

THE USE OF FOREIGN SOLDIERS DURING THE TAIPING REBELLION

Alex Gouzoules

By the year 1860, the Taiping Rebellion had been raging across China for over a decade. The largest civil war in history had turned the once fertile and prosperous Yangzi Delta, especially the area between the rebel capital Nanjing and the treaty port of Shanghai, into a bloody wasteland. A British Quartermaster General described the misery of the area when he wrote, “the distress and misery of the inhabitants were beyond description. . . . the old looked cast down and unable to work from weakness, whilst that eager expression peculiar to starvation . . . was visible upon the emaciated features of the little children”¹. Ten years into the rebellion, the fighting was still extremely intense and neither side seemed close to victory. The proximity of much of the fighting to Shanghai forced both sides to interact both officially and unofficially with Westerners. One of the many important ways in which the Chinese interacted with Westerners during this time period was through the use of Western soldiers in the war. The standard interpretation of these interactions is that the Taiping were rigid and inflexible toward Westerners. However, a comparison of Taiping and Qing attitudes toward Western mercenaries reveals that during the 1860s both sides were similarly flexible and adaptable in making use of Western troops.

Western soldiers began to be used somewhat reluctantly by both sides during the Taiping Rebellion. The Qing Dynasty made extensive use of Western support in the closing stages of the rebellion, relying heavily on Western war materiel and even the direct participation of the British and French militaries during certain operations. These forces made a huge difference in the conflict and perhaps decided the war in the Qing’s favor, as the Taiping were cut off from ports that could have offered Western supplies and were thus regarded unfavorably by Western governments due to their effect on Chinese trade. At certain points, however, both sides relied on individual Western soldiers officially in their service, and they did so in a similar manner.

Western Imperial soldiers can be divided into two categories. The first consists of mercenaries and adventurers who served the Qing simply for rewards, the most famous of whom was the American Fredrick Townsend Ward. The second category consists of European officers such as Charles Gordon, who were loaned by their governments to serve in the Imperial armies against the Taiping. The Qing made use of both groups to set up foreign officered Imperial armies, but also found their employment problematic and had some trouble controlling the foreign “barbarians.” This was especially true of the second group, whose loyalty extended to their home governments. Sometimes these soldiers were employed locally and without the consent of the Imperial government. Despite these problems, the Imperial forces found ways to employ many foreigners against the rebels throughout the 1860s.

¹ Wolseley, Garnet, *Narrative* p 350, cited in Spence, Jonathan, *God’s Chinese Son* p 304

The Taiping were cut off from the coast and were opposed by the Western powers and therefore had less access to Western soldiers than the Qing did. In spite of this, they still made surprisingly extensive use of foreign troops. Like the Imperialists, the Taiping leaders employed Western soldiers locally, sometimes without the support of the Taiping government at Nanjing. Westerners who served the Taipings can be divided into three categories; those who joined the Taipings out of ideological support for the rebellion, those who served for monetary reasons, and, in some cases, those who were pressed into Taiping service.

Western soldiers played an important role in deciding the last years of the Taiping Rebellion, and the ways in which the two sides of the war used foreign troops was surprisingly similar. Both sides had ambiguous relationships with their foreign soldiers, often employing them locally and for a variety of reasons. Both the Taiping and the Qing used some methods to control the foreigners, but also embraced the use of foreign troops to a degree. Little work has been done comparing the strategies of both sides in employing foreigners. Such a comparison reveals that during the 1860s both sides were flexible and adaptable in making use of individual Western troops.

Much has been written on the foreign officered armies of the Imperialist forces. The Ever Victorious Army has been the subject of many books, and its last commander, Charles Gordon, subsequently became a hero in his home country and therefore has been thoroughly discussed. Many of these works, especially the older ones, lionize the leaders of the Ever Victorious Army; older American scholars such as Cahill and Abend give Ward much of the credit for ending the rebellion while British scholars such as Mossman give this same credit to Gordon. More modern scholarship, notably Richard Smith's *Mercenaries and Mandarins*, have presented a more accurate picture, portraying the Ever Victorious Army as setting an important institutional precedent but not deciding the war. Some has also been written regarding the Franco-Imperial forces, such as the Ever Triumphant Army.

