



The Boxer Rebellion, 1899-1901

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I. Immediate Situation

The day is 21 June 1900. Long-simmering tensions between the Chinese Empress, Chinese nationalists and occupying foreign governments and their militaries have reached a critical point. The future of Chinese sovereignty and foreign imperial rule is at stake. Who will rule China, foreign government or the government of China,

the Chinese Emperor or a new democratic government? In the chaos of the Chinese streets, nothing is certain. These disputes will determine China's ability to rule itself, the power of foreign empires, the nature of the international system, and the outlook for future world conflict. How they are resolved seems certain to shape Chinese and world history for generations.

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The immediate catalyst for action came five days ago, when foreign powers attacked and stormed the Chinese Imperial Forts at Taku. With rampaging mobs of Chinese nationalists patrolling the streets, confronting and sometimes attacking foreigners, especially foreign officials but also traders and missionaries, the situation has become tense and dangerous. Yesterday the German ambassador was assassinated in streets of the national capital, Peking. Today Empress Dowager Cixi issued an imperial decree declaring war on the invading foreigners from France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Russia, the Untitled States, and all other foreign powers in China.

Meanwhile, a radical group of nationalist mystics, called the Boxers, has risen up in several major cities. They are leading protests and violent rampages against foreign targets across the country. Despite the legal requirements of sovereign immunity and the extraterritoriality of their embassies to China under international law, foreign diplomats and their families are currently besieged inside the capital. They are requesting military forces from their home governments to invade Peking, rescue them and assure their safety. But the Boxers appear to have the sympathy or support of the imperial Qing government, which sees them as a useful tool in its effort to restore the sovereignty of the Government of China. No one know how the Chinese Imperial Government, the Boxers or foreign powers will respond.

II. China and the Qing Dynasty

For hundreds of years the Qing Dynasty has ruled China, but the past few decades have seen China dominated by foreign powers who extract profit out of their respective sphere of influence. These spheres are zones where each power has exclusive rights to exploit the country side how it wishes. Angered by years of such mal treatment and humiliation the Empress has now joined forces with a group of violent reactionaries known by many names, such as: the Righteous and Harmonious Fists, the Yihetuan, and in the West the Boxers. This group of mostly peasant farmers is united by their hatred of foreigners, and are determined to not only expel, but destroy any all outsiders and domestic collaborators in the country. Originally the imperial government was killing and repressing the Boxers, viewing them as a threat to its authority, but soon began to see their value. In an effort to intimidate the Empress into crushing the Boxers, the foreign powers attacked and captured a group of forts at the coastal harbor of Taku, but this backfired. Infuriated on the 21st of June, 1900 the Empress declared war on all foreign power demanding they leave the country at once, and joined forces with the would be rebels. However; this is by no means agreed upon in China.

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The foreign powers have competed and collaborated to with one another to dominate China using their superior weaponry, but they have never faced a challenge such as this, whole regions are imbued with a passionate hate of the foreign. The Boxers roam in large groups across northern China, but have so far only gained real support in Shandong and Zhili provinces. There the Boxers have moved from town to town, destroying churches and beginning to eliminate as many of the 230,000 Chinese Christians and their European missionaries as they can.

troops, civilians, and diplomats under siege in the Capital Peking. Called the Legation quarter this is where Russia, Great Britain, Germany, France, Japan, the Untitled States, and others have built their embassies, and is right in the middle of the Chinese capital. Now trapped with their with their families, and hundreds of Chinese Christian refugees, the Legation Quarter as it is are known, is protected by only a handful of soldiers, surrounded by enemy troops deep inside the country. It is unknown how long they can last, and what may happen to them if they are defeated.

III. The Siege in the Capital

The most immediate threats the foreign powers should be concerned about is the fate of their

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IV. Backstory

First Opium War: Foreigners from the West have been in China for centuries, as daring individuals looking for profit, adventure, and religious converts crossed half the globe to make it to the middle kingdom; yet those that survived the journey were few, and didn't effect China in a serious way. Those days however have come to an end. As the Industrial Revolution took hold, Westerners continually wanted more access to China. Merchants saw a fortune to be made in the tea, silk, and porcelain trade, and Christian missionaries were eager to convert the Confusion and Buddhist Chinese. China allowed this, but only in part. Christian missionaries were forbidden from preaching, and trade was restricted to only the port of Canton through the

state monopoly. Even with these restrictions foreign powers rushed to trade with China, but continually protested the strict regulations. Viewing the massive potential for profit, Britain began to trade Opium in China, despite the China's demand that it be stopped. Britain continual pedaling of Opium, and its desire to break the restrictive trade regulations led directly to the First Opium War, during which Britain used its superior tactics and technology to smash all Chinese opposition. Given no choice China conceded defeat and China was forced to submit to the first of what became known as the unequal treaties.

