

Foreign Military Adventurers in the Taiping Rebellion, 1860–1864

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Abstract

Using Western and Chinese archival sources, the following paper explores the military intervention of freelance foreign adventurers, particularly a militia eventually known as the Ever-Victorious Army, in the waning years of the Taiping Rebellion (1860–1864). My goal here is not merely to retell the story of this force, or to reassess its contribution to the subjugation of the Taipings, a question already studied by several historians. Instead, I will analyze the complicated and ever-changing relationship between these adventurers and the powers around them: Qing local authorities, the imperial court in Beijing, and the various foreign countries, especially Great Britain. I argue that the opening for such a force as the Ever-Victorious Army was created by the need of all parties for informal cooperation against the Taiping while maintaining plausible deniability. Once this need had passed, the foreign military adventurers became redundant and could be discarded by their former sponsors.

Keywords

Ever-Victorious Army – Frederick Townsend Ward – military intervention – Taiping Rebellion

The Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), one of the most disastrous wars in the history of the Qing dynasty, has already been the subject of a rich scholarly literature.¹ In this paper, I will focus on a specific aspect of the rebellion's waning years, 1860–1864: namely, the intense involvement of foreign adventurers in the fighting. “Foreign adventurers” are defined here as self-employed actors

¹ See, for example: Platt 2012; Spence 1996; Michael and Chang 1966–1971; Yu 2012.

who voluntarily leave their countries and participate in foreign wars in which they have no personal stake. I do not use the word “mercenary,” because monetary gain is only one of several motives associated with such participation in overseas conflicts, along with excitement, honor, social mobility, and ideology.

In the Taiping war, foreign adventurers served with both the Qing and Taiping, often despite explicit prohibitions of their governments. The most famous group, eventually known as the “Ever-Victorious Army,” was established by Frederick Townsend Ward and Henry Andrea Burgevine, two penniless American adventurers who disembarked at Shanghai in 1859. This duo persuaded the circuit intendant (*daotai*) of Shanghai that they could protect the city from the Taiping rebels by raising a unit of foreign volunteers. Their ragtag force included Americans, British, other Europeans, and also Filipinos (at that time subjects of the Spanish Empire). My goal here is not primarily to retell the story of this force. Instead, I would like to analyze the complex and fluid relationship between these adventurers, the local Qing authorities, and the foreign powers in the treaty ports, particularly Great Britain.

As I shall explain in more detail below, there were three distinct stages in the history of Ward and Burgevine’s force. In the first stage, from the establishment of the force in late June 1860 to its disbandment three months later, it was known as the “Foreign Arms Corps.” During that stage, the British and Americans in Shanghai were deeply hostile to the force but did not do much to curb it. British and American officials were reluctant to alienate the local Qing authorities who sponsored the Foreign Arms Corps, and felt their hands were tied by legal complications. However, when the force was reestablished in March 1861 as the “Shanghai Foreign Legion” it was perceived as a direct threat to Western interests in Shanghai. Therefore, the British Navy ignored legal hindrances and forcibly disbanded the unit. Finally, in the spring of 1862, this elusive militia of adventurers resurfaced as the Ever-Victorious Army, a semi-official unit in the Qing imperial army. At this point, British officials in Shanghai supported and co-sponsored the force, in a complete volte-face from their earlier policy.

As we shall see, the importance of the adventurers was not so much in their military contribution, which though remarkable at times was mostly quite modest. It lay, instead, in their political role as mediators between the Chinese and the British, making it possible for both sides to gradually change their policies and cooperate with one another while maintaining plausible deniability. Ultimately, the Ever-Victorious Army served as a gate opener for formal British intervention in the Taiping Rebellion, which was far more important in the overall balance of the war than any operation that Ward and Burgevine’s force ever conducted.

1 Historical Background: The Taiping Rebellion and the Crisis of 1860

The First Opium War (1839–1842) between Great Britain and China, in which the Qing Empire suffered a crushing defeat, forced the Qing dynasty to accept humiliating peace conditions. Among other things, the court in Beijing had to hand Hong Kong over to the British, as well as to open five “treaty ports”: Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Ningbo, and especially Shanghai, to Western residence and trade. Britain and France, followed by the United States and other powers, went on to secure “concessions” within the treaty ports, extra-territorial zones in which their own laws and officials dominated administration. Even outside these concessions, Western citizens were not subject to Qing law. If they committed a crime, they were judged by their own consuls. This semi-colonial situation exposed the dynasty to harsh domestic criticism. A combination of population pressure, rampant unemployment, economic crisis, frequent natural disasters, and the endemic presence of brigand gangs, coupled with ethnic tensions between Manchu and Han Chinese, gave ample fodder for rebellions which periodically shook the empire.²

One of the most dangerous rebellions was launched in 1850 by Hong Xiuquan, the leader of a semi-Christian religious cult named *Taiping Tianguo* (Heavenly Kingdom of the Great Peace). Hong’s movement, originally based in Guangxi province, defeated several Qing armies and advanced northward, occupying Nanjing in 1853. For the next three years, Taiping armies battled the Qing for control of the lower Yangzi, while launching a “Northern Expedition” aimed at capturing Beijing, the seat of imperial authority. Everywhere they went they banned “idolatry,” burned temples, destroyed statues, and enforced a strict moral code of vice suppression. For a while, they achieved incredible victories, and the Northern Expedition reached within a hundred miles of the imperial capital of Beijing. In 1855, however, the Northern Expedition was encircled and destroyed, while in 1856 the Taiping capital in Nanjing was engulfed in a fratricidal power struggle.³ Hong’s rebels, exhausted and weakened by internal strife, were gradually pushed to a narrow strip of land around Nanjing. The end of the war was finally in sight.

