heed
the summons.

Zhang Zhidong

The agreement was called the “Mutual Protection of South East China.” This agreement, signed by Li Hongzhang (governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi), Liu Kunyi (governor-general of Jiangsu, Anhui and Jiangxi), Xu Yingkui (governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang), and Zhang Zhidong (governor-general of Hunan and Hubei) ensured that their provinces would not be invaded regardless of what happened in the North. This agreement and the refusal to obey a direct Imperial decree were nothing short of high treason. Yet, the Imperial Court was in no position to do anything about it. This is the reason why the majority of China (South and East China have the highest population concentrations in all of China) did not participate in the war.

Sick Men of Asia

Drugs, gambling, prostitution have long since weakened the fighting spirit of the Chinese. It clouded their judgement and melted their courage. Their pursuit of hedonism and pleasure led to cowardice. Indeed, even in the Second Opium War, the English, when they took the fortifications in Guangzhou, noticed the soldiers were too stoned to fight. The Manchu court was acutely aware of the lure of pleasure. They had forbidden their bannermen from attending theatre and opera performances, from visiting brothels, from gambling, from all manners of pleasure they had gotten used to. It was to no avail, even though the Empire had collectively pardoned the entire Manchu caste for a number of times for their debts incurred when gambling, living excessively or otherwise. Indeed, it was widely

known that the Manchus often snuck out of their Tatar cities to take part in the vices offered to them by the Chinese. The addiction to hedonism had thoroughly corrupted most virtuous qualities of the Manchus as a collective. As such, the effectiveness of the Manchu Banners was a far cry from the time they fought in Kangxi's campaigns and a further cry from the time of their conquest of China. Indeed, the Manchu armies had become nigh useless. Even attempts to strengthen the Manchu fighting forces were in the end for naught. The Hushenyong (Tiger Spirit Battalion), a unit of 10,000 Manchu bannermen with modernised weaponry and the Shenjiying (Beijing Field Force), a mostly Manchu army, also modernised, were decimated in the Battle of Beijing.

This, for me at least, has made abundantly clear that alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution and gambling are absolutely not harmless forms of entertainment. They lead to the destruction of your body and soul and they lead to the death and defiling of your closest family members. Abstain from these vices if you know what's good for you!

Lackluster Commitment

It appears the governor-generals of these Southeastern provinces were of the opinion that the war was lost before it began. They decided to preserve their own regional strength for the future. Their lack of faith in their own military capabilities caused them to opt for self-preservation instead of resistance. Perhaps they did not realise that if the Imperialists did away with the Beijing court, they would be next. And indeed, perhaps the south of China realised this in 1937, when the Empire of Japan launched its full offensive into all of China, not just the North.

There is no need to heed the Imperial decree from
Beijing.

Ronglu, Supreme Commander of the Wuwei Corps

Among those who did obey the Imperial decree to fight, the commander of the Wuwei corps, Ronglu (a.k.a. Yung-lu), was actually opposed to fighting the Western invasion. He thought that battling 11 of the most powerful nations while having lost against Japan five years prior to 1900 was a fool's errand. Indeed, it was recorded that he once uttered the phrase "There is no need to heed the Imperial decree from Beijing." So, he fought the entire war with diplomatic damage control in mind. During the siege of the legations he prevented Dong Fuxiang from acquiring artillery to destroy the legations. He never directly committed his Wuwei Corps in full strength against the foreign armies. Nie Shicheng, commanding one of the wings of the Wuwei Corps was even fighting and killing many of the Boxers before the Western forces attacked Dagu. Yuan

Shikai, the man who commanded the most well-trained and well-equipped wing of the Wuwei Corps at the time, decided to preserve his strength by not participating in direct combat against the invasion forces. His army remained at full-strength after the Boxer War. Among the Wuwei Corps, the only commanders who fought the Imperialist forces seriously were Dong Fuxiang and Nie Shicheng.

One should always have a realistic view of enemy capabilities. It is bad to underestimate the enemy, but it is equally as bad to overestimate the enemy. The Chinese troops were demoralised before the fighting even began. When the storming column of the invading navies stormed Fort No. 4, the defenders fled instead of resisting. When the Allied soldiers entered Tianjin, it is rumoured that the Imperial forces abandoned the Boxers to their fate. The Western Forces were few in number, the soldiers hastily assembled, the supply lines long and expensive. They would never have been able to justify a greater invasion force and a longer, prolonged campaign in China. A war of attrition by committing the full capabilities of the Boxers and the Imperial armies would have been impossible for the invasion forces to resist. It appears that very few of the commanders of the Imperial or regional armies believed they stood even a sliver of chance against the invasion forces. As such, their overestimation of the enemy forces prevented them from considering victory at all, leading to lackluster commitment.

*Remember:
No matter how strong they seem,
they are not gods;
even if they were,
gods can bleed as well.*

Concluding Word

Firstly, I apologise for the long time it took me to write this article. There was much research to be done and in the initial phase I fell into a minor state of depression after doing the research. I was demoralised and questioned even the purpose of writing these articles if all they bring to light is pain and a severe loss of faith in the goodness of humanity. But then, I do stand by my original point of departure for writing these, and that is to make sure that none of this is ever forgotten. To this end, I have once again picked up my pen. With that out of the way; my concluding words.

The West invaded China under the pretense of political and moral justice. They wanted to avenge the murder of Christians and western expatriates by punishing the perpetrators. However, their moral highground fell into a thousand pieces as their hypocrisy was revealed. How is it possible for the morally superior and civilised Western armies to commit crimes more heinous than the ones they were avenging? How can indiscriminate murder of innocents possibly be seen as justice for the ones they were trying to avenge? To this day it baffles the mind how deeply

hypocrisy runs.

No, this is no crusade, no holy war; it is a very ordinary war of conquest . . . A campaign of revenge as barbaric as has never been seen in the last centuries, and not often at all in history; . . . not even with the Huns, not even with the Vandals . . . That is no match for what the German and other troops of the foreign powers, together with the Japanese troops, have done in China.

August Bebel in the Reichstag, 19 November 1900, cited in Roland Felber and Horst Rostek, *Der 'Hunnenkrieg' Kaiser Wilhelms II. Imperialistische Intervention in China, 1900/01* (illustrierte historische hefte), East Berlin 1987, p. 43.

As for the goals that the Eight Nations Alliance set out to achieve with this war? They succeeded in their primary objective, which was to relieve the Foreign Legations in Beijing. They also succeeded in “punishing” the Chinese population by creating a nightmarish hell for the Chinese unfortunate enough to be on the receiving end of their cruelties. As for their strategic goals, however, to perhaps put a ruler on the throne sympathetic to Western influence or to eliminate China’s most effective fighting forces at the time were not succesful. The Empress Dowager had escaped unscathed and a good portion of China’s modern armies were kept away from the fighting, leaving them at full strength.

On the Chinese side, it is also remarkable that the Emperor and the Capital were threatened and subsequently invaded while the rest of China just looked on and ate all the pies instead of rushing to the aid of their land and liege. Much like in the [Sino-French War](#), the same message about unity can be shared here. If even the surrounding provinces of Shandong (Shantung), Henan (Honan) and Shanxi (Shansi) sent their armies to the aid of Zhili (Chihli), then the invading forces would have never been able to invade China with such ease and so few men. Never mind the odds of a succesful Western invasion if all of China rushed to Zhili and Beijing.



"Barbarie — Civilisation"

"It's all a matter of perspective. When a Chinese coolie strikes a French soldier the result is a public cry of 'Barbarity!' But when a French soldier strikes a coolie, it's a necessary blow for civilization."

Le Cri de Paris, July 10, 1899

Artist: René Georges Hermann-Paul

So, I would have to echo Card's exhortation. The best defense is prevention, and one of the ways to prevent the victimisation of women, is to reject the idea that women are perpetual victims and therefore easy targets. The idea that women should not be trained in martial arts and in the use of weapons should be rejected. That actually doesn't just go for women. In fact, if you wish to deter an attacker, one must gain the reputation of being indomitable. Asians were seen as cowards, in fact "yellow bastard" still refers to cowards. Asian men are seen as meek and cowardly. Asian women as subservient and docile. These are the reasons why we are still being targeted by other groups for theft and robbery. This is why world media can insult us daily with impunity. This is why it seems like it's just another tuesday when a man of European descent kills Asians. Irrational humans truly behave like animals. Humility, passivity and agreeability only communicate weakness, which incurs aggression. Dignity, assertiveness and perseverance communicate strength, which deters aggression.

Lastly, for your own sake, and the sake of our people: stop doing drugs, stop

seeing prostitutes, stop gambling and stop drinking alcohol.

*Remember, but bear no hatred,
for hate is a bottomless cup, I will pour and pour.*

Learn from this history lesson. Be strong.

Read about the various heroes, Imperial, Yihetuan or otherwise, in the next part of our three part article. Stay tuned.




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10 thoughts on "War in China: the Ravishment of the North (2/3)"

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Daniel

10 Nov 2021 at 19:59



You are making massive errors in this post

the majority of northern China was NOT affected by the foreigners. Only the Hebei province (Beijing and Tianjin) and Manchuria were. The rest of northern China including Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu, Henan and Shandong were NOT occupied by the Eight Nation Alliance. The “Southeast pact” by the governor generals staying out of the war included Shandong which was governed by northern General Yuan Shikai.

“Mutual Protection of Southeast China” was just a name, it included the north as well, and even northern provinces like Shanxi, Shaangxi, Henan and Gansu whose governors didn’t sign the pact were not invaded. Only Manchuria and Zhili (Hebei),, the Beijing Tianjin area were ocupied.



The majority of Beijing was also inhabited by Bannermen, Manchu Bannermen and Mongol bannermen. That's the reason why the inner city of Beijing was called the "tartar city". Over 50% of the Manchu banner population of the Qing dynasty was stationed in Beijing and surrounding areas of Zhili (Hebei) and Manchus

disproportionally suffered from the rapes and massacres.

Also the southeastern mutual protection governors like Yuan shikai and Zhang Zhidong and Li Hongzhang warned the alliance that they would go to war against the foreigners if the alliance invaded any part of China beyond Zhili. None of them cared about Manchu bannermen enough to plunge the whole country into war.

★ Like

[Reply](#)

[Afakv](#)

11 Nov 2021 at 09:06



Excellent! I've been waiting for comments like this one to come along.

I didn't mean to imply that all of Northern China was occupied. Perhaps my wording should have been more careful. Certainly I am aware that provinces around Zhili remained by and large relatively unaffected.

★ Like

[Reply](#)

Daniel

10 Nov 2021 at 20:04



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutual_Defense_Pact_of_the_Southeastern_Provinces

The Eight Nation Alliance did not have the military capability, money, funds, time or soldiers to occupy the rest of northern China beyond Zhili (Hebei province). That's the reason why the Empress Dowager Cixi fled to Xi'an in Shaanxi (another part of northern China) and not to the south. The Eight Nation Alliance realized they would not be able to pursue Cixi beyond Zhili.