Foreign Presence in China and The Unequal Treaties: The Unequal Treaties were a series of humiliating agreements China was forced into

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begging at the end of the first Opium War. The treaties demanded China give up large portions of its sovereignty to foreigners on its soil. Foreigners inside China had special extraterritoriality rights, or in other words they were not subject to Chinese laws in China. If any foreigner, or Chinese Chastain convert for that matter, was charged with a crime they would be judged by their nearest embassy or consulate, and not local officials. Each of the foreign powers carved bits of territory from China, the most prominent being:

- Britain at: Hong Kong, Weihaiwei, Tientsin (part of the city),
- France: Zhanjiang, Tientsin (part of the city),
- Germany: Kiautschou Bay,
- Japan: Korea, Taiwan,
- Russia: Harbin, Dalian (Port Arthur).

Additionally China had to give missionaries the right to preach anywhere in China, and they were forced to accept trade terms that made the foreign powers a fortune. Later Chinese history would call this the century of humiliation.

V. The Qing Empire and the Empress Dowager Cixi

China has been ruled by the Qing dynasty for hundreds of years, first coming to power in 1644. For the last 40 years China and the Qing have been dominated by one woman, the Empress Dowager Cixi. First rising to prominence as the favorite wife of one of the Emperors, when that Emperor died in 1861 she ruled the empire in her son's name until he was old enough to rule himself. Yet when he too died in adolescence, her four year old nephew was chosen to become the next Emperor, and Cixi maneuvered her way so that she would rule "in his name" until he came of age as well. Once finally deemed old enough to rule at the age of 18, the new emperor, Guangxu, would enjoy almost no real power as Cixi continued to

influence the government through a network of corruption, spies, and well placed friends.



In 1898 the Emperor Guangxu finally tried to escape Cixi's grasp and embarked on a trail of reforms that fatefully become known as the "100 Days Reform." Guangxu intended to reform the government to redistribute power more along the lines of a European constitutional monarchy. He also wanted to eliminate the extreme corruption present in China that made everything inefficient by opening up the government.

The Emperor knew his largest obstacle would be his aunt, the Empress Dowager Cixi. While Cixi believed in modernizing the military and some technological advancement, she was a stubborn conservative supporter of the old social order. To remove her once and for all the Emperor Guangxu planned to assassinate Cixi, but mistakenly trusted the influential General Yuan Shikie with his plans. Yuan quickly betrayed the Emperor's plot to Cixi. She then moved quickly to oust the Emperor in a military coup, supported by Dong Fuxiang, Prince Duan,

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and her favorite General Ronglu. Within a day Emperor Guangxu was placed on permanent house arrest, the reforms were immediately halted, and many of the leading reformers were executed. The Guangxu Emperor would watch with anger as the Boxers continued to grow and consume the countryside.

The leadership of China was split on how it viewed the coup. Some leading officials believed they were necessary and wanted things to change so China can keep up with the rest of the world. Others accepted that China needed a modern military and industry, but flat out rejected any attempt to change Chinese society or power structure. Most of those in the capital and all those close to Cixi supported the coup; some even recommended assassinating the Emperor, like the extremely conservative Prince Duan. However, many of the powerful Viceroy in southern China like Li Hongzhang, and Liu Kunyi, who controlled large modern garrisons of their own, demanded that the Emperor's life be saved. As the country drifted towards war with the foreigner, and Cixi issued her declaration of war, it was still unclear to many of the most powerful officials in China where they stood. Some were torn is issues surrounding the coup, other were reformists that admired the foreign powers, others saw the upstart Boxers a greater threat to China then the foreign and were hesitant to fight side by side with the peasants.

VI. Early Chinese Modernization

As mentioned the Empress Dowager Cixi did support some modernization. Just after China's defeat in the Second Opium War in 1860 China set out upon a massive program of modernization called the "Self-Strengthening Movement." It founded universities and built factories, but was primarily focused on upgrading the military. The program erected numerous arsenals, foundries, and naval yards across China to allow it to produce modern firearms, ships, and cannon. Yet, while they were capable of producing modern weapons they were inefficient and often cost just as much, if not more, than purchasing weapons directly

from other nations. Through purchases and domestic production the government has stockpiled large amounts of modern weapons in stockpiles hidden across that country in case of emergency.

