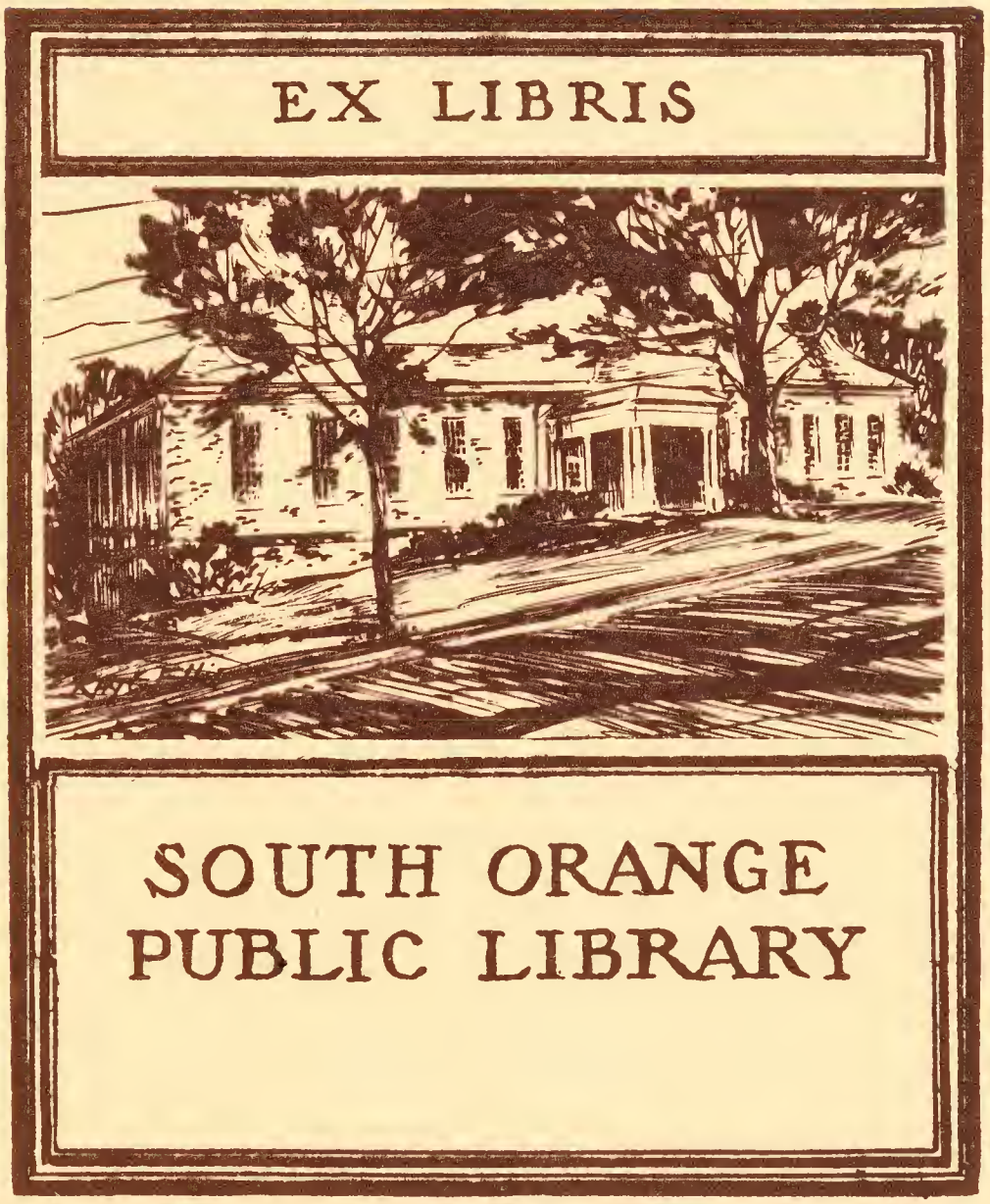
THE BOXER REBELLION

By Irving Werstein

Anti-Foreign Terror Seizes China, 1900

A World Focus Book



A revolutionary storm burst on imperial China in 1900. Led by a secret anti-foreign society, the I-Ho Ch'üan – roughly translated as "the Fists of Righteous Harmony" and commonly called "the Boxers" — thousands of Chinese soldiers, peasants, and workers rose up to drive out of their land the foreigners who had been exploiting China.

The so-called Boxer Rebellion was a desperate effort by certain elements of Chinese society to defend the ways of their ancestors against the impact of rampant imperialism.

It took an armed force manned by troops of eight nations to put down the Boxers. This is the story of the Boxer Rebellion and the events leading up to it.

PRINCIPALS

HUNG HSIU-CH'ÜAN — Chinese mystic who led Taiping rebellion
FENG YÜN-SHAN — Leader of Taiping fighting units
TZ'U-HSI — Empress Dowager of China
KUANG-HSÜ — Emperor of China
WILHELM II — Kaiser of Germany
NICHOLAS II — Czar of Russia
JOHN HAY — United States secretary of state
YÜ-HSIEN — Chinese official siding with Boxers
BARON KLEMENS VON KETTELER — German minister to China
ADMIRAL SIR EDWARD SEYMOUR — Commanding British Royal Navy units in Chinese waters
ADMIRAL ARNOLD KEMPFF — Commanding United States Navy units in Chinese waters
COLONEL DMITRI SHIRINSKY — Commanding Russian troops in China
GENERAL ISORU FUKUSHIMA — Commanding Japanese troops in China
MAJOR GENERAL ADNA R. CHAFFEE — Commanding United States troops in China
MARSHAL COUNT ALFRED VON WALDERSEE — Commanding international troops against Boxers at Peking

Looking toward the "Forbidden City" in Peking.

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FRANKLIN WATTS, INC.
845 Third Avenue
New York, New York 10022

This book is for Goldie and Jack

The author and publisher wish to acknowledge
the helpful suggestions of Professor C. T. Hu, Columbia University

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SBN 531-02150-5

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 79-172448
Printed in the United States of America
1 2 3 4 5

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The Boxer Rebellion

An ancient Chinese bell brought to the Maryknoll Seminary in New York State was for many years used to announce the annual departure of missionaries to China.

China – the Troubled Land

Until about the middle of the nineteenth century China kept herself serenely and imperiously apart from the rest of the world. For centuries, the Chinese had lived in isolation, content with their own social order, religion, traditions, and customs.

A thousand years before the West knew of such things as paper, printing, or gunpowder, the Chinese had invented them. They were highly sophisticated in the arts and the sciences. Although there was a wide gap between the style of life of the rulers and that of the ruled, a splendid civilization flourished in China.

One dynasty after another ruled over the vast land. The first house to rule China is believed to have been established in 2205 B.C. and to have lasted until 1765 B.C. However, little is known of that remote period in China's long history. Succeeding dynasties such as the Chou, Ch'in, Han, T'ang, Sung, and Ming, among others, nurtured learning, the arts, and literature.

In the seventeenth century, the Ming were overthrown by the Manchu, who swept down from the northeast and founded a dynasty they named the Ch'ing, which was to hold sway for two and a half centuries. This was the last of China's dynasties.

During the regime of the Manchu, or Ch'ing, the country's isolationism was penetrated to an important extent by the outside world so long shunned by China. There had, in fact, been visits from Catholic missionaries as early as the thirteenth cen-

