

The Boxer Uprising — I

The Gathering Storm in North China (1860-1900)

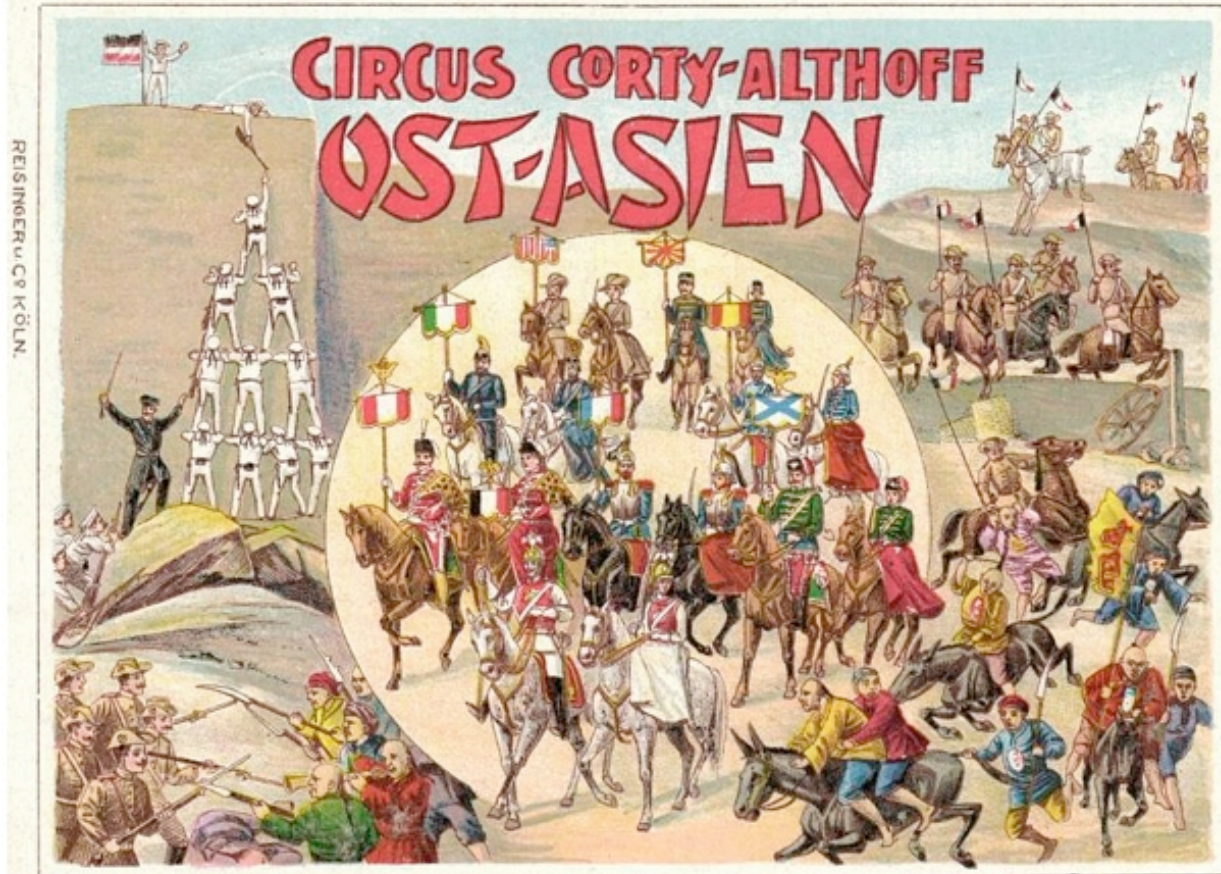
Essay by Peter C. Perdue & Ellen Sebring

The Boxer Uprising

Carving Up China

Imperialist Rivalries

Sources & Credits



“Circus Corty-Althoff Ost-Asien”

(Circus Corty-Althoff East Asia)

Postcard, Germany, ca. 1900

[c1900_236_001]

IMPERIALIST RIVALRIES

Although the imperial powers joined together to raise an Eight Nation Army to relieve the siege, each of the major powers had its own special relationship with China and its own view of its geopolitical interests. In sum, each of the imperial powers had its particular motives for sending troops to China, and each of them distrusted the others.

The deluge of global imagery from this period thus not only reveals a common racial prejudice against savage Orientals, but also shows the deep tensions between the powers that were only temporarily soothed by the joint expedition.

