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Peer-reviewed article

THE VIEW FROM THE LEGATION

British diplomatic diaries during the Boxer siege of 1900

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written about the 'Siege of the Legations' in Peking (Beijing) in 1900, both at the time and later by historians looking back over these accounts and into official papers subsequently released to the public. There is a wealth of first-hand diaries and testimonies of the Siege written by those who were actually there, as well as contemporary newspaper reports, and even semi-fictionalised versions. This article examines three diaries kept by members of the British diplomatic corps—including the British Minister, Sir Claude MacDonald, and two student interpreters from the Consular Service, Lancelot Giles and William Meyrick Hewlett—and endeavours to look at these three sources in relation to a range of contemporary material: other diaries, newspaper reports, fictionalised accounts, photographs, and other pictorial depictions, wherever this seems relevant and appropriate. In looking at the private, first-hand accounts of these individuals, this article examines the views of three Westerners whose vantage points we might reasonably expect to have bridged the cultural divide between the two distinct cultures of the besiegers and those besieged. It was, after all, the job of the British diplomatic corps—from the chief representative, the British Minister, to the most junior members of the Legation staff, the Student Interpreters—to understand, interact, and essentially mediate between Britain and China.

In 1900, the era of Western colonialist expansion had, perhaps, reached its maximum extent. The power and influence of the British Empire in particular, as the foremost imperialist influence within China, was beginning to wane.[1] In many ways, the events of the Boxer Uprising changed the geopolitical balance between the Western powers which were present within China's borders and allowed others—most notably Japan—to challenge or at least vie with Britain's pre-eminence.[2] After its devastating confrontations with China in the two Opium Wars of

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1839–1842 and 1856–1860, Britain aggressively imposed its forward policy of free trade upon the Chinese Empire.[3] The resulting system of extra-territoriality, whereby China was compelled to open a number of its ports to foreign traders who were exempted from the jurisdiction of the local Chinese authorities, served to weaken China's sovereignty within its own borders.[4] As a result of these 'Unequal Treaties,' a system of informal empire arose wherein a mixed milieu of foreign nationals took up residence within these treaty ports, creating semi-colonial enclaves of their own making and their own administration.

Robert Bickers divides this 'settler society' into four categories: *settlers*, *expatriates*, *missionaries*, and *officials*.[5] The *settlers* were mostly lower working-class traders and business people who tended to settle over time, often with several generations of their families eventually residing for their entire lives in China; the *expatriates* were more transient, or resident only for relatively short periods of their working lives—for instance, bankers, or those in manufacturing, shipping, or railway industries, or multi-national companies; the *officials* were diplomats, consuls, military personnel, or those working in the Imperial Chinese Maritime Customs Service. Each of these categories had their own relative stake in this system of informal empire which they perceived as being guaranteed by the treaties; and, as such—ever mindful of upholding the imperialists' notions of 'prestige'—it was the job of the diplomats in the Legations and the consuls stationed at each of the treaty ports to negotiate, mediate, or insist on the expatriate community's behalf that these 'treaty rights' were duly honoured by the Imperial Court or the Yamens of the provincial governors and local magistrates.[6] The *missionaries*, and by extension their Chinese Christian converts, represented another special category which caused particular agitation among the ordinary Chinese, especially during the troubled period associated with the rise of the Boxer movement.[7]

As China increasingly came under the influence of new, Western-led global economic cycles, so too this began to have an effect upon the lives of ordinary Chinese subjects, many of whom may never have even seen a Westerner. Yet popular resentment of the foreign presence in China began to rise throughout Chinese society during the last half of the 19th Century.[8] Disaffection with the Manchu rulers of the Qing Dynasty, which had first come to power in 1644, displacing the indigenous Han of the Ming Dynasty, had long been simmering, with various uprisings periodically occurring throughout the latter parts of

the 18th and 19th Centuries, most notably in the instance of the White Lotus Uprising of 1796–1804 and the Taiping Rebellion of 1850–1864.[9] Some of these uprisings, although stirred by various or combined factors of economic depression, natural disasters—such as floods or prolonged periods of drought—government maladministration, or over-taxation, are thought to have had their organisational roots in the so-called 'secret societies,' such as the Triads, the White Lotus Sect, or the Big Sword Society. These groups were often fraternal associations, either of bandits unified by organised criminal intentions or brotherhoods drawing on the religious tenets typical of master–disciple relationships; frequently, they practised specialised traditions of martial arts, such that at certain times they might form openly into militias for the 'protection' of local communities; hence, in retrospect 'secret societies' is somewhat of a modern misnomer when applied to some of these groups by historians.[10]

The Boxers—the popular Western name having been derived from the title used by those Chinese who were in favour of the movement, *Yihequan* (义和拳), meaning 'Boxers United in Righteousness,' or equally the less favourable name used by those opposing them, *Quanfei* (拳匪) or 'Boxing Bandits'—are said to have arisen out of such 'secret society' roots, yet unlike other similar underground organisations, the Boxers did not appear to be united under a single, distinct leadership, a fact, which along with their supernatural claims to possess certain magical abilities (such as invulnerability to bullets, arrows, etc.), only added to the enhanced sense of mystery which initially went hand-in-hand with their extreme fanaticism.[11] As Joseph Esherick has noted in his detailed examination of the origins of the Boxer movement, the lack of any centralised or coordinated leadership is one of the most striking and characteristic features of the movement, a feature which certainly sets it apart from many of the popular uprisings which had previously occurred in Chinese history.[12] The fact that the Boxers eventually showed themselves an essentially loyalist movement, rather than one which was opposed to the Qing as the ruling hierarchy, was also a defining factor. This simple fact may have played a deciding part in the Imperial Court's eventual decision to back the Boxer cause, when after much vacillation both for and against, the Chinese government finally declared war on the foreign powers.