The subject of Western Taipings has received very little scholarly attention. Many of the Taiping sources that mention Westerners fighting with the rebels are contradictory, and the statements of Westerners serving with the Taipings often paint remarkably different pictures of the same movement. The most extensive and noteworthy account of the rebel forces by a Westerner is A.F. Lindley's *Ti Ping Tien Kwo [Taiping Tianguo]*. Other primary sources give brief details of life as a Western Taiping soldier. These sources have been studied far less than the accounts by Ward and Gordon have been.

The year 1860 marked the beginning of the use of large numbers of Westerners in the rebellion. At this time, Taiping armies were making a drive at Shanghai, and the Imperial forces were unable to stand against them. The Europeans, whose trade centered upon the treaty port of Shanghai, were nervous about a possible Taiping takeover of the city. On the other hand, the Europeans were by no means allies of the Manchu government, and the French and British were in fact still engaged in the conflict with the Qing known as the Second Opium War. This situation led to the awkward position of the Western powers hoping for a victory by the Qing Imperial government which they were warring with.

The Imperial government was also in an awkward position regarding the conflict with the Taipings. Even after the Treaty of Tianjin ended the Arrow War, Beijing was

not enthusiastic about using Westerners to fight the Taiping even though Imperial armies were suffering major setbacks. The initial view of the throne, along with important officials such as Prince Gong, is summarized by Smith, who writes “they objected to foreign intervention on the grounds that prolonged contact with the rebels might foster collusion . . . [and] that military assistance would give the barbarians pretexts for later demands”². Such views of the Western powers were not necessarily unduly suspicious. Prosper Giquel, a Frenchman who became involved in training Imperial troops during the war, wrote that, “in rendering the Chinese the immense service of our help in battling the rebels, we augment our influence and create new obligations for Peking”³. Although the foreign powers were prepared to protect Shanghai itself from the rebels, the understandable suspicion by the Imperial court of European intentions meant that for the time being further support would not be available from foreign governments.

Local officials at Shanghai, however, desired more support from the West than Beijing was willing to provide for. For this reason, they turned to the use of foreign mercenaries who were not associated with Western governments. The chief of these mercenaries was the American adventurer Frederick Ward. Born in Salem, Massachusetts, Ward had spent his life as a sailor and mercenary, fighting in Central America and the Crimea and serving on various merchant ships in the Far East⁴. Ward saw opportunity in China and hired the services of two highly competent American officers, Edward Forester and Henry Burgevine⁵ and with their help put together a force that consisted of Western deserters and Filipino mercenaries⁶. The force was known as the Shanghai Foreign Arms Corps, and was funded by two Shanghai merchant-officials, Wu Xu and Yang Fang, along with the governor of Jiangsu, Xue Huan. It is important to note that Xue did not acknowledge to his superiors the fact that the force was led by Americans, and, as Smith writes “Peking made it clear that Ward’s force should be considered a merchant undertaking, in no way associated with the Ch’ing [Qing] government”⁷.

The Shanghai Foreign Arms Corps met with little success at first and the mercenary band that Ward had put together at Shanghai was no match for the battle hardened Taiping rebels they faced. In 1861, Ward remade his force, keeping his better Western soldiers on hand and using them as officers to train a Chinese army. Ward’s Chinese recruits were trained in a Western style and under strict but regular discipline. They were drilled with Western weapons and artillery, trained to respond to English commands and bugle calls, and equipped in uniforms made to resemble the colonial forces of the European empires⁸. The new force proved very successful, and was renamed the Ever Victorious Army by the court at Beijing.