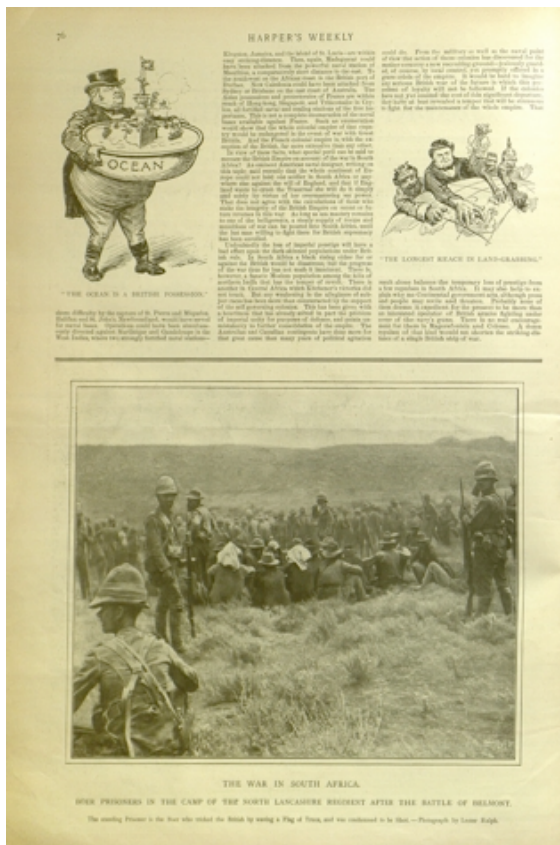
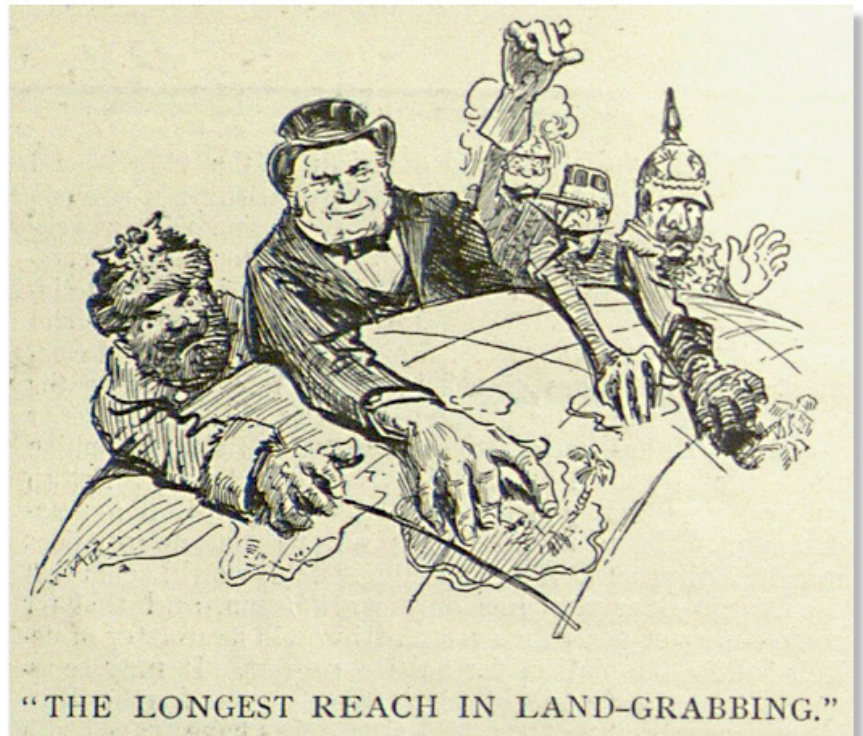
Great Britain

The British were still the predominant world imperial power, as they had been during the nineteenth century since the defeat of Napoleon. Their primary interests in China were commercial, and they focused most of their attention on the lower Yangzi valley, while they sent steamships up the Yangzi to obtain goods from the interior. They also held Hong Kong and developed substantial commerce in the Canton region. But British dominance, based on its control of the oceans and its large colony in India, was coming under challenge from several fronts. Germany began building a navy to contest British supremacy, while the French moved to take control of Indochina and extend their interests into south China. Russia presented a constant imagined threat to India as it moved into Central Asia. Rudyard Kipling saw the future for the British empire in an alliance with the United States, which also needed to build up its navy to become a global power.



"Imperial Federation,—Map of the World Showing the Extent of the British Empire in 1886," with "British Territories Coloured Red." Supplement to the "Graphic," July 24, 1886.

Source: Wikipedia Commons
 [1886_July24_the_Graphic_Map]



This presentation in the January 27, 1900 issue of Harper's Weekly calls attention to the global reach of the British empire, on which, it was said, the sun never set. In "The Longest Reach in Land-grabbing," John Bull's empire-building extends beyond that of Russia, Italy, France, and Germany.

Detail, above left, caption: "The ocean is a British possession."

Detail, above right, caption: "The longest reach in land-grabbing."

Harper's Weekly, January 27, 1900

[harpers1900_01_005]

From 1899 to 1902, British troops in South Africa fought a war against two independent republics founded by Dutch Afrikaners, the Transvaal and the Oranje Vrijstaat. Early victories by the British were not decisive, as the Boers waged a drawn-out guerrilla war campaign, just as the Filipinos were doing against American forces at the same time. Both countries used brutal tactics of internment of civilian populations in concentration camps and ravaging of the countryside to force surrender by the farmer fighters. The popular press, however, showed a sanitized picture of the war, with traditional pictures and lithographs of military operations. But the Boers were depicted as savages, analogous to the Boxers in their closeness to the earth and rejection of the British civilizing mission.



