

From opium wars to Boxer rebellion: Consequences of the Boxer Rebellion

A force of about 20,000 foreign troops from eight nations finally reached Peking and after 55 days the siege of the legation was lifted. Some estimates put the Boxer numbers at about 300,000 while the Foreign Legation held about 1000 foreigners as well as Chinese Christians. One might have expected some success from the Boxers but, in spite of committing imperial troops to the conflict, the Empress Dowager had withheld the heavy artillery from Boxer control and at least one General in the Imperial Army was not committed to supporting the Boxers.

The consequences of this disaster for China were enormous. Cixi was forced to flee from Peking to Xian in the disguise of a peasant woman (she promoted this as an official 'tour' of the country) and Peking was in the hands of foreigners. The rivalry of the foreign powers over access to China continued so there was no seizure of Chinese territory as colonial possessions. The foreign powers realised they needed a central authority to deal with so Cixi continued as the voice of China's government.

A huge penalty was exacted from China in the form of a large indemnity. The Qing rule had been badly shaken and the Empress Dowager's gamble had backfired badly. China was faced with the extra humiliation of another defeat at the hands of foreigners and, coupled with significant internal problems of drought and peasant unrest, the Qing Dynasty lurched from one crisis to the next. Social and economic problems, coupled with weak emperors, intensified the unrest. Child emperors, constantly under the control of the Empress Dowager, were unable to instil confidence among the people. Even attempts by Cixi to introduce belated social and political reforms into China were too little too late.

Resistance grew and the Qing Dynasty finally collapsed with the 1911 revolution.