The use of mercenaries such as Ward served several purposes for the Imperial government. Ward and his men did not serve a foreign government; in fact, Ward and his second-in-command, Burgevine, became Chinese subjects and renounced their American citizenship. Ward married the daughter of his Chinese financial backer, Yang Fang, and

² Smith, Richard. *Mercenaries and Mandarins*, p 21.

³ Giquel, Prosper. *A Journal of the Chinese Civil War*, p 39.

⁴ Cahill, Holger. *A Yankee Adventurer*, pg. 33-35.

⁵ Cahill, p 43

⁶ Smith, *Mercenaries and Mandarins*, p 29

⁷ Smith, *Mercenaries and Mandarins*, p 31

⁸ Cahill, p 148

was given a mandarin red button and the rank of Green Standard Colonel in the Qing army⁹. This was in keeping with the millennia old Chinese tradition of employing foreign barbarians who embraced Chinese culture; this practice was accepted as natural even as early as the Tang Dynasty¹⁰. The advantage of using Ward as opposed to direct aid from foreign governments was twofold. First, Ward's loyalty was not divided between the Qing and other governments, and second, foreign governments could not claim credit for the success of his force and thereby make demands of China. It is clear that Beijing took Ward's status as a Chinese subject seriously, as they were reportedly concerned that he never shaved his forehead or wore the Manchu queue¹¹.

Ward was a gifted commander who was willing to "become civilized" and adopt Chinese customs. Unfortunately, such men were rare, and Ward himself was killed in action against the Taiping in September, 1862. To replace him, and to lead the increasing number of other Western trained Imperial armies that were forming in China, the Imperial government was forced to turn toward a different type of Westerner: soldiers loaned to the Qing by their home governments.

By the time of Ward's death, the foreign powers had become more amenable to the Qing Dynasty due to the settlement of their differences in the treaty of Tianjin. The British and French were anxious to protect the valuable area around Shanghai and to ensure that the payment of the treaty indemnity they were owed by the Imperial government was not jeopardized by the rebels. At the same time, the success of Imperial armies officered and supplied by Western powers had made the Chinese more willing to turn to Western assistance. This led to a step that neither side was completely comfortable with but which served the purposes of both China and the West. In 1863, an order was passed in Parliament authorizing British military officers to take temporary service under the Chinese Emperor¹².

The man who eventually took command of the Ever Victorious Army was Charles Gordon, a British officer whose personality and background were strikingly different from Ward's. Gordon was a deeply religious man who was raised by a military family in England¹³. A member of the Royal Engineers, Gordon had served in the Crimean War before volunteering for service in China during the Arrow War¹⁴. His career in China earned him the nickname "Chinese" Gordon, and his later service in Egypt and death in the Sudan made him one of the most famous British commanders of the nineteenth century. During Gordon's tenure as commander of the Ever Victorious Army, the force remained under Imperial control, and the British made an arrangement with Li Hongzhang, then governor of Jiangsu, to work out how an army could be commanded by two nations. On paper, control over where the army marched and who was appointed to the officer corps rested with the British, but, as Smith writes, the "agreement bound Li only as far as he chose to honor it"¹⁵.

⁹ Smith *Mercenaries and Mandarins*, p 54

¹⁰ Smith, Richard. "The Employment of Foreign Military Talent: Chinese Tradition and Late Ch'ing Practice," p 114

¹¹ Smith, *Mercenaries and Mandarins*, p 54

¹² Lindley. *Ti-Ping Tien Kwoh*, p 571

¹³ Smith *Mercenaries and Mandarins*, p 125-126

¹⁴ Wilson, Andrew. *The 'Ever Victorious Army'*, p 126

¹⁵ Smith, *Mercenaries and Mandarins*, p 153-154

Unlike Ward, who adopted Chinese ways, Gordon and other foreign officers loaned to the Qing often came into conflict with Chinese officials. The most famous of these conflicts was the Suzhou massacre. During the siege of Suzhou, in which the Ever Victorious Army participated, several of the Taiping Wangs, or Kings, in charge of the city's defense began secret negotiations with Gordon, offering the city to the Imperialists in exchange for their safety. These Wangs murdered their senior commander who remained loyal to the Taiping cause and surrendered the city walls to the Ever Victorious Army. When the Wangs presented themselves to Li Hongzhang, who had overall command of the Imperial force, Li had them decapitated and mutilated despite Gordon's guarantee¹⁶. Gordon was incensed at this offense to his honor as an officer and gentleman, and he refused to take the field for a period after this incident. The Ever Victorious Army remained idle for a time after the massacre.

