Guide to the Selfridge / China Photograph Albums

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Guide to the Selfridge / China Photograph Albums, ca. 1890s-1900

Collection number: Wyles Mss 56

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Selfridge / China Photograph Albums,
Date (inclusive): ca. 1890s-1900
Collection Number: Wyles Mss 56
Extent: .4 linear feet (1 document box)
Repository: University of California, Santa Barbara. Library. Department of Special Collections
Santa Barbara, California 93106-9010
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Access Restrictions
None.
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Acquisition Information

History
As part of the Treaty of Nanking (1842) which ended the first Opium War, western merchants were granted permission to trade and lease land on the west bank of the Huangpu River in Shanghai. The combination of a good port, western technology and commerce, and a large local work force soon made Shanghai one of the leading trading centers in the East. All major streets led to the waterfront and the great mercantile houses, many of which were grandiose stone buildings, were constructed in due course along the embankment facing the river. This area came to be known as the Bund (from a
Hindi word for dyke or embankment). In addition to trading houses and banks, many foreign consulates were located there as well. Shanghai itself came to be divided into the British-dominated International Settlement, the French Concession, the Chinese City to the south and the large Chinese suburb of Zhabei to the north. This era of foreign control and influence largely prevailed until 1949 and the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Following further hostilities in the late 1850s, Tientsin [Tianjin] and several other cities were opened to foreign settlement. By the end of the 19th century, Tientsin was arguably the most important commercial city in North China. Long a head of navigation on the Grand Canal, Tientsin became the hub of a growing railway network that was expanding to connect distant parts of China. Tientsin was also a major international trading city with shipping connections to all parts of Asia. Between 1900 and 1907 Tientsin was administered by an international commission. Under this administration the city's walls were demolished and various public works projects completed. By the end of 1903, Russia, Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Belgium, Austria-Hungary, and Italy had formal concessions at Tientsin.

A popular movement that developed in North China, the Boxer Rebellion was directed against both Manchu and foreigners, especially missionaries. The Boxers (from the Chinese Yihetuan (I-ho-ch'üan), or "Fists of Righteous Indignation") began to organize as a secret society to oppose extortion by local officials of the Manchu dynasty. Members grew more militant and more antiforeign until, by spring 1900, Boxer groups drifted toward Beijing (Peking), attacking Chinese Christians and European citizens. The Boxers then began what was to be a fifty-five day siege of foreign legations in Peking. The end of this uprising was both swift and tragic. On August 4, 1900, a combined column of foreign expeditionary forces started to fight their way to Beijing. The foreign relief force arrived in Beijing on August 14, 1900. The forces razed the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, and the empress Cixi's (Tz'u-hsi) villas in the Fragrant Hills west of the city.

The Boxer Protocol that officially marked the end of the uprising was signed by officials of the Chinese government and the representatives of some eleven foreign powers on September 7, 1901. The Boxer Protocol that followed the hostilities allowed the permanent stationing of foreign forces in Peking, Tientsin, and at several other points to guard the lines of communication between the capital and the sea.

Scope and Content of Collection
The collection contains two photograph albums of scenes in China, including Shanghai, Peking, and Tientsin [Tianjin], apparently from the period preceding and during the Boxer Rebellion, ca. 1890s-1900. Some photos are snapshots while others appear to be more of the picture postcard variety.

Further information about the Boxer Rebellion, the photographic record, and foreigners in China may be found in works such as:

The Face of China as Seen by Photographers and Travelers, 1860-1912 (exhibition), 1978.

Box 1: 1
Photo Album, ca. 1890s
Abstract: [Black and white mounted photos, no captions, some of a house interior, costume ball, and wedding (likely from one of the foreign legations on the Bund in Shanghai), as well as scenes from Peking, northern China, and the Great Wall]

Box 1: 2
Photo Album, 1900
Abstract: [Black and white mounted photos, no captions, some industrial scenes perhaps of iron smelting and railway lines; one partial caption for Tientsin [Tianjin]; street scenes, parades and processions; also a number of very graphic execution scenes]