The Boxers were a spontaneous popular movement, which seems to have arisen for a number of interconnected reasons, the foremost of

which was the deep resentment felt towards the presence of foreigners residing in China, as the foreign communities themselves were only too well aware. It is notable, in fact, that many of the contemporary accounts written by these Westerners show a remarkable acuity in acknowledging the true causes of this resentment, as the following example by an American Pastor, the Reverend Z. Chas. Beals, writing in 1901, demonstrates:

> The Boxer movement has unquestionably had as its chief reason the hatred and contempt of the foreigner. As such, it received the smiles of the dominant party in Peking; on such it based its hopes of success. I think we may be safe in giving besides the first or great central cause five others which helped to bring to an issue the present state of things in China. We will give them in order, as follows:
>
> First, or great central cause, contempt and hatred of foreigners. The reason for this hatred was brought about, first, by abuse from foreigners themselves. Second, political 'land grabbing.' Third, oppression and lawsuits by the natives who entered the church (especially Roman Catholic) for that purpose. Fourth, Boxer superstition. Fifth, inability of our Consuls and Ministers to deal with Chinese officials as they should have been dealt with.[13]

The acknowledgement here that the foreigners were themselves largely to blame, which could perhaps be read as a tacit colonialist '*mea culpa*,' belies the book's more general purpose. Beals' tone is very much one of indignation; for him, "*the Boxer movement has been one of the greatest crimes of the nineteenth century.*"[14] But the imposition and the imbalances of extra-territoriality were not the sole factors which contributed to the eventual social conflagration. Economic disadvantages, compounded by a prolonged period of drought, are also thought to have played a substantial part in fuelling the unrest.[15]

The Boxers came from all levels of Chinese society, yet the majority of the bands which openly practised hostilities towards the foreign communities were peasants, made idle by the prevailing drought-like conditions.[16] As such, many missionaries, and even the British Minister in Peking, Sir Claude MacDonald, prayed or hoped for the

timely return of rain to the north China plain as the surest solution to the tensions.[17] Unfortunately, when the first rains did come in earnest (on 13 June), it was too late, since by then the troubles which had first arisen across north China (in Zhili and Shandong Provinces in particular) had taken hold and the Foreign Legations were by then already under siege.[18]

The economic sufferings of the Chinese peasants extended beyond merely those engaged in agriculture but to those employed in other industries and trades too, for instance, the carters and boatmen, whose livelihoods were greatly impinged by Western interventions, such as the building of railways and the labour-changing activities of other commercial syndicates.[19] The Boxers' xenophobic ire extended beyond the foreign communities. They made a deliberate policy of targeting Chinese Christian converts and any sympathetic Chinese officials, businesses, or tradespersons connected to Westerners or Western goods or ideas. As one eye-witness testified:

> Chinese officials and merchants fleeing from the capital to their homes in the provinces were searched by Boxers and beheaded if any article of foreign manufacture could be found upon their persons or among their luggage. More than half of the mandarins in the empire refused to obey the order of the Empress Dowager, and at the risk of their own lives protected the missionaries and gave them escort, money, and every facility to escape. It would have been much easier for them to have massacred the helpless missionaries and infinitely more agreeable to their imperial mistress.[20]

Reasons for joining the Boxers were not simply limited to the realities of such hardships as hunger or hatred of foreigners. There were other motivations too, such as patriotism, prestige, religious ideology, self-protection, social unity, and community support, as well as compulsion, peer-pressure, or fear of what might befall the individual or their family if they chose not to join.[21] The Boxers, then, are perhaps best viewed as the culminating synergy of different but allied manifestations of social anxieties—of unease, poverty, unemployment, dislocation, disenfranchisement from recourse to their own legal system in certain circumstances and situations, a

profound sense of collective disgruntlement—a mass up-welling of defensiveness in response to a social system under threat.[22] Yet curiously, unlike the instances of several previous rebellions in China, this disaffection found its eventual focus not upon the failures of the ruling dynasty, which was widely seen as corrupt and effete, itself a culturally alien imposition. However, some scholars have perceived that in its early stages the movement could quite easily have taken this direction.[23] Indeed, it has been suggested that through their self-professed patriotism the Boxers were in some senses guided towards their confrontation with the perceived threats brought by the foreign community as a result of the leniency shown by senior Qing officials following the Boxers' armed confrontation with the Qing authorities in an incident which has since become known as the Battle of Senluo Temple. Joseph Esherick sees this confrontation as an event which in fact *bolstered* the Boxers' loyalist claims, since the Boxers were, in effect, a popular movement working to assist society by acting on behalf of the State, thereby making up for the shortcomings of the ruling hierarchy.[24] This was a claim which, perhaps naturally, caused some Qing officials to disapprove of the Boxers. And, indeed, the split in official opinion persisted throughout the entire Siege of the Legations, causing much speculation, confusion, and uncertainty amongst the diplomatic corps during their fifty-five day period of isolation.