Westerners like to boast about how they "occupied" "all of China" in the Boxer rebellion. They never made it beyond Zhili. Stop giving them credit for doing things they were incapable of doing (conquering all of northern China). They never occupied the majority of northern China which was out of their range. And neither did Japan in World War II. Japan never occupied Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, western Henan (all in northern China) and never occupied Sichuan, Yunnan,

Guizhou , western Hunan and western Guangxi (all in southwestern China). They only occupied the eastern coastal seaboard regions.

★ Like

[Reply](#)

Afakv

4 Jan 2022 at 10:38



I reread your comment and I find it slightly unjust how you claim that I claim they occupied all of the North.

In my conclusion I state: "If even the surrounding provinces of Shandong (Shantung), Henan (Honan) and Shanxi (Shansi) sent their armies to the aid of Zhili (Chihli), then the invading forces would have never been able to invade China with such ease and so few men."

The implication is clear, the rest of the North wasn't even involved in the war.

★ Like

[Reply](#)

John Gao Dong

12 Jun 2023 at 20:54



Hello sir, thanks so much for the excellent article! I was just wondering if you had any more information or materials on the use of poison gas weapons by the Allied Forces.

★ Like

[Reply](#)

Afakv

27 Jul 2023 at 08:31



Hello sir!

Thank you for the high praise! I am actually not quite aware of what kind of gas they have used. Maybe they were similar to the ones used in WWI given the time period, but this is pure conjecture on my part.

★ Like

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Afakv's Memories

Never Forgotten

War in China: a Symphony of Resistance (3/3)

Painting by Xu Yong, 1958



Both [part 1](#) and [part 2](#) of this article focused on the pain, the suffering and the wrongs that were done to the inhabitants of Qing China. This part will retrace the events already discussed in the previous parts from the perspective of the many actors involved in the conflict. One should never forget the many heroes and heroines who rose against all odds, stood face to face with the devil and chose to stare it down in dastardly defiance. These are the stories of those who chose to become hope, even though there was no hope to be found.

Like the previous part, this one is also longer than usual. In order to aid in navigation there will be a clickable contents menu on the right. Each of the historical figures covered in this article can be read separately, as this part doesn't necessarily form a coherent unit from start to finish. Unit 6 should be read in its entirety for a more complete picture of the Yihequan movement. Feel free to read this part out of order, or pick out the stories that appeal to you, the reader. I shan't hold you any longer: read!

[6. Yihequan Boxers: the Divine Fist](#)

[6.1 Boxer Leadership](#)

[6.1.1 Master of Martial Arts](#)

[6.1.2 The Travelling Healer](#)

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[7.1 Sleeping with the Enemy](#)

[7.2 The Red Beards](#)

[8. Paladins of the Military](#)

[8.1 Singing of a Daring Song](#)

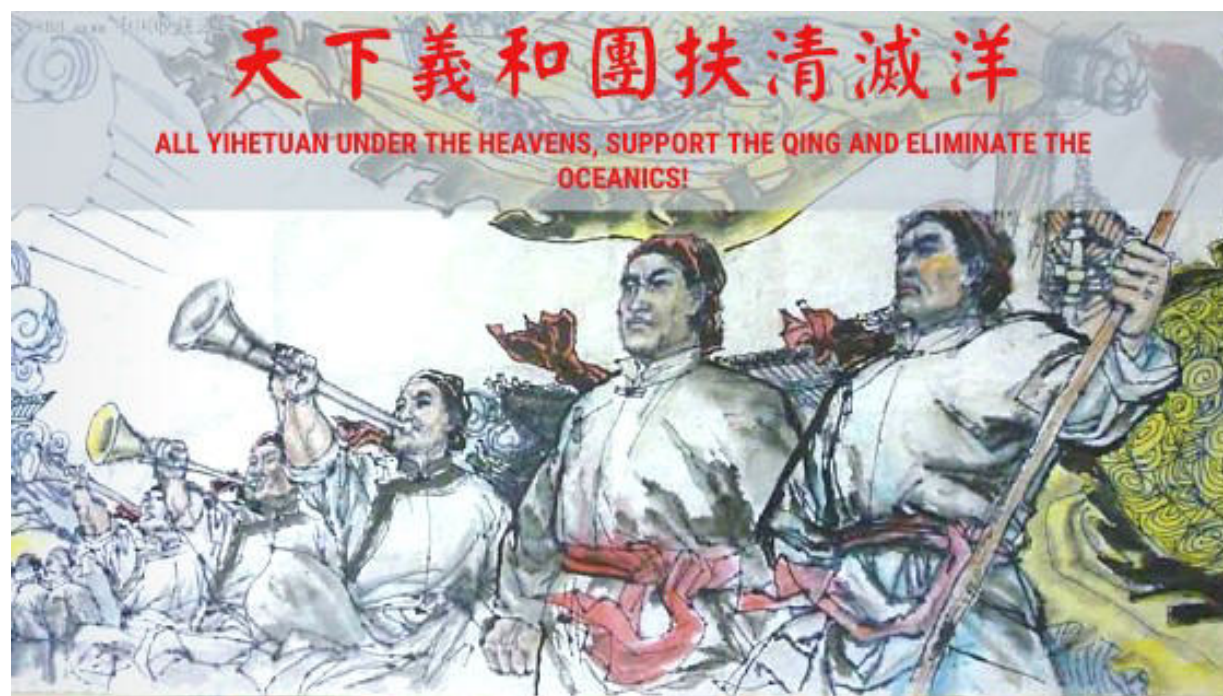
[8.2 The Last Arrows](#)

[8.2.1 Defenders of the Northeast](#)

[8.2.2 Guardians of Beijing](#)

[8.3 Brave Ten-thousand](#)

[Concluding Word](#)



Painting by master figure painter Yao Xiangfa 姚祥发 (1947-present)

6. Yihequan Boxers: the Divine Fist

義和團，起山東，不到仨月偏地紅

The Militia United in Righteousness, risen from Shandong, before three months, everywhere the revolution.

A popular saying during the Boxer War, as quoted in Sun Qihai, *Baguo Lianjun Qin Hua Jishi*, (Beijing: Huawen Chubanshe, 1996): 38

The Yihequan movement went by many names. The Imperialist invaders called them the Boxers. The Imperial Court called them Quanfei 拳匪 (Boxer Bandits) and later dubbed them the Yihetuan, the Righteous Harmonious Militia. Under the common people they were known as the Divine Fist (Shenquan 神拳).

男学议和女红灯，
杀尽洋人海宇澄，
待到刀枪无用日，
试看霞蔚并云蒸。

一片苦海望无津，
小神忙乱走风尘，
八千十万神兵起，
扫灭洋人世界新。

Men should study Righteous Harmony, women Red Lantern; Killing all the Oceanics will calm the seas and the skies; When the day comes that swords and spears are of no use; Try to watch the beauty of rosy clouds and rising steam.

A sea of suffering with no ford in sight;
The lesser gods haste and hurry in the dust;
Eighthundred million divine soldiers will rise;
To purge Oceanics and renew the world.

Now, the Yihequan movement didn't start at the turn of the 20th century. Actually, the name Yihequan existed even as far back as during the Wang Lun Rebellion of 1774 and the Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813, as both these groups identified themselves as Yihequan (Esherick 42). Later, the movement expanded rapidly when the Western missionaries and their Chinese converts continued to

provoke Chinese society. The Christians, mainly the Catholic Missionaries, would interfere frequently in China's domestic politics and justice, much to the dismay of the disadvantaged (Esherick 84). Indeed, as Esherick puts it "trade and Christianity formed the inextricably linked engines of Western empire-building" (Esherick 74).

[Click here for more information on the specific trespasses of the missionaries.](#)

Ultimately, the tensions reached a boiling point. The fact that the peasant class of the inland plains of Shandong and Zhili were extremely impoverished meant that the extreme flooding of the Yellow River was a devastating blow to the livelihoods of these people. The exact origins of the Yihequan uprising is therefore a complicated subject, as many factors played into the desperation of the people. While Imperialist expansion was one of the greater causes, it cannot be denied that the failed Imperial project of the Manchus was also an immense contributing factor leading to the misery of the common man.



A young Yihequan warrior carrying a spear with a traditional red tassel. On his forehead is a talisman with the character "qian" 乾. It was believed that this would grant them invulnerability to bullets.

The Yihequan movement, while it acted for the right reason, sometimes went about it the wrong way. Aside from their heroic actions against the devilish invaders, they also murdered and robbed many of their fellow Chinese. The origins of the Yihequan had always been one of famished and impoverished peasant-turned-bandits. Their belief in the idols of their polytheistic pantheon (which included mythical warriors, characters from popular novels and gods from folk religion) and their magical invulnerability to bullets showed that they were highly fanatical and superstitious. It is not for naught that the Qing government decided to suppress them, as their fanaticism and criminality threatened anyone who disagreed with them and could easily be turned against other Chinese and the Manchu government.

Yet, for all their flaws they were one of the few forces who actually defied foreign aggression and stood against foreign invasion. One should also not forget that most of the Yihequan warriors were **teenagers**, ranging from 12 to 20 (Esherick 277). These young boys and girls, leaving behind everything they knew, would carry their swords and spears against machineguns, poison gas, artillery and repeating rifles manned by well trained soldiers of the most technologically advanced nations of the world. For that, they deserve praise and admiration.

To prevent misunderstanding, it should be noted that there were several bands of Yihequan who went by the same name, but otherwise differed in ritual, practise and character (e.g. some Yihequan units did not believe in invulnerability at all). There was no one organisation that governed all the Yihequan cells.

Boxer Leadership

Master of Martial Arts

In town called Liyantun (梨園屯) Italian missionaries were endeavouring to demolish an old Temple to the Jade-Emperor and an adjacent school for charity in order to build their church there. They faced heavy resistance from the locals. The local magistrate had sided with the locals initially. However, the missionaries, using diplomatic pressure in Beijing, had overturned the local ruling on the matter so that the site was handed over to the Christians. Some influential locals had vigorously protested the ruling of the officials, and were imprisoned six months for impertinence, others were stripped off their state issued degrees (Esherick 147).



Zhao Sanduo memorial statue in Wei County, his birthplace and place of death.

These grievances outraged the local youth. As soon as the Christians began construction, the church came under attack by the Eighteen Chiefs (Shiba Kui 十八魁). The Christians and the rest of the village came in a deadlock which lasted for years during which neither side gained a distinct advantage over the other. The Eighteen Chiefs knew they could not fight the Christian alone forever. Knowing this, they looked for allies. They sought out a martial arts teacher who lived five kilometers away in the next village over. His name was Zhao Sanduo 趙三多 (1841-1902). Zhao Sanduo was a master of the Plum Flower Fist (Meihuaquan 梅花拳). He was widely known for his sense of innate righteousness and justice. As a man of some social standing, he would frequently use his influence to right wrongs.

Zhao Sanduo became involved in the fight of the Eighteen Chiefs. In the spring of 1897 he organised a martial arts exhibition right in Liyantun as a show of force for the Eighteen Chiefs. On April 27, a large and fuming band of men numbering 500 or 2,000 rushed in and attacked the Christians as they were once again preparing to build the church. The Christians struck back, but the hammer of "justice" could not be halted so easily. The Christian homes were looted, the Christian attackers wounded and all Christian families were forced to flee their

homes.