The Qing government found effective ways to control the relatively large number of Western military personnel that were loaned to them. One effective and traditional method was to play the "barbarians" off each other. This was one reason that, when the Ever Victorious Army in Shanghai went from being an American mercenary force to a more official British force, the Chinese encouraged the creation of the Franco-Chinese Ever Triumphant Army in Ningbo. As Leibo describes, "while ostensibly working together to support the ailing Ch'ing dynasty, the two European powers worked also to undermine each other's accomplishments"¹⁷. By creating these two forces, neither the British nor the French could withdraw their officers and support from the Qing without fearing that their rival would step into their place and gain influence in China at their expense. This was perhaps one of the reasons why Gordon, despite the offence to his honor as an officer at Suzhou, resumed combat operations with Li Hongzhang after a brief protest.

The Qing government, despite their obvious differences with the Western powers and their initial reluctance to employ foreign barbarians, in the end proved quite willing to accept Western help against the Taipings. These initiatives started at the local level, however, without official Imperial sanction, and only grew in acceptance when methods of controlling the Westerners were firmly established. When the Qing employed freelance mercenaries, such as Ward, they were encouraged to become Chinese, although their loyalty to the Imperialist cause could usually be bought with sufficient money. The more challenging problem of controlling foreign military officers was accomplished through a variety of means, including the use of foreign rivalries to exert control.

The military use of Westerners by the Taiping armies is far less well known. Indeed, many sources on the Taiping specifically mention the reluctance of the rebels to employ Westerners. One such statement is a bizarre comment by A. F. Lindley, who writes "the absence of all mercenary attraction to their ranks arose from the wish of the Ti-ping [Taiping] Government to have no adherents who could possibly join them from other than religious or patriotic motives"¹⁸. This statement contrasts with many of the events that Lindley himself writes about, such as the defection to the Taipings of Henry Burgevine and many of his followers. Another comment denying the use of Westerners by the Taiping comes from the *Autobiography of the Chung-Wang*, an account written by

¹⁶ Wilson, p 200-203.

¹⁷ Leibo, in Giquel p 19.

¹⁸ Lindley p 250

the Taiping general after he had been captured by the Imperialist army and was awaiting execution. The Chung Wang, writing of the fall of Suzhou, states that “the gates of the city were then taken possession of by the [foreign] devils . . . to take away whatever men and women they liked . . . the Tien-Wang [Tian Wang] was unwilling to employ devils for this very reason”¹⁹. This is a confusing statement when contrasted with Lindley’s description of a conversation he had with the Chung Wang, in which he writes “I had determined, if possible, to raise another body of Europeans, with whom to form a disciplined Ti-ping force. . . the Chung-wang proposed that I should undertake the very work I was myself anxious to perform”²⁰. These statements are conflicting and show that the Taiping had no unified strategy toward the use of foreigners but instead were willing to employ them in an ad-hoc manner.