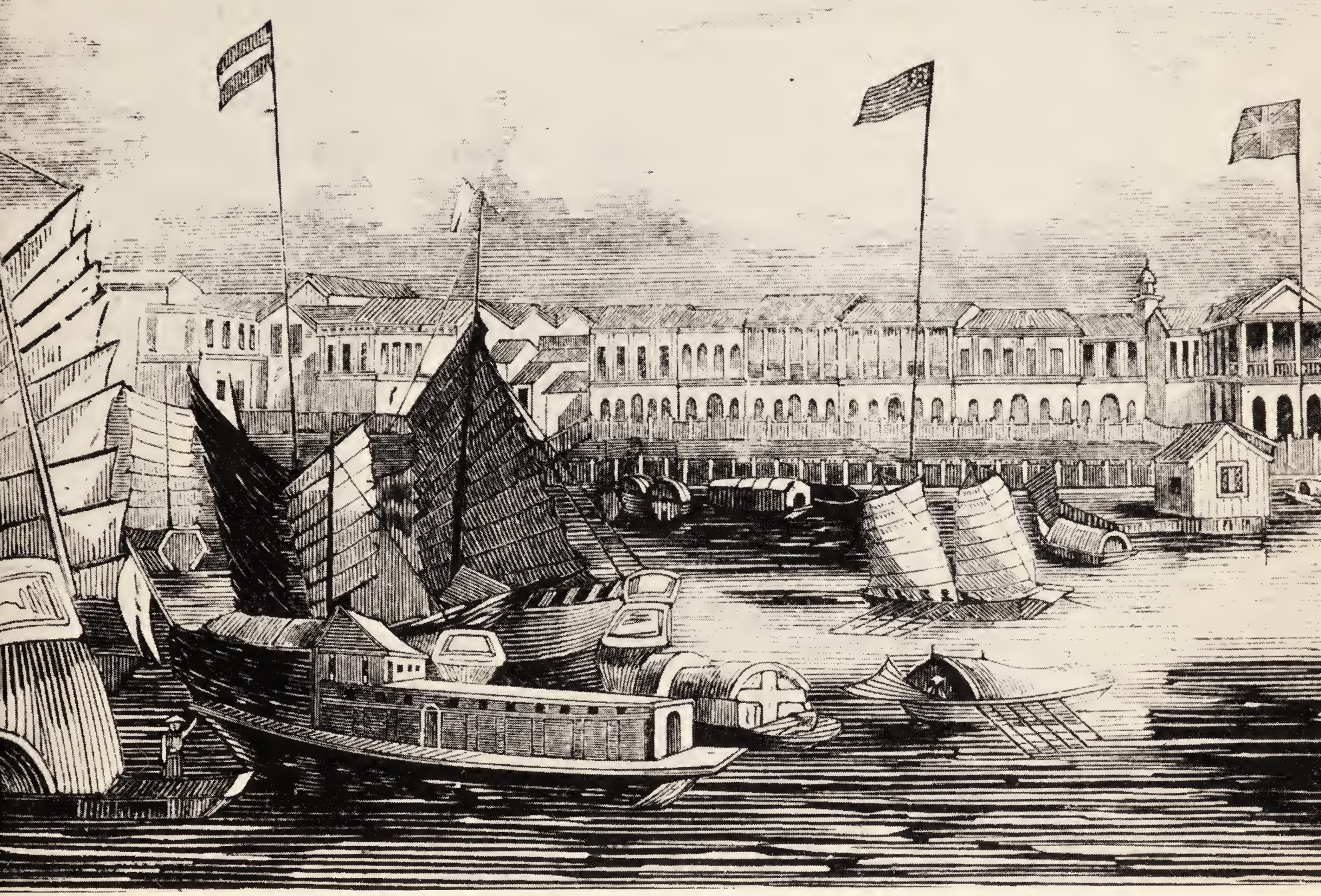
tury. But the entry of aliens was encouraged when the Ch'ing emperor K'ang-hsi gave permission for Catholic missionaries to set up schools in specifically designated areas.

The missionaries converted a number of Chinese to Catholicism. But in a country so huge, this influence scarcely made a ripple and did not diminish China's established religious philosophy — Confucianism. The Catholic missionaries were followed by Protestants, and the two sects vied with each other to save Chinese souls.

Close behind the missionaries came merchants from the West — "Ocean Men," the Chinese called them. The traders saw China as a profitable market. As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and then in increasing numbers during the eighteenth century, traders from Portugal, France, Britain, and Holland sailed to China. The first merchant ship from the United States dropped anchor at Canton in 1784. It was the forerunner of many more. Trade between China and Russia was conducted overland through Manchuria.

From the outset, the Chinese refused to give Westerners much commercial leeway, and in time they imposed even tighter restrictions. Foreigners who wanted to do business were soon limited to a single port — Canton — and commerce was rigidly controlled by incredible official red tape. But the Westerners were willing to accept all restrictions. Chinese silk, tea, and cotton were much sought after in Europe, and China was a rich outlet for European manufactured goods.

The British, with their huge merchant fleet, soon gained the lead in the China trade. A number of British merchants, based in India, began to smuggle opium into China. This narcotic, which Chinese had smoked for a hundred years — though in



The flags of many nations flying in front of foreign factories at Canton.

small amounts — quickly became the most salable item in the tradesmen's catalogs. Addiction to the drug spread rapidly. By 1836, more than two thousand tons of opium were being delivered annually at Canton. The demand outstripped the supply.

Alarmed by the growth of opium addiction, the imperial government in Peking sought to restrict its sale. Rankled by any curtailment in profits, British traders pressured London to act. In 1839, Britain and China went to war — mainly over the issue of opium trading — although there were other points of disagreement.

It was a small-scale war, marked by a succession of Chinese defeats. Hostilities were carried on sporadically. Each time the British won a battle, they tried to negotiate a settlement with Peking, only to be rebuffed. The war dragged on for three years until Emperor Tao-kuang finally saw it was futile to continue and sued for peace terms.

The British demanded and won many concessions. They acquired Hong Kong as a trading post and made the Chinese open five ports — Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo, and Shanghai — for trade and as places for foreign residence. British consulates were to be placed in these cities and "foreign enclaves" laid out.

These were districts where Britons and other outlanders could live, but not be subjected to Chinese law. Any crimes committed by the residents of the foreign quarter would be tried under British — not Chinese — laws. Also, missionaries could carry on their work in the newly opened treaty ports but were not permitted outside them.

Shortly afterward, the United States and other countries secured similar concessions from Peking. Although no one was

totally satisfied with the settlement, trade with China boomed. This was the era when Americans sailed the famous clipper ships for their China trade.

The Westerners kept hounding Peking for more privileges. They still could not travel into the interior of the country and had to live only in the assigned sectors of the treaty ports. Westerners also insisted on full diplomatic representation in Peking.

On this point, the Chinese refused to yield. To them, Peking meant the "Forbidden City"; the walled palace area within Peking was the heart of the "Celestial Empire" in which no lowly foreigner must ever be allowed to set foot.

Although Westerners felt they had not been given enough privileges, some Chinese officials argued that the "foreign devils" had been allowed too much.

Because the so-called Opium War of 1839–42 opened the treaty ports to a flood of that drug, opium addiction was reaching epidemic proportions. As a result, the years between 1842 and 1856 were marked by ever-mounting tensions between Chinese and foreigners.

The Chinese resented the outlanders. But they resented still more their own countrymen who had succumbed to opium, thus enslaving themselves to the white man who provided the narcotic. They also resented the Chinese whom missionaries had converted to Christianity and denounced them as traitors.

Upper-class Chinese scornfully regarded all foreigners as "barbarians." In turn, Westerners arrogantly mocked Chinese ways and referred to the people in such derogatory terms as "chink," "slope-head," or "slant-eyes."

The situation came to a climax in 1856, when the Chinese seized a small Hong Kong-based Chinese trading vessel, the

A twentieth-century photograph of the "Forbidden City" gives a partial view of the interior.

Arrow, sailing under the British flag, and arrested her crew. The British, seeking an opportunity to obtain more concessions in China, used this as an excuse to start another war against the Celestial Empire. Hostilities broke out on October 23, 1856. France, then closely allied with Britain, also entered the war because of the illegal execution of a French priest in Kwangsi Province.

For a time, the Anglo-French allies did not press matters. But late in 1857, they launched a combined land and sea offensive. They first captured Canton and then, in May, 1858, the main enemy defenses, the Taku Forts near Tientsin. This thrust threatened Peking. With the Forbidden City endangered, the Chinese surrendered.

By the 1858 Treaty of Tientsin, Peking gave foreigners permission to travel anywhere in China. For the first time, foreign shipping was allowed passage on the Yangtze River. Additional ports were opened for trade. Also, fully staffed consulates would be permitted in Peking.

However, before the treaty was ratified, the Chinese went back on their word. When British and French envoys arrived at Tientsin, ready to journey to Peking for the signing of the papers, they were required to travel by a difficult and circuitous route. The victorious allies, angered by this treatment, resumed the war.

A British naval force sailed off to take the Taku Forts, which had been restored to the Chinese. But instead of surrendering, the forts' garrisons fought back so hard that four British gunboats were crippled and the attackers forced into a hasty retreat.

Following this unexpected setback, the allies sent an Anglo-French army overland to Peking. They captured the Taku Forts

French and British forces near Canton in 1856, during hostilities with China.

after a bloody fight, took Tientsin, and went on to the capital, which they entered without opposition. Emperor Hsien-feng, who had succeeded to the throne in 1850, on the death of Tao-kuang, fled to Jehol, north of Peking.

The Chinese capitulated after the fall of the Forbidden City. Britain and France gained many new concessions. The Chinese had to open another group of port cities and to permit the immediate establishment of foreign legations in Peking. Missionaries were given free movement throughout all of China. When these terms were met, the Anglo-French troops evacuated Peking and the emperor returned to his ancient capital.