They could not enjoy their victory for long, as developments elsewhere in China caused Christians to gain privileges all across the province. Moreover, the Imperials wanted to avoid trouble with the foreign powers at all costs, leaving Zhao Sanduo and company in the dust. Yao Wenqi, at this time, had joined Zhao Sanduo. Wenqi brought a radical spark to their struggle and the first seeds of revolt took root. Zhao Sanduo, initially reluctant, but ultimately forced by circumstance and his character to do what was right, soon walked the path of rebellion. The elders and masters of the Plum Blossom martial sect could not agree with this kind of “troublemaking” and did not allow him to use the name of Plum Blossom Fist. So, Zhao changed the name to something else: the anti-Christian movement would henceforth be known as the **Yihequan** 義和拳, fists united in righteousness (Esherick 153-54).



Young warriors of the Yihequan movement. This picture is quite representative of the social composition of the Yihequan. Most of them were teenagers, the town of Chiping even had a “Baby Brigade” (娃武隊 wawudui). In this image they carry single edged sabres known in Chinese as *dao* 刀 and a large polearm which is called a big sabre, known as a *dadao* 大刀. It is a weapon similar to the European glaive and the Japanese naginata.

Unbound by the traditional master-disciple relations, the Yihequan was far more volatile than the Plum Blossom Fist ever could be. The Yihequan was a heterogeneous group, this meant that Zhao Sanduo, while powerful, did not wield enough influence to control the group. Similarly, if he died, it would not have meant the end of the Yihequan.

The Shandong officials in an attempt to weaken the Yihequan, arrested a few of the Eighteen Chiefs. This angered the Yihequan, and caused a string of violent attacks in 1898. Christians and churches were usually the targets of violence. Zhao Sanduo was involved in these attacks. It was rumoured that the Yihequan were planning to rescue the arrested members of the Eighteen Chiefs from jail. The Yihequan gathered horses and for the first time raised banners with the famous slogan “support the Qing, destroy the foreign” (扶清滅洋 fu qing mie yang).

The Qing government, aware of the diplomatic ramifications this would have, sent militia leaders and local gentry to reason with the Zhao Sanduo and other prominent figures. The sincerity of their begging and their kowtowing in public moved the Yihequan. They agreed to disperse according to the wishes of the government. However, the dispersal was of no use at all. On the way back, some Yihequan fighters were verbally abused and harassed by Christians. They banded together immediately and began burning churches and killing Christians. The Qing government deployed the military and ended the Yihequan disturbances of 1898.

Zhao Sanduo did not participate in the large scale battles and direct confrontations with the Western invaders of 1900. He did emerge again in 1902. Zhao Sanduo got into a direct anti-government protest because the government failed to grant tax relief in Guangzong County during a year of extreme drought. The government arrested Zhao Sanduo. He was put in jail and starved to death. They beheaded him after his death and hung his head in Wei county, the place of his birth.

All information regarding Zhao Sanduo has been extracted from Joseph W. Esherick's "Boxers United in Righteousness" in *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*.

The Travelling Healer



Zhu Hongdeng was known for his red attire. He would wear a red cap and full red clothes to battle.

Zhu Hongdeng 朱紅燈 (?-1899) (lit. Red Lantern Zhu) gained fame as an itinerant healer who refused payment for treating the sick. He was born in a small village in Shandong. In 1898, the Yellow River flooded and forced many Shandong residents out from their homes; Zhu Hongdeng was one of those forced to move away. He went to live with his uncle, who happened to be a doctor. 1898 was merely a few years after the humiliating loss against Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War. Christian missionaries encroached upon Chinese lands and Chinese rights. Under this oppressive environment, Zhu Hongdeng began studying martial arts; the only way he knew to defend his faith and family. This was when he came in contact with the Yihequan, which outsiders called Dadaohui 大刀會 (the Big Sword Society). They claimed their practise would render one invulnerable to bullets (Esherick 96).

Soon, he began to establish martial arts training grounds. Using what he knew about medicine, which he had picked up from his uncle, he traversed the countryside as an itinerant healer. He used his healing as a cover what he really intended: to spread his anti-Christian philosophy. His hard work propagating his

ideas soon cast off its fruits, as the movement grew quicker than ever before. Soon, he became the “leader” of the movement in the area of Changqing. Do take leader with a grain of salt, as there was no real organisation to speak of. Zhu Hongdeng was widely recognised to have greater martial and magical abilities and was therefore able to rally a great number of Yihequan warriors to his cause whenever there was a conflict to be had with the Christians and foreigners (Esherick 234).

拿洋教，保江山

Seize the Oceanic faith; Save our Rivers and Mountains

It was this period, under the pressure of extreme poverty, that the Yihequan movement began to change. Indeed, “there were Spirit Boxers [here] before the flood, but they only studied [boxing] and established a boxing ground. After the flood they started acting up [nao-qi-lai-le]” (Esherick 223).

Zhu Hongdeng led his first attack on a Christian church in June 1898. The Yihequan movement grew. In the area of Changqing, the local landlords banded together to expell this new, charismatic leader with his dangerous ideas. He was forced to take his followers and flee elsewhere. Huaping County would hence become his base of operations. The cause spread rapidly from Changqing to Huaping County, Sanshili Pu, Yaojiazhuang, Balizhuang, Mashawo and many more.

Subsequently, Hongdeng laid waste to the churches that were established in all of these places. The corruption brought by the missionaries reached far and wide, but luckily, it was not deep yet. The cleansing fire of righteousness purified the unclean temples to debauchery of the evil missionaries, who misused the name of the Christian faith to further their wordly agendas and fulfill their worldly desires.

In the summer of 1899 some local Yihequan fighters had requested help from Zhu Hongdeng for a small local dispute. This escalated the whole affair. His appearance alarmed the authorities, causing the government to dispatch troops from Jinan to fight Zhu Hongdeng’s force. This marked the first major battle between the Yihequan and the government. After the battle, Zhu Hongdeng continued to raid Christian homes and churches.

On the 24th of December 1899, Hongdeng was captured by the infamous Manchu official Yuxian, later dubbed the Butcher of Shanxi. Hongdeng was beheaded in Licheng. Yuxian’s strategy of suppressing the Yihequan movement by executing the leaders without persecuting the followers failed due to the heterodoxy of the Yihequan movement. After the death of Hongdeng, the Yihequan members, now

officially the Yihetuan 義和團 (Militia United in Righteousness or Righteous Harmonious Militia) movement, simply selected new leaders.



A flag of the Yihetuan
"Righteous Harmonious Militia"

Lord of the Altar

By the time the Yihequan entered the great cities of Zhili Province, Tianjin and Beijing, a "tan" or altar would denote a cell of the Yihequan. The hierarchy of the Yihequan was not very complex. There would be a Lord of the Altar (壇主 tanzhu), under him would be the Elder Brother-Disciple (大師兄 da shixiong) and the Second Brother-Disciple (二師兄 er shixiong). The Yihequan resistance fighters would refer to each other as Brother-Disciples. The organisation was light on the top down hierarchy and relatively egalitarian because of the lack of master-disciple relations.

The power of the Yihequan could be maintained by keeping a set of strict rules. This purity was a pre-requisite among the Yihequan fighters:

1. Do not covet wealth
2. Do not lust after women
3. Do not disobey your parents
4. Do not violate Imperial laws
5. Eradicate the foreigners
6. Kill corrupt officials
7. When you walk on the streets, keep your head lowered, looking neither left nor right.
8. When you meet a fellow member, greet him with hands clasped together.
(Esherick 295)

Zhang Decheng 张德成 (?-1900) was born in a city called Gaobeidian to a canal boatman's family. He followed in his father's footsteps and became a boatman as



洋鬼子吸盡了我們的血，侵吞了我們的田地，竊取了我們的金銀財寶，把魔爪伸進膠州、旅順口和海參崴。現在，大報應的時候到了！

A DEPICTION OF
ZHANG CHENGDE

A depiction of Zhang Decheng. Note that the boxers are not wearing all red in this image. This is accurate. While Zhu Hongdeng and the Red Lanterns might have famously worn red, other units of Yihetuan did not necessarily wear red.

well. When Zhao Sanduo stirred up the fires of rebellion, Zhang Decheng joined and created the *Best/First Brigade Under Heaven* (天下第一團). This regiment consisted of 5000 warriors, and were the most powerful and influential unit of the Yihetuan movement. Zhang Decheng and Cao Futian 曹福田 were prominent figures in the resistance against the invasion. They were most renowned for the battle of Zizhulin and the battle for the Laolongtou railway station in Tianjin. Zhang

Decheng died in an ambush in August; his corpse was tossed in a river.

The first major battle that Zhang Decheng was involved in was the battle of Zizhulin 紫竹林 (Purple Bamboo Forest). This battle took place on the 17th of June 1900 at the foreign concession area of Tianjin, when Nie Shicheng, along with his well trained Wuyi Jun 武毅軍 (Tenacious Army) and a portion of Song Qing's Yi Jun 毅軍 (Resolute Army) discovered the Wubeitang 武備堂 (the Chinese military academy that housed 200 cadets, mentioned in part 2) was destroyed, its students murdered and burnt to cinders. The fury of the Qing soldiery could not be quelled. The Qing military, now working together with the Yihetuan, laid siege to the concessions. The first assault took place on the morning of the 18th. Before the battle 500 torch-bearing warriors gathered under Zhang Decheng. They wore red turbans, protective talismans on their chests and billowing blue pantaloons with big curved swords hanging from their waists. Here they offered their respects to the gods and spirits they would invoke during battle. Zhang Chengde held a speech:

[...] The foreign devils have sucked our blood dry, devoured our fertile fields, stolen our valuable treasures. They have extended their demon claws into Jiaozhou, Lüshunkou and Haishenwei. Now, the time for great retribution has come! [...]

An excerpt of Zhang Decheng's speech as quoted in Sun Qihai, *Baguo Lianjun Qin Hua Jishi* (Beijing: Huawen Chubanshe, 1996): 124

The 500 men stormed onto the fields before the concession perimeters. The signal was given for the 500 to march toward the barricades. Akin to the Napoleonic times, these "red coats" marched 50 to 60 men abreast. They believed their charm, incantations and talismans would make them invulnerable to bullets. As they approached the barricades, the first thundering shots were fired... and the first warriors began to fall. The volleys fired from the barricades felled more and more warriors, and the men began to drop, left and right. Yet, the courage of the warriors never faltered. The old grandmaster (only referred to as such) led the warriors from the front. Fifty meters from the barricades, he took off his clothes, revealing his muscled torso, scarred, rippling, formed like rugged rock by decades of martial arts practise. The remaining 400 or so warriors followed his example and bared their chests. The warriors charged.

A bullet struck the old grandmaster. He swayed and raised his sword high in the sky, and collapsed onto the dirt. And like him, many others were felled by the bulletstorm. The bodies began to pile up in front of the barricades. So many fell until, of the brave five hundred, mere dozens remained. They retreated. The fire and the torches they had carried onto the battlefield slowly dimmed... then went out. The Yihetuan had been soundly defeated in this first battle. Superstition is no substitution for superior firepower.