Writing to Lord Salisbury, who was both British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary at the time, in the days leading up to the Siege, Sir Claude MacDonald observed:

> There is a long Decree [issued by the Imperial Court] in the 'Gazette' which ascribes the recent troubles to the favour shown to [Chinese Christian] converts in law suits and the admission to their ranks of bad characters. It states that the Boxers, who are the objects of the Throne's sympathy [...], have made use of anti-Christian feeling aroused by these causes, and that bad characters among them have destroyed chapels and railways, which are the property of the State.
> (...)
> It is probable that the above Decree represents a compromise between the conflicting opinions which exist at Court. The general tone is most unsatisfactory, though

> the effect may be good if severe measures are actually taken. The general lenient tone, the absence of reference to the murder of missionaries, and the justification of the proceedings of the Boxers by the misconduct of Christian converts are all dangerous factors in the case.[25]

The most common perception of the Chinese, which seems to run through many first-hand accounts written by Westerners during or shortly after the Siege, is that the Chinese are duplicitous. Nothing that the Chinese authorities say or promise is to be taken at face value. There were numerous occasions throughout the course of the Siege when communications, ostensibly from persons in charge at the Chinese Court, offered the foreign diplomats safe passage out of the city, which were dismissed as ruses designed to lure them into the open so that they might be massacred more swiftly and easily.[26]

Even after the Chinese Government had declared war on the foreign community on 21 June, a degree of circumspection persisted amongst the Chinese themselves. As Peter Fleming has observed, on 23 June the Empress Dowager, Cixi, issued an unusually vague and imprecise decree to the Imperial Council, stating that

> The work now undertaken by Tung Fu-hsiang should be completed as soon as possible, so that troops can be spared and sent to Tientsin for defence.[27]

The 'work' of General Tung Fu-hsiang (Dong Fuxiang) alluded to here was presumably an oblique reference to his command of a detachment of Imperial troops from Kansu who had commenced the military assault on the Legations. This 'vagueness' allowed some senior Chinese officials to hedge their bets by prevaricating rather than answering the official call to arms. Fleming notes two contrasting yet prominent examples: Li Hongzhang, who was then Viceroy at Canton, who decided that the Edict must have been issued without full or proper authority (many of his fellow Viceroys choosing to assume the same), and Yuxian in the province of Shanxi, who, in contrast, sought to execute as many foreign missionaries as he could.[28]

The fact that most Westerners perceived the Chinese as dishonest was symptomatic of a much broader antipathy, which was commonly held by the settler community residing in China. This antipathy had

its roots in the prevailing ideas of Social Darwinism. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, and in particular his ideas concerning 'natural selection,' chimed with the progressive ethos of modern industrialism. It was seized upon by some and used, if not wholly as a *raison d'être* for colonialism *per se*, then certainly as a lens for evaluating social and racial differences and placing them into a cultural hierarchy.[29] This kind of reasoning, in conjunction with an 'orientalising' conception of 'the other,' helped the foreign community in China to define itself.[30] Such notions of modernity naturally implied the backwardness of the Chinese, whose Empire—despite the venerable fact of its antiquity and all its ancient cultural and scientific achievements—had simply stagnated and become fossilised. Hence, many of the Westerners who found themselves living in China at this time believed that they were actually benefiting China by introducing this new modernity to the Chinese.

In examining three diaries of the Siege kept by three members of the British diplomatic corps, namely the British Minister, Sir Claude MacDonald, and two Student Interpreters from the Consular Service, Lancelot Giles and William Meyrick Hewlett, it is only reasonable to expect that we might find a number of value judgements made with regard to the Chinese and their conduct. It was, after all, the job of these individuals as members of the British diplomatic corps—from the chief representative, the British Minister, to the most junior members of the Legation staff, the Student Interpreters—to understand, interact, and essentially mediate between Britain and China. Many of the missionaries working in the interior of China after the 1860s suffered periodic confrontations (often arising from cultural misunderstandings) with the indigenous population whom they were endeavouring to proselytise.[31] Reports of these atrocities, such as the 'Massacre at Tientsin' (Tianjin) in 1871, fused with reports and photographs demonstrating the harsh severity of certain forms of corporal and capital punishments administered by the Chinese judicial system, conjured a perfect horror in the Western popular imagination, which coloured perceptions of the Chinese as an ingeniously cruel and inherently barbaric race.[32] This perception again reinforced the colonialists' justifications for their '*mission civilisatrice*.'[33] The international diplomatic body, and their consuls in particular, were no strangers to these kinds of dangers themselves. Yet, as a distinct category, they were frequently men of a sympathetic

disposition towards China and Chinese culture, if not always towards individual Chinese themselves.[34]

Indeed, Lancelot Giles was the son of one of the foremost contemporary Sinologists, Herbert Allen Giles, who himself had begun his career in the Consular Service in China before becoming Professor of Chinese at Cambridge University, a chair which he occupied until he retired at the age of 87.[35] Giles's diary of the Siege is, in fact, a long letter addressed to his father, and as such it demonstrates a certain even-handedness with regard to its descriptions of the hostile Chinese forces. Similarly, the diary of Sir Claude MacDonald, which was written up after the Siege as an official record for the Foreign Office in London, also demonstrates an even-handedness of tone in its descriptions of the Chinese soldiers and Boxers conducting the assault. Whilst the reasons behind this *sangfroid* may well belie a number of different factors, which combined towards shaping the written styles of their compositions—for instance, personal traits of character, mindfulness as to the disposition of the intended recipient(s), diplomatic professionalism, considerations towards posterity, for instance British 'prestige' and the so-called 'stiff upper lip' mentality—a number of value judgements are nevertheless discernable.