The Taiping Revolt

Assailed as it was by outside forces, the Manchu dynasty also faced serious internal disorders. Although these upheavals arose within the country, they were caused partly by foreign influences.

In 1843, an obscure schoolteacher, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, converted to Christianity. Six years before, after failing the imperial examination for the third time, Hung had suffered a nervous breakdown and experienced hallucinations. After his conversion to Protestantism, Hung explained his visions through his adopted religion.

He became obsessed with the idea that he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ. According to Hung, the Savior had chosen him to lead the Chinese away from the belief that the emperor was a divine being.

Clad as a monk, Hung wandered across south China preaching against the Manchu ruler. Times were hard and poverty was common in the land. Because the people were discontented, they listened to Hung and he gained many followers.

Next, Hung claimed that his visions (and his "elder Brother") directed him to lead China down the right path, to persuade the people to drop their ancient practices and accept new ones based on the teachings of Christ.

Hung had no idea of precisely how to carry out his ordained mission. But among his followers was a practical young man, Feng Yün-shan. Feng organized Hung's disciples into compact,

Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, who, in the 1850's, led the Taiping rebels against the Manchu.

well-armed fighting groups sworn to overthrow the Manchu in the name of Jesus.

In 1852, Hung had another vision telling him to revolt against the regime. Feng's fighters launched an uprising and the insurrection spread. By 1853, the Taiping rebels, as the fighters were known, had taken the city of Nanking. From there, they ruled most of central China for more than a decade. Theirs was a confused regime; its aims, beyond the overthrow of the Manchu, were as unclear as its philosophy.

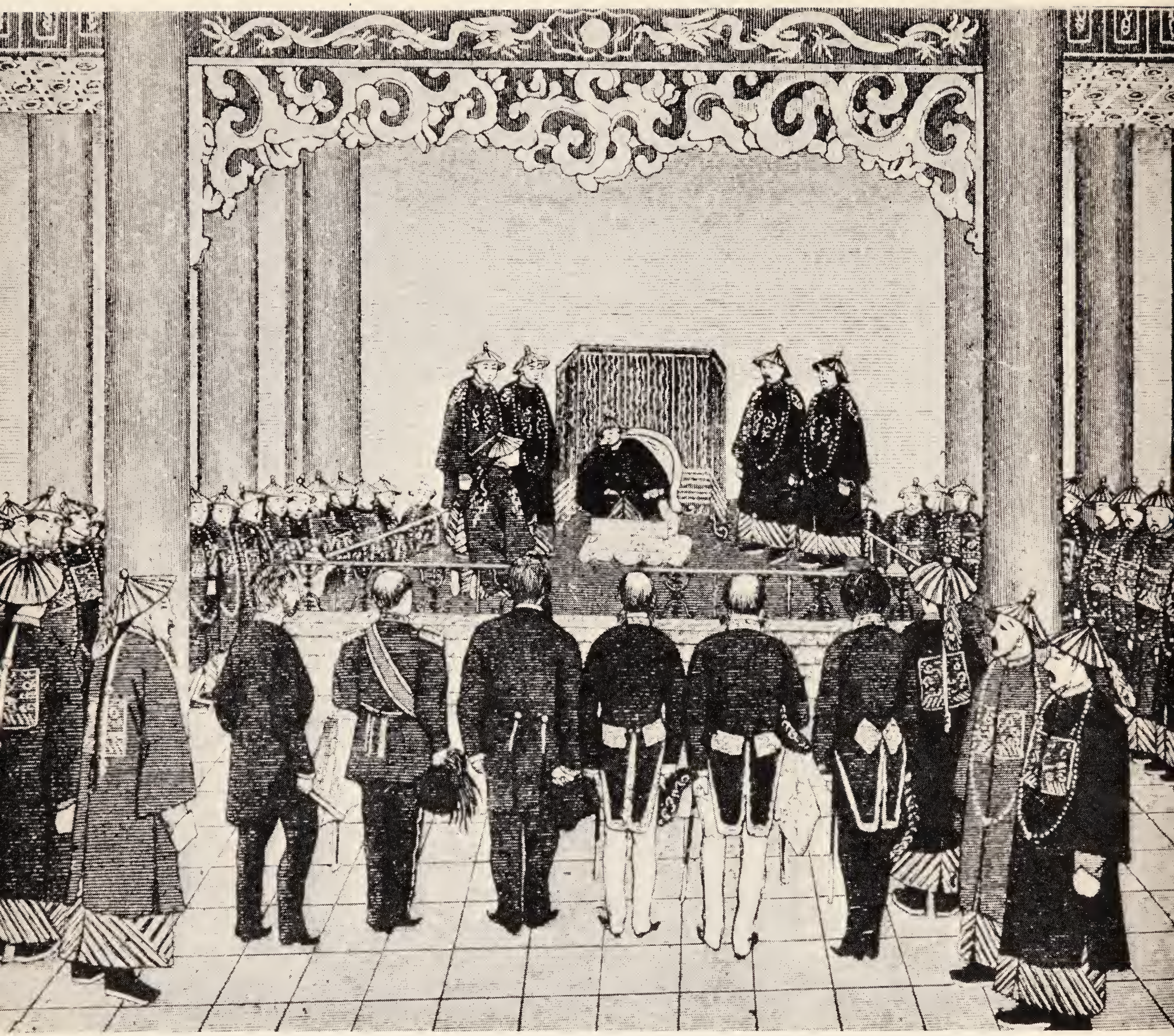
Although Taiping forces occasionally threatened Peking, the rebels made little headway. Actually, it had not been so much their strength as the weakness of the imperial government that had enabled them to attain military success in the earlier phase of the movement.

The Manchu finally crushed the rebellion in 1864. They received limited help from Western soldiers of fortune led by a British regular army officer, Captain Charles George Gordon, who thus earned the nickname "Chinese" Gordon.

The Taiping Rebellion was costly in lives, money, and property. During the decade it lasted, several of China's richest provinces were laid waste.

In 1861, when Emperor Hsien-feng died, he was succeeded by his only son, T'ung-chih. Thus began the period known as "T'ung-chih Restoration," during which the Taiping rebels were suppressed and faltering steps were taken toward "self-strengthening." Since Emperor T'ung-chih was only five years old when he ascended the throne, his mother, the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi, ruled as the boy's regent.

British Captain Charles George Gordon (who later rose to general) fought on the side of the Manchu in the Taiping Rebellion. This photograph of Gordon in mandarin's dress was taken especially for the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi.



Emperor T'ung-chih grants an audience to foreign representatives at the palace in Peking in 1873. The young emperor, still in his teens, died two years later.

T'ung-chih, dominated by his mother for the next fourteen years, died in 1875. Since he was childless, the throne went to Kuang-hsü, Tz'u-hsi's nephew, then about three years old. Tz'u-hsi ruled until Kuang-hsü was proclaimed to be of age in 1887, but retained strong influence over him even after she retired in 1889.

Tz'u-hsi kept the Ch'ing dynasty in power by crushing all opposition to it. While she reigned, Peking clung to the past. She allowed no reforms and stubbornly resisted any suggestion of change, although pressures for it mounted within the country during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

War with Japan – 1894–95

For more than thirty years — 1860 to 1894 — China enjoyed a period of comparative tranquillity. After the Taiping rebels were finally put down in 1864, no further domestic unrest of any importance followed.

On the surface, the relationship with foreigners seemed smooth. Few unpleasant incidents occurred, although difficulties did arise from time to time.

In 1870, some French Catholic missionaries were murdered. Similar acts of violence took place a few years later. But these were isolated incidents, leading to no serious rupture of relations with foreign powers.

The serene mask was ripped away in the mid-1890's. Foreign encroachments were crumbling China's long-standing isolationism. Some Chinese officials, realizing that their country could not remain chained to the past, sought to modernize the Chinese army and to build a new navy. Telegraph lines were strung for better communications between cities, and railroads were started.

In Peking, however, the emperor and most of his court

Clouds over the Summer Palace symbolize the storm brewing in China. While Chinese Emperor Kuang-hsü lived in the past, Japan was strengthening its military power for the future.

showed no enthusiasm for the efforts to modernize. The emperor did not actually forbid reshaping the army, constructing a navy, stringing telegraph lines, or laying railroads. He simply acted as though none of these things was taking place. Within the palace walls, life remained as it had been for centuries — opulent, gracious, and self-centered.

But Emperor Kuang-hsü was made to learn that a new day had dawned. His harsh awakening came from a short, disastrous war China launched against Japan in 1894.

For years, the Chinese had regarded the Japanese as an inferior people living in an inferior country. China was vast; Japan small. China was rich; Japan poor. Culturally, China was the master; Japan the pupil.