替天行道

Carry out the Way on behalf of Heaven

The Saintly Mother

Lin Heier 林黑兒 (1871-1900?) was the leader of the Red Lanterns (Hongdengzhao 紅燈罩/紅燈照) during the Yihetuan uprising. Lin Heier's origin story is steeped in mystery. There are many accounts, both oral and textual, that claim one or the other. Most sources agree, however, that she was a prostitute and a street performer. The legends also never fail to convey her proficiency with witchcraft and medicine. As for her youth, the story usually relays that her father, Li You 李有, was a boatman who operated on the canals of Tianjin. Heier became a



good pugilist under Li You's tutelage. She was described as being conventionally beautiful. Also important to note, you'll see why later, is that she has been described as "sexually promiscuous since youth" (Lu). One time, Li You got into a dispute with Christians, and trespassed on a restraining order. He was arrested, and beaten to death in captivity. Her life was dramatically changed after the death of her father. With no source of income she was forced to work as a prostitute.

It was Christianity that killed her father and forced her into prostitution, and so, she was determined to destroy it. She joined the Yihequan movement.

先學義和拳，後學紅燈罩 殺了洋鬼子，滅了天主教

First study Yihequan, then study Hongdengzhao
Kill the foreign devils, destroy the Catholic faith

She approached Zhang Decheng with a proposal to enter into open armed resistance against the foreign invaders. Her proposal was accepted through display of her sorcery. It was believed there was power in sexual and moral purity, and that a woman's body had special powers. She became the leader of 3,000 girls, aged 12 to 18 who chose to live by the sword rather than to die by inaction. She led the Red Lanterns and was dubbed the Saintly Mother of the Yellow Lotus (Huanglian Shengmu 黃蓮聖母) (Spence 223).

Her Red Lanterns were a group of Boxers who played a great role in the defence of China and the resistance against foreign incursion. In combat, her Red Lanterns

functioned as vanguards and scouts. Her Red Lanterns were also dubbed Guizishou 刽子手 (Executioners), since they were usually the first to kill foreigners wherever they could find them. The other Yihequan warriors attributed many magical powers to the Red Lanterns. Their belief that normal women were filthy and polluting was perhaps countered by the Red Lanterns, who should then be pure and clean, and from that cleanliness and purity awakened great magical powers.

When Tianjin was lost, she was captured by the enemy. When they held her in jail they humiliated her, she never lost her composure and dignity.



Lin Heier as portrayed in the Peking Opera *Red Lantern*.

It is uncertain what ultimately became of her. Some say she was raped and killed, some say she was executed by the Qing government, others say she was tortured to death and that her corpse was treated with formalin by taxidermists to be paraded around Europe as a curiosity. What is certain is that she was a **true warrior**. Her steadfast strength and influence inspired many others, from her era and since, to follow in her footsteps and cast off the stifling coils of oppression by our own two hands.

Her simultaneous prostitute and saintly “virgin” status might seem baffling. However, according to Lu Yunting, the image of sexual promiscuity through prostitution and moral and sexual purity are not incompatible with each other in the realm of popular imagination. Indeed, to a certain degree Lin Heier was idolised and deified. In Confucian China, women often only had high influence and power in private spaces. Women who had high influence in public spaces were either witches/sorceresses, prostitutes or performers. All three of these identities were given to Lin Heier. Her duplicitous identities developed over time as different eras and different groupings saw fit to interpret her legend in different ways. I am acutely aware of my own historicity in writing this article. Nevertheless, there is one constant in every reading of her story: she is irrefutably a hero. In my pursuit to spread the story of this titan, that is all I need to know.

7. By Any Means Necessary

Sleeping with the Enemy

Sai Jinhua 賽金花 (1872-1936) was a heroine, who contrary to Lin Heier, did not attempt to save China by fighting on the battlefield by leading a band of deadly warriors as battlefield executioners. Instead, she attempted to save lives by seducing the enemy commander and urging him to take off the iron boots he was crushing the Chinese with. She is most famously known as Sai Jinhua, but had many aliases (in her childhood she was called Zhao Lingfei and Zhao Caiyun). Sai Jinhua was a courtesan on a floating brothel. Her beauty caught the sight of her first husband, Hong Jun. Hong Jun was a high ranking mandarin, and took her as his concubine. Later, Hong Jun was appointed diplomatic duties and travelled to Russia, Austria, the Netherlands and Germany. He was accompanied by Sai Jinhua during this three year long journey. It was allegedly during this journey that Sai Jinhua became acquainted with Alfred von Waldersee (Alfred von Waldersee's journals, unfortunately, do not once mention her name.)

Alfred von Waldersee, as mentioned in part 1 and 2, was appointed Field Marshall of the Eight Nation Alliance. He and his German forces, however, arrived late to the fighting. By the time they reached Beijing, the siege was over and no glory was to be had. He vented his frustrations at the Zhili countryside. In a bid to humiliate, undermine and pervert Chinese society, he launched as many as **75 punitive**



Graf Alfred von Waldersee in und um Peking während der Kriegswirren 1900-1901

expeditions. It was the Kaiser's wish to avenge the death of the envoy Von Ketteler, who was killed by Enhai.

Jinhua is sometimes portrayed as hero and other times as traitor, a controversial character. Her



Sai Jinhua

conduct during the Boxer Rebellion is oft disputed. According to her own



Sai Jinhua and third husband Wei Sijiong

autobiography, however, she denies having had any improper relations with the Generalfeldmarschall. She claims they were no more than good friends. Legend, however, has it that she became intimately acquainted with the Count in the bed of the Empress Dowager Cixi. She used her charms to plea for him to show mercy and refrain from being more brutal in his extermination campaigns. His punitive expeditions certainly caused many innocents to lose their lives. Perhaps Sai Jinhua managed to convince him to lay off even one expedition. A life saved is a life saved, and if Sai Jinhua was willing to sacrifice her name and pride for human lives, then she can be counted among the heroes of this era.

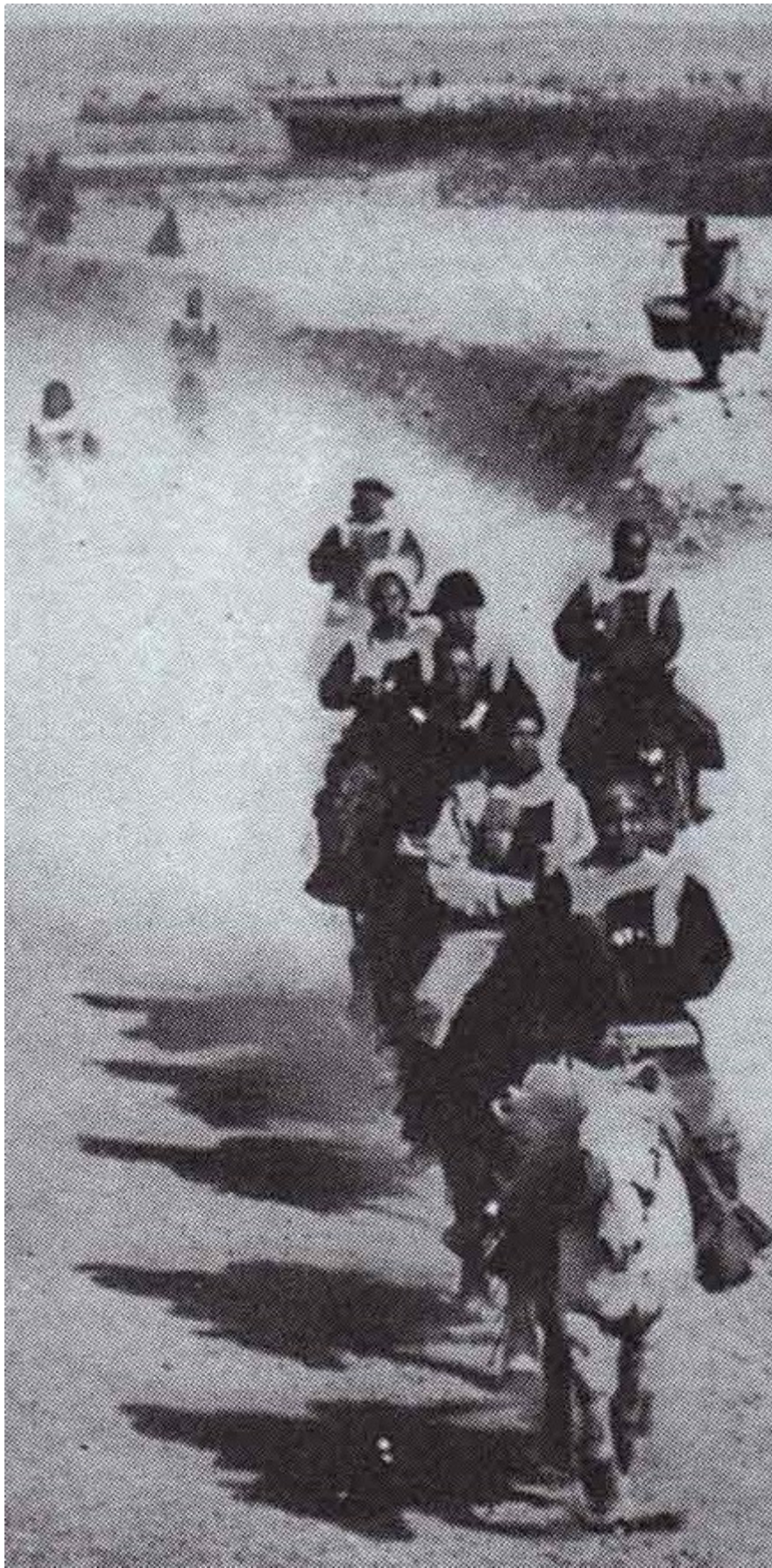
The Red Beards

This section is based on research done by Sun Yue 孙越, a renowned translator and author from China, residing in Russia. His blog can be accessed via this [link](#) (Chinese). Any opinions I might add do not reflect his views.

In 1629, when the Ming Dynasty resistance hero general Yuan Chonghuan executed general Mao Wenlong for smuggling, Mao's marines and soldiers disbanded and melted into the countryside of Northeast China (otherwise known as Manchuria). These men "can be seen as the genesis of the Red Beards" (Sun Yue). Some chapters of the Red Beards (Chin. Honghuzi 红胡子) were made up of typical bandits who robbed anything and anyone to survive, others would rob the rich only, and adhere to some kind of chivalrous code. Generally speaking, the Northeast of China by the late 19th century had become a lawless place, where bandits, ruffians, outlaws and other fugitives from Qing jurisdiction would escape to and wreak havoc upon.

When the time of the Taiping Rebellion came in the 1850's, the chaos and tumult gave rise to much turbulence in all of China. The Eight Banner forces stationed in the homeland of the Manchus in the Northeast of China were sent toward the South, in order to squash the Taiping Rebellion. As a result, a vacuum was left in Northeast China, giving the Red Beards a period of great freedom and providence.