"The Chinese Kopje; — Not so Easy as it Looked from a Distance."
Puck, July 25, 1900
Artist: Udo Keppler

This illustration represents the eight-nation alliance that invaded China looking up at a mountain labeled "Chinese Question" topped with the face of an angry Chinese person. Kopje, the Dutch name for "small hill," indicates similarities of the Boxer Expedition to the Boer War in South Africa.

[puck_1900_ChKopje_008]

France

The French, unlike the British, had never created a successful East India Company to participate in the Canton trading system, and they had not traded in opium. Initially, their primary interest in China was the promotion and protection of Christianity. They joined with the British in 1856 to make war on China, benefiting the most from the provisions of the treaty ending the Second Opium War (1856-1860), which allowed missionary access to the Chinese interior. Beginning in the late-nineteenth century, they moved to take control of Indochina. In 1884, they fought their first independent war with China, when the court in Vietnam appealed for aid from China against French incursions. The French victory in the Sino-French war gave the French unimpeded control of Indochina, and the opportunity to spread their influence in south and southwest China. They sent commercial missions to the region to explore mineral and plant resources and to plan for railroad development.





This series of French postcards caricaturing the conflict in China depicts the brutality of British and Russian imperialists, as they torture and carve up the Chinese dragon. On the left (top), John Bull the Englishman confronts the Russian over the dead body of the Chinese dragon. Under the title "Dissection of the Chinese monster," the Russian Cossack says, "Look but don't touch."

In the second image, the title reads, "A Counter blow in China to the famine in India." As foreign powers carry away portly Chinese mandarins, John Bull says to his "faithful subject", the starving Indian, "What do you think I am, a drum [to beat upon for aid?]." In the third image, foreigners sharpen a razor to shave the sleeping mandarin. The title says, "Don't complain: we're doing everything we can to make you happy."

In the fourth image, John Bull, stuck in the war in Transvaal, shouts impotently while other foreigners saw off the legs of the mandarin's chair. The title says, "John Bull, caught in his own trap, can only grind his teeth while the others saw away." The fifth image (bottom) shows the Russians and others tearing China to pieces while John Bull screams under them. The title says, "Poor John Bull, they're thumbing their noses at you. On your back they rip off the juiciest morsels. Get up quick ...if you can!"

top row: [flkr10-15_FrPostcards_4]
bottom [flkr12_6004395961]

GERMANY

Germany, unified as a nation state in 1870, soon felt that it, too, needed an imperial mission to make itself into a recognized world power and to secure sources of raw materials for its rapid industrialization. Real estate available in the world for colonization was scarce, but Germany joined the struggle to carve up Africa, established a colony in Samoa, and looked for a chance to take a piece of Chinese territory. German missionaries also penetrated Shandong province under government protection beginning in the 1890s. When Chinese murdered two German missionaries in 1897, the Germans found their pretext and occupied Jiaozhou on the coast of Shandong, forcing the Chinese government to lease the territory to them for 99 years.

Jiaozhou became a popular tourist destination for Germans, who sent back postcards depicting both its exotic markets and the availability of familiar German products like beer and sausages. The Germans founded the first major beer factory in Jiaozhou's capital of Qingdao in 1903. Tsingtao beer is still the most popular Chinese beer sold abroad. Postcards celebrated the harmonious mingling of different races—white, Asian, and black—in the new German empire.



While Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II promoted virulent "Yellow Peril" sentiments, many postcards on the eve of the Boxer uprising still conveyed a contrary image of amity and even intimacy between the Chinese and Germans resident in China.

"Kiautschou (Jiaozhou bay in Shandong)"

Postcard, Germany, ca. 1899

Source: Wikipedia Commons
[Tsingtau_Postkarten_ca_1900_Kiautschou].

Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II, however, held a more menacing view of Asia. He warned of a rising "Yellow Peril," first directed at Japan after 1895 and later at China, and supported German claims to lead the nations of Europe in a war of civilization against a savage Oriental threat.



These German postcards from ca. 1899 capture Kaiser Wilhelm II's bellicosity toward China. Left: a German in spiked helmet, possibly the Kaiser himself, threatens the powerful empress dowager Cixi. The caption reads: "The German: Just wait until I get there!" (Der Deutsche: Na wart! wenn ich dir rüber komme.) Right: "The Iron Fist" (Die gepanzerte faust) strikes a Chinaman with a dagger as if descending from heaven.

[1899_244_001_mailed_fist]

As in other imperialist nations, once the multi-nation foreign invasion of China was underway, private German commercial interests seized the opportunity to join in generating and disseminating popular images of the conflict. A run of postcards from the C. H. Knorr company, for example, which produced packaged convenience foods like soup mixes, wedded images of its products to scenes of ongoing developments in the invasion that it deemed would be of particular interest to a German audience.



Another set of German postcards shows how the Boxer events in China were dramatized in many kinds of media, including advertisements with lavish illustrations. A series of postcards from the C. H. Knorr company depicts events in China of interest to the German audience, with the company's packaged grocery products displayed in the corners.