In the 1850's, Japan was opened up for trade with the West and the Japanese quickly accepted certain Western notions, while retaining their own basic traditions, rites, customs, and life-styles. The Japanese greatly admired the foreign warships that visited their shores. Within a few years they built a powerful navy on the European model, which enabled them to assert themselves in East Asia. China failed to follow suit until the 1880's, much too late to catch up with Japanese sea power.

Japan also armed and trained its troops with the latest European weapons and techniques. Once again China lagged. By the time Peking decided to reequip its forces, it was no longer possible to outstrip Japan.

Once in possession of modern military power, Japan embarked on an aggressive expansionist policy. From the mikado (emperor) down to the lowliest fisherman and peasant, the Japanese were charged with the ambition to dominate Asia, which for so long had been under the shadow of China.

Cramped on their small islands, the Japanese needed elbow room. One place to find it was Korea — at that time known as Chosen. China had exercised suzerainty over that land for centuries and still retained loose control over it. In the past, Japan had attempted unsuccessfully to wrest Chosen from China.

Confident of its newly acquired military and naval might, Japan again resolved to dispute China's claims to Korea. The time came in 1894, when an anti-government revolt broke out. Peking rushed troops to help put down the insurrection — and so did Japan.

Spokesmen for the mikado flatly denounced China's exclusive domination of Korea and stated that Japan no longer recognized it. Korea — or Chosen — must be given independence. Should this happen, they thought, Korea would be their easy prey.

Angered by such impudence, China declared war on Japan on August 1, 1894. To control the waters off Korea and north China, the Nipponese rushed a dozen warships to the mouth of the Yalu River. A Chinese squadron of equal numbers attacked the Japanese there. The new navy of Nippon won a stunning victory — all the Chinese ships were sunk or damaged.

Buoyed up by their naval triumph, the Japanese decided to try out their modernized army and launched an all-out offensive in Shantung Province and Manchuria. By March, 1895, the Rising Sun flag flew over much of that territory.

The Chinese strongholds of Weihaiwei and Port Arthur, which guarded the sea-lanes to Peking, were in Japanese hands. Battered and beaten on land and sea, the Chinese gave up.

The Japanese exacted harsh terms in the Treaty of Shimonoseki that ended the brief war and gained much under the pact.

Mutsuhito (1852–1912) was emperor of Japan when his country defeated the Chinese navy in 1895.

China was to recognize Korean independence; cede Formosa and the adjacent Pescadores Islands to Japan; agree to pay a large indemnity; give Port Arthur and the Liaotung Peninsula in Manchuria to Japan, and meet other equally humiliating demands.

Russia, however, saw in a resurgent Japan a rival to its own ambitions in the Far East. Backed by its ally France, Russia vigorously protested the Treaty of Shimonoseki and warned that it would fight to nullify it. The Germans joined the French and Russians in this outcry. They, too, feared the emergence of Japan; indeed, Kaiser Wilhelm II labeled the Japanese "the Yellow Peril."

Germany declared it would go to any lengths to stop Japanese expansion. The Japanese yielded to this overwhelming opposition. They relinquished Port Arthur and retired from the Liaotung Peninsula but retained Formosa and the Pescadores.

Nippon's speedy defeat of China revealed the impotence of the Chinese dragon. Hungry for territory, suspicious and jealous of each other, the Western powers took the Japanese victory as a signal to carve out for themselves "spheres of influence" in China, each nation scrambling for the biggest slice.

The Land-Grabbers

In the wake of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, China found itself totally helpless and defenseless against the voracious powers. Russia, Great Britain, France, and Germany greedily seized huge areas, using any excuse to annex territory.

For example, in November, 1897, two German missionaries were murdered in Shantung Province. Kaiser Wilhelm promptly seized the port of Tsingtao in reprisal. The Germans followed this by forcing Peking to "lease" them — at nominal rental — the port and the land around Kiaochow Bay as well. The kaiser also insisted upon certain mining rights in mineral-rich Shantung.

The German take-over at Tsingtao was only the first lap in the race to ravage China. No sooner had the Germans made their move than Russia pounced on Port Arthur, which Japan had already been forced to relinquish.

Czar Nicholas also sent his soldiers into the nearby port of Dairen. Then, like the Germans, Russia legalized this land grab by "leasing" for a period of twenty-five years the entire Liaotung Peninsula — where Port Arthur and Dairen were located.

Leasing was a splendid way for an aggressor to avoid charges of "colonialism" or "imperialism." The Chinese had no cause for complaint. This was a simple business deal — rent was being paid. And the leased real estate would be returned after a stipulated period — or would it?

Having looked on as Germany and Russia satisfied their

A drawing of a German flagstaff being erected at Tsingtao in 1898, during the German occupation of that port.

hunger, Great Britain joined the feast. It demanded a lease on Weihaiwei, and China readily agreed that Britain could keep that bastion "as long as Port Arthur remained in Russian hands."

At the same time, Britain negotiated a ninety-nine-year lease on Kowloon, opposite Hong Kong. The British also acquired exclusive spheres of influence and trading rights in several of China's richest provinces.

Not to be left out, France "leased" Kwangchowan in the south and also gained spheres of influence in Kwangtung, Kwangsi, and Yunnan provinces.

Nor was that the end to what one historian has called "the Big Oriental Barbecue." Ignoring the protests of the other powers, Russia took over the whole of Manchuria. Even Italy, barely established as a unified nation, tried to obtain a share of territory.

From the time of the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895 until early 1899, no fewer than thirteen Chinese provinces had been devoured by the great powers of the world, with the exception of the United States.

The Open Door

The Americans had not participated in the division of China only because they were still expanding within their own borders, pushing out into the vast reaches of the frontier. American businessmen as yet had little interest in foreign ventures. Though the United States traded with China, it did not seek territorial gain there.

However, after 1898, when America defeated Spain in a six-month-long war, the Philippine Islands, Guam, and Hawaii became United States property. The eyes of American business then turned to the Far East. Americans became deeply concerned with securing a firm foothold in China. For the first time in its history, the United States was a colonial power, with major interests far beyond its continental boundaries.

Accordingly, United States Secretary of State John Hay pressed the countries with spheres of influence in China for guarantees that American traders would not be shut out of the China market.

He insisted that Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Japan, and Italy maintain an "Open Door" policy. That is, any nation might do business at the treaty ports on the same basis as those that had obtained leases and concessions from China.

Except for Russia, who equivocated, the powers involved agreed to the Open Door. American businessmen poured into China. American flagships plied the sea-lanes to the Orient and

trade grew swiftly. To a certain extent, the Open Door policy kept the powers from slashing still larger slices out of the Celestial Empire.

As Hay bargained with the countries intent upon gaining further concessions from China, groups of Chinese were seeking to save their nation from being reduced to a colony. Clubs and societies dedicated to the salvation of China mushroomed across the land. Some advocated reforms along Western lines. The disastrous war with Japan had shown that the old China could not survive unless strong measures were taken.

Influential men who advocated radical reform managed to gain Emperor Kuang-hsü's support during the summer of 1898. For about three months, edict after edict emanated from Peking ordering changes suggested by the radicals.

These reforms were wide in scope. Schools would teach Western as well as Chinese subjects. The civil service bureaucracy was to be overhauled. The army would be retrained and reequipped with modern tactics and weapons. Many other reforms were planned as well.

But the radicals met strong opposition. While they wanted change, conservatives, led by the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi, ardently defended the status quo. Had the emperor and his advisers been more skillful, they might have obtained their reforms a little at a time. But Kuang-hsü, inexperienced in statesmanship, was impatient with piecemeal reforms. His radical associates were just as willful. They demanded that everything be changed at once. As a result they clashed head on with Tz'u-hsi and the conservative element in the government.

Accomplished politicians would have dealt diplomatically with the empress dowager and not have antagonized her. Al-

though not the official ruler since 1889, Tz'u-hsi still wielded a great deal of power. Radicals who felt that she endangered their cause plotted to destroy this power through reform.

Tz'u-hsi's informers told her of the conspiracy and she reacted in typically vigorous fashion. Secretly mobilizing her followers, she carried out a coup d'etat. The emperor's radical friends were executed and Kuang-hsü stripped of his powers while the empress dowager reestablished herself as the ruler of China. She was strongly backed by the nobility, the military, and the masses.

With Tz'u-hsi in power, the court was filled with arch reactionaries. Their ignorance and superstition and, in particular, their fear that they would lose power prompted them to advise the empress dowager to adopt the disastrous anti-foreign policy. The Manchu nobles fabricated the story that foreign governments were determined to restore Emperor Kuang-hsü to power at her expense.