After being defeated by the Empire of Japan during the First Sino-Japanese war in 1895, a great many of the defeated Qing forces in Northeast China deserted and were recruited by the Red Beards. The numbers of the Red Beards swelled to about 100,000. They were a great plague to the people of Northeast China. Although, I must confess, I feel a bit of fondness for these people, as my own family line descends from Manchurian bandits.



Honghuzi during the Battle of Mukden.

P. F. Collier & Son, 1904, Russo-Japanese War: A Photographic and Descriptive Review of the Great Conflict in the Far East

They were a controversial band of men. By 1900, the residents alongside the banks of the Sunggari Ula (Songhua River) had become regular prey for the Red Beards. However, when the Russians came the Red Beards suddenly became one of the last lines of defense. When the Russians came to kill innocents in Hailanpao, the Honghuzi came to their defence. When the Russians established their railways, it was the Honghuzi who sabotaged the railway. When the Russians came to conquer Manchuria, it was the Honghuzi who fought guerilla warfare against the Russian forces.

The Red Beards had the means and the men to resist, and in fact, were the one of the reasons the Russians didn't commit to full extermination campaigns in the Northeast, like the other Europeans did in Zhili. It was not in the Russian interest to fight a counter-insurgency war, as it would drain their resources and prolongue the war. The Russian Tsar was relieved when the war ended as quickly as it did.

“We cannot thank God enough for such a speedy and unexpected end to our actions in the Far East.”

Tsar Nikolai II in E. J. Bing, ed., *The Secret Letters of the Last Tsar* (New York, 1938), p. 138, quoted in Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy*, p. 144.

If the Russian antagonised the innocents and the Honghuzi in the same way that the Germans antagonised the people in Zhili, there would be no doubt that the full commitment of anti-Russian resistance from the Honghuzi it would have destroyed the already precarious Russian position in China.

As we can see. The Red Beards weren't truly motivated to fight against foreign invasion. I see them more as opportunistic band of bandits trying to survive in a time of turmoil. The thing is, however, that fate decided they would serve the cause of the people. Their story serves to remind us that not all actors that aid your cause have to necessarily agree with your views, or even think they are working for your cause. A good strategist does not merely control his own forces, he steers all actors, including the enemy. Resistance by any means necessary.



A Japanese depiction of the Honghuazi bandits during the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905.

Source: *Impressions of the Front: Woodcuts of the Sino-Japanese War*,
Okamoto, Shumpei,
Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1983, p.31.

8. Paladins of the Military

Singing of a Daring Song

Song Chunhua 宋春華 (1866-1900) was an officer in the Qing army from a village in the Shaanxi province. He had passed the martial exams and served as a one of the so called Blue Plume Imperial Guards (藍翎侍衛 lanling shiwei) among the Imperial Bodyguards for a time. He served his office and was promoted to the rank of Shoubei 守備, a fifth degree military rank. He was then stationed in the Green Standard Camp in Tianjin. At the time of the impending invasion of Tianjin, Viceroy Yulu had appointed Chunhua to guard the Southern gate of Tianjin.

The fires of chaos raged on as the Western powers waged their war. Soon, the Southeast Tianjin Ordnance Factory was lost to the invaders. Song gathered a crowd of his men and spoke to them: "the preservation of the ordnance factory is a matter of life or death for Tianjin. We must take it back. Those of you who are courageous, follow me and sally forth out of the city!" His men agreed. At midnight, a hundred men snuck away from their posts and attempted to retake the factory. Alas, the invaders had a heavy presence and a tight defence at the ordnance factory. After an exchange of fire, Chunhua was shot in the leg. After his failed foray, he returned to the city. Not long after, when the fall of Tianjin seemed imminent, he spoke to his wife: "The city stands alone and our men are few, in the end it will be lost. Take our son and find a life elsewhere. I have sworn to defend this city to my death!" His wife and child fled the city. He remained at his post,



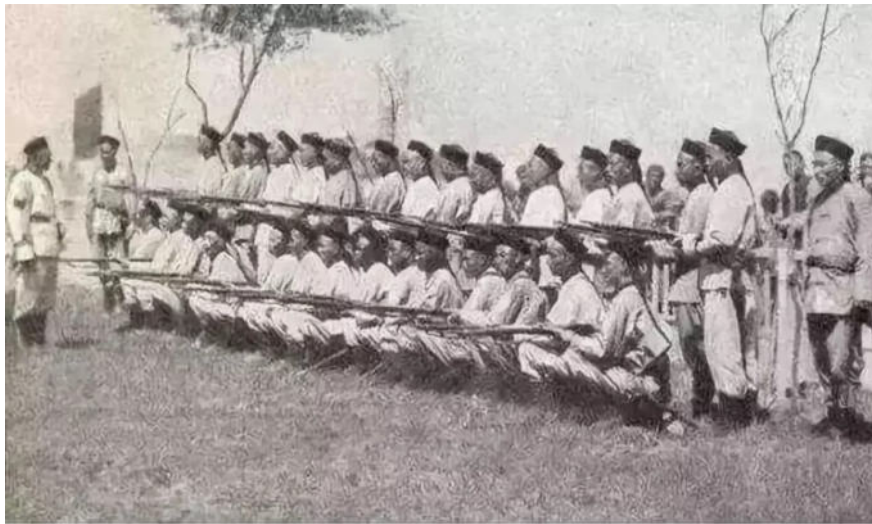
Chinesischer regulärer Infanterist

holding his ground at the Southern gate of Tianjin. The invaders lost 750 soldiers trying to enter. His commendable courage was not enough to stem the doomsday. In the end, he and his men were overrun (Sun Qihai, 163). Before dying, he uttered these final words:

吾志不遂，負國恩矣！然自接戰以來，
殺敵過當，今日之死，亦無所恨。

Song Chunhua before his death: "I have not completed my aspirations; so I am ashamed of the merits my country has granted me! Since the start of the war, I have slain many enemies, the number of which are higher than the ones I have lost. Although I will die today, I do so without regrets."

Noble men like Chunhua make the difference in this world. It is men like him who safeguard our rights and our way of life. If only he and his men did not stand alone. If only there were more of him. Learn from history, I say! Do not forget what Chunhua sacrificed! He could have fled with his wife and child, and lived a happy life somewhere away from the war. He could have, but he didn't. He had a duty. He knew that if he didn't stand and fight, no one would. And if everyone thought of fleeing and living a good life, nobody would be there to guard the gates against death and destruction. A man should face chaos, so that those behind him can live in peace.



Infantry of the Late Qing Dynasty

The Last Arrows

Defending Manchuria

The Manchu defenders of Manchuria felt a heavy blow when the Russians murdered thousands of innocents in Blagoveshchensk on the 17th to 21st of July. Despite being aware of the disparity in power, Chang Shun and Shou Shan, commanders of Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces, could no longer stand idly by while the Russians slaughtered Qing subjects by the thousands. [The Hailanpao massacre](#) could be seen as nothing but a declaration of war. (Glatfelter 181)

Even though the Northeast of China had been drained of Qing Bannermen, those who stayed behind fought with tooth and nail in order to defend their homeland. The Manchus were always a warlike people. Manchu bannermen, holding on to their homelands, holding on to their dying traditions, facing certain doom, held on to what they knew: war.



Manchu bannermen

Source: photographed by John Thomson c. 1868-72

Historically, the outstretched plains of Manchuria used to favour the Manchurian horsemen and their dreaded composite bows with the power to affix men to their horses. The Eight Banners of the Manchus could once have been considered the most formidable cavalry force in all the world, so strong that even the most elite Guanning Iron Cavalry of the Ming could not stand up to them. The Eight Banners were now reduced to not even a shadow of its former self.



A Manchu bannerman in full draw position.

Source: H.R. Kress from atarn.org, found via manchuarchery.org

The terrain now favoured the advanced gunpowder armaments and artillery of the Russians. The long range bombardments and long range volley fire of the Russian infantry was simply not to be countered by the Qing armies, either modern rifle infantry or traditional infantry. Due to the absence of the Boxer rebels, The war in Manchuria much resembled a more conventional war, where most of the military actions were carried out by Imperial regulars. The Russian campaign was swift and effective. It took the Russian three months to occupy all of

Manchuria. The Manchus of Northeast China: once, feared conquerors; now, brave martyrs.

Guardians of Beijing

After the humiliating defeat of the Qing dynasty during the Second Opium War, China attempted to reform its military through the Self-Strengthening Movement. Out of this movement arose several new armies. The Manchus established the **Shenjiying** 神機營 (Divine Engine Division, a.k.a. Peking Field Force) in 1862, its men drawn from among the Manchu Eight Banners.

After the humiliating loss against Imperial Japan in 1895, the Manchu Prince Zaiyi 載漪 (a.k.a. Prince Duan) endeavoured to increase the Imperial defenses around the capital. There was a recruitment drive which caused the Shenjiying to be reformed. The extant 25 foot and horse battalions in the Shenjiying were transformed into modern fighting forces, numbering 15,000. The reform had given the Shenjiying a unique identity, they had now ceased to be a burlap doll stitched together from different sections from the other parts of the Qing military.



Yuan Shikai's Right Division of the Wuwei Corps, escorting the Empress Dowager and entourage back to safety in 1902.

Additionally, they established a new army called the New Army (新軍 Xin Jun).

Their command was handed over to Yuan Shikai shortly after its creation. This Xin Jun was then incorporated into the **Wuwei Corps** 武衛軍 as the Right Division (scroll down to see image below for clarification).

In 1898, the Shenjiying underwent another major change. The encroaching foreign powers drove the Court to emphasize the modernisation of its military. 10,000 exceptional men were drafted from the entire Qing military apparatus. These men were drilled with the latest doctrines and armed with the latest weaponry, all in an effort to create an elite corps at the beck and call of the Court. The main purpose of the Shenjiying actually wasn't just to defend Beijing. The Shenjiying functioned as major training institution tasked with training the other parts of the Eight Banners. They were also tasked with acquainting themselves with and mastering newly invented weaponry. For these reasons, the Shenjiying was the cutting edge for the modernisation of the Eight Banners (Wang 88).

In 1899, the anti-foreign Zaiyi decided to established another new army for the same reasons. This army was known as the **Hushenyng** 虎神营 (Tiger Divine Division). 10,000 strong, it was established to defend Beijing from harm.

As for the Wuwei Corps, which was deployed in Zhili to fight for Imperial Court, they were mainly very effective against the Yihequan, but not so much against the West. Yuan Shikai's Right Division was also stationed in the area, but he only deployed his troops against the Yihequan and never against the Western invaders. In the previous part, I mentioned how Nie Shicheng also was extremely effective at killing and dispersing the Yihequan, after all, his army was well trained and well armed. When his forces finally moved against the Western forces, he gave the Tianjin legations a thrashing. Regrettably, he was slain alongside as many as 3,000 of his soldiers while launching an attack against the Russians in Tianjin. Nie Shicheng's weakened forces continued to struggle without him, but were annihilated at the battle for Baliqiao and Tongzhou.