But in 1860 the Taiping movement, weakened by years of defeat and fratricide, experienced a surprising resurgence. Loyalist armies besieged but could not breach Nanjing’s thick stone walls and elaborate fortifications. The previous year, in 1859, the Qing government rekindled the Second Opium War

2 Meyer-Fong 2013, 7–8; Spence 1969, 58. For a thorough analysis of the causes of the Taiping Rebellion see Teng 1971, 9–33.

3 For a succinct description of the Taiping war’s operational history, see Yu 2012.

(in which France, as well as Britain, took part) that began in 1856, by getting into a fight with a Franco-British diplomatic expedition in the Hai River, near Beijing. This was a disastrous war, defined by the allies' sacking and burning of the emperor's summer palace. Li Xiucheng, the most important Taiping military leader in the field, seized the opportunity and smashed the Qing forces around Nanjing.⁴

After relieving the siege on Nanjing, Li set his eyes on the port of Shanghai. The lucrative customs revenues of this important commercial hub could revitalize the rebellion, possibly changing its fortunes altogether. Li knew that Shanghai had a strong presence of British and French troops, and that even the Chinese part of the city could not be occupied without their consent. Friendship with the foreigners could allow the Taipings to take Shanghai, then use its revenues to buy steamships from abroad, assert control over the entire Yangzi River and cut the Qing Empire in half. In spring and summer 1860, the Taiping armies swept eastwards through the lower Yangzi valley and occupied Suzhou, just west of Shanghai, without a fight. As they approached Shanghai, the Qing dynasty's Green Standard forces collapsed, leaving only the foreigners as a serious force between the Taipings and the ocean.⁵

Li and his superior, the "shield king" (de facto prime minister) Hong Ren'gan, were optimistic about the prospects of reaching an understanding with the foreign powers. Hong Ren'gan, a fluent English speaker, relied on his excellent contacts with foreigners from his days as an assistant to missionaries in Hong Kong. Besides, it was common knowledge that Britain and France were fighting the Qing government in northern China. The Taiping permitted foreign commerce in their territory and, in contrast to the xenophobic Qing officials, were relatively friendly to foreigners. In addition, Li and Hong hoped that shared Christian beliefs could help facilitate understanding.⁶ This hope was not far-fetched. At the time, several influential foreigners, including Thomas Meadows, the British consul in Shanghai, were sympathetic to the Taiping cause.⁷

But notwithstanding their ongoing war with the Qing dynasty, most British and French diplomats, officers, and elite citizens in Shanghai disagreed with

4 Thomas Meadows to Sir Frederick Bruce, 25 May 1860, FO 228/291, vol. 2, 45–47, BNA; Bruce to Lord Russell, 1 August 1860, *CRAF*, 91.

5 Meadows to Bruce, 4 June 1860, FO 228/291, vol. 2, 52–53, BNA; Memorandum of a Conference between Mr. Bruce and Commissioner Ho, in Bruce to Russell, 12 June 1860, *CRAF*, 68.

6 Lindley 1866, 74–75, 272–74, 281–82; Reverend J. Edkins and Reverend G. John, "A Visit to the Insurgent Chief at Soochow," *NCH*, 7 July 1860; Meadows to Bruce, 5 July 1860, FO 228/291, vol. 3, 57–58, BNA.

7 Meadows to Russell, 19 February 1861, *PRRC*, 3–6.

Meadows and were highly suspicious of the Taiping movement. British and French policy was conservative in nature. Even when at war with the Qing dynasty, their goal was to extend their economic privileges and sustain trade, not to replace the Qing with a revolutionary administration seen as dogmatically theocratic, incompetent, and prone to anarchy. The perceived bad experience of Western envoys in Nanjing, the capital of the Taipings, only served to reinforce this basic hostility.⁸ Many British observers accused the Taipings of committing systematic massacres and other atrocities in the area around Shanghai. The fact that many Taiping generals tried to prevent these atrocities, typically perpetrated by uncontrollable gangs on the periphery of their armies, was little known or cared about by the foreigners. The fact that the Taipings were ready to allow foreign trade in Yangzi River ports under their control did not matter much, because the Qing government had already promised the British and the French the same privilege in the Treaty of Tianjin (June 1858) and the Convention of Beijing (November 1860) as soon as the Taipings could be cleared from their Yangzi holdouts. In practice, the British could trade even in Taiping-controlled ports (except in arms and other strategic goods), but this trade was illegal, haphazard, and unsafe. As it stood, the mere existence of the Taipings seemed to block the extension of trade along the Yangzi, which foreign merchants eagerly sought.⁹

The Taiping forces, wrote the *North China Herald*, the most important newspaper in the International Settlement, were akin to a “cloud of locusts,” burning, ravaging, and killing wherever they went. They were determined, alleged the *Herald*, to “surround Shanghai with a belt of desolated country.” The Taipings’ friendliness towards foreigners meant nothing to the foreigners if their Chinese business partners were being killed, robbed, and driven from the area.¹⁰ The last consideration was especially important because at that stage, the Chinese part of Shanghai became a vital “emporium of trade for British merchants.”¹¹

Based on such considerations, British Minister Sir Frederick Bruce decided that “without playing any part in this civil contest or expressing any opinion on the rights of the parties, we might protect Shanghai from attack, and assist

8 Li 2018, 22–23.

9 Platt 2012, 155; Gregory 1969, 77–80, 87, 167–69; Dean 1974, 30, 51–53, 69–70.

10 *NCH*, 12 January 1861; Bruce to Vice Admiral James Hope, 16 June 1861, *PRRC*, 56–57. Li Xiucheng, a leading Taiping general, did not try to deny that in his deposition. He only blamed other generals and officials, and most of all his sovereign, Hong Xiuquan. See Li 1977, 103, 115, 133, 151–53. On the *North China Herald* and its impact see Wasserstrom 2009, 25–27.