Tz'u-hsi annulled all reforms and called for resistance to further foreign encroachments. If she had had her way, the Open Door would have been slammed tightly shut.

The Fists of Righteous Harmony

Among those who fanatically supported the empress dowager was a secret fraternal society that practiced the art of self-defense. Known as I-Ho Ch'üan — roughly translated as "the Fists of Righteous Harmony" — it was dedicated to the cause of driving all foreigners and their influences out of China. Americans and Britons in China humorously referred to I-Ho Ch'üans as the Boxers.

Secret societies had a long tradition in China. However, because they were primarily anti-dynastic, the imperial government's policy toward them was one of ruthless suppression.

When the Germans seized Tsingtao in 1897, the I-Ho Ch'üan, which had existed for more than a century, raised the slogan "Death to Foreigners!" and rallied thousands of Chinese to its banners.

In 1898, there was almost daily harassment of foreigners, ranging from verbal insults to outright violence. When Tz'u-hsi took over from Kuang-hsü, the Boxer-sparked unrest grew more intense. One high-ranking official, Yü-hsien of Shantung Province, openly abetted the Boxers.

The situation in Shantung became more critical every day. Anti-foreign acts were so widespread that Peking finally had to

Foreigners, threatened by Boxers, are here guarded by soldiers of the regular Chinese army. Such protection was rare, for the government encouraged the rebels.

remove Yü-hsien, who had recently been appointed governor of the province. However, in a few months he was made governor of Shansi Province — and once installed there, again openly sided with I-Ho Ch'üan.

A calamity of nature gave impetus to the Boxer agitation against foreigners. The summer of 1899 was marked by a record-breaking drought that blighted crops and ruined fall harvests.

Spreading out through the countryside, Boxer agitators stirred up the peasants against both Westerners and Christianized Chinese, blaming the protracted dry spell on them. The Boxers told the farmers that the old gods were offended by the presence of such interlopers in the Celestial Empire. Unless the land was purged of foreign devils and those who had turned from the ancient faith, even worse disasters than the drought were likely to occur.

The cry "Death to Foreigners!" rang out across northern China. In towns, cities, and remote villages, missionaries and their families were massacred. The survivors fled to the dubious sanctuary of the foreign quarters in the treaty ports or else sought refuge in their country's legations at Peking.

But even in the capital, foreigners were menaced. British, French, German, American, Japanese, Russian, and Italian diplomats called upon Chinese officials for protection. They received, instead, vague promises that the imperial government would "do something" about I-Ho Ch'üan. Indeed, imperial troops were brought into Peking but took no action to curb the Boxers. In fact, the rebels were encouraged by the government because of their professed support for the Manchu court.

On the last day of 1899, the situation worsened sharply. As

the foreign community was festively welcoming in the new century, members of the Big Sword Society, which was allied with the Boxers, killed the Reverend Sidney Brooks.

The murder was but an evil foreshadowing of the ugly year ahead.

The Brewing Storm

With the coming of 1900, apprehension gripped China's foreign communities. It was soon made evident that the empress dowager would not take a strong stand against the Boxers. In an edict dated January 13, 1900, the imperial government advised all officials to deal "justly" with I-Ho Ch'üan when foreigners made charges against the society's members.

Reports of anti-Western violence flooded the Peking legations, which duly lodged protests with the Chinese Foreign Office and were given profuse apologies. But the Boxers continued their assaults.

It took a while for foreign diplomats to accept the reality that the imperial government had no intentions of stopping the Boxer movement. Indeed, some imperial soldiers were cooperating with I-Ho Ch'üan gangs.

In the six years since the Sino-Japanese War, foreigners had consistently misjudged the Chinese people. Because the Chinese had humbly met every Western demand, foreigners failed to understand that the compliant Chinese were boiling with hidden resentment. Absorbed in business transactions, European and American traders accepted Chinese silence as acquiescence in the humiliation of their country.

But the masses seethed with anger. Men less self-satisfied than the foreigners in China would have heeded portents of the storm brewing over the land they had plundered. With the arro-

gance of conquerors, however, the Westerners ignored the distant thunder. Not until the fury erupted did they note what was happening.

The storm broke first upon the missionaries because they were the most vulnerable targets. Boxer wrath engulfed Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, and Baptist missionaries alike.

These were the alien devils who sought to entice the Chinese from the creeds of their ancestors and to replace the old gods with the Christian deity. The missionaries were killed, beaten, expelled, their schools and churches burned, their hospitals razed.

Then, the pent-up resentments swirled over all foreigners in a tidal wave of resurgent Chinese xenophobia and patriotism. The Boxer battle cry, "Death to Foreigners!" actually was another way of saying "China for the Chinese!" — a forlorn hope in that era of rampant imperialism.

The rising violence confused Westerners. An American merchant wrote from Tientsin: "I simply can't understand it. We've done so much for these people . . . . We've built schools, telegraph lines, and railways." It never dawned on him that nobody had asked the Chinese if they wanted Christian schools, telegraph lines, railroads, or any other Western "improvements."

All these innovations of Western society had been imposed upon the Chinese. At the outset, the people had been apathetic to the Western impact on their culture and had viewed foreigners with disdainful amusement. What could a handful of outlanders do to China? But the aliens had jabbed and pricked, inflicting a thousand small wounds until the once-mighty Chinese dragon was bleeding to death.

Small wonder that foreigners were astounded when the storm finally burst. Not all of them, however, were unprepared

Foreigners could not imagine the proportions to which Boxer agitation would grow. Here, after the violence spread, defenses are erected at the American Legation in Peking.

for the turbulent eruption. Baron Klemens von Ketteler, the German minister to China, had repeatedly warned his colleagues in the diplomatic corps that troubled times were in the offing. A student of Chinese history, von Ketteler spoke several dialects of the language fluently. Of all the diplomats in Peking, he was the best informed on China.

However, von Ketteler's prophecies were discounted as exaggerations by the representatives of the other nations. They gave little attention to his "scare stories." Even when anti-foreign Boxer agitation started in earnest, the Peking-based diplomats took no positive action. But by March, 1900, the most naïve optimist in the foreign community had to see that grave events were at hand.

Still, it was not until the Boxers placarded the walls of Peking with posters urging the people to "eliminate" the "foreign devils" that the legations called on their governments for military reinforcements to provide protection for their personnel and the many refugees who sought sanctuary behind the legation walls.

The Last Dance

After a period of relative quiet, the crisis escalated in late April, 1900. A strange story was whispered in Peking's tearooms, on street corners, and in shops. It was said that at midnight of April 29, worshipers in a certain temple near the Imperial Palace were startled to hear a deep voice emanating from the temple shrine.

The mysterious, disembodied voice was supposed to have announced: "I am Yu Ti, God of the Unseen World. I have stopped the rains from falling because you have yielded to the foreign devils. You let them build railroads and telegraph systems; you let them teach you their unholy religion. I, Yu Ti, am displeased. You can regain my favor by heeding the I-Ho Ch'üan. They are carrying out the will of heaven! Hear me! Cut the telegraph wires! Tear up the railroads! Decapitate the foreign devils! On the day you exterminate the foreign devils, the rain shall fall, the drought shall end, and you shall be free!"

Undoubtedly, Boxer agents had spread this unlikely story. Yu Ti was the most revered and feared of the Chinese gods. Peasants and laborers — a largely unschooled and superstitious folk — would not dare disobey the words of Yu Ti. By linking the god to their cause, the Boxers ensured the active support of the most backward and downtrodden elements in the country.

Soon after the verbal manifestation of Yu Ti, telegraph lines were severed at many points. Mobs attacked repair crews trying

Li Hung-chang, perhaps China's leading statesman during the Boxer uprising. The empress dowager sought Li's advice but listened, instead, to the reactionaries at court. When the rebellion was over, Li was appointed commissioner to restore peace. Here, he is shown with British Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone, probably during his visit to Europe in 1896.

to mend the breaks. The railroad tracks linking Tientsin and Peking were ripped up in several places. Inside Peking, the Boxers handed out leaflets calling for a general uprising when "Yu Ti gives the divine sign."

Weeks passed and unrest simmered in Peking. Despite the presence of reinforced imperial army patrols, mobs raged through the streets, shouting, jeering, looting, smashing windows, setting fires, and occasionally beating up foreigners. These disorders were sporadic; at times, several days would pass without trouble in the streets.

The diplomats made unavailing protests to the Chinese Foreign Office. Queries about the official position of the imperial government on the Boxers received evasive answers.

Rumors abounded that the Boxers were planning to massacre every foreigner in Peking on June 1. When this word reached the Legation Quarter late in May, the diplomats acted with unaccustomed haste. Urgent messages went out to various capitals stressing the real danger of a wholesale massacre.