In Giles's diary the Boxers are 'fanatics,' the Chinese soldiers are described as hopelessly inept marksmen; they are all 'barbarians' and 'brutes.'[36] MacDonald, who also had a distinguished military background prior to his diplomatic career, tends to use the arguably less emotive term 'enemy' to describe the Chinese belligerents. He occasionally allows himself a degree of partiality though, for example in relating an understated yet approving comment on the strength of feeling shown by the besieged towards their besiegers:

> During the early days (...) a large dog trotted into the Japanese barricade with a note tied round its neck. This was from the Chinese General commanding in that quarter, pointing out the futility of further defence and recommending unconditional surrender. A reply, declining the suggestion in somewhat forcible terms, was tied on the dog's neck, with which he trotted back. This was repeated several times, the advisability of surrender being urged with greater insistence each time. The answers varied only in the strength of their language.[37]

The diary of W. Meyrick Hewlett, who acted as personal assistant to MacDonald during the Siege, which, as with Lancelot Giles's diary, was addressed to his family back home in England,[38] is similarly restrained throughout until its closing pages; wherein—writing after the Legations were finally relieved on 14 August—he becomes outspokenly candid, describing the final days of fighting and his personal feelings towards the Chinese:

> At 7.25 I saw a Chinaman get up on the barricade and expose his head and shoulders to arrange a straw mat. I covered my left eye with my handkerchief, got a very careful sight (he was only 40 to 50 yards away) and put the rifle in the loophole firmly. Just then a second appeared, and I got my first shot in. I could not see through the smoke. I devoutly hope I hit him; it is a lovely sensation to know you are sending a bullet at one of these brutes, and I was only sorry I was not using smokeless powder to see him fall. You must think I am getting horrid, but one cannot daily see the babies in the Legation dying, their poor little faces getting that quiet resigned look almost past fretting, without feeling bitter against these beasts of Chinese.[39]

Previously, he had written of "*longing to get a shot at a Chinese, forgetting it* might *mean killing a man—I don't yet think I should like to bayonet one.*"[40] But, clearly, the psychological strain of living under siege eventually sets in, and again, after the foreign troops are occupying Beijing, he writes:

> August 15th – I went into all the forbidden places of the Temple of Heaven, the buildings are magnificent, huge grounds and lovely grass; the mess opened all the delicacies for me and were awfully jolly. 9. – I went back and was ordered by the Major to fire at the Chinese looting shops, and to disperse the crowds, but not to hit them: I longed to fire into the beasts who have kept us shut up so long, but an idiotic spirit of mercy pervades everyone.[41]

The Chinese—now without being able to distinguish between former Boxers or ex-soldiers—have all become 'grovelling curs' in his estimation.[42] He delights in the freedom to flout Chinese protocols whilst exploring the city:

> I entered a Llama Temple with the Chief which had never been entered by Europeans before; the priests were absolutely cringing curs again, and it makes me sick, knowing the conceit of the priesthood here, and how they usually receive foreigners.[43]

He describes with glee the looting carried out by the International Relief Force,[44] and with a curious alignment of empathy and disdain he describes how:

> My boy and Chang San came back, having had an awful time, the old man quite white, and both half starved, never having dared to leave their houses. (...) Teachers, boys, and Mafus all coming grovelling back.[45]

This show of disdain for the Chinese servants who had formerly been employed at the Legation should not distract from the fact that there was still a large Chinese presence within the Legations throughout the Siege. These were mostly Christian converts, and whilst there was a reluctance to take them in at the start of the troubles, along with the fact that no accurate census of their numbers or casualties was officially kept, they did provide invaluable support to the defence efforts.[46] Sir Claude MacDonald himself notes how a work party of these converts uncovered an old cannon, which was later restored and put into action, occasionally to devastating effect. The gun, which was officially nicknamed 'the International' because of the mixed components used in its restoration and operation, he notes, also had a number of other epithets such as the 'Dowager Empress' or 'Betsey.'[47] He also records with admiration several Christian converts who were brave enough to leave the confines of the Legation in attempts to pass through the enemy lines, acting either as messengers or to undertake reconnaissance missions.[48]

It is worthwhile comparing these descriptions of the Chinese alongside those regarding the Japanese, most notably the Japanese

military personnel, who "*have been fighting like demons.*"[49] Not just these three diaries alone, but many of the contemporary sources recount with clear admiration the conduct of the Japanese who are credited with maintaining a stalwart defence of the barricades, frequently sustaining the fiercest fire.[50] Indeed, Sir Claude MacDonald makes frequent mention of the Japanese Military Attaché, Lieutenant-Colonel Shiba.