At the close of the rebellion, the European governments opposed the Taiping, so the rebels consequently had no Western officers such as Gordon loaned to them. During the 1860s, however, the Taiping frequently made use of Western soldiers. Western soldiers served the Taiping for three reasons. The first group of Westerners in Taiping service joined the rebels out of ideological sympathy. Many of these Westerners felt connected to the Taiping because of their Christianity. The most famous Westerner in this group was A. F. Lindley. Lindley was an English soldier who identified with the Christian rebel movement and despised the Manchu government of China, which he perceived as corrupt, decadent, and heathen. Lindley’s book *Ti Ping Tien Kwo*, which he wrote after returning to England, is both an autobiography and a history of the failed revolution. Lindley and two other European friends joined the rebels at Nanjing and trained Taiping soldiers in the use of artillery. Later, Lindley encouraged other Westerners to smuggle supplies to the often-besieged capital and even stole an Imperial steamer for the Taiping. Lindley also attempted to raise a Taiping force modeled after the Ever Victorious Army which was to be known as the Loyal and Faithful Auxiliary Legion, but most of the European officers he recruited for this task were killed when the Qing captured Suzhou²¹. Throughout Lindley’s years of service with the Taiping, during which he suffered wounds and lost his wife, he accepted no pay for his services²².

Although Lindley was doubtlessly the most dedicated Westerner in Taiping service, other Europeans also joined the rebellion for ideological reasons. Lindley’s two companions served the movement for no pay, both married Taiping women, and gave their lives for the movement²³. These dedicated volunteers were often used by the Taiping as officers for their troops. Lindley and his companions served as officers in the Chung-Wang’s artillery and intended to officer the Legion they planned on raising. In the spring of 1861 Lindley also encountered two other European volunteers serving as high-ranking officers in the Chung Wang’s army (another incident contradicting the aforementioned statement in the Chung Wang’s autobiography). Describing these men, he writes “They had served with him several years, were both married, and perfectly happy and contented, although they had passed a considerable time without seeing

¹⁹ Chung-Wang, *The Autobiography of the Chung-Wang*, p 56

²⁰ Lindley p 647

²¹ Lindley p 678.

²² Lindley p 648.

²³ Lindley p 548

another European than themselves”²⁴. This shows that in the early 1860s it was acceptable if not commonplace for European volunteers to serve in the Taiping armies.

As the fortunes of the rebellion turned for the worse, the Taipings were forced to use European soldiers who joined for different reasons. The most common group of these soldiers were those who served the rebels out of a desire for money and loot. A man who was a perfect example of this group was Henry Burgevine, one of Frederick Ward’s lieutenants. Near the end of 1863, Burgevine, disgruntled over the fact that command of the Ever Victorious Army had passed from Ward to the British rather than to him, took 125 American members of Ward’s force and defected to the rebellion²⁵. These men came to the Taiping cause with useful experience and equipment (Burgevine brought an Imperial steamer with him to the Taiping) but proved to be extremely unreliable and incompetent due to frequent drunkenness²⁶. Burgevine’s second in command soon decided that the rebellion could offer him little and defected back to the Qing, killing two Taiping guards as he fled their lines²⁷. Most of the remainder of Burgevine’s group, including its commander, also soon left the rebellion as the tides of the war turned against the Taiping and as they came to need medical attention that could not be found with the rebels²⁸. A group of mercenaries not associated with Burgevine in Taiping service is described by R. J. Forest as “getting no pay, but plenty of rice and spirits. They were allowed to plunder wherever they went”²⁹.

The Taiping turned to men such as Burgevine late in the war to replace men they had lost in the previous decade. These mercenaries were better trained and equipped than untrained levies, but they were far less useful than dedicated partisans such as Lindley. Lindley did not approve of Burgevine’s defectors, writing that as soon as “they could not reckon upon external support, large pay, and much booty . . . they became discontented and anxious to desert a failing cause”³⁰. At this stage of the war, the rebels were simply trying to hold on to cities they already possessed, and these defensive actions yielded little loot with which to please Western mercenaries. This is likely one reason why the Taipings encountered more problems with their mercenaries deserting than the Qing did. This lack of money to pay their soldiers was an endemic problem throughout the Taiping army during the later stages of the war and was not restricted to their employment of Western mercenaries. The French General Giquel describes having dinner with a Taiping general who had defeated Ward at Qingbu but had defected to the Imperial side. Giquel writes that “his soldiers are finally going to be paid. This must be particularly agreeable to him, since he has been forced until now to provide both their wages and food”³¹.