Beijing seemed well guarded on paper, three of the most modern and well armed armies were garrisoned in and around the city. However, the truth of the matter was that these armies, despite their impressive reforms and modernisations, were unprepared to fight the well drilled and well armed armies of the world. As a result, the Shenjiying, the Hushenyng and the Centre Army of Ronglu were decimated during the Battle of Beijing. The Rear Division of the Wuwei Corps was somewhat effective due to the ferocity shown by the Gansu Army, but with 3/5th of its main body absent from the battle, they too had no chance at victory.

武衛軍 The Wuwei Corps



聶士成
武毅軍

Front Division
Wuyi Jun - Tenacious Army
Commander: Nie Shicheng



宋慶
毅軍

Left Division
Yi Jun - Resolute Army
Commander: Song Qing



榮祿
中軍

Centre Division
Zhong Jun - Central Army
Commander: Ronglu of the Guwalgiya Clan



袁世凱
新軍

Right Division
Xin Jun - New Army
Commander: Yuan Shikai



董福祥
甘軍

Rear Division
Gan Jun - Gansu Army
Commander: Dong Fuxiang

Afakv's
Memories 

Brave Ten-thousand

The Gansu Army (甘軍 Gan jun), otherwise known as the Kansu Braves, were vilified by the Western forces as 10,000 Islamic rabble. Indeed, the Gansu Army consisted of irregulars from the “savage” province of Gansu in West-China. The army was made up of mainly infantry and cavalry, although they also had a few squadrons of artillery and engineers. It's members consisted of Hui, Salar, Dongxiang and Bonan Muslims. It was led by the legendary and daunting Dong Fuxiang 董福祥.

汝真好漢，各大帥能盡如
爾膽量，洋人不足平矣！

Zaiyi on Dong Fuxiang: “You are a true hero, if every marshall had guts like yours, it would not be difficult to pacify

the Oceanics!"

The Gansu Army was feared in Zhili and in Beijing for they destroyed churches and killed Christians. They looted the homes of Chinese Christians as well, accusing them of being secondary devils (ermaozi 二毛子). The Gansu Army, alongside the Yihetuan, also went rioting and destroyed anything that seemed Western when Clemens von Ketteler killed a young Chinese boy. When they were called to Beijing, they were stationed in the Southern Hunting Park (南苑 Nanyuan), used by the Qing for military drills to organise hunts. It was conveniently close to the railway station, which caused no small amount of despair among the Europeans, who were harassed by the Gansu Army. One time, when the secretary of the Japanese legation Sugiyama Akira 杉山彬 attempted to leave Beijing through the Yongdingmen, he was halted by the guarding Gansu Army. After a brief exchange of words, they beheaded him.

In spite of these deeds of violence, even intelligent people still believed that the Kansu soldiery were a tower of defence for China, and would be more than able to repel any number of foreign troops.

Heng Yi, a man from Jiangsu living in Beijing as quoted in Sir Edmund Backhouse & John Otway Percy Bland, Annals & memoirs of the court of Peking: (from the 16th to the 20th century), 453-455

Indeed, they were a tower of defence for China. Most Imperial forces refrained from facing the Western armies of the Eight Nations Alliance head on. The Gansu Army had no such deliberations. Their singular purpose was clear: to defend the Empire and kill the enemy. Indeed, while everyone was marching away from Beijing, while most of China sat at home and signed the Mutual Protection of Southeast China Treaty with the enemy, the Gansu Army left their own homes, marched across half of China, headed to war.

While the general trend of the Chinese was to be helpless against Western aggression, with a few notable exceptions of course, such as the impervious Sengge Rinchen and the immaculate Ching Shih, the impetuous Gansu Army proved to be a most formidable foe to rise against the tide of invasion, and the impending devastation of home and hearth. Frankly, the Gansu Army scared the invaders. The German Kaiser feared the Mohamedans so much that he convinced the Ottoman Caliph Abdul Hamid II to send Enver Pasha (not the Young Turk) to convince the Gansu Braves to stop fighting. The envoy arrived after the fighting was done, however.

The German Kaiser was right to be worried, for it was the Gansu Army that defeated Seymour's expedition when he attempted to pass through Langfang. It

was the Gansu Army that fought most ferociously against the foreign legations in Beijing. It was the Gansu Army that held the Zhengyang Gate against the British during the Battle of Beijing and even sacrificed its General Ma Fulu 馬福祿 and four of his paternal cousins in a dauntless charge against the invaders. It was the Gansu Army that protected the Empress Dowager and her entourage until they reached safety. General Ma Haiyan 馬海晏, in his loyalty, died of exhaustion after escorting the Empress Dowager.

董福祥甘軍，驍男好鬥

An appraisal from the Court and the People at the time: "The Gansu Army of Dong Fuxiang: valiant men, eager to battle"

The Gansu Army, brave and loyal, armed with nothing but their repeating rifles, cold steel and courage showed more determination and will to battle for what was right than many of the Manchu and Chinese soldiers. Why was this? I raised the problem of the "sick men of Asia" in the second part of this three parter article. The Manchus and the Chinese were notorious for their pursuit of pleasure. The Manchus believed that the "Chinese way" had corrupted their frugal Manchu warriors to fall into the trap of pleasure seeking. The Chinese by and large just want to live a good life where they are provided for. Rich Chinese and Manchus are like the rich anywhere, prone to debauchery and hedonism and that includes the consumption of intoxicants. While many of the Manchus and Chinese were addicted to opium, the Gansu Army was staunchly opposed to the opium trade. The Muslim Chinese served as a stark contrast to both the Manchus and other Chinese. Islam teaches to abstain from drugs, prostitution, alcoholism and gambling, and it is precisely these vices that weakened the Chinese and the Manchus. Is it any surprise then, that the bravest army to face down the West was Islamic?

The Muslim troops were "picked men, the bravest of the brave, the most fanatical of fanatics: and that is why the defence of the Emperor's city had been entrusted to them."

Arnold Henry Savage Landor (1901). China and the Allies. Charles Scribner's sons. p. 194.

The Gansu Army, ferocious, loyal and powerful as they were, could not face the enemy all alone. During the Battle of Beijing, the force was decimated by the Western onslaught. They did what they could by escorting the Empress Dowager

to safety, but not long after, their army was disbanded. The Western forces demanded the head of Dong Fuxiang for his role in the war. The Qing Empire refused to execute one of its most loyal commanders, but the Gansu Army was no more.



This image is frequently used to depict boxers overall, but are likely soldiers from the Gansu Army.



The most famous picture of the Muslim soldiers of the Gansu Army.

Concluding Word

Heroes come in all shapes and sizes, and everyone can contribute to a cause in his or her own way. Sai Jinhua wasn't good at fighting like Lin Heier, but she had other skills she used to help her people. Some fight for ideals, like Zhu Hongdeng, the Gansu Army and Song Chunhua, others because they don't want to see their families murdered, their faith humiliated and their homes destroyed, like the Manchu Bannermen, the Yihetuan and the Red Beards. None of them forgot who their enemies were and where their loyalties lay.

What did all of these men and women have in common? They all fought a war they were losing. They all fought a hopeless battle they almost certainly knew they were going to lose. I talked about lackluster commitment in part 2. How many soldiers, generals and statesmen didn't believe that victory was possible? Because of this one deadly assumption, they just opted not to fight at all. This is not the way. A just war must always be fought, even if there is no hope of victory, even if one thinks it is futile. The moment you forsake your principles is the moment you die spiritually.

Ah, but then Chinese heroes always were lonely. I sincerely ask my people why it

has to be like this? Why must our heroes be lonely? Would the Yihetuan have lost if they gained full support of the Qing? Would the Gansu Army have been decimated if even the rest of the Wuwei Corps under Yuan Shikai joined in the battle? Would Beijing even have fallen if the neighbouring provinces sent their forces to Zhili? Would the Eight Nations Alliance have even dared to enter China if the entirety of China heeded the call of duty? I doubt it.

I implore the reader to make a choice. When you encounter trouble today, will you choose to stand by your brothers and sisters in a battle with hopeless odds? Or, will you stand by the sidelines, hoping that your brothers and sisters will win the battle for you? Let me tell you this: if the odds are low, and none of us join in, the odds will even be lower. Your passivity and inaction is directly contributing to the cause of your enemies.

*Remember the sacrifice of our heroes.
Remember who they were and what they gave.
Remember how they struggled and who they fought.
Remember them and honour their graves.*



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John Dong

15 Jun 2022 at 19:44



Dear friend, first of all I must congratulate you on this exceptionally well written blog and article. It contains lots and lots of engaging information that is deeply well researched.

was wondering that since this blog is about Asian history and colonialism, you could do a writeup on the history of imperialism in the Indian Subcontinent? Although today China and India may not be the best of friends, I believe that their histories share much in common. For example, during the Boxer War many Indian soldiers deeply sympathized with the boxers, with Indian officers even

complaining that it was entirely justified. In 2008 the Indian government even returned a set of bells which they had looted before, which is far better than what any of the “civilized” countries have done.

Kindly let me know if you think this is possible.

★ Like

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10 Nov 2022 at 14:39



Hello John, thank you for the comment. I am not an expert on Indian history, so I do not foresee that I will do such an article anytime soon. But, I would love to learn more!

★ Like

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Afakv's Memories

Never Forgotten

Appendix: A Timeline and a Map of the War in China of 1900

The Boxer Rebellion and the subsequent Western invasion/intervention is a complicated episode in world history with many moving pieces. In order to benefit the accessibility to the material in my articles, I have created a timeline which ties together most major events of the war. The timeline is based on the “八国联军侵华大事记” article from the publication *Catholic Church in China*. In addition to the timeline I have also marked a map with most relevant locations that are discussed in these articles and on the timeline.

Undoubtedly, the reader will recognise the events described my previous articles [The Black River Runs Red: The Massacres in Northeast China](#) and [War in China: the Fall of Beijing](#) as well as the more recent [War in China: the Ravishment of the North](#). If one is unfamiliar with Chinese geography and Late Qing history, I would strongly recommend to pull this page up beside the articles for ease of access when the information is needed.

Scroll down for the map, it's all the way at the bottom.

Click the timelines and press “view full size” to zoom in.



A map of Northern China and relevant locations

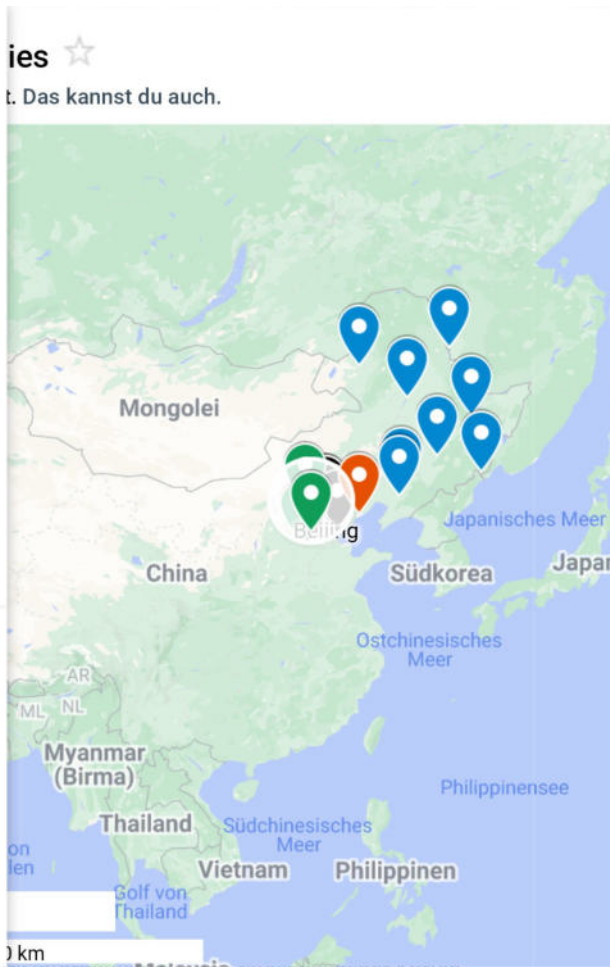
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Afakv's Memories

Never Forgotten

The Black River Runs Red: The Massacres in Northeast China.