Given his military background, MacDonald had been made Commander-in-Chief of the combined defence forces of all Legations and, as such, he and Shiba seem to have had a mutual rapport and respect for one another, which worked well, with the two men often consulting each other.[51] For example, MacDonald writes on 1 July:

> Thinking the proposition rather risky, I consulted Colonel Shiba, in whose judgement of affairs in the Fu I had the fullest confidence.
>
> Colonel Shiba replied that he thought the capture of the [Chinese] gun practicable, and that the sortie should be made. I accordingly gave orders that the desired reinforcements should be sent (...)[52]

This close relationship between the British Minister and the Japanese Colonel was mirrored in the wider cooperative relationships between the two nationalities as they were represented in the International Relief Force.[53] A telling depiction of this can be found in a commemorative illustration of the Force's Commanding Officers, in which the Japanese Officer and the British Officer stand to one side of the other nationalities depicted, with the Japanese Commander reaching up to light the British Commander's cigarette.[54]

Sir Claude MacDonald's admiration for Colonel Shiba was echoed by Giles, who writes:

> The Japanese Colonel Shiba is in command of the Fu. He is considered the best officer up here, just as the Japanese are undoubtedly the best soldiers. Their pluck and daring is astounding, our marines are next to them in this respect; but I think the Japanese lead the way.[55]

Likewise, Hewlett frequently expresses his positive opinion of Colonel Shiba and the Japanese soldiers. However, his praise is frequently tinged with a certain degree of racial condescension, as he describes Shiba as "*a splendid little man of action.*"[56] Other racial signifiers appear too, for instance when the International Relief Force finally arrive, the soldiers of the 7th Rajputs are described as "*big Black men.*"[57] It is perhaps worth noting here, however, that whilst Hewlett had a reputation for being a temperamental man of frequent and irrational prejudices, and for all his scathing (and occasionally murderous) dislike of the Chinese demonstrated in the pages of his diary, he subsequently had a long and distinguished career in China, reaching the level of Consul-General, and he was conferred a knighthood before he retired.[58] In the latter part of his career, he was, in fact, noted for his close working relationships with his Chinese counterparts, whom he tended to favour, much to the disapproval of some of his consular colleagues.[59] National snobberies and Great Power rivalries also feature fairly prominently in both Giles's and Hewlett's diaries. As essentially private documents, they were perhaps less guarded in this respect than when compared to Sir Claude MacDonald's diary of the Siege.[60]

Japan was seen as a complete contrast to China at this time. Faced with similar attention from Western colonialists, the Japanese, after the Meiji Restoration restored the Emperor to direct rule in 1868, had opened their ports and begun to modernise, but strictly on their own terms. The Japanese had already fought and won a war with the Chinese (1894–1895) and, as Akira Iriye has noted, Japan emerged triumphant from the Sino–Japanese War as a confirmed imperialist nation, both in terms of international and national self-perception.[61] Subsequently, China became the arena for the competing imperialisms of the West and the East. The Japanese defeat of China in 1895 (and, moreover, their defeat of Russia in 1905) came as a shock to the prevailing geopolitical landscape.[62] Indeed, during the Sino–Japanese War, casting a hypothetical eye to the future, a British newspaper published the following speculation:

> Consider what a Japan-governed China would be. Think what the Chinese are; think of their powers of silent endurance under suffering and cruelty; think of their frugality; think of their patient perseverance, their slow

> dogged persistence, their recklessness of life. Fancy this people ruled by a nation of born organizers, who, half-allied to them, would understand their temperament and their habits. The Oriental, with his power of retaining health under conditions under which no European could live, with his savage daring when roused, with his inborn cunning, lacks only the superior knowledge of civilization to be equal of the European in warfare as well as in industry. Under the Japanese Emperor the dreams of the supremacy of the Yellow Race in Europe, Asia, and even Africa ... would be no longer mere nightmares. Instead of speculating as to whether England or Germany or Russia is to be the next world's ruler, we might have to learn that Japan was on its way to that position.[63]

Reading this, it is perhaps easy to see how readily the myth of the Boxers mixed with Western insecurities regarding modernisation in East Asia, such that the conflation of the two were later transmuted into the notion of the 'Yellow Peril' in the popular imagination.[64]

At the time of the Boxer Uprising, given China's weakened position, there was a very real concern within China—for both the Chinese Government and the imperialist powers—regarding the prospect that China could well find itself broken up under the implementation of proper colonialism. Lord Salisbury himself perhaps best expressed a Social Darwinist view held by many Western imperialists when he stated that "*the living nations will gradually encroach on the territory of the dying.*"[65] It was mindfulness of this which caused the Guangxu Emperor to attempt to reform his Government and thereby set China on the road towards some sort of programme of modernisation. However, he was effectively deposed by the Empress Dowager Cixi, who sought to maintain the *status quo* by backing the Boxers and declaring war on the foreign community, thereby hoping to return China to its former policy of isolationism.[66] It was a move which, some historians have claimed, took the Powers unawares; hence why, when the touch-paper was lit at the start of the Boxer troubles, many of them—not least the diplomatic staff of the Legations—were seemingly so unprepared.[67]

Similarly, it has been claimed that the Chinese could easily have overwhelmed the Legations in the first days of the Siege.[68] Certainly,

it was a puzzle when the Legations were finally relieved, as to why the Chinese had used so little of their superior firepower. Yet, had they done so, as Peter Fleming conjectures, many of the high-ranking Qing officials feared that China would have been overwhelmed by the Powers and in all probability then been broken up. To avoid this, he claims that the Chinese Minister of War, Jung Lu (Ronglu), should take ultimate credit for feigning the pretence of a hard-fought Siege against such a tiny and ill-defended enclave.[69]

So, as the Boxers and Chinese soldiers disbursed after the Siege had been routed, what—or rather who—managed to keep China together in the aftermath of the Uprising? Hans van der Ven argues that this achievement was not necessarily down to the efforts of the diplomats, nor even the two Chinese plenipotentiaries, Li Hongzhang and Prince Qing, who together negotiated the Peace Settlement, but rather another man who in many senses stood as the real bridge between East and West: Sir Robert Hart.[70]

