

Activity 10. Empress Dowager Supports the Boxer Rebellion (1899)

Source: I. Headland (1909). *Court Life In China The Capital Its Officials And People* (NY: Revell), p. 61-64.

Background: In the last years of the 19th century, a nationalist movement known as the Boxers led a rebellion against foreign influence that hoped to restore China to its previous position as the world's leading power. One of its slogans was "Support the Qing, destroy the foreign." In November 1899, Italy demanded that it be permitted a sphere of influence in China. In response, the Qing Empress Dowager, Tzu Hsi, issued a secret edict to administrative heads across China calling on them to resist further efforts by European nations to seize control over Chinese territory. When the Boxers placed the capital in Beijing under siege, an Eight-Nation Alliance that included British, Japanese, Russian, Italian, German, French, and United States troops invaded China. The Qing tried to repeal the foreign invaders but both the Boxers and government forces were defeated. Read excerpts A and B from the edict issued by Tzu Hsi and answer questions 1 – 4.

A. Our empire is now laboring under great difficulties which are becoming daily more and more serious. The various Powers cast upon us looks of tiger-like voracity, hustling each other in their endeavors to be the first to seize upon our innermost territories. They think that China, having neither money nor troops, would never venture to go to war with them. They fail to understand, however, that there are certain things that this empire can never consent to, and that, if hardly pressed upon, we have no alternative but to rely upon the justice of our cause, the knowledge of which in our breasts strengthens our resolves and steels us to present a united front against our aggressors.

B. It behooves, therefore, that our viceroys, governors, and commanders-in-chief throughout the whole empire unite forces and act together without distinction or particularizing of jurisdictions so as to present a combined front to the enemy, exhorting and encouraging their officers and soldiers in person to fight for the preservation of their homes and native soil from the encroaching footsteps of the foreign aggressor. Never should the word "Peace" fall from the mouths of our high officials, nor should they even allow it to rest for a moment within their breasts. With such a country as ours, with her vast area, . . . her immense natural resources, and her hundreds of millions of inhabitants, if only each and all of you would prove his loyalty to his Emperor and love of country, what, indeed, is there to fear from any invader? Let no one think of making peace, but let each strive to preserve from destruction and spoliation his ancestral home and graves from the ruthless hands of the invader.

Questions

1. What did the Boxers mean by the slogan "Support the Qing, destroy the foreign"?
2. Why did Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi issue this call for resistance?
3. Why does the Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi believe resistance will be successful?
4. Based on your knowledge of Chinese history, do you think this is likely result? Explain.