11 Chappell 2016, 537–38.

the authorities in preserving tranquility within its walls."¹² Accordingly, diplomats dispatched by Bruce made clear to the Taipings that Shanghai was a no-go zone for their armies.

We now know that the British and French eventually intervened to stop the Taipings. Thus, it is tempting to understand Bruce's statement as the opening move of this foreign intervention. However, for contemporaries this was not as clear. Viewed from the perspective of that historical moment, the statement was highly ambiguous and could be interpreted in more than one way. Would the foreigners protect only the International Settlement and the French Concession in Shanghai, or the Chinese city as well? And what about the surrounding countryside? Maybe the Taipings would be barred from Shanghai but permitted to hold positions outside the walled perimeter, bombing and starving the city with impunity? The British, in the words of J.S. Gregory, entered a period akin to a "shadowy no-man's land, somewhere between neutrality and active hostility" towards the Taipings. It was still unclear, even for them, to what extent they would intervene in the war.¹³

These questions were important for both Chinese and foreign residents of Shanghai, but to the Qing bureaucrats in the city they were a matter of life and death. The key officials in Shanghai, Circuit Intendant (*daotai*) Wu Xu, and Municipal Treasurer Yang Fang, knew well that no Chinese power could save them from the rebels – their life and property were entirely dependent on foreign protection. Naturally, Bruce's equivocal statement did nothing to calm their fears.

Therefore, Wu and Yang decided that they had to procure some kind of military force, preferably a Western one. Like many other Chinese officials, Wu and Yang were in awe of British victories in the First and Second Opium Wars and tended to overestimate the military prowess of Western foreigners. Already in May, Wang Youling, governor of neighboring Zhejiang province, implored Wu to ask for foreign help. He was even prepared to take responsibility for such an "infamy" and "crime" in a formal petition to the court. "I can only cry to the sky," he said.¹⁴

In the retrospective recollections and reports of Wu Xu, the recruiting process was described as an orderly bureaucratic procedure. Foreign warriors applied to Wu, who admitted them to Qing service after due deliberation and proper procedure. As loyal servants of the throne, these foreign fighters proved

12 Bruce to Russell, 30 May 1860, *CRAF*, 60.

13 Gregory 1969, 84.

14 Meadows to Bruce, 25 May and 25 June 1860, FO 228/291, vol. 2, 45–46, 65–66, *BNA*; Bruce to Russell, 10 June 1860, *CRAF*, 65; Editorial, *NCH*, 7 July 1860; Zheng 2009, 58–59.

invincible, and helped the Qing to win the day.¹⁵ In practice, this process was far more complicated, and interesting, than the sanitized image portrayed in official Qing documents and memoirs.

In fact, Wu was forced to bypass official channels in order to recruit foreign fighters. Xue Huan, the prefect of Suzhou and the future governor of Jiangsu province (i.e., Wu Xu's superior), refused to forward Wang and Wu's petition to the court precisely because he assumed that Beijing would turn it down.¹⁶ During the last phase of the Taiping war, the Qing state, its own army units in shambles, had to rely on the loyalty of semi-official military forces led by Han literati, such as Zeng Guofan's Xiang (Hunan) Army. The dynasty was deeply ambivalent about the recruitment of such armies, because they were external to the Manchu-led military structure and tipped the political balance in key provinces in favor of local elites.¹⁷ Hiring Western foreigners was one audacious step further, as the Qing dynasty was fighting these same foreigners in North China (the Second Opium War ended only in October 1860). The Xianfeng Emperor and his ministers were notoriously xenophobic, and there was justified fear that the British, French, or other foreign countries might seize the opportunity to add additional territory to their existing concessions. Therefore, recruitment of Western foreigners was anathema to the court in Beijing. Already in March 1860, Wu opened secret negotiations with the British and the French without notifying the court, but he was still unable to secure regular foreign soldiers for the protection of the Chinese part of Shanghai. The British and the French, still obligated to maintain formal neutrality, refused to commit themselves in full.¹⁸

The solution came from a third party: the Chinese business community in Shanghai. The link to that community was Yang Fang, both an official and a successful businessman. Yang, who was placed in charge of the search for foreign fighters, quickly recognized that the situation in Shanghai had given rise to a gap between the interests of the parties and their capacity to act on them. The foreigners wanted to protect the port of Shanghai, but they were encumbered by their neutrality and the convoluted channels of diplomatic bureaucracy. At the same time, the local Qing authorities wanted to hire foreigners, but they were afraid to do so officially lest they get into trouble with the court in Beijing. In the 1850s, the local Chinese authorities leased foreign steamships, and even cooperated with foreign forces to defeat an earlier Triad rebellion in Shanghai,

15 Wu 1958, 125–27.

16 Zheng 2009, 59.

17 Zheng 2009, 75–77; Platt 2012, 116–25, 355–58.

18 Zheng 2009, 59; Li 2018, 23–24.

but hiring foreign fighters to fight beyond the city walls was unprecedented.¹⁹ Therefore, Yang Fang decided to employ foreign adventurers as a private initiative of local merchants, hoping that the interests of the parties in subduing the Taiping would motivate them to look the other way and quietly approve this unofficial solution.²⁰ The combined interests of all parties to use foreign help against the Taipings, and the simultaneous difficulty to obtain such help, made it reasonable to use private foreign adventurers as an interim solution.