As the Inspector General, in charge of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, Hart was a Westerner employed by the Chinese Court.[71] He was also one of those foreigners besieged in the Legations. Writing to his colleague, James Duncan Campbell, in London, he stated:

> I am horribly hurt by all that has occurred, but there it is, and we can only try to make the best of it! I hold on to be of use to the Service, to China, and to the general interest. I think I can be of use, and only I in all three directions, at this juncture.[72]

As Van de Ven notes, many historians have debated whether or not the Customs Service was a tool of the imperialists or whether such a cosmopolitan bureaucracy was actually a benefit to China on its road to modernisation. Certainly, John Fairbank viewed Hart as a genuinely balanced link between the East and West, maintaining the 'synarchy' of Chinese and Western Officials charged with administering the treaty port system together.[73]

The Boxer Uprising can be seen as a pivotal point in China's move towards modernity. As a leaderless, popular mass uprising, the Boxer movement can be interpreted in different ways, either as a patriotic, anti-imperialist insurgency, which gained official state backing, or as

a proto-nationalist movement with anti-dynastic roots, which helped shape China's entry as a sovereign state into the global community of nations.[74] The Boxers themselves seem to have been many things to many people. In the diaries examined here, they are perhaps made most conspicuous by their absence. Commenting on the start of the Siege, Hewlett says:

> At that time we thought (some of us) there was something pathetic in the thought of these ignorant men, who believe themselves quite invulnerable, coming often singly to be shot. They advance slowly, making the most absurd gestures with their arms, burning joss-sticks, and carrying torches, refusing to move back, and making no combined rushes. They are easily shot, but now no sympathy can be found for these brutes, who murder and burn. Some of the atrocities have been too awful for words.[75]

In the beginning, the Boxers were somewhat ridiculous figures, repeatedly described as 'picturesque' in their 'colourful uniforms,' like characters from a comic opera (an impression made all the more absurd by the fact that many of the gods and spirits they professed to worship were drawn from popular Chinese novels and operas).[76] Yet, as the Siege begins, they blur and blend into the Chinese Imperial Forces they are fighting alongside and it becomes the Imperial Court and the Chinese Military, as state actors, who assume the spotlight of the Westerners' collective concerns, frustrations, and anger.

Ultimately, for those within the Legations at least, the Boxers themselves become a sideshow. It is the Chinese Court whom the Westerners are really at war against and, as such, the Court and the Boxers become ciphers for China's stubborn intransigence. Yet, given the stark contrast of China with Japan, as shown in these three diaries, clearly, it was assumed, that it was merely a matter of time and attrition until China learned its lesson, given the Westerners' faith in the ideas, morals, and hierarchies which constituted their world view.[77] Hence, the diaries themselves, as well as much of the commemorative artworks and photographs generated by the West, both during and in the immediate aftermath of the Uprising, are all heavily self-referential, depicting the Westerners' strength and resilience, attesting to the might through which they believed their ideas of progress and

modernity would naturally succeed.[78]

The view from the Legation was certainly a circumscribed one. Blinkered by a grand self-confidence and bolstered by a belief in the moral right of the Western imperialist project. The collective assurance that they were leading the way in terms of social and economic progress towards a greater global modernity was still somewhat unbalanced by inherently conflicted racial perceptions. Whilst it praised the Japanese on the one hand and condemned the Chinese on the other, looking down from the immovable barricades of the staunchly self-regarding colonialists' world view, it still managed to condescend towards both.

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Endnotes

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8 Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 161

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11 Purcell, *op. cit.*, pp. 164–165; Ch'en, J., 1960, 'The Nature and Characteristics of the Boxer Movement—A Morphological Study,' in: *Bull. School of Oriental and African Studies, Univ. of London*, **23**, No. 2, p. 297

12 Esherick, J. W., 1987, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press), p. 296

13 Beals, Rev. Z. C., 1901, *China and the Boxers: A Short History on the Boxer Outbreak, with Two Chapters on the Sufferings of Missionaries and a closing One on the Outlook* (New York: M. E. Munson), p. 19; see also Hykes, Rev. J. R., 1901, 'Three Prime Causes of the Boxer Uprising,' in: *The Advocate of Peace (1894–1920)*, **63**, No. 5 (May), pp. 103–104; Clements, P. H., 1915, *The Boxer Rebellion: A Political & Diplomatic Review* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press), pp. 15–16, 26, and 69–73

14 Beals, *op. cit.*, p. 7; In the immediate aftermath of the Uprising,

many of the Westerners residing in China saw themselves simultaneously as both victims and victors, see Hevia, J., 2003, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in 19th Century China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press), Ch. 9

15 see Cohen, P. A., 1997, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience and Myth* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press), Pt 2, Ch. 2 – Drought and the Foreign Presence

16 Ch'en, *op. cit.*, p. 296

17 Esherick, *op. cit.*, p. 281

18 Martin, C., 1968, *The Boxer Rebellion* (London: Abelard-Schuman), p. 89

19 Hykes, *op. cit.*, p. 104

20 *Ibid.*, p. 103 – 'imperial mistress' is a reference to the Empress Dowager Cixi

21 Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 5; Ch'en, *op. cit.*, p. 304

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23 see Purcell, *op. cit.*, Ch. 9 and 10

24 Esherick, *op. cit.*, p. 254; see also Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 32–33; Ch'en, *op. cit.*, pp. 293–295; on the early Boxers' possible connections to descendents of the Imperial family of the former Ming Dynasty and their distrust of the Manchu regime