Actually, London, Berlin, Rome, Washington, Moscow, and Tokyo had been reluctant to dispatch armed forces to China in case Peking regarded it as an act of war. The foreign governments would have preferred the Chinese themselves to handle the Boxer crisis.

But the emphasis the diplomats had placed on the threat of a mass slaughter impelled the powers to move swiftly. From naval stations and bases established along China's coast, Britain, France, Italy, the United States, Russia, and Japan mobilized an international force of marines totaling about 340 men, plus a battery of five rapid-firing guns and a large quantity of ammunition.

As this detachment was forming, the foreign colony in Peking sought to maintain some appearance of normalcy. On May 24 the British minister gave a party to celebrate Queen Victoria's eighty-first birthday. All the foreign community was invited to an elaborate banquet. Dinner was served on gold plates. The aged queen was toasted in vintage wines and rare champagnes. An orchestra played for outdoor dancing. The lilting music was loud enough to muffle the cries and shouts of a riotous mob in the Chinese quarter just outside the city walls.

If anyone at the party heard the tumult, nothing was said. The guests danced away the night, the women radiantly beautiful in modish gowns, the men impeccably clad in full dress or dashing uniforms.

Outside Peking's walls was furor; in the British Legation only the peaceable sounds of clinking glasses, women's laughter, and music. The dancing couples twirled with carefree abandon as though unaware that violence and death lurked in the night outside.

That gala salute to Queen Victoria was the last dance Peking would enjoy for a long time.

Days of Wrath

Anyone who still had reservations or doubts that days of wrath were at hand soon changed his mind. In almost every district of north China, the Boxers — often allied with imperial troops and local armed militia units — conducted a stepped-up terror campaign against foreigners and Chinese Christians.

In the capital, only the presence of imperial troops kept Boxer mobs from sacking the city and assaulting the Legation Quarter. On May 28 Tz'u-hsi issued an order that her troops were no longer to be burdened "with the task of protecting the lives and property of foreigners . . . or those who consort with them." She finally showed her hand by publicly aligning herself with the Boxers. The empress dowager stated: "The time has come to walk along the old and tried paths of our ancestors. Heed Yu Ti! Obey and follow his command! Death to the foreigners!"

When their ruler exhorted them to turn on the foreigners, many imperial soldiers joined Boxer mobs. Some officers, however, managed to keep their units in line, commanding their men to maintain law and order. They correctly foresaw a bloodbath for China if foreigners were slaughtered as the Boxers wished.

The situation at Peking was deteriorating rapidly as the rumored date of the Boxer uprising — Friday, June 1 — drew near. The rioters got bolder. On Tuesday, May 29, they destroyed the electric streetcar line that skirted the city's walls. It had been built by a foreign company to provide speedy transportation

The Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi (1835–1908), who opposed outside influence on China and refused to protect foreigners from the Boxers.

around Peking's outskirts. The Boxers tore up the tracks, wrecked the streetcars, set them afire, and killed the Chinese conductors and motormen.

That same day, homes of foreigners located outside the walls were burned. On the evening of the twenty-ninth, legation staffs and male refugees were issued pistols and ammunition. Armed men stood guard at the legations.

On Wednesday, May 30, a courier arrived at the British Legation with word that the international force composed of American, British, Russian, Italian, Japanese, and French marines had reached Tientsin and was on the way to Peking.

When the internationals boarded railroad cars at Tientsin, about 3,000 imperial troops appeared and blocked the tracks. The British officer commanding the column set up his rapid-firing guns and threatened to shoot his way through the Chinese.

The imperials departed and the international troop train rattled on unmolested to Peking. Once in the city, the marines marched to the Legation Quarter from the railroad station, eyed by sullen crowds. Though the detachment was small, no attempt was made to interfere with it, and the marines were joyously welcomed by Peking's foreign colony.

The arrival of the marines in Peking gave the people in the legation compound much reassurance, but the Chinese residents of the city were irked by the presence of foreign troops, looking on them as invaders.

The Boxers, crowding the gates of the city, distributed leaflets announcing that the massacre of the foreigners had been postponed until Tuesday, June 5, because the god Yu Ti had so ordained.

Divine will had nothing to do with the change in the Boxer

schedule. The marines, the rapid-firing guns, and rumors that a large army of "foreign devils" was coming had caused the delay.

But disaster had merely been postponed. The arrival of the days of wrath was not far off.

Admiral Seymour's Expedition

The international column that had reached Peking was only the vanguard of the force being mobilized to protect foreigners in China. Admiral Sir Edward Seymour, commanding the Royal Navy's China Squadron, ordered the cruisers *Phoenix, Aurora,* and *Humber* to Taku from the British naval base at Weihaiwei. The American warship *Newark,* with Admiral Arnold Kempff aboard, also steamed to Taku, as did German, French, Italian, and Japanese gunboats.

Appointed commander of the international forces in China, Admiral Seymour ordered 1,200 more men to guard the Legation Quarter in Peking. Included in the battalion were American, British, German, French, Russian, and Italian marines.

On June 10 the unit started by train for Peking. This move was begun five days after the Boxer deadline for the massacre of Peking's foreigners. Although no attempt to carry it out had been made, the threat was still a real one.

Some thirty miles from Tientsin, Seymour's relief expedition ran into trouble. Not only had the tracks been torn up, but swarms of Boxers attacked the troop trains as well. They were beaten off only after hard fighting.

The next day — June 11 — the battalion was reinforced by French and Russian units, bringing its strength to about 1,800 men. However, further progress toward the capital was impossible; the relief expedition was assaulted by Boxers, and by a

International troops head for Peking.

large imperial army force under General Tung Fu-hsiang. Tung had orders to keep additional foreign troops out of Peking.

When Tung's soldiers left Peking, the Boxers swarmed in. They murdered the secretary of the Japanese Legation, attacked groups of isolated Europeans, burned the customhouse, looted several mission schools, and desecrated the European cemetery on the city's outskirts. Several times mobs charged the Legation Quarter, only to be driven back by the marines.

Meantime, Seymour's men were stopped short. They lacked the numbers and firepower needed to brush aside General Tung and the Boxers. Perhaps the admiral would have taken his chance at an all-out assault, but bad news came from Tientsin. The Boxers and their followers, backed by imperial troops, had taken control of the city. The imperial forces were manning the Taku Forts that guarded the river approach to Peking to prevent allied warships from bringing in reinforcements and supplies.

Admiral Seymour realized that his column was in danger of being cut off from its base at Tientsin. Hemmed in at the front and the rear, the admiral abandoned the effort to reach Peking and turned back toward Tientsin, only to find that the railroad tracks leading to that city had been ripped out.

After some vicious clashes, which kept on until June 22, Seymour's marines finally reached the Hsiku Arsenal, a string of forts on the left bank of the Pei-Ho River, a few miles from Tientsin. The weary internationals took refuge there.

The forts, which had been in foreign hands for years, were well stocked with food, water, and ammunition. The admiral's men were, however, trapped inside them. They could neither advance nor retreat. Their only hope was to have the encirclement

broken by allied troops from Tientsin. But Seymour had no means of communicating with those forces.

A Chinese servant agreed to get through the Boxers and imperial troops, cross the river, and reach the internationals at Tientsin. The servant made the perilous trip and explained the predicament of Seymour's column to the commanding officer, a Russian, Colonel Dmitri Shirinsky.

On June 26, Shirinsky led eight companies of infantry, marines, and several artillery batteries to the arsenal. The hostile forces retreated without a battle, and Seymour's men marched out of the forts. The combined units returned to Tientsin, where the action next centered. While Admiral Seymour's expedition had been cooped up in the Hsiku Arsenal, dramatic events had taken place around Tientsin and at the Taku Forts.

On June 17, after prolonged but futile negotiations over evacuation of the forts, the Chinese had been attacked by a combined allied naval force. Led by the Russian gunboat *Bobr,* the ships opened a vigorous bombardment on the five strongpoints that dominated both banks of the Pei-Ho at its mouth.

Participating in the engagement were British, French, German, Italian, and Russian naval units. The United States Navy gunboat *Monocacy* was at the scene, but took no part in the shelling. Admiral Kempff had been instructed by Washington to refrain from any action that might be construed by the Chinese as an act of war. Kempff felt that guarding the Peking legations and fighting off Boxer mobs were not belligerent acts aimed at China, but he considered shelling the forts a warlike move.

For this reason, the American vessel did not fire a single salvo in the entire engagement. Ironically, the *Monocacy,* stand-

ing off to one side during the battle for the Taku Forts, was the first ship hit by a Chinese shell.