2 Spring and Summer 1860: Ward and Burgevine Seize an Opportunity

Frederick Townsend Ward was born in 1831 in Salem, Massachusetts. He had dreamt of army life from a young age but failed to earn admittance to West Point. Instead, he took part in several ocean voyages, fought in the Crimean War, and spent several years in Central America. There he served under William Walker, “the grey-eyed man of destiny” and one of the most famous American filibusters of the day, who tried to carve out a private empire in Nicaragua. After a falling-out with Walker, Ward moved to Mexico and eventually to China.²¹ His close partner, Henry Andrea Burgevine, was a native of North Carolina. Contrary to Ward, an abolitionist and supporter of the Union, Burgevine defended slavery and was a partisan of the Confederacy. Like Ward, he tried his hand at various trades, failed to gain admittance to West Point, volunteered in the Crimean War, and finally looked for fame and fortune overseas.²² Burgevine was charismatic and highly ambitious. Before he embarked on his voyage from California to China, he allegedly told a friend that he would use the chaos in the Middle Kingdom to establish an empire of his own.²³

Ward and Burgevine probably met on the steamer that took them to China. After their arrival, they worked for a few months on the Yangzi River in the thriving business of convoy protection. The river was infested with pirates, and all merchant ships needed armed escorts. Then, in spring 1860, Ward took note of a business opportunity. He heard from one of his acquaintances,

19 Bruce to Russell, 10 June 1860, Memorandum of a Conference between Mr. Bruce and Commissioner Ho, in Bruce to Russell, 12 June 1860, *CRAF*, 65–68; Yu 1987, 418; Han 1987, 411; Ye 2006, 33; Li 2018, 22.

20 “Hill vs. Ta Kee, Minutes of the Court,” 9 January 1875, in “Ward Claim,” 31.

21 Anson Burlingame to W.H. Seward, 27 October 1862, Legation Archives, Peking, vol. 37, 538–39, NARA. See also Schmidt 1863, part 1, 2–4.

22 Detrick 1968, 6–12; MacGowan 1877, part 1, 104; O’Flynn 1900.

23 O’Flynn 1900.

the American merchant Charles Hill, that Yang Fang was looking for foreign recruits to fight the Taiping. Ward and Burgevine immediately called on Yang and introduced themselves as “military experts.” They offered to occupy the Taiping fortress of Songjiang, a strategic strongpoint southwest of Shanghai, for a large sum of money. Yang brought the proposal to the *daotai* Wu Xu.²⁴

Wu and his superior, the provincial governor Xue Huan, confirmed Yang’s plan without official sanction from Beijing. They decided to remain behind the scenes, pretending that the scheme was a private initiative of Chinese merchants in Shanghai. Risking their reputations and careers, Wu and Xue hoped that the court in Beijing would retroactively approve.²⁵ Yang brought the money from his fellow Chinese merchants, while Charles Hill, looking forward to future profits, supplied arms and leased one of his steamships to the force. The new army of adventurers was called “The Foreign Arms Corps.” According to the contract signed with its Chinese sponsors, the troops received regular salaries as well as a bonus for the capture of walled cities. Even more tempting for the adventurers was the free rein they had to loot and pillage, a prospect for enrichment far more promising than any wage the Shanghai merchants were willing to pay.²⁶

3 First Stage: The Foreign Arms Corps, June to September 1860

Ward and Burgevine decided to recruit foreign fighters rather than Chinese, mainly as a result of a widespread belief, shared by Ward, his Qing employers, and the public opinion in the International Settlement, that Chinese were inferior to foreigners in their martial skills.²⁷ With such prejudices in mind, Ward and Burgevine searched the taverns and public houses of the International Settlement for foreign volunteers. They were easy enough to come by, given that Ward was willing to pay a far higher salary (monthly and in loot) than the Royal Navy – leading to quite a few deserters joining his ranks. But most of

24 Detrick 1968, 24; Rantoul 1908, 29–30; “Hill vs. Ta Kee,” 9 January 1875, in “Ward Claim,” 28; Foster and Lansing, 1908.

25 Yu 1987, 418; Zheng 2009, 60–64. According to Li Shuwei, the Xianfeng Emperor knew of this initiative and was content to turn a blind eye as long as it remained private (i.e., unofficial). See Li 2018, 24–25.

26 Hill was not paid for the steamship and sued for the money in the courts for decades. He was finally paid only in 1885 from the Chinese indemnity fund. See “Hill vs. Ta Kee,” 9 January 1875, in “Ward Claim,” 25–29; George O. Glavis to Thomas F. Bayard, Secretary of State, 3 July 1886, in MLDS, Roll 710, NARA; Wilson 1868, 62–63; Rantoul 1908, 30–31. The arms were stored in the headquarters of Yang Fang’s firm; see “Rebels,” *NCH*, 11 August 1860.