25 MacDonald, Sir C. M., 2000, *The Siege of the Peking Embassy, 1900: Sir Claude MacDonald's Report on the Boxer Rebellion* (London: Stationery Office), pp. 15–16 – Telegraphic, MacDonald to Salisbury, 7 June 1900

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 166–168; Giles, L., 1970, *The Siege of the Peking Legations: A Diary*, edited with an introduction by L. R. Marchant (Nedlands, WA: Univ. of Western Australia Press), pp. 114, 130, 154–155, and 177; Hewlett, W. M., 1900, *The Siege of the Peking Legations, June to August 1900* (Published as a Supplement to the *Harrovian* of Nov. 1900, by the Editors), pp. 61 and 71; Reid, Rev. G., 1900, 'The Siege of Peking,' in: Shanghai Mercury, *The Boxer Rising: A History of the Boxer Trouble in China – Reprinted from the 'Shanghai Mercury'* (Shanghai: Shanghai Mercury Ltd, October), pp. 97 and 104–105; see also Fleming, P., 1984, *The Siege at Peking* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), pp. 159–160

27 Fleming, *op. cit.*, p. 121 – citing the historian Chester C. Tan, who drew on extensive Chinese sources for his study: Tan, C. C., 1955, *The Boxer Catastrophe* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press); see also p. 162; Esherick, *op. cit.*, p. 303; Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 310, note 74

28 Fleming, *op. cit.*, p. 166; see also Kit-ching, C. L., 1976, 'Li Hung-chang and the Boxer Uprising,' in: *Monumenta Serica*, **32**, pp. 55–84; Hevia, *op. cit.*, pp. 288–289

29 Darwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 276–277; Iriye, *op. cit.*, pp. 144–145

30 see Said, E. W., 2003 [1978], *Orientalism* (London: Penguin)

31 Clements, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16; Cohen, P. A., 2003, *China Unbound: Evolving Perspectives on the Chinese Past* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon), Ch. 4 – Boxers, Christians, and the Gods: the Boxer conflict of 1900 as a religious war; Bickers, R., 2011, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832–1914* (London: Allen Lane), Ch. 8

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33 Hevia, *op. cit.*, p. 291

34 see Coates, P. D., 1988, *The China Consuls: British Consular Officers 1843–1943* (Hong Kong: Oxford Univ. Press)

35 Giles, *op. cit.*, pp. xix–xx; Lancelot's brother, Lionel, was also a noted academic and translator of Chinese classical texts, who became Keeper of the Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts at the British Museum

36 Giles, *op. cit.*, pp. 114, 138, 141, 150, and 156

37 MacDonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 253–255

38 Although a private document, the diary was published in November 1900 by Harrow School, where Hewlett had been a pupil, as a supplement to the school's newspaper, *The Harrovian*. Hewlett's

grandfather, Thomas Hewlett FRCS, had been the School Surgeon at Harrow, serving in that role for some forty years. In 1922, when Hewlett was Consul-General in Chengdu, he donated a volume of the *Yung Lo Ta Tien* (Yongle Dadian), which he had salvaged from the Hanlin Library during the siege in June 1900, to the West China Union University Museum in Chengdu. Two letters relating to this volume, one by H. A. Giles and one by Hewlett, quoting the relevant passages from his diary of the siege, were later published, see: Graham, D. C., 1932, *J. West China Border Res. Soc.*, **5**, pp. 150–152

39 Hewlett, *op. cit.*, p. 67

40 *Ibid.*, p. 58 – emphasis in original

41 *Ibid.*, p. 74

42 *Ibid.*, p. 75

43 *Ibid.*, p. 75 – 'the Chief' mentioned here is a reference to Sir Claude MacDonald

44 see Hevia, J., 2007, 'Looting and Its Discontents: Moral Discourse and the Plunder of Beijing, 1900–1901,' in: Bickers, R., Tiedemann, R. G. (eds), *Boxers, China and the World* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield), pp. 93–114

45 Hewlett, *op. cit.*, p. 75; which contrasts with his more sympathetic treatment of these Chinese servants at the beginning of the Siege; see, pp. 3 and 6

46 Fleming, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–100; MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 281; Giles, *op. cit.*, p. 143; see also 'Journal of Mary E. Andrews, American Missionary,' in: Sharf, F. A., Harrington, P. (eds), 2000, *China 1900: The Eyewitnesses Speak: The experience of Westerners in China during the Boxer Rebellion in letters, diaries and photographs* (London: Greenhill), pp. 173 and 176 – Andrews also notes that women played a crucial role in the defence, see also Hoe, S., 2000, *Women at the Siege, Peking 1900* (Oxford: HOLO Books)

47 MacDonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 214–216 and 281; see also Giles, *op. cit.*, pp. 145 and 128–129, Fig. 35

48 MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 219; Giles, *op. cit.*, p. 156

49 Hewlett, *op. cit.*, p. 6

50 see Casserly, Captain G., 1903, *The Land of the Boxers, or China Under the Allies* (London: Longmans, Green & Co.), pp. 47–51; however, the upright conduct of some Japanese soldiers was later disputed: see Middleton, B., 2007, 'Scandals of Empire: The Looting of North China and the Japanese Public Sphere,' in Bickers, R.,

Tiedemann, R. G. (eds), *Boxers, China and the World* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield), pp. 115–132

51 Fleming, *op. cit.*, p. 117; Giles, *op. cit.*, p. 124

52 MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 185; see also, pp. 151–152, 172, 185–186, 215, 241–245, 253–255, and 281