The forts were taken after a seven-hour-long struggle highlighted by a bayonet charge of marines from the five nations involved in the affray. The engagement cost the internationals about one hundred men killed or wounded. Chinese casualties totaled more than four hundred killed or wounded. Allied flags flew from the battlements of the shell-pocked forts.

The Battle of Tientsin

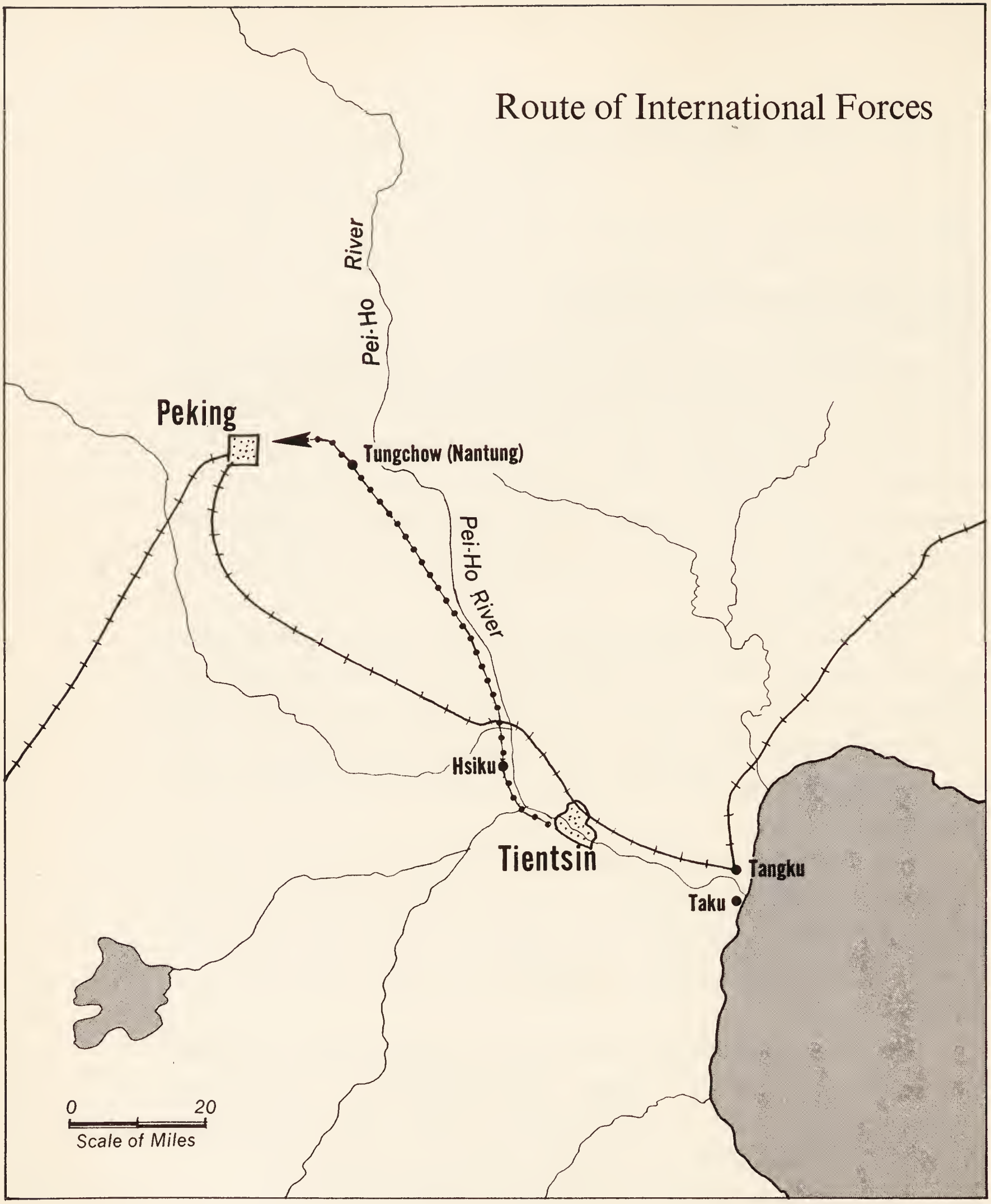
In June, 1900, Tientsin had a population of a million people crowded into the walled Chinese district known as the Old City. The foreign settlements and concessions were about two miles southeast of the Old City. They consisted of a large French concession along the south bank of the Pei-Ho River, a British district lying to the southeast of the French, and German settlements adjoining the British.

The wall surrounding the Old City had been built to keep out the Taiping rebels. Ten feet high, ten feet broad at the top, and thirty feet wide at its base, the wall ran only a few yards from the foreign settlements. In fact, the American consulate, the last house in the British concession, was less than three hundred yards from the wall.

The Boxers controlled the Old City. On June 17, when warships were shelling the Taku Forts, they attacked the foreign settlements. That onslaught was repulsed, but the Boxers, reinforced by imperial soldiers, continued to make forays on the foreign quarter.

Once the Taku Forts were secured, a strong force of allied troops was rushed to Tientsin. Reinforcements — especially Japanese and Russian — arrived daily at Taku. Soon, some eight thousand internationals — infantry, marines, cavalry, and artillery — forced their way into the foreign district and scattered the assailants. However, Boxers and imperial troops, numbering

Route of International Forces



many thousands, manned the city wall and entrenched themselves along the Pei-Ho River line.

The imperial soldiers were from regiments equipped with late-model rifles and rapid-firing guns. A big government arsenal was well stocked with additional weapons and ammunition. The Boxers armed themselves from that supply and dug in at various strategic points, keeping up a hot fire into the foreign district.

This impasse continued for almost two weeks, while the allied forces were strengthened. Russia alone had over 4,000 men at Tientsin. The Japanese and Germans mustered another 3,000 apiece. Americans brought about 1,800 men there, with more coming from the Philippines. Britain and Italy also had battalions on the way.

On July 13, the internationals — including Japanese, British, French, American, and German troops — all commanded by Japanese Major General Isoru Fukushima, mounted a full-scale offensive to break the Boxer grip on Tientsin.

The allied assault opened with a heavy barrage from naval guns, thirty fieldpieces, and a battery of eight Hotchkiss guns. The internationals routed the Boxers, but only after hard fighting in which the United States Ninth Infantry regiment was cited for gallantry and valor.

Fighting swirled from the wall into the twisting streets and alleys of the Old City. Hand-to-hand struggles took place between men using knives, bayonets, rifle butts, and pistols. Houses caught fire and the uncontrolled flames spread until most of the Chinese district was burning. Shrieking refugees fled the holocaust. Men, women, and children were knocked down and trampled to death in the panic-stricken rush to escape the fiery carnage.

By dawn of the next day, General Fukushima's mixed com-

mand drove the enemy out of the city. Pockets of resistance remained, however, and mopping-up operations continued for almost a week. During the fighting, the internationals had displayed remarkable discipline, but once it was over, they went on a rampage of looting. Roving bands of internationals fought each other for possession of some valuable or other.

An American newsman in Tientsin at the time wrote: "It was disgusting to see men in uniform — officers as well as ordinary soldiers — behaving like the worst type of brigands."

After a few days, order of a sort was restored, and Admiral Seymour announced that Taku, Tientsin, and the neighboring region were all firmly under allied control.

Once the city was secured, thousands of international soldiers funneled into Tientsin. The American forces were greatly strengthened. Major General Adna R. Chaffee landed at Taku with transports carrying 17,500 troops fresh from the Philippines. Admiral George C. Remey, commanding the United States Asiatic Squadron, arrived aboard his flagship, the cruiser *Brooklyn,* to take over United States naval operations.

Even as American and other national units were coming in, anxiety over the safety of the foreigners in Peking was mounting hourly.

On July 29, Sir Claude MacDonald, the British minister in the Chinese capital, sent word by courier to Admiral Seymour:

> We are surrounded by unknown number of Boxers and imperial troops . . . . Have been under siege and fired upon continually since June 20. . . . Please come quickly. Do not know how much longer we can hold out . . . .