27 Spence 1969, 61–62.

the recruits were not soldiers. According to a British naval officer, they were the “scum of all nations”: a dirty lot, ragged and unkempt, dressed in a motley of uniforms and civilian clothes, with malfunctioning and antiquated arms.²⁸

Ward himself looked more like a theater stooge than a commander. In camp and on the battlefield, he always chomped on a Filipino cheroot, dressed himself in a “tight-fitting black uniform to match his long black locks ... and carr[ied] a swagger stick in lieu of a sidearm.”²⁹ But Wu Xu and Yang Fang were so swayed by the military reputation of the foreigners that they sincerely believed the ragged force could change the course of the war in their favor. By its mere existence, Ward’s force violated the foreign powers’ neutrality and was therefore illegal. His troops trained in a village near Shanghai, and the deserters in his ranks could not even visit the International Settlement to receive medical treatment for fear of arrest.³⁰ The entire business seemed like a scam, designed to extort money from panicked Chinese merchants and bureaucrats.

We have some evidence, in fact, that the Chinese authorities in Shanghai mistrusted their new contractor. Wu made it clear to Ward that he would enjoy the protection of the Chinese government “only if he deserved it.” These suspicions proved fully justified. In early July 1860, Ward ordered his troops to attack Songjiang. Most of the Foreign Arms Corps soldiers, untrained and poorly disciplined, showed up drunk. The Taiping guards were quick to notice their awkward advance on the city and drove them off with massive volleys of musket fire.³¹

Throughout this fiasco Ward had shown a trait that would characterize him for the duration of his short career: dogged perseverance unshaken by setbacks and failures. He and Burgevine dismissed most Westerners in the force. Looking for fresh recruits, they set their eyes on another, pariah, community in Shanghai – the Filipinos. Although immigrants from the Philippines were theoretically subjects of the Spanish Empire, they were only nominally supervised by “their” consul in Shanghai. Hence, they were relatively free to roam and enter service with whomever they pleased. In 1860, there was a relatively large population of young Filipino men in Shanghai, whom Westerners derided as criminals and ruffians. In other words, perfect material for the Foreign Arms

28 Admiral Archibald G. Bogle to Francis H. Lee, 17 February 1897, Appendix no. 1 in Rantoul 1908, 50.

29 Platt 2012, 76. Bogle to Lee, 17 February 1897, in Rantoul 1908, 51.

30 Forester 1896, part 1, 628.

31 Rantoul 1908, 31; Wu Xu’s orders to Ward, promising him protection “if he deserves it,” are in FTWP, folder no. 6.

Corps. With the help of their new recruits, Ward and Burgevine were finally able to take Songjiang on July 16.³²

The spectacular battle of Songjiang, and especially the prominent role of Ward's foreign soldiers, retrospectively justified Wu, Xue, and Yang's gamble, and the imperial court, though still eschewing formal approval, did not oppose their actions. Wu even assured the population that since foreign soldiers were fighting for the dynasty in Songjiang, Shanghai's Chinese residents should join the fight as well.³³ And yet, Ward's victory gave the Chinese authorities some room for concern. It was not just that the rascals of the Foreign Arms Corps robbed and mistreated the local population. Qing Green Standards were guilty of similar depredations, and much worse, whenever they occupied a town. More than the looting, Wu and his superiors were worried by the precedent of a permanent foreign occupation of a Chinese town. Therefore, Wu warned Ward that Songjiang was an exception. Whenever he took a new city from the Taipings, he and his troops were not allowed to stay, but had to give it away to the Green Standards "in order to avoid blame and condemnation."³⁴ The Chinese authorities needed Ward to repel the Taipings, but they certainly didn't want the rebel kingdom replaced with a private fiefdom ruled by an American.

The occupation of Songjiang also won Ward publicity in Shanghai's International Settlement, though notoriety might be a better word. Thomas Meadows, the British consul in Shanghai, still harbored sympathy for the Heavenly Kingdom, and warned the Foreign Office that Ward's activity might jeopardize trade by offending the Taipings.³⁵ In an official press release, he denounced the Foreign Arms Corps in the harshest of terms, accusing them of "mercenary ruffianism." He also made it clear that British subjects who joined in the war would be punished as murderers.³⁶ To his chagrin, however, Meadows could not arrest Ward, Burgevine, and their Filipino aide-de-camp, Vincente Macanaya, as the first two were Americans and the last was a Spanish subject. The Spanish consul was indifferent, and his American colleague had no means of chasing his delinquent subjects around Shanghai.

Notwithstanding Meadows' threats, even British soldiers in the force had little reason to fear repercussions. At worst, they faced a fine, expulsion from

32 Rantoul 1908, 31.

33 Wilson 1868, 63–64; "Rebels," *NCH*, 14 July 1860; Wu Xu to Ward (undated, but must be from summer 1860, after the occupation of Songjiang, as Wu uses the term "Foreign Arms Corps" and congratulates Ward on the liberation of the city), FTWP, folder no. 18.

34 Wu Xu to Ward (undated), order to attack Qingpu, in FTWP, folder no. 25.

35 Meadows to Bruce, 5 July 1860, FO 228/291, vol. 3, 57–62, 64, BNA.

36 British Consular Notification, 7 July 1860, Bruce to Meadows, 4 August 1860, FO 228/291, vol. 3, 69; volume of dispatches of Bruce to Meadows, 51–53, BNA.