53 Britain and Japan later signed a formal military alliance in 1902; see Iriye, *op. cit.*, p. 143; Mishra, *op. cit.*, pp. 128–129; Darwin, *op. cit.*, p. 329

54 Sharf, F. A., Harrington, P. (eds), 2000, *The Boxer Rebellion: China 1900: The Artists' Perspective* (London: Greenhill), p. 51, No. 12, 'East and West: A Group of Officers at the Gate of the Forbidden City, Peking' by Gordon Browne, from a sketch by a correspondent ('The Graphic,' 8 December 1900)

55 Giles, *op. cit.*, p. 127

56 Hewlett, *op. cit.*, p. 23 (the epithet is used twice on this page) and 38 – 'dear little Shiba'

57 *Ibid.*, p. 73 (twice)

58 Coates, *op. cit.*, p. 391; Hewlett joined the China Consular Service in 1898 and retired in 1935; he was knighted (KCMG) in 1931

59 Coates, *op. cit.*, p. 391; see also, pp. 390–391, 424–427, and 464; Hewlett, W. M., 1944, *Forty Years in China* (London: Macmillan)

60 Giles, *op. cit.*, pp. 129, 136, 145, 147, 148, and 161; Hewlett, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 35, 37, 51, and 69

61 Iriye, *op. cit.*, p. 138

62 *Ibid.*, p. 139; Shimazu, N., 2008, 'Patriotic and Despondent: Japanese Society at War, 1904–5,' in: *Russian Review,* **67**, No. 1 (January), pp. 34–49

63 Quoted in Iriye, *op. cit.*, p. 145

64 Hevia, *op. cit.*, Ch. 9 and 10; Cohen, P. A., 1992, 'The Contested Past: The Boxers as History and Myth,' in: *The Journal of Asian Studies,* **51**, No. 1 (February), pp. 82–113; Forman, R. G., 1999, 'Peking Plots: Fictionalizing the Boxer Rebellion of 1900,' in *Victorian Literature and Culture,* **27**, No. 1, pp. 19–48; Young, J., 2008, 'Rewriting the Boxer Rebellion: The Imaginative Creations of Putnam Weale, Edmund Backhouse, and Charles Welsh Mason,' in: *The Victorian Newsletter,* No. 114, pp. 7–28; Elliott, J., 2002, *Some Did it for Civilization, Some did it for their Country: A Revised View of the Boxer War* (Hong Kong: The Chinese Univ. Press), Ch. 1 and 5; also note that some Western writers were openly sympathetic towards

Chinese resistance to Western imperialism, see: Hunter, J., 2006, 'Women Missionaries and Cultural Conquest' in Mathisen, R. R. (ed.), *Critical Issues in American Religious History: A Reader* (Waco: Baylor Univ. Press), pp. 539–540; Kuehn, J., 2007, 'Encounters with Otherness: Female Travellers in China, 1880–1920' in Kerr, D., Kuehn, J. (eds), *A Century of Travels in China: Critical Essays in Travel Writing from the 1840s to the 1940s* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press), p. 84

65 *The Times*, 5 May 1898; quoted in Bickers, *op. cit.*, p. 344

66 Rowe, *op. cit.*, pp. 243, 247–250, and 255–257; Bickers, *op. cit.*, pp. 333–334 and 344–345

67 Fleming, *op. cit.*, pp. 62–66, 71–72, and 100

68 *Ibid.*, pp. 225–226

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 227–229; Fleming also shows that this opinion was shared by Sir Robert Hart, yet he points out that Hart does not name who he thought was responsible

70 Van de Ven, H., 2006, 'Robert Hart and Gustav Detring during the Boxer Rebellion,' in: *Modern Asian Studies*, **40**, No. 3 (July), pp. 631–662

71 see Van de Ven, H., 2014, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press)

72 Quoted in Van de Ven, 2006, *op. cit.*, pp. 631–632

73 Fairbank, J. K., 1964, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard Univ. Press), pp. 462–468; see also Brunero, D., 2004, *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854–1949* (London: Routledge); Chang, C., 2012, *Government, Imperialism & Nationalism in China: The Maritime Customs Service and its Staff* (London: Routledge)

74 see Clements, *op. cit.*, pp. 69–70; Manning, W. R., 1910, 'China and the Powers Since the Boxer Movement,' in: *The American Journal of International Law*, **4**, No. 4 (October), pp. 848–902

75 Hewlett, *op. cit.*, p. 4

76 *Ibid.*, pp. 50 and 68; Giles, *op. cit.*, p. 130; Ch'en, *op. cit.*, p. 291; Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–107

77 Hevia, *op. cit.*, pp. 332–333

78 Both Hewlett and Giles describe how they made a photographic record of the Siege together; see Hewlett, *op. cit.*, pp. 58, 60, and 62; Giles, *op. cit.*, p. 172; Giles's photographs of the Siege are now

held at the Australian National University; see 'The Giles Pickford Collection' (accessed 2 February 2017): http://anulib.anu.edu.au/using-the-library/collections/asia-pacific-digital-collections/giles-pickford/; see also Lucas, C. J., 1990, *James Ricalton's photographs of China during the Boxer Rebellion: his illustrated travelogue of 1900* (Lewiston, NY & Lampeter: Mellen); Sharf & Harrington (eds), *The Boxer Rebellion: China 1900: The Artists' Perspective*