As the Taipings became more desperate, they also turned to another method of recruiting Western soldiers. On some occasions the Taipings attempted to coerce Europeans into serving in their ranks. One example of this came when Frederick Ward’s other lieutenant, Edward Forester, was captured by the rebels. Forester’s journal gives an account of his experiences as a Taiping prisoner that is related by Cahil. The American

²⁴ Lindley p 246

²⁵ Lindley p 643

²⁶ Lindley p 640-641

²⁷ Lindley p 645

²⁸ Letter by George Smith in Clarke, Prescott. *Western Reports on the Taiping* p 407

²⁹ Report from RJ Forrest in Clarke p 402

³⁰ Lindley p 643

³¹ Giquel p 81

officer was tortured and threatened with execution by the [Protecting King], who demanded that Forester take a position as an officer in his army or as a spy in Shanghai³². Forester refused, and Ward bought his freedom from the rebels as soon as he learned that his lieutenant was still alive.

Another man who was pressed into Taiping service was Patrick Nellis, an English silk trader who was taken prisoner by the rebels in 1864. Nellis was asked to shoot a target with a rifle and, having done this successfully, was given command of a band of other European silk traders who seem to have also been captured by the rebels³³. The band was given 4,000 dollars a day, but this was soon discontinued and the men were forced to provide for themselves off the land³⁴. Not surprisingly, these men who were pressed into Taiping service showed no loyalty to the rebel cause. Nellis and his surviving men took advantage of a Taiping retreat to escape the rebels.

The use of tactics such as these were obviously a sign of desperation and do not seem to have been in widespread use by the Taiping. Both Forester and Nellis were unwilling to fight for the rebels, Forester refusing and Nellis deserting when given the opportunity. It is interesting to note, however, that in both cases the Westerners were offered money to fight despite the fact that they had been captured against their will.

The way in which both sides used foreign soldiers shows us much about Chinese attitudes towards Westerners during the middle of the nineteenth century. As Smith points out, China had employed barbarian troops throughout its history³⁵. The nineteenth century, however, was a time when foreign interests were particularly threatening to China. This made both sides initially reluctant to employ Western soldiers, but this reluctance was overcome during the course of the 1860s.

Despite the usefulness of foreign soldiers, the Qing government initially turned down offers of foreign aid. After the close of the Arrow War, Beijing proved more willing to use foreigners as troops but was still careful about keeping foreigners in certain areas and under Chinese control. The Qing were willing to employ mercenaries in the tradition of allowing barbarians to turn toward Chinese civilization. Following this tradition, both Ward and Burgevine became Chinese subjects during their service with the Ever Victorious Army. The Imperial government still watched these mercenaries closely, and with good reason. Although Ward remained loyal and gave his life for the Imperialist cause, Burgevine's later defection to the Taiping rebels showed the insincerity of his "turn toward civilization." Many other Western soldiers seem to have, for one reason or another, fought for both sides during the war. Lindley mentions fighting against a "Colonel Rhode" who later willingly joined the Taipings³⁶, and Nellis, before being pressed into rebel service, had fought with an Imperial artillery corps³⁷. Another officer of the Ever Victorious Army, named Morton, defected from the Imperial service to the rebels only to return to the Qing and fight for them again³⁸. The fact that foreign governments could use their services as a pretext for later demands and the fact that

³² Cahil p 192-193

³³ Statement of Patrick Nellis in Clarke p 413

³⁴ Nellis in Clarke p 415

³⁵ Smith, *Mercenaries and Mandarins* p 80

³⁶ Lindley p 640

³⁷ Nellis in Clarke p 412

³⁸ Michael, Franz. *The Taiping Rebellion, History and Documents*, p 1196.

independent mercenaries tended to switch sides at will explain the Qing Dynasty's general reluctance to use large numbers of foreign soldiers despite their effectiveness.