Shanghai, or a short term of imprisonment in Hong Kong. Enforcement efforts were weak as well. The British dispatched an occasional patrol ship to apprehend British recruits in Ward's force but did not try to eliminate the Foreign Arms Corps altogether.³⁷

Therefore, the diplomats' sharp rhetoric against Ward was at odds with their feeble attempts to stop him. Their failure to act on their words enraged Royal Navy and merchant marine commanders, who complained that Ward encouraged desertions from their ships. The editor of the *North China Herald*, in sympathy with these commercial interests, railed against the adventurers who supposedly threatened the safety of the foreign residents in Shanghai, calling them "degraded, evil-minded men who are flocking to China as crows."³⁸ However, the *Herald*, as well as most diplomats other than Meadows, still saw Ward's force as a minor nuisance – haphazard ruffians without effective leadership. Indeed, several people in the community even saw a positive side in Ward's activity. By recruiting dubious Westerners and Filipinos, he was dredging criminals from Shanghai and sending them to the front. Better that they die in Songjiang than terrorize respectable people in the treaty port.³⁹

Undeterred, Ward used his celebrity status to recruit more European adventurers and Royal Navy deserters in Shanghai. He signed a new contract with Yang and Wu to occupy Qingpu, another walled fortress northwest of his newly won prize of Songjiang.⁴⁰ In Qingpu, however, Ward encountered not only an energetic Taiping general, but also a rival foreign adventurer, a renegade British sailor named Savage who fought for the Taipings. Intoxicated by his recent victory, Ward attacked Qingpu without adequate intelligence. The Foreign Arms Corps was pushed back with heavy losses. Even worse, Ward's jaw was struck by a bullet. He was evacuated to the rear, bleeding profusely and unable to

37 Meadows to Bruce, 5 July 1860, FO 228/291, vol. 3, 60, 63–64, BNA; "Rebels" and editorial, *NCH*, 21 July and 4 August 1860; Detrick 1968, 34, 37; G.F. Seward, U.S. Consul in Shanghai, to W.H. Seward, 5 February 1864, DUCS, Roll 7, as well as S.W. Williams to W.H. Seward, 26 June 1865, Legation Archives, Pekin, vol. 41, 156, and G.F. Seward to Anson Burlingame, 25 April 1862, DUCS, Roll 6, NARA; Bruce to Russell, 23 May 1861, *PRRC*, 41.

38 Supplement, "Rebels," and editorial, *NCH*, 14 and 21 July, 4 August 1860. The quotation is from the edition of 8 August.

39 Cahill 1930, 116. The *NCH* articles, quoted in the footnote above, create an impression that the paper still saw the Foreign Arms Corps as a minor irritation of delinquent but scattered mercenaries. At this period, and in contrast to later times, Ward's name was mentioned in the paper only rarely. Apart from Meadows', American and British diplomats' references to him were also scarce, indicating that they saw him as a minor problem.

40 Rantoul 1908, 31–32; Wu Xu to Ward (undated), order to attack Qingpu, in FTWP, folder no. 25.

speak. He would remain disfigured for the rest of his life, burdened with scars and a speech impediment.⁴¹

The British press and Western diplomatic corps rejoiced in Ward's defeat. The editor of the *North China Herald*, beaming with glee, did not forget to aim some venomous arrows at both Ward and his Filipino fighters. "The first and best item of intelligence we have ..." editor Richard S. Compton told his readers, "is the utter defeat of Ward and his men before Ch'ing-p'u [Qingpu]. This notorious man has been brought down to Shanghai, not as was hoped, dead, but severely wounded.... He managed to drag his carcass out of danger, but several of his valorous blacks were either killed or wounded."⁴²

With typical perseverance, and probably fueled by strong liquor to assuage his pain, Ward communicated with his officers in writing and ordered them to stage a second attack on Qingpu. Meanwhile, he recruited about a hundred adventurers, Greeks and Italians, and bought some artillery pieces. On August 9, the Foreign Arms Corps stormed the walls of Qingpu yet again, supported by Qing imperial forces, only to be disastrously defeated. Li Xiucheng rushed to rescue the besieged Taipings with 10,000 to 20,000 troops, outflanked Ward and captured his guns, river boats, and ammunition. The small contingent of adventurers and their Qing allies were decimated. Vincente Macanaya, Ward's Filipino aide-de-camp, was nearly captured, having to push his way through Taiping soldiers hemming him in from all sides.⁴³

In late September 1860, Wu Xu formally dispersed the Foreign Arms Corps. Ward disappeared from the scene, possibly to Paris, to undergo an operation on his fractured jaw. Burgevine assumed command of the remnant of the force and sought to reorganize it – but with meager success. Foreign Arms Corps veterans, restless, bitter, and destitute, lurked near Yang Fang's house, ate his food, received monetary handouts, and were often seen on his doorstep, smoking opium pipes. Others took to impromptu robbery and other crimes.⁴⁴

That was the inglorious end of the first incarnation of Ward's force. As we have seen, Ward and Burgevine were quick to seize a fleeting opportunity in the summer of 1860. For the local Chinese authorities in Shanghai, their recruitment was a compromise between the military need to cooperate with foreigners and the political difficulty of doing so openly. The British, diplomats and officers alike, loathed the Foreign Arms Corps because Ward endangered

41 Albert Freeman to Frederick G. Ward, 9 September 1864, in Glavis to Bayard, 3 July 1886, MLDS, Roll 710, NARA; Wilson 1868, 64.

