



# The Boxer Rebellion and the Great Game in China

*David J. Silbey*

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**A concise history of an uprising that took down a three-hundred-year-old dynasty and united the great powers**

The year is 1900, and Western empires are locked in entanglements across the globe. The British are losing a bitter war against the Boers while the German kaiser is busy building a vast new navy. The United States is struggling to put down an insurgency in the South Pacific while the upstart imperialist Japan begins to make clear to neighboring Russia its territorial ambition. In China, a perennial pawn in the Great Game, a mysterious group of superstitious peasants is launching attacks on the Western powers they fear are corrupting their country. These ordinary Chinese—called Boxers by the West because of their martial arts showmanship—rise up seemingly out of nowhere. Foreshadowing the insurgencies of our recent past, they lack a centralized leadership and instead tap into latent nationalism and deep economic frustration to build their army.

Many scholars brush off the Boxer Rebellion as an ill-conceived and easily defeated revolt, but in *The Boxer Rebellion and the Great Game in China*, the military historian David J. Silbey shows just how close the Boxers came to beating back the combined might of the imperial powers. Drawing on the diaries and letters of allied soldiers and diplomats, he paints a vivid portrait of the war. Although their cause ended just as quickly as it began, the Boxers would inspire Chinese nationalists—including a young Mao Zedong—for decades to come.

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