The series begins with (1) the departure of German troops for China; (2) the naval bombardment at Taku; (3) the battle for the Taku forts; (4) the battle at Tientsin, interestingly shown from the Chinese troops' point of view; (5) murder of German diplomat von Ketteler; and ends with (6) the taking of Peking, looting already in progress.

[flkr01-06_Knorr_postcard_series]

Austria-Hungary and Italy

The two other European powers, Austria-Hungary and Italy, had very limited relations with China, but they joined the expedition, at least in name, in order to demonstrate their membership in the group of significant European powers. Italy had tried and failed to gain territorial and commercial concessions in China. The Hapsburg empire of Austria and Hungary had a few missionaries in China, and hoped to benefit from supporting its German ally.



Although Italy was a minor participant in the multinational invasion, this Italian cartoon conveys a subtle picture of the situation in China. The Chinese figure, slightly goofy-looking at first glance, represents Li Hung-chang, China's most eminent statesman, who is in fact adroitly juggling six foreign powers (clearly including Germany, Japan, France, and probably the U.S., Britain, and Russia). Lurking and smirking behind him is the formidable empress dowager Cixi.

*"Usages et Coutumes Chinois — Comment on joue au volant en Chine." (Chinese Customs: How the Chinaman juggles)
Il Fischietto, Turin, Italy, ca. 1900*

Source: "Chinois d'Europe et Chinois d'Asie," undated archival album of cartoons collected by John Grand-Carteret, p. 22
[dh7060_e1389]



LA CHEVAUCHÉE DES SORCIÈRES EN CHINE.

Le savant Confucius a dit au sujet de la domination de l'étranger : « Quand sur les eaux du Yang-Tsé-Kiang le soleil se lèvera de Li-Hong-Chang, alors on verra sortir deux dragons du pays, tandis que des milliers de diables seront chassés dehors ».

(Der Flob, de Vienne, juillet 1900).

In this cartoon from an Austrian magazine, the foreign powers confront the familiar Chinese dragon, here ridden by a “witch” who obviously represents the powerful empress dowager Cixi. The figure in the sun at the upper right is the powerful minister Li Hongzhang.

“La Chevauchée des Sorcieres en Chines”

(The Ride of the Chinese Sorcerers)

Caption: “The sage Confucius said of foreign domination: When the sun of Li Hongzhang rises over the Yangzi river, two dragons will appear to drive out millions of foreign devils.”

Source: “Chinois d’Europe et Chinois d’Asie,” undated archival album of cartoons collected by John Grand-Carteret
[Grand-Carteret_36_DRAGON_bpt6k63508640]

United States

The United States was also a latecomer to the cause of imperialism in Asia. Although Commodore Matthew Perry's ships had begun the opening of Japan in 1853, and Americans eagerly participated in both the Canton trade and the chances to trade in opium after the opening of Chinese ports, Americans still saw themselves as different from European powers who aimed to occupy territory in China. American missionaries and businessmen hoped to help Asian peoples become richer and stronger without imposing discriminatory treaties on them: they argued that free trade would benefit all countries equally.



Harper's cover graphic at the height of the Boxer Uprising taps two cherished stereotypes: China as a mad and ferocious dragon, and the United States, personified by Uncle Sam, as poised and rational—offering “peace” but entirely prepared for war. The choice, as the caption declares, is entirely up to China.

“The Dragon's Choice”
Harper's Weekly, August 18, 1900

[harpers1900_07b_v2b_013]

The American proposal for an "Open Door" that made Chinese markets available to all countries equally implied that no single power could occupy territory with exclusive rights. All the other imperial powers, who did occupy Chinese territory, paid lip service to the American proposal but ignored it in practice.

For much of the nineteenth century the U.S., with its huge continental territory, was either insulated from economic dependence on the wider world across the Pacific, or too involved in the domestic repercussions of the Civil War to pay attention to geopolitical concerns.

But as its industrial economy needed more overseas markets and materials from abroad, and its expansion continued beyond the west coast into the Pacific, the U.S. inexorably became an imperial power in its own right. Promoters of open imperialist annexations argued that the U.S. needed to compete for global commercial supremacy by securing raw materials and territories. American businessmen staged a coup in Hawaii in 1893, and the U.S. annexed the islands in 1898.

The takeover of the Philippines from Spain in 1898 was followed by a brutal campaign to suppress the anti-imperialist Filipino force led by Emilio Aguinaldo. Popular journalists depicted the U.S. as a benevolent school teacher lifting the burden of Catholic medievalism from the ordinary Filipino peasant, and repelling the corrupt banditry of Aguinaldo and his rebels. Geopolitical analysts focused on the Philippines as the key gateway to Asia for American commerce.

The U.S. experience in the Philippines certainly affected views of the role of U.S. troops in the relief of the Boxer siege of foreign legations in Beijing. Images of benevolence toward smaller dark-skinned people transferred easily from one Asian country to another, but the awareness that Asian peoples could resist white domination with harsh military action prepared the American public to accept that the Boxers represented yet another savage, inexplicable outburst by ungrateful Asians against their white benefactors.