42 "Rebels," *NCH*, 4 August 1860.

43 Schmidt 1863, part II, 2; MacGowan 1877, part I, 105.

44 Wu Xu to William L.G. Smith, U.S. Consul in Shanghai, 27 September 1860, Legation Archives, Pekin, vol. 35, 661, NARA; Carr 1992, 133; *NCH*, 27 October 1860.

their neutrality and incentivized desertions from the British Navy. However, because the British also wanted to push the Taipings away from Shanghai, their distaste of Ward and Burgevine was somewhat ameliorated by the adventurers' usefulness in practice. The result was a mixed response: sharp condemnation and mild action. Legally, the British had few other options, because Ward and Burgevine were not British subjects. However, when the political situation changed over the next few months, the British ignored these legal niceties and moved to eliminate Ward once and for all.

4 Second Stage: The Shanghai Foreign Legion, Spring 1861

Soon after the disbandment of the Foreign Arms Corps, Vice Admiral James Hope, the senior British naval commander in Shanghai, engaged the Taipings in direct negotiations, thereby closing the political space which provided Ward with his opportunity. In February 1861, he took a trip up the Yangzi River to Nanjing, the Heavenly Kingdom's capital. For the moment, the Taiping commanders were less interested in Shanghai. The Heavenly King ordered Li Xiucheng and some other commanders to proceed westward, relieve the pressure on Nanjing, and fight the Qing forces up the river. The ensuing months witnessed several large-scale battles between Li Xiucheng and the loyalist Hunan Army of Zeng Guofan. For a while, Shanghai became a sideshow for both Qing and Taiping. Therefore, Vice Admiral Hope and an accompanying delegation of British diplomats were able to secure an agreement with the Heavenly King. In return for Britain's neutrality in the civil war, the Taipings would not interfere with trade, and most importantly, would keep out of the Shanghai area for one year. According to the treaty, Taiping forces were not allowed to advance within two days' march, or thirty miles, of the city.⁴⁵

And yet, in the winter of 1861, Ward reappeared in Shanghai, stubborn and unrepentant. Indifferent as ever to the complaints of the elites in the International Settlement, the British Consulate, the *North China Herald*, and the Royal Navy, he set out to use the same crowd of drifters, deserters, and adventurers to rebuild the defunct Foreign Arms Corps, now renamed the Shanghai Foreign Legion.⁴⁶ Rejoining forces with Burgevine, he was able to draw a crowd of 82 foreign adventurers – British, Americans, Danes, Norwegians and

45 Wilson 1868, 70–71; "Report by Mr. Parkes on Communications with the Insurgents at Nanjing, March 29 to April 2, 1861," in Hope to the Secretary to the Admiralty, 8 April 1861, enclosure no. 2, *PRRC*, 10–15.

46 W.T. to Walter Medhurst, 26 April 1861, ADM 125/7, BNA.

others – from the grog houses of Shanghai, with a promise of food, a generous monthly salary, and a suit of clothes, as well as bonuses for every city captured. Typically, Ward's agents looked for sailors who had absconded after a row with their captain or comrades. They plied them with liquor and enticed them with exorbitant promises. When the hungover fugitives recovered from their intoxication, they realized they had been smuggled to the Legion's headquarters in Songjiang.⁴⁷ By that point, however, the British authorities were in no mood to tolerate adventurers. They were even cracking down on the "convoying" business because it encouraged desertions, and all too often crossed the line into piracy. Ward's renewed presence was too much to bear.⁴⁸

The British had despised Ward's force in its previous iteration, but in 1860 the threat to Shanghai which the regular forces could not remove, plus the support Ward received from the local Qing authorities, reduced the motivation to stop him. British attention then was still focused on operations against the Qing government in northern China. Furthermore, British officials were constrained to operate within the confines of the law and were not prepared to violate it by arresting and trying an American citizen. But at least some of these political constraints had been eliminated by the agreement reached with the Taiping. As a result, the Royal Navy's commanders were determined to get rid of Ward, even illegally, just as they had been ready to breach the law on previous occasions when a crucial interest was involved. In the battle of Muddy Flat (1854), for example, the Westerners in Shanghai attacked an inoffensive Qing force without any legal basis, merely because it encamped too close to the walls of Shanghai. The British, specifically, had shown a complete disregard for legality when they provoked the "Arrow War" (Second Opium War) in 1856 under highly dubious pretexts.⁴⁹

Vice Admiral Hope therefore acted quickly and resolutely upon this occasion. In late April 1861, Ward was found and arrested in Shanghai, but the day before his arrest, he and Burgevine made a crucial move.⁵⁰ Both formally gave up their American citizenship and appealed to be naturalized as Qing subjects. In order to make his appeal more convincing, Ward even arranged for himself

47 Affidavits of captured deserters, an attachment in Dew to Hope, 21 May 1861, ADM 125/7, 321–24, BNA; *NCH*, 27 April 1861, as well as "The Chinese Foreign Legion," *NCH*, 8 June 1861. Commander Hire assumed that the number was 200, but this may be an exaggeration. See "Commander Hire's Report relative to the Recent Desertions at Shanghai," 1 May 1861, ADM 125/7, BNA.

48 Vice Consul in Ningbo to Hope, 18 March and 1 April 1861, ADM 125/7, BNA; Deposition of John Hinton, in Medhurst to Bruce, 6 May 1861, *PRRC*, 43.