The army was extremely obsolete and in desperate need of reorganization. Some parts of the Chinese military were still called up in an almost feudal fashion. China still maintains the "8 Banners," which are units divided by ethnicity and staffed based by the ancestors of the original Qing nobles and loyalists. The other pillar of the Qing military is the "Green Standard Army." This was an entirely Han Chinese formation that was used for day to day policing of the empire. By the 19th century both of these units were obsolete both technologically and structurally. The 8 Banners has turned into more of a bureaucracy than a fighting force, costing the Empire a fortune in salaries and consistent of many unnecessary officer positions. The Green Standard Army is scattered across China. Used for every role from border patrol, to tax collection, to rebel suppression. The scattered and unfocused nature of the Green Standard Army has almost depleted its effectiveness as a real fighting force. To add to both of their difficulties both of them use more obsolete weapons.



Through the Self-Strengthening Movement this system gave way to a new type of army. The best formations are those equipped with modern

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weapons, and trained by Europeans, because even when Chinese troops have been properly equipped in the past, without the proper training, they have been no match for the equally equipped, but their far more disciplined foreign counterparts. Many commanders, Viceroys, and nobles started to recruit and train their own units for specific tasks. One of these new units was the Guards Army, or Wuwei Troop. Separated into 5 divisions each is equipped and trained in the latest European fashion, and compose the core of the Imperial Army around the Capital. Ronglu, Yuan Shikia, Nie Shicheng, and Dong Fuxiang are all command different components of this army. Each of the 3 most powerful viceroy's of Southern China Li Hongzhang, Zhang Zhidong, and Liu Kunyi also have their own well trained and equipped forces. The quality of the different divisions and the garrison troops vary.

VII. The Boxers

The origins of the Boxers aren't entirely certain. First arising as a secretive society based off a spiritual form of martial arts, the Boxers turned into a political organization sometime in the 1890s. The group grew rapidly in the past two years, 1897-1898, as a drought and then a flood ravaged much of northern China, especially the provinces of Shandong and Zhili that are now the heartland of Boxer support. Blaming the terrible circumstances on evil foreigners the Boxers seemed to have an answer to those Chinese peasants who have lost everything, and are scared of the changing time. The Boxers stance was based on three main principles, xenophobia tied to Confucianism, violence, and a strong genuine belief in mysticism.

Boxers tie their xenophobia (The hatred of foreigners) to old Chinese Confucianism (Specifically the concept of Li for those interested). Confucianism is central to Chinese life and is based off of several key relationships, like those inside families, and between rulers and ruled. This tied together the community who also practiced veneration of ancestral spirits that

are tied to the land. From the Boxers point of view, as Churches, railroads, and telegraph wires literally poison to the country, and invites angry spirits to bring misfortune to China. These destabilizing forces upset the relationships that have been constructed up over the centuries, and has led to violent reactions. The Boxers think the railroads shake the graves of their forefathers, and that telegraph line rust is poison in air. This is why the Boxers view all foreigners, and foreign things, as the source of all the wrong doing in China, and urge the destruction of anything/one foreign in order to make China great again.

Violence is the only method the Boxers know (or to be fair have available) to remove the foreigners and effect change. Until recently they would occasionally burn down a church or ambush a merchant out in the country side, but now that the central government has all but endorsed the Boxers, they have gone on a riot across Northern China. Every church, foreign store, and railroad they come across has been put to the torch as they begin to form up around the major cities. This rampage has turned violent against people as well; any foreigner or Chinese Christian caught is usually immediately killed. While there have only been a few foreigners hurt to date, that number of Chinese Christian is now in the thousands.

Magic is a strong and genuine part of the Boxer belief system, and is one of the ways the Boxers have grown so rapidly. They state that 100 days of constant training in their form of spiritual martial arts can make someone impervious to foreign weapons, and after 200 days they can fly. A common spectacle in Boxer recruitment drives is to secretly fire blank bullets at a Boxer commander, after receiving no wounds from the shot the crowds are mystified and join in their hundreds.

Another group that is central to the Boxer system is its female branch called the Red Lanterns. These mostly young women in their late teens are said to have an impressive array of mystical powers, the ability to fly, blow fire with their fans, and heal wounds. The Boxers are actually quite respectful of women, and often

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rely upon the Red Lanterns for organization, but they have never been seen in combat.