Chinese immigration to the U.S. also added a distinctive element to the American image of the Orient. Chinese had begun to leave Canton in significant numbers in the 1850s to flee the disturbances of the Taiping rebellion (1850–64) and to participate in the gold rush, and in the 1860s they worked to build the first transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869. The Burlingame treaty of 1868, which normalized relations between China and the U.S. also provided for free immigration of Chinese, but did not allow Chinese to become citizens.

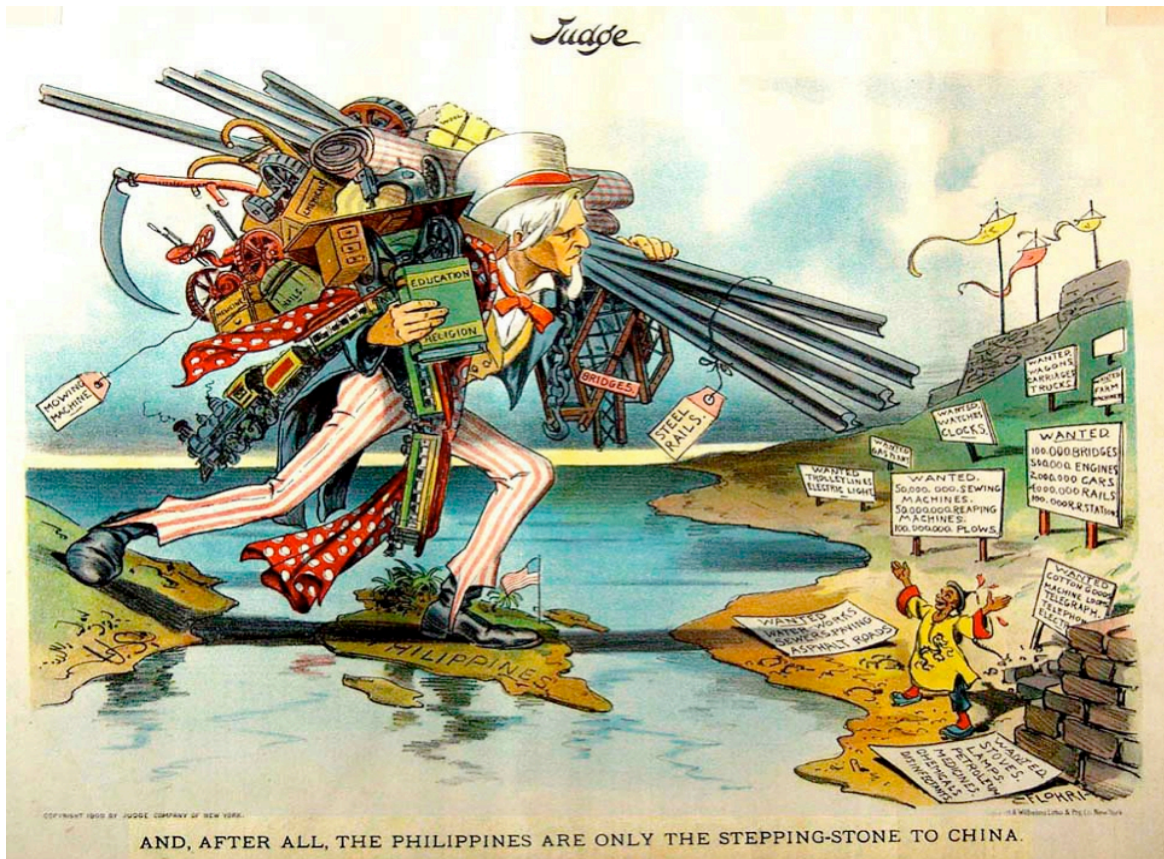
Chinese grew to become the largest immigrant group in California. 300,000 of them had entered the U.S. before the passage of anti-Chinese exclusion acts. They faced severe racial discrimination. White farmers and businessmen attacked the Chinese as an alien, dangerous race, easily adopting the Yellow Peril fears raised in Europe. The Exclusion Act of 1882 reversed the open policy of the Burlingame treaty, prohibiting further immigration and rejecting intermarriage of Chinese with Europeans. This and later exclusion acts were not repealed until 1943. Most Chinese were confined to crowded Chinatowns, which became known as places of disease, dirt, drugs, and gambling, dominated by ancient "secret societies" who engaged in violent "tong wars."

Newly organized public health campaigns to combat plague by quarantine in Chinatowns in San Francisco and Hawaii in 1900 coincided with the outbreak of the Boxer rebellion. These images linked the domestic threat of Chinese immigrants directly with the violent Boxer attacks on missionaries in China.

In the U.S. the Republican president William McKinley had defeated William Jennings Bryan in 1896 on a platform supporting the gold standard, plus high tariffs on foreign imports to protect American business interests. McKinley challenged Spanish control of its Caribbean colonies and led the U.S. into the war of 1898, prodded by the Hearst journalistic empire's whipping up of public opinion, obtaining as a byproduct America's first Asian colonies, the Philippines, Guam, and Hawaii. In 1900 he ran successfully against Bryan again, defending imperial acquisitions as necessary for American prosperity, but in September 1901 he was assassinated.