[Click here to access the appendix with handy map and timeline.](#)

Precisely 119 years ago on July 17, 1900, and the following days until July 21, the Russians carried out several massacres against the native people of Northeast China (Manchuria) that occurred during the mass exodus of Manchus, Daur, Solon and Chinese from Outer Manchuria. The exodus was a result of the Russian order to expell all Qing subjects still living in what had then become Russian land. In English, these incidents are known as:

1. The Hailanpao Massacre 海兰泡大屠杀 (a.k.a. the Blagoveshchensk massacre)
2. The Sixty-Four Villages East of the River Massacre (Jiangdong Liushisitun Canan 江东六十四屯惨案)
3. The Burning of Aigun (Aihun Dahuo 瑷珲大火)

This article contains accounts of people who survived these tragedies; their stories deserve to be told. Their pain, their suffering and their agony are not figments of someones imagination. They are real. Yet, are hardly known in the world. Perhaps the distant and frigid winds of Manchuria have carried away the frozen tears of the fallen. Today we shall thaw them, and tell the dead that we remember.

This is a long article, take a cup of tea and prepare for some serious reading. Alternatively, if you just want the details of the massacre, you can scroll or swipe down and skip the context.

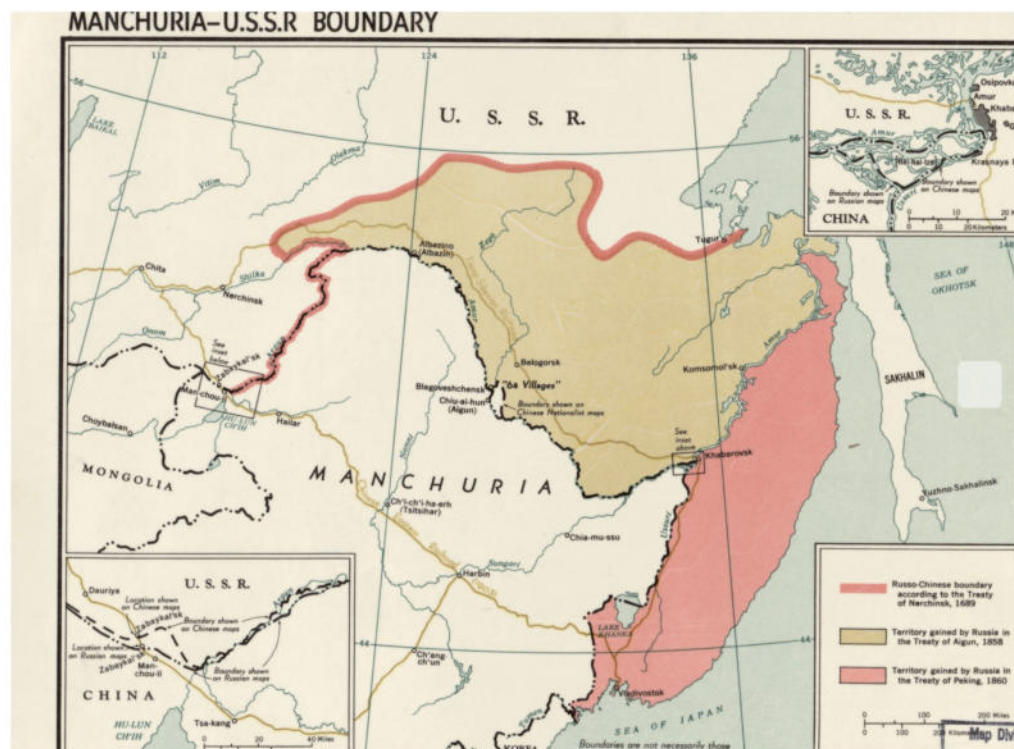
To the right, the Russian military in Manchuria.



The Context: Russian interests in China

The Russians had long coveted Manchuria, it was a cherished dream of the Russian Tsars to give Russia access to an ice-free port by annexing Qing land. Even in the time of Kangxi, the Cossacks entered Manchuria to pillage and conquer. The Manchu Qing Empire was not so weak (yet) as to allow foreign invaders to run amok so close to the Manchu heimat. Indeed, the Kangxi Emperor beat back the Cossacks, thereby setting in motion the signing of the Treaty of Nerchinsk (Nibuchu Tiaoyue 尼布楚条约) of 1689. This treaty would determine the Russo-Chinese border for a century and a half.

When China grew weak, Russia sensed it was their opportunity to strike again. In 1858 and 1860, the Qing Empire and the Russian Empire signed the Treaty of Aigun (Aihun Tiaoyue 璦琿条约) and the Convention of Peking (Beijing Tiaoyue 北京条约) respectively, as a result of the Second Opium War (1856-1860). Between these two treaties, the Qing Empire gave away in total 1,000,000 square kilometers (equivalent to France and Germany combined) to the Russian Empire. The Russian Empire, however, had an insatiable appetite, they wanted **all** of Manchuria. Indeed, Russian interests in China were continuously threatened by an ever encroaching Japan, the UK and Germany ever racing to gain more concessions in China. Manchuria, however, seemed to belong to Russia alone.



In March 1898, Russia's dream of an ice-free port came true with the acquisition of Port Arthur (Lüshunkou)

旅顺口) in Shandong Province. The construction of the Trans-Siberian railway also shifted the balance of power in the region in favour of Russia. With these acquisitions all Russia had to do was to consolidate its newly gained advantages and privileges. By 1900 it could be said that Russian influence rivalled or had even exceeded British influence in China. Russia had a strong position, however, it wasn't so strong that it could resist a powerful shift in the balance of power in China such as the Boxer Rebellion.



Alexey Kuropatkin in 1904

“We shall turn Manchuria into a second Bukhara.”

Imperial Minister of War, Aleksey Kuropatkin (1848 – 1925)

The construction of the Trans-Siberian railway and the acquisition of Port Arthur were not the end of the story. In order to properly exploit the Chinese market, more tracks needed to be laid into the heart of China. The opportunity for the Russians arose when China lost the First Sino-Japanese war, and according to the Treaty of Shimonoseki (Maguan Tiaoyue 马关条约) of 1895, had to pay immense sums in indemnity to the Japanese.

In 1896, a secret deal was struck between Li Hongzhang 李鸿章 (1823-1901) and Prince Alexey Lobanov-Rostovsky (1824-1896), aptly called the Li-Lobanov treaty, that gave Russia permission to construct railways in the provinces of Amur (Heilongjiang 黑龙江) and Kirin (Jilin 吉林) in exchange for a military alliance between Qing and Russia in case Japan attacked and by loaning money to Qing China in order to pay the Japanese.

The Russians commenced construction on the Chinese Eastern Railway in Manchuria, from Port Arthur to Tieling (铁岭, 80km north of Mukden, modern day Shenyang 沈阳), Vladivostok and Harbin. The construction did not go smoothly, the working conditions were abysmal; thousands of Chinese construction workers refused to work under such conditions. The Russian presence in Manchuria caused for a lot of friction between the Russians and the locals, in 1899 and 1900 there were several clashes between the Russian personnel and the Chinese, the construction of the railway was also constantly harassed by the mounted bandits known as Honghuzi 红胡子 (Red-Beards).



Honghuzi sentenced to die. Photographed by A. Kuznetsov in the city of Chita 赤塔.

As the Boxer Rebellion spread to the Zhili Province 直隶, it was perceived as a threat to Russian assets in Manchuria. In 1900, the Boxer Rebellion spread to Manchuria and the display of open hostility from the Boxers in conjunction with the Qing regulars in Manchuria gave the Russians a perfect excuse to invade

and occupy the region. It appears all the Russians were waiting for was an excuse to pretense to invade as by the end of May 1900, 70,000 soldiers had gathered at the Qing border. Even before the declaration of war, the Russians had moved in on several Qing towns and effectively turned the border river of Amur into an inland Russian river. Indeed, Aleksey Kuropatkin, the Russian Minister of War was reported to have said: “This has given us an excuse to occupy Manchuria” and “we shall turn Manchuria into a second Bukhara.” So it came to be that, in addition to the Beijing-Tianjin campaign, the Russians also invaded Northeast China under the guise of protecting the railroad and pacifying Manchuria.

On July 9, Kuropatkin ordered the invasion of Manchuria. A hundred thousand pairs of boots, split into seven routes, crossed into Manchurian territory. The Manchu Bannermen defended their homes bravely; many died defending their homes and families to the last man. The Cossacks became infamous for their pillaging, raping and burning of Manchurian towns. Thousands of Manchus fled south, away from their homeland. After several months of fighting, a Cossack reconnaissance party entered Mukden under the command of Dejan Subotić in October; the invasion had officially ended.

The Massacres

On July 14, 1900, Qing forces and the Honghuzi bandits attempted to prevent the Russian man-of-war “Mikhail” from proceeding beyond Aigun. The “Selengge” fired on the Qing troops. The Qing forces returned fire and forced a retreat by damaging the ships and wounding and killing several Russian soldiers. The “Selengge” commenced bombardment on the city of Aigun. The Qing forces answered by launching an offensive across the river toward Hailanpao, they lacked the manpower to seize the settlement, therefore the assault amounted to long range artillery barrages.



Original caption: On the 18th of 6th moon there were four Russian men-of-war scouting about the Amur river with dangerous intention, but General Shou had detected out their traitorous movements and immediately ordered his soldiers to attack them. The Russians were badly defeated and two of their men-of-war were sunk.

As a response, the Russians decided to expell all Qing subjects living North (and East) of the Sahaliyan Ula (Manchu for Amur, the Black river). This order affected not only those of the 64 Villages, but also the Qing subjects who lived in Blagoveshchensk, Irkutsk, Nerchinsk, Khabarovsk and Vladivostok. In all of these places the “expulsion” of Qing subjects was really a euphemism for extermination and ethnic cleansing, no less than 20,000 Qing subjects were affected.