At current, the masses of Boxer volunteers are beginning to stream in from the fields and congregate in the major urban areas around Peking and Tianjin, with other significant contingents near Jinan; while their numbers are large and exact figure is unknown. Armed with whatever they can find they are not very effective fighters, but are very eager. They are generally commanded by the two most notable Boxer leaders Cao Futian & Ni Zanqin, but since the Boxers are a volunteer group of illiterate armed peasants in from the fields, an exact breakdown of command (if it can be called that), or any exact number of Boxers (which are large) is informal and loose at best.

VIII. Foreign Powers

The first concern of foreign powers is the fate of their diplomats, civilians, and soldiers in trapped inside the capital. They have food and arms to hold out for some time, but their exact status is unknown. At the moment the foreign powers have around 3,000 troops combined on the coast by the Taku Forts with naval support.

Each of the foreign powers has access to different sources of strength, and will be able to draw upon different resources. While many of the representatives from the foreign powers have very prominent positions they do not have unchecked access to every resources of their nation as each government will only allow a certain amount of resources to be dedicated to China. But, home governments can be influenced, and public relations swayed to convince each representative's home government to release more resources.



X. Competition & Cooperation

The foreign powers are by no means a unified block. While they are convening to deal with this threat, each has their own goals in China, and many of them are actively competing with one another.

Britain is by far the strongest power in Asia (and knows it), and has the most to gain from things remaining as they are. Britain has had issues with each of its European counter parts. It has feared Russian expansion for decades and has looked to check it where ever possible. With France, Britain has had warmer relations lately, but has almost gone to war over issues in Africa twice; then with Germany building a fleet at a frightful pace Britain views that country's growing world presence as a possible threat. With these less than ideal relations with the rest of Europe Britain has become closer to Japan. Britain can call upon her positions in India and Africa to support her efforts in China

France's international relations are also lack luster. Its relations with Britain are peaceful at the moment, but France is all too aware that Britain is its main competitor for empire on the world stage. It has begun to grow what may become an alliance with Russia, who also is without many friends internationally. After their embarrassing defeat by the German Empire, France considers Germany its mortal enemy, and has gone out of its way to block German ambitions on many occasions; due to this embarrassment France has taken aggressive

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foreign policy to make up for lost ground. It also sees its self as the protector of Catholics in China and has gone out of its way to protect persecuted Catholics in China in the past. France has been fighting for years in Indo-China and has many ports around the world.

Germany is the newest of the great powers. With the most powerful army in Europe it is trying to break out and make its name on the world stage, but this is often mistaken for cockiness. Though old friends with the Russian Empire it is starting to find itself fearful of the gigantic country, it recently fought France, but wants that better relations with that country to avoid a possible two front war in the future. Though late to the game of empire building Germany snatched a few in colonies, and has its own base in China. Still woefully behind Germany has vocally announced its willingness to divided China into colonies between the great powers. The German emperor has personally called on his troops to avenge the murder of their diplomats in China. Germany's base at Kiautschou Bay is the only friendly port is has in Asia, and has difficulty bring resources over from Europe or its positions in Africa.

Japan is a new country in the modern sense, having only come out of extreme isolation 50 years ago, but is clearly a rising power in Asia. Having easily won a war with China just 6 years ago, conquering Korea and Taiwan. Japan is eager to expand into China and bring prestige to the only non-western imperial power. Lately Japan has fostered close relations with Great Britain, as both are concerned with Russian moves in northern China. As one of the most aggressive powers in China, Japan is looking to gain from the crisis, but will need diplomatic cover to do so.



Russia has been hungrily eyeing China for years, viewing it as a possible location to further expand its empire, especially in into Manchuria (The Northern bulb of China). Though vast and powerful Russia views itself vulnerable and is somewhat paranoid. It may have to fight Japan over control of Northern China, is actively concerned about Germany Empire, and has been dealing with British interference since the days of Napoleon. France is one of the only countries Russia can count on, and wants to attract them as a friend. Due to its long rail connections Russia can relatively quickly move resources from one side of the country right up to the border with China.

The United States is an outlier in this grouping. For years enjoying isolation at the other end of the world the, U.S. has only recently began to build an empire. It took the Philippines and several islands from the Spanish just 2 years ago, and still has to station large numbers of troops to stop the country from revolting. The large democracy hasn't yet begun to build up its military, but has a small core of veteran soldiers. Officially following what it calls the "Open Door" policy the U.S doesn't want China it be divided up or controlled through spheres of influence, but rather to respect China's sovereignty; however, to the other powers who already have inroads in China this is viewed as the U.S. trying to catch up.

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French cartoon from 1901: China is powerless while foreign powers divide its territory

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