In 1899, the U.S. Secretary of State John Hay tried to ward off the division of China by announcing an "Open Door" policy, asserting equal access to Chinese markets for all powers and the prohibition of open territorial conquest. What held back the powers from an open division of China, however, was less the influence of the United States, which was still a weak imperialist beyond its own shores, than the recognition of all the powers that an inter-imperialist war over China would benefit no one. This common interest in preserving a weak, but united Qing empire undergirded the joint imperial expedition to Beijing and the treaties that kept the empire alive afterward.

Although U.S. publications contributed their fair share of racist cartoons and commentary to the Yellow Peril attitudes of the time, the conquest of the Philippines and upheaval in China also provided a fertile field for emphasizing the enormous commercial opportunities that Asia in general—and the China market in particular—offered, especially to dynamic trading nations like the United States and Great Britain.



"And, After All, the Philippines are Only the Stepping-Stone to China."

Judge, March 21, 1900

Artist: Emil Flohri

This spectacular cartoon in the American weekly Judge vividly conveys the dynamics and contradictions of the U.S. "Open Door" policy in Asia at the time of the Boxer Uprising. One side of this was the contemporaneous U.S. conquest of the Philippines, which artist Emil Flohri astutely points out was regarded by many Americans as a commercial "stepping-stone to China." The immensity of the envisioned China market is spelled out in both the huge burden of heavy industrial commodities Uncle Sam carries and the profusion of Chinese signs itemizing "Wanted" imports. These include locomotives and steel rails, farming equipment such as reaping machines and plows, cotton textiles, sewing machines, medicines and chemicals, trolley lines as well as trucks and carriages, telegraphs and telephones, etc.

As the book in Uncle Sam's hand indicates, the U.S. would simultaneously be bringing "education" and "religion" to China. The tiny welcoming Chinese figure in this graphic was a striking contrast to the more familiar cartoon caricatures of China as a raging dragon or ominous "Yellow Peril." At the same time, the graphic makes clear that the U.S. would be the prime beneficiary of an "open door" to China.

Source: Wikimedia

[cb28-038_1900_Mar21_Judge_Philippines_wm]

Awakening China

As the Boxer uprising flared into the multinational intervention, some graphic renderings depicted an even more precarious picture of the see-saw of imperialist rivalries. In this situation, China itself became a potential source of global discord—a giant firecracker; a dark and dangerous terrain to navigate, full of traps that might lead to future wars; a “sword of Damocles” hanging by a thread over the heads of the interventionist powers.



"A Dangerous Firecracker"
Puck, July 11, 1900
Artist: Louis Dalrymple

DEAN C. WORCESTER ON THE PHILIPPINES

HARPER'S WEEKLY

A JOURNAL OF CIVILIZATION

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NEW YORK, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1899

TEN CENTS A COPY
FOUR DOLLARS A YEAR



A FAIR FIELD AND NO FAVOR!
UNCLE SAM: "I'M OUT FOR COMMERCE, NOT CONQUEST!"

"A Fair Field and No Favor!"

Caption: "Uncle Sam: 'I'm Out For Commerce, Not Conquest!'"

Harper's Weekly, Vol. 43, No. 2239, November 18, 1899

Artist: W. A. Rogers

This November 1899 Harper's cover illustration also reflects endorsement of the "Open Door" policy, which the U.S. announced as its official policy toward China in September of that same year. In contrast to the bellicose European powers clamoring for spheres of interest, Uncle Sam offers unfettered commercial expansion. Italy, Russia, France, and Germany clamor for "conquest" behind him, with a suave hat-tipping England off to the side. As a symbol of the commerce the U.S. had in mind, the male figure personifying China—with his typical long queue and traditional garb—holds a locomotive in his hand.

Source: HarpWeek
[1899_Nov18_Harpers]

Japan

Of all the nations engaged in the Boxer expedition, Japan and Russia had the most well-defined material and territorial interests to protect, and the most reason to distrust each other. In the Sino-Japanese war of 1895, Japan had established pre-eminent influence over Korea, forcing Korea open to Japanese trade and driving out the pro-Chinese faction in the country. Japan saw its role in Korea in the same way as the other imperial powers viewed their own colonies. Japan claimed to bring "enlightenment" in the form of modern science and culture to backward peoples. Japan had no missionaries to protect in China, and it was not a target of Boxer attacks, but it identified itself with the Western powers' goal of forcing China to accept trade and modern culture, and it saw advantages in joining the Western expedition as a way of raising its status among the Western powers. Not until the signing of the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902, directed against Russia, could Japan gain recognition of its role as one of the major world powers. Its participation in the Boxer expedition, for which it sent the largest number of troops and often took the lead in attacks, showed that Japanese could fight for the Western version of "civilization" even more effectively than the Westerners themselves.