The Fall of Peking

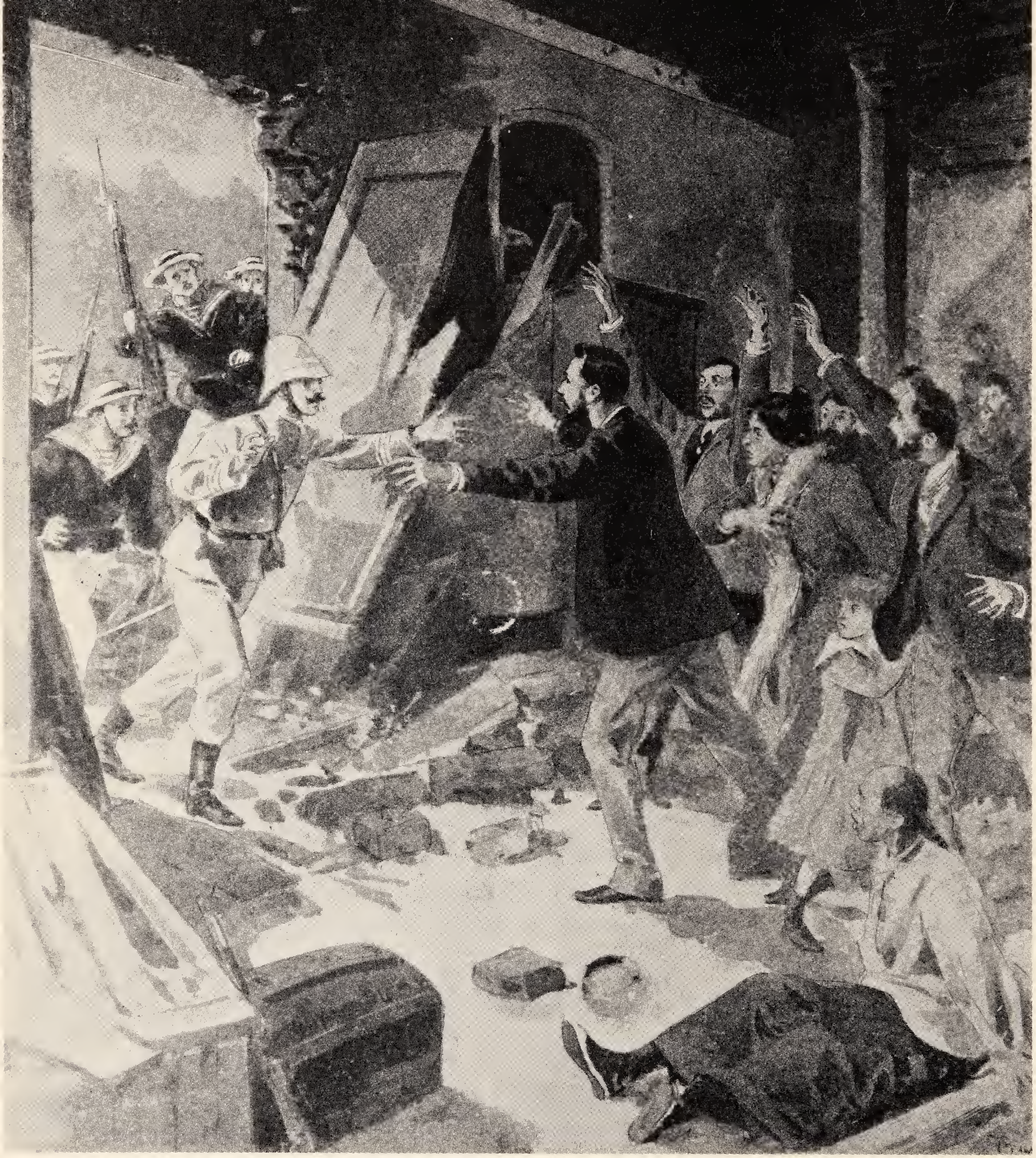
While the allies were wresting Tientsin from the Chinese, the situation at Peking had worsened for the several thousand refugees in the Legation Quarter. The force of marines guarding the quarter had been reduced by casualties since the Boxers began their delayed assault on June 20.

The signal for the mass onslaught was the murder of the German minister, Baron Klemens von Ketteler, who had left the legation grounds for an eleventh-hour conference with Chinese officials in the hope of obtaining some sort of settlement for the evacuation of women and children. No sooner had von Ketteler left the legation compound than he was shot down in cold blood by Boxer gunmen.

When Kaiser Wilhelm II learned of von Ketteler's death, he angrily ordered a large force to China. Addressing the troops, the kaiser declared, "I want you to be as the Huns of a thousand years ago. . . . You must make the name of Germany known in such a manner in China that no Chinese will ever again dare look askance at a German!"

But Kaiser Wilhelm's soldiers were still far away, and the troops gathering at Taku and Tientsin mobilized slowly. Until help arrived, the defenders of the Legation Quarter in Peking were on their own.

The siege of the legations dragged on for days, which stretched into weeks. During the month following von Ketteler's



French troops arrive to rescue besieged missionaries in Peking.

death, there was scarcely a moment when the foreigners were not under hostile fire. Losses among the defenders mounted. Food and water had to be rationed. The civilians — especially the children — suffered from the shortages. But the defenders would not yield. Everyone trapped in the Legation Quarter knew that surrender meant death.

On July 31, a messenger from Admiral Seymour managed to get into the compound with the good news that a strong relief expedition was on the way.

The Boxers also knew a relief column was heading for Peking and redoubled their efforts to storm the legation district.

Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany ordered a large force to China.

The foreigners defended themselves valiantly. Of the many heroic deeds performed by the multinational marines on duty during that cruel time, none equaled the feat of Gunner Joseph Mitchell, United States Marine Corps, who was nicknamed "the One-Man Army."

He lived up to this name.

At about the time the Boxer assaults first struck, Mitchell found a rusty cannon barrel in a storehouse. He cleaned up the barrel, mounted it on an Italian gun carriage, and used Russian ammunition for it. Mitchell worked the piece single-handedly, since he was the only artillerist in the compound. The cannon, affectionately called "Old Betsey, the International Gun," was the biggest and most effective weapon in the Legation Quarter's arsenal. It broke up a number of Boxer forays.

While fighting went on in Peking, the relief columns pushed north from Taku and Tientsin. They numbered 19,000 men, led by Marshal Count Alfred von Waldersee, a German. In his command were 2,000 troops of the United States Army under General Chaffee.

It took the internationals from July 31 until August 14 to break the siege of Peking and rescue the bedraggled people trapped in the Legation Quarter. But, at last, the allied soldiers broke into Peking and smashed the Boxer Rebellion. Tz'u-hsi and the emperor fled the city in haste on August 15, when United States troops attacked the Imperial Palace grounds.

The Boxer Rebellion had been a desperate effort by a frustrated people to save an ancient way of life from intruding foreigners. Had the Boxer terror spread beyond the north of China, the country would have suffered an even worse fate than it did. As it was, the cost to China, and especially to the Manchu,

After the Manchu were finally overthrown in 1912, Dr. Sun Yat-sen became first leader of the newly formed republic.

was high. Ten high officials were executed, and 100 others were severely punished; some 25 Chinese forts were destroyed; official apologies had to be made; foreign legations were expanded and fortified; and a staggering indemnity of 450 million taels (approximately $333 million United States) had to be paid.

By backing the Boxers, the Ch'ing dynasty had doomed itself. In 1912, the Manchu were overthrown and China became a republic under Dr. Sun Yat-sen. He was followed by Chiang

Kai-shek, and after a protracted period of civil war, Japanese occupation, and another civil war, Chiang lost China to the Communists led by Mao Tse-tung.

No man can say what the future holds for Mao's China — but this is certain: he succeeded in doing what the Boxers had failed to accomplish. Mao broke the stranglehold foreigners had clamped on China for so many decades.

Brief Chronology

1839 – 42 – The first Opium War between Britain and China.

1856 – 58 – Britain and France defeat China in a brief war.

1858 – Treaty of Tientsin giving Britain, France, and other nations concessions in China.

1860 – 94 – The so-called Tranquil Time.

1894 – 95 – War between Japan and China. Chinese defeated.

1895 – Treaty of Shimonoseki granting Japan wide trading rights in China.

1897 – Germans seize Tsingtao in reprisal for murder of German missionaries by Chinese.

I-Ho Ch'üan (Boxers) reorganize and wage campaign against foreigners.

1900 – Boxer Uprising. Put down by large international force including Americans.

1912 – Fall of Ch'ing (Manchu) dynasty. Chinese republic formed.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brooklyn-born Irving Werstein began his career writing for magazines, but soon turned to the world of radio and TV. When, more than a decade later, he began to write specifically for young people, he at last found the audience he most wanted to reach. His ability to humanize history went unsurpassed and was appreciated and recognized by his readers.

Mr. Werstein died suddenly on the morning of April 7, 1971. At that time, about fifty of his books had been published. The week before he died, Mr. Werstein expressed to one of his editors his regret that he had not begun to write for young people fifteen or twenty years earlier than he had. He felt there was still so much he wanted to say to them. *The Boxer Rebellion* was one of the last books in which he sought to say it.

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