**Boxer Rebellion: Background**

By the end of the 19th century, the Western powers and Japan had forced China's rulers to accept wide foreign control over the country's economic affairs. In the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60), the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), and several rebellions China had fought to resist the foreigners. Unfortunately, China lacked a modernized military and suffered millions of deaths and injuries. In the aftermath of the war with Japan, China was divided into “[spheres of influence](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h901.html)” by powerful countries allowing outside nations even greater control. Understandably, the Chinese deeply resented the presence of these powerful foreigners and were frustrated by the weakness of their own government. China had effectively lost its independence.

One reaction to this exploitation was the emergence of a secret martial arts society known as the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists. Thanks to their somewhat awkward name, the English began using the term "Boxers" to describe them because the term "fists" appears in their name and the fact that they rigorously practiced the martial arts. The Boxers' famously calm demeanor in the face of their foes is believed to have stemmed from their spiritual beliefs. They believed that by combining rigorous training and prayer with a healthy diet, they could perform superhuman physical feats and were impervious to the bullets and blades used by foreign soldiers.

By the late 1890s, the Boxers had begun carrying out regular attacks on foreigners and Chinese Christians. Although the Boxers came from various parts of society, many were peasants, particularly from Shandong province in northern China. This region had been plagued by natural disasters such as famine and flooding. Harsh conditions and starvation were common. In the 1890s, China had given territorial and commercial control in this area to several European nations. The Boxers blamed their poor standard of living and continued suffering on foreigners who were colonizing their country. There was also frustration with the fact that the wealthy and powerful seemed happy to ignore the suffering of the poor. This combination of factors left the Chinese peasants increasingly disheartened and desperate. As a result, the Boxers began to gain popularity and increase their strength in the rural North.

**Boxer Rebellion: 1900**

In 1900, the growing Boxer Rebellion spread from rural regions to the area around the main city in China – Beijing. Bands of Boxers were roaming the countryside around the capital freely attacking foreigners. The Boxers killed Christian missionaries as well as Chinese Christians and destroyed their churches. The Boxers saw these missionaries as symbols of outside influence because they attempted to convert the Chinese to Christianity and actively disrespected traditional Chinese ceremonies and family relations. As the fighting spread into the city, railroad stations, businesses, and foreigner’s homes were also destroyed. On June 20, 1900, the Boxers began a siege of Beijing’s Legation Quarter where many foreign diplomats lived and worked. As the rebellion continued to gain momentum, the Chinese Empress, Dowager Tzu'u Hzi - under pressure from forces in her own government - sided with the Boxers and declared that all foreigners were to be killed on sight.

In response to the growing unrest, the Western powers and Japan organized a multinational force to crush the rebellion, On August 14, after fighting its way through northern China, an international force of approximately 20,000 troops from eight nations (Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) arrived to capture the city of Beijing and rescue the foreigners and Chinese Christians. Within a relatively short time, the foreign soldiers easily defeated the numerically superior Boxers due in large part to their advanced weapons and technology.

**Boxer Rebellion: Aftermath**

The Boxer Rebellion formally ended with the signing of the Boxer Protocol on September 7, 1901. The Western powers and Japan agreed—mainly because of U.S. pressure to "preserve Chinese territorial and administrative integrity" to end the practice of carving out Spheres of Influence in China. Many came to support the idea of an Open Door Policy, because they realized that arguing among themselves would damage their ability to exploit China in the future. Nevertheless, China was compelled to pay an indemnity of $300 million, to amend commercial treaties to the advantage of the foreign nations, and to permit the stationing of foreign troops in Beijing. China emerged from the Boxer Uprising with a greatly increased debt and was, in effect, a “subject nation”.

KEY TERMS:

**Spheres of Influence:** A section of a country where a foreign nation enjoys special rights and powers.

**demeanor**: a person’s appearance and behavior

**commercial**: activities intended to make money – buying and selling goods – trade

**indemnity**: a payment made because of damage, loss, or injury

**subject nation**: a country under the control of another nation