Most Japanese graphic renderings of the multinational intervention tended to be detailed and relatively straightforward nationalistic depictions that emphasized the discipline of Japan's military forces and their equality to and close collaboration with the Western powers.

福島の将軍と軍合連隊の津に進入の図



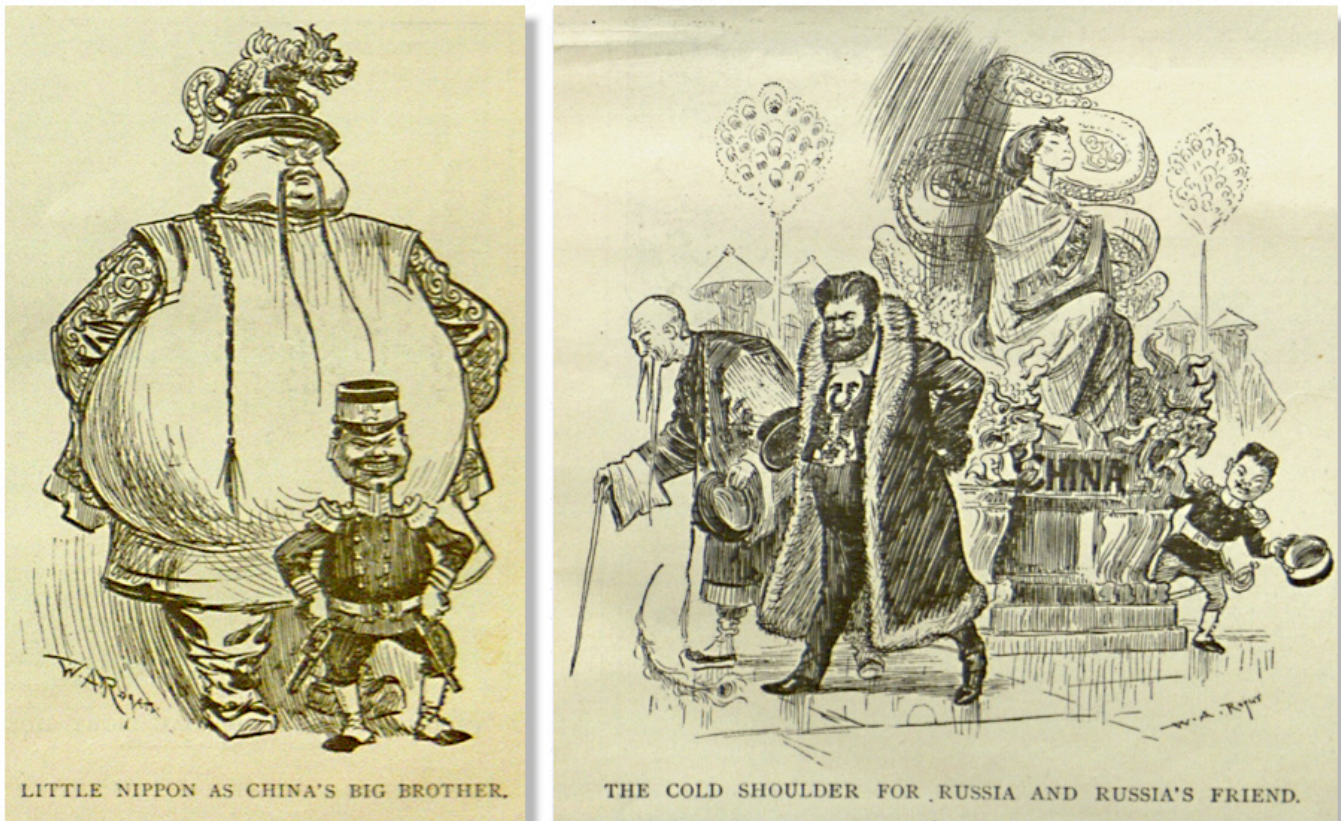
"The Japanese army under Major General Fukushima advancing with the allied armies toward T'ien-chin, China"

Japan, July 1900

Artist: Nakajima Ishimatsu

Source: Library of Congress
[1900_02539u_July_loc]

The Japanese sense of perfect equivalence to the Western powers was rarely reciprocated, however. On the contrary, most European and American depictions of the foreign forces in China routinely depicted the Japanese as "little men"—not only vis-à-vis the Westerners, but vis-à-vis China and the Chinese as well. A full-page treatment in *Harper's Weekly* in early 1900—five full years after Japan had crushed China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 to 1895—reflected the resilience of this lingering anti-Japanese condescension.



LITTLE NIPPON AS CHINA'S BIG BROTHER.

THE COLD SHOULDER FOR RUSSIA AND RUSSIA'S FRIEND.



This full-page article, "The Pacific to the Fore," in Harper's Weekly, February 24, 1900, still depicted a diminutive Japan despite its victory over China five years earlier, and speculated on Japan's relationship to China and Russia.

Detail, above left, caption: "Little Nippon as China's big brother."