The first targets of extermination were the 64 Villages East of the River (Jiangdong Liushisitun 江东六十四

屯) and Hailanpao 海兰泡 (Blagoveshchensk). These places were on the northside of the Sahaliyan Ula, and as such had been ceded to Russia in 1858. The Treaty of Aigun stipulated that the original inhabitants of the 64 Villages would retain their rights to live on this land in perpetuity, and its people would remain under Qing jurisdiction. The **64 Villages** were traditionally inhabited by the Manchu, Solon and Daur, but had since gained a sizeable portion of Han Chinese settlers. By the time of the Russian invasion in 1900 the population had swelled to 35,000 people. **Hailanpao** counted 38,000 inhabitants, half of whom were subjects of the Qing Empire. These Qing Subjects were mainly labourers, merchants and farmers, keeping the economy of Hailanpao afloat.



Arresting a Qing subject in Hailanpao.



From left to right: Solon, Manchu and Daur.

The Hailanpao Massacre

The execution of my orders made me almost sick, for it seemed as though I could have walked across the river on the bodies of the floating dead.

A Russian Officer, as quoted by Louis Livingston Seaman

On July 15, the Russians, unable and unwilling to provide the passage across the Sahaliyan Ula, instead carried out a razzia on the Qing subjects in Blagoveshchensk. They managed to catch 3,000 to 3,500 people, who they rounded up and coralled into a riverside lumberyard.

Early in the morning of July 17, the Qing subjects were taken to a precipice overlooking the Sahaliyan Ula. The Russian police encircled the prisoners. Slowly, with fixed bayonets, the Russian police closed in on the

people, making the circle smaller and smaller. There was no way to go except for off the cliff, into the river. People fell into the river like strangely shaped snow, only to be swept away by the raging waters. In the scramble to escape the encirclement, the elderly, the ill, mothers and their children were trampled to death. Those who approached the Russians were bayoneted to the ground. Those who somehow got through the line were ridden down or axed.

Then, the order was given to open fire.

The sound of gunfire melded together with cries of despair. The mortally wounded died on the banks, the lightly wounded drowned in the river, the unscathed were hunted and killed. The Black river was painted red with the blood of innocents. As the slaughter neared its conclusion. Some surviving mothers desperately clung on to the banks of the river while holding up their newborns, and as the Cossacks approached, begged them to have mercy on their babies. The Cossacks bayoneted these babies and parted them into many pieces. Clinging to the banks of the river was a floating mass of bodies, many of whom still drawing breath. Some of the Russian volunteers who participated in the massacre denounced their comrades for their monstrosity, claiming that only *“only beasts completely devoid of humanity could bear to endure such things.”* (Xue, 1981)

The killings continued for four more days and concluded on 21 July. The massacre at Hailanpao claimed more than 5,000 lives. Reportedly, on the 22 of July, Hailanpao was “cleansed” of its 19,000 Qing subjects.

In the 1950s, several interviews were conducted with the survivors of the massacre:

“My paternal cousin, Sun Yide 孙翼德, was a bricklayer working in Hailanpao, he was just 20 years old when they pushed him into the river and drowned him. My cousin-in-law was widowed and had to live in widowhood at the age of 20.”

Sun Yihai 孙翼海, a Han man who arrived in Heihe in 1918

“On the 20th of July there was a thunderstorm. The corpses in the river all floated to the surface. The corpses floated there for 4 or 5 days like so many sheets of ice. A layer of oil had formed on the surface of the water. We couldn’t drink from the river anymore.”

Jin Baichuan 金百川, a Hui man who worked in Hailanpao



Sheets of ice on the Sahaliyan Ula by Hailanpao.

The 64 Villages East of the River Massacre



Most people living in the 64 Villages had crossed the river to flee the Russians between July 14 and July 17, having received news of the coming calamities. However, not everyone had left.

A map of the 64 Villages East of the River. The Purple line running from North to South represents the Sahaliyan. On this map, everything East of the Sahaliyan was given to Russia in the Treaty of Aigun.

The people of Manchuria were hardy and stubborn. They took up arms and joined the Honghuzi in their resistance against Russian invasion. On July 17, 500 resistance fighters hid themselves in the 64 Villages with support from the locals. The resistance lay in ambush and were able to kill several hundred Russian invaders. Outnumbered and facing overwhelming odds against a better equipped and better trained enemy, the resistance was eventually defeated. The 64 Villages were captured completely by 21 July.

From 17 to 21 July, the Russian “cleansed” the area by fire. In each village they would gather the villagers they into a large house and set fire to this house. The killing was indiscriminate and the looting widespread; in Boerduo village 博尔多屯 alone, a thousand people were killed in this manner.

“I ran from Nanwobao 南窝堡 for an entire day until I reached Qiandongshan 前东山. Descending the mountain, I heard gunshots behind my back. I hit the ground immediately and crawled for the longest time, until I finally reached the river.”

Wu Xiaolian 吴小莲, a Han woman from Nanwobao, one of the 64 Villages

“That year, I was nine years old. On the evening of the night we fled, I was still playing on the streets. I remember the moon was bright that night. We didn’t even have time to eat, my family fled for the river with nothing but the clothes on our backs.”

Wu Suo 吴锁, a Daur man of the Bordered Blue Banner

“On July 16, when we arrived at the river, having fled away from Qianduanshan 前端山, we saw that the riverbanks were full of wagons, horses and people, littered with abandoned things. [...] The boats, they were only filled with people, if there was space, more people would go on, an extra life saved was an extra life saved. When my paternal uncle and cousin got the young and the old of the family aboard the boat, they flipped the three carts we had taken from home. They tied six of our horses to the back of these carts. The men of the family then sat atop the carts, and like that, risking our lives, we followed the stream of the river. From that moment on, we became a family who owned nothing. The horses at our houses, our land, our homes, we left them all on the Eastern side of the river.”

Xu Yonglai 徐永来, a Han man of the Bordered Red Banner

“When we reached the river, there were rows and rows of wagons and horses at the riverbanks. Many people drowned in the river due to the lack of boats. Whoever got on, got on. When it was our turn to cross the river, my cousins had tied the horses to the back of our boat. Our boat hadn’t gotten far into the river when the Russians appeared on the banks. Their gunfire sounded like they were stir-frying beans. My cousins quickly detached the horses, thanks to that we left with our lives.”

“The uncle who lived nextdoor to us, Russian soldiers hacked him and his whole family to death.”

Wu Yeshe 吴叶氏, a Han woman from Nanwobao, one of the 64 Villages

"I had an uncle who was a police officer in Aigun. Before the incident he ran back home and scolded us for still tilling the land. He told us: 'the Laomaozi 老毛子 [Ruskies] have gone mad, if we don't leave now, we're all done for.' So, we packed up our things and left. He stayed behind alone, we left one horse for him to ride away when things turned sour. He never rode away, the Russians killed him."

Guo Yunting 郭云亭, a Han man from Ergouzi Village, one of the 64 Villages

The people who lived in the 64 Villages were all either killed or driven away. Xue Xiantian concludes that of the people from the 64 Villages, the Russians massacred 2,000 and 2,000 died while crossing the river.



A modern rendering of the massacre at the 64 Villages.

The Burning of Aigun

Those who were expelled from Outer Manchuria arduously crossed the Sahaliyan Ula and settled South, in Qing territory. Those who fled from the 64 Villages crossed the river from the Eastside to the Westside and landed near Aigun. Scarce could the refugees rest as it did not take the Russians long to give chase. On August 2nd, the Russians came to the gates of Aigun. They aimed two cannons at the gates and blasted their way into the city. The Russians flooded through the gates, slashing their sabers and hewing their axes. The killing of the previous month could finally be resumed. This time, fire would be their main weapon of choice. They set fire to the houses in the city, soon, the entirety of Aigun was set ablaze. Many people perished in the inferno. Aigun was reduced to nothing more than a pile of ashes, the only building that remains is a temple building from 1755. In fact, when the Russians crossed the river they already started burning riverside villages, those living within were killed.

Those who fled the Eastside of the river had to flee once more, this time, together with those who lived on the Westside of the river. Most fled toward Qiqihar. However, not everyone had the strength or resources to make such a long journey, they fled into deserted places and into the woods. The journey was long and difficult. Some met their fate at the hands of pursuing Russian soldiers, others starved to death or died of exhaustion. Finally, there were parents with many children, yet did not have the strength to carry them all. These parents were often forced to leave their children behind.

“At the time I was only two years old. In total, I had six brothers and sisters, I am the youngest. Afterwards, I heard from seniors that my mother was ill back then, and could not carry me any longer as her strength failed her. They abandoned me halfway on the road for up to three times. And each time they left me behind, my father, after walking ahead about a few dozen steps and hearing me I cry as if my life depended on it, took me with him as he could not bear to abandon me.”

Xu Caoshi 徐曹氏, a Manchu woman from Houduanshan, one of the 64 Villages

According to my mother, our family lived in a camp of the Yellow Banners. At the time my father had been conscripted into the army. So, only my very old grandfather and my mother could take my four brothers to evacuate. On the road, grandfather and second brother were lost due to the crowd. Grandfather was never seen again. Mother took big brother (13 years old), third brother (6 years old) and my 40 days old little brother and fled with the crowd. The Russian soldiers were chasing us from behind and opened fire on the refugees. In the chaos the Russians took away my third brother. One time, my mother took my big brother and little brother and many other people to hide in a vegetable cellar. My little brother couldn't stop crying. She feared he would cause everyone to be discovered, so, with tears in her eyes, my mother dropped little brother into a corn heap. After a while, my big brother went to find my little brother, he found him. When he returned to the vegetable cellar, he could see several dozen mounted Russian soldiers open fire at the cellar. He waited for the cavalry to leave before going into the cellar to take a look. Many had been killed. When big brother found mother, she was still breathing, but had sustained nine wounds. Afterwards, it took them two more months of walking to reach Qiqihar.

Wu Lan 吴兰, a Manchu woman from Aigun

Fate, however, played a cruel joke on the refugees. Everywhere they went, the Russians were not far behind. After arriving in Qiqihar, the Russians did so too. They commenced the bombardment of Qiqihar and launched artillery shells into the city. The mother of Wu Suo (the nine year old Daur) died because she was hit by such a shell. In a sort of twisted parallelism of the Hailanpao Massacre, on the banks of the Sahaliyan near Qiqihar, 300 Russian soldiers encircled a group of 30 refugee women. Out of fear what might happen to them, they all threw themselves into the river and drowned themselves.



The last and only surviving structure after the burning of Aigun.

The survivors, united in their pain and hatred for the Russian invaders, never ceased to fight. The entirety of the Manchurian campaign was fraught with constant harassment from the Honghuzi. Many of the Honghuzi ultimately went as far as to join the Imperial Japanese army in the Russo-Japanese war, just to see more Russians dead and thereby protecting their homeland.

**Protect what is yours.
Retrieve which was lost.
Avenge those you love.**

Finally, what can we take away from these painful memories? This article began by stating that Russia long harboured ill-intent when it came to the Manchurian territories. The one thing that prevented the Russians from invading earlier was the strength of Kangxi's army. Obviously, violence and strength should not be the answer, but being a threat and a force to be reckoned with clearly will dissuade any potential predators from viewing you as prey. Ergo, speak softly and carry a big stick.

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A modern depiction of the Hailanpao massacre when the people are driven off a cliff into the Sahaliyan Ula (Hei He 黑河/Amur River).

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