At a local level, however, officials such as Li Hongzhang did not share in the government's reluctance to employ mercenaries. The Ever Victorious Army was originally organized by local Chinese officials and businessmen in Shanghai without the support of the central government. The officials were more concerned with the immediate progress of the war than they were with the long term concerns that Beijing had. And although Western mercenaries were not obviously loyal to the Imperial cause, this did not seem to be as large a concern to field officers and provincial authorities as it did to Beijing. On the field, the Imperial forces were always willing to employ men who had fought for the Taiping before. Li Hongzhang's second in command at Suzhou, General Qing, was a former Taiping Wang, and the French General Giquel encountered at least three Qing generals who had fought for the Taiping before turning sides³⁹. At the local level, Chinese officials were often willing to take steps for the sake of expediency which would have been frowned upon by the Imperial government at Beijing. The effectiveness of the various foreign officered legions that were created at the local level later encouraged the central government to overcome their reluctance and find ways to employ Western troops.

There are instances when the Taiping seem to have been reluctant to make use of foreign troops, and most scholars who have studied the rebellion have concentrated on these. To be sure, the Taiping leaders were often haughty and arrogant when dealing with representatives of foreign governments. A classic example of this attitude came in an edict from the Tian Wang to foreigners, in which Hong Xiuquan refers to representatives of foreign governments as "such leaders of soldiers as there may be in the outer tribes"⁴⁰. The aforementioned quote from the Chung-Wang, in which he proclaims that the Tian Wang refused to employ foreign devils as soldiers, also seems to agree with this attitude. On another occasion, late in the war, the English trader Patrick Nellis was told by the Tow Wang that "he had never met a good foreigner"⁴¹. Considering the circumstances which brought Nellis into Taiping services, this feeling was doubtlessly mutual.

Despite these instances of antagonism between the rebels and Westerners, the Taiping had many reasons to employ foreign soldiers. Unlike the Qing Dynasty, the rebels shared religious doctrines with the European nations and therefore faced fewer cultural barriers to working with foreigners. Although many Christian Europeans despised aspects of the Tian Wang's doctrines, others saw in the Taiping a movement that had the potential to Christianize China. Lindley was especially enamored with Taiping piety. Writing about their celebration of Christmas, he said "The Ti-pings keep the festival two days before we do; and, if possible, venerate it still more . . . we had never enjoyed a better Christmas in our lives"⁴². This cultural bridge to at least some Europeans gave the rebels reason to turn to their help. In the later stages of the war, the Taiping were also vastly outgunned by their opponents due to the Imperial government's access to superior Western weaponry. Foreign mercenaries proved to be one of the few

³⁹ Giquel mentions these Taiping defectors on pg 68, 72, and 75.

⁴⁰ Michael p 1126.

⁴¹ Clarke p 415

⁴² Lindley p 696.

ways in which the Taiping could acquire modern weapons. Both the rebel partisan Lindley and the soldier-of-fortune Burgevine stole steam-powered gunboats from the Imperial military and brought them over to the rebels. These vessels caused difficulties for Gordon, who was accustomed to dominating the numerous waterways in central China⁴³.

The Taiping movement as a whole seems to have been aware of these reasons to employ foreigners, as they did so frequently throughout the 1860s. In 1861, a Captain Aplin of the Royal Navy found 104 Westerners fighting for the Taiping, under the leadership of a man named Savage⁴⁴. Savage fought against Ward's Shanghai Foreign Arms Corps, the early incarnation of the Ever Victorious Army, in 1860⁴⁵. The fact that Savage is never mentioned by Lindley during his account of his years of Taiping service implies that Lindley's band of Westerners and Savage's never crossed paths. Groups of Western troops were therefore used by several different Taiping leaders throughout the 1860s.