Detail, above right, caption: "The Cold Shoulder for Russia and Russia's Friend." Harper's Weekly, February 24, 1900

[harpers1900_01_012]

Russia

Russia was the power with the longest historical engagement with China, having signed its first treaties with the Qing dynasty in 1689 and 1727. The early period of equitable interaction changed in the late-nineteenth century, when Russia took advantage of China's defeat in the Second Opium War to gain its own favorable treaty, and sent troops into the Ili valley during the Muslim uprisings of the 1870s, where they stayed until China forced them out diplomatically in 1881. By the 1890s, Russia had developed its commercial interests on the Pacific coast, founding the town of Vladivostok in 1880. But Russian interests in the Far East faced resistance both from the British, who feared a potential move against India, and from Japan, which aimed for uncontested influence in Korea. Russia, like Japan, had no missionary activities in China and was not a target of Boxer attacks, but it saw the foreign expedition as a golden opportunity to take advantage once again of China's weakness and other powers' interests to advance its own at low cost. The Russian Minister for War General Alexi Kuropatkin and Count Sergei Witte, the minister of finance, saw the Boxer expedition as a perfect excuse for seizing Manchuria and turning it into a Russian colony.



"The Same Old Bear."

Caption: "Russian Bear (to British Lion), 'You've got so much to do elsewhere, I'll tackle this obstreperous Party.' British Lion, 'Oh, thanks! But I wouldn't leave you alone with him for worlds!'"

Punch, June 13, 1900

In this cartoon in England's premier humor magazine, Punch, the British lion and Russian bear express their mistrust of one another in ironically polite terms, while the other nations involved in the Boxer uprising comprise a motley and noticeably goofy background. The Chinese dragon sports, among other things, a pair of boxing gloves.

[1900_punchvol118a119lemouoft_0429_archive]

Dangerous China: Another Kind of China Peril

As a general rule, most foreign caricatures of China depicted the country as either a formidable menace to the world or a small backwater ripe for commercial penetration. A cartoon published in the American periodical *Judge* in 1898, as the Boxer depredations were about to rise to a crescendo, conveyed a somewhat different picture. Here the world was a "see-saw," in which the Anglo-American powers were engaged in a uneven "balance of power" game vis-a-vis the other major nations of the world. In this power struggle, some countries already had fallen off the see-saw—and China was hanging on for dear life and perilously close to falling also.



"The See-saw of Nations."

Caption: "The Anglo-Saxons hold the balance of power."

Judge, April 9, 1898. Note that China hangs off the end of the plank.

In this depiction of global power struggle at the turn of the century, Uncle Sam and John Bull weigh heaviest, while other nations—notably Russia, Germany, France, Spain, and Turkey—struggle to stay on the other end, and China is merely holding on for dear life. "History" stands in the balance, and the fulcrum of the see-saw is, ominously and tellingly, a cannon.

[Judge_1898_Apr9]

Awakening China

As the Boxer uprising flared into the multinational intervention, some graphic renderings depicted an even more precarious picture of the see-saw of imperialist rivalries. In this situation, China itself became a potential source of global discord—a giant firecracker; a dark and dangerous terrain to navigate, full of traps that might lead to future wars; a “sword of Damocles” hanging by a thread over the heads of the interventionist powers.



“A Dangerous Firecracker”

Puck, July 11, 1900

Artist: Louis Dalrymple

John Bull, representing England, and the rulers of Germany, France, Austria, and Japan watch as the ruler of Russia lights the fuse of a large firecracker labeled "China."

[puck_1900_11July_firecracker_007]



Puck, September 6, 1901

Artist: Udo Keppeler

Representing the dangers of war between the imperial powers during the Boxer intervention, the cartoon shows Uncle Sam holding a lantern labeled "Prudence" in one hand and John Bull with the other, leading Austria, Japan, France, and Germany through a field of traps labeled "Casus Belli" (an act that provokes war).

[puck_1901_744_yale_beinecke]



"Awakening of China"

Caption: "A Disturbing Possibility in the East."

Puck, September 4, 1901

Artist: Udo Keppler

Here, Uncle Sam sits at a table with 10 figures, three of whom are unidentified, the others representing the leaders of the eight nation alliance: Russia, England, Germany, Japan, Italy, Austria, and France. There is a large tray of fruit labeled "Chinese Indemnity" on the table. Hanging above the table by a thin string is an enormous sword labeled "Awakening of China."

[puck_1901_04Sep_25561u_LOC]

The danger was multifold. Intervention threatened to intensify already-existing rivalries among the imperialist powers (as indeed happened, when the intervention was followed four years later by war between Tsarist Russia and Japan). At the same time, the humiliation of China threatened to awaken the nation in truly perilous ways. This latter premonition became especially strong in 1901. The victorious foreign powers had weakened the Qing court by imposing a harsh indemnity on it, and by forcing it to execute officials who had stirred up the Boxers, but they shared an interest in keeping the dynasty alive. They feared the possibility of another uprising of the Chinese masses and the onset of conflict between the imperial powers themselves. This China, unlike the slain dragon, as firecracker or as sword of Damocles, threatened to blow up the imperial world order.