More importantly, the Taiping were often willing to override their own traditions and customs to accommodate foreign soldiers. The Taiping movement as a whole had a different attitude toward money than the Qing did, usually sharing it in a somewhat collective fashion. Foreigners, however, were always offered pay when it was available. Lindley's team of mercenaries was given a reward of 20,000 dollars for stealing the Imperial steamer *Firefly*⁴⁶, a huge sum for the Taiping at a late stage of the war which would never have been given to Taiping soldiers. While they had a supply of money, the Taiping even paid Nellis and his soldiers, who were pressed into service rather than recruited⁴⁷. The Taipings also allowed Western soldiers to partake in activities forbidden to their own on pain of death. There are several instances where Western Taipings are recorded as drinking and were sometimes even paid in alcohol. Lindley observes some of Burgevine's men in Taiping service "drinking *samshoo* to encourage themselves"⁴⁸, and Forrest also wrote that Western Taipings were being paid with "plenty of rice and spirits"⁴⁹. Valuable Western recruits such as Burgevine were allowed to drink and even paid with alcohol despite the fact that one of the rebels' "Ten Essential Rules to be Observed in Camp" declared that soldiers should "cultivate good morals; do not smoke tobacco or drink wine"⁵⁰. Foreigners were also described as being "allowed to plunder wherever they went"⁵¹ despite a clear Taiping regulation stating "let no one destroy the dwellings of the people or loot their property"⁵². The Taipings were clearly willing to bend their own rules to accommodate foreign soldiers. The Taiping also showed their willingness to use Western soldiers in other ways, as they at least once offered Gordon a position if he would defect to their ranks. In an 1863 letter to the last commander of the Ever Victorious Army, two Taiping Wangs informed Gordon that, "if Your Excellency

⁴³ See Gordon, Charles. *General Gordon's Private Diary of his Exploits in Asia*, 202-204 and 228-230.

⁴⁴ Forrest in Clarke p 401.

⁴⁵ Cahil p 127.

⁴⁶ Lindley p 669

⁴⁷ Nellis Clarke p 415

⁴⁸ Lindley p 646

⁴⁹ Forrest in Clarke p 402

⁵⁰ Michael p 139

⁵¹ Forrest in Clarke p 402

⁵² Michael p 141

should be willing to come to our side, we shall be delighted to work together with you”⁵³. As mentioned above, they also made overtures to Colonel Forester despite his service as an Ever Victorious Army mercenary.

These instances show that, despite the fact that they were often opposed by Western militaries, the use of foreign mercenaries among the Taiping was fairly widespread, and the rebels were willing to employ even foreign officers who had commanded armies against them and foreign troops who violated Taiping laws. Indeed, the Tian Wang’s arrogant and uncompromising attitude toward foreigners does not seem to have prevented Taiping commanders and local authorities from hiring Westerners any more than the neo-Confucianism of the Empire prevented Qing Generals from making use of the Ever Victorious and Ever Triumphant Armies.

Despite their extreme differences, both sides of the Taiping rebellion made similar use of Western soldiers in their armies. Both the Qing government and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom had conflicts with Western governments during this period and had reasons to shy away from the employment of Westerners. These conflicts and reasons, however, did not stop both sides from being willing to employ foreigners, as these soldiers brought with them the advantages of modern training and weapons. Foreign soldiers were employed flexibly, as neither side had an official policy regarding the use of them. The two sides both developed methods of attracting and controlling Western soldiers. In an article on China’s history of employing foreign mercenaries, Smith writes that “China’s response to the basic problems of employing foreign military men, although tinged with specific characteristics of Chinese political culture . . . was reasonably enlightened and not fundamentally different from that of other countries”⁵⁴. I believe that the information presented in this paper supports that argument but also extends it to the Taiping. To the extent that Western support was available to the rebels, many Taiping commanders were flexible and willing to recruit from it. In both the Qing government and in the organization of the Taiping rebels, officials and generals employed different groups of Westerners, turned to Western support to different extents, and found their own methods of controlling these soldiers. This use foreshadowed the ways in which China would go about reforming after the rebellion was over.

⁵³ Michael p 1196.

⁵⁴ Smith “The Employment of Foreign Military Talent” p 132.