49 Bickers 2011, 127–30; Chappell 2016, 537.

50 "Commander Hire's Report relative to the Recent Desertions," 1 May 1861, ADM 125/7, BNA.

a bogus match with a Chinese bride. While the application was forwarded to Beijing through the convoluted channels of Qing bureaucracy, Ward protested to his British captors that neither they nor the Americans had any jurisdiction over him, as he belonged to neither country. On Ward's behalf, Wu Xu told the British that Ward was now a naturalized Chinese subject.⁵¹

That argument, though technically untrue as Ward and Burgevine's application had yet to be approved by the court in Beijing, was sufficient to confuse the British, not because they cared over much about Qing law, but due to the possibility of political complications with the Chinese authorities in Shanghai. Ward's request was unprecedented. It was strange indeed for a Westerner to voluntarily become Chinese and so forgo the protection from Chinese laws that many foreigners deemed "barbaric."⁵² Ward took this step only to protect himself, but his move had long-term consequences. He and Burgevine became inhabitants of an uncharted zone: neither fully Chinese, nor fully Western, and partially free of the rules of both worlds.⁵³

And yet, despite his new "citizenship," Ward was confined to one of Vice Admiral Hope's vessels for questioning. Initially, the British planned to haul him aboard a ship heading far away from China. "It is best to get this ruffian Ward from the colony," the British consul ordered, hoping to solve the problem once and for all.⁵⁴ But fearing political complications, the British duly handed him over to the Chinese, who released him immediately. The British rearrested Ward a few weeks later, illegally and indefinitely. But the commander of the Foreign Legion jumped from the ship on which he was confined into a waiting boat manned by some of his officers. Burgevine was arrested as well, tried by the American consul, and found innocent. Probably because he was a Chinese

51 "Memorandum of Interview between Mr. Alabaster with H.E. the Taotai regarding Colonel Ward," 26 April 1861, U.S. Consulate in Shanghai to Hire, 24 April 1861, "Memorandum of Questioning by Commander Hire to the Person calling himself Col. Ward," 25 April 1861, as well as Hire's letter (probably to Hope) from the same date, ADM 125/7, BNA; Note from Fan Sheng-Fu to Hau (Ward) – formal note from the father of his bride, 29 May 1861, FTWP, folder no. 19.

52 G.F. Seward to W.H. Seward, 5 February 1864, DUCS, Roll 7, NARA (see especially pp. 3–4 of the letter).

53 Ward's citizenship was a matter of constant irritation, and nobody could really agree whether he was American or Chinese, or whether an American could become a Chinese. After Ward's death, the lawyer responsible for his estate wrote that "Ward, though he styled himself a citizen of some other country [China], was undoubtedly an American to all intent and purposes, and especially in his feelings." But Ward saw himself, and was treated, alternately as a Chinese or an American according to whim and convenience. See Edward Cunningham to G.F. Seward, 20 October 1862, in MLDS, Roll 710, NARA.

54 "Commander Hire's Report relative to the Recent Desertions," 1 May 1861, ADM 125/7, BNA.

subject, the U.S. consul felt he had no jurisdiction over him.⁵⁵ In any case, both adventurers were soon back in business, organizing a few dozen Western drifters to re-enter the war.

Vice Admiral Hope probably planned to take additional steps against Ward, but active intervention proved unnecessary. Burgevine frittered away his newly recruited forces with reckless military operations, partly motivated by an anxiety to prove his worth to his Chinese patrons. To justify maintaining and feeding these shady foreigners, Yang, Wu, and Xue had to demonstrate unambiguous results to their imperial masters by recapturing walled cities. Therefore, Burgevine flung his force into yet another assault upon the walled town of Qingpu. But the attack failed, with disastrous consequences. The promised Qing forces failed to arrive, while many of Burgevine's adventurers absconded or showed up drunk. By the end of the day, 23 of his 70 European recruits were killed (almost one third of the unit).

Emboldened by Ward's defeat, the British moved against his army and systematically hunted, arrested, and tried any British subject who served in the Shanghai Foreign Legion. Though the release of non-British adventurers in the corps was secured by their respective consuls, the Shanghai Foreign Legion disappeared as a military force.⁵⁶ Ward and Burgevine went into hiding again. They would not reemerge until the political situation changed, well into the last months of 1861.

5 Third Phase: The Ever-Victorious Army, January to September 1862

By late 1861, the agreement between the Taipings and the British Navy was set to expire. The armies of the Heavenly Kingdom, defeated in the middle Yangzi valley, were once again pushed towards the eastern coast. With the cities of the Yangzi valley in Qing hands, Shanghai's riches were too important and could no longer be ignored. Li Xiucheng, the Taipings' most prominent commander, advised the British that he would not extend the agreement after 1861. He would still respect the treaties with the foreigners and leave the International Settlement and the French Concession unmolested, but Shanghai's Chinese city did not belong to any foreign power. As a Chinese town, it had to be

55 Report of Judicial Cases, U.S. Consulate in Shanghai, January 1 to June 30, 1861, DUCS, Roll 5, item no. 27, NARA; Smith to Medhurst, 20 May 1861, DSCD-S, Roll 5, Forester 1896, part 1, 629.

56 Affidavit of captured deserters, an attachment in Dew to Hope, 21 May 1861, ADM 125/7, 320, BNA; NCH, 25 May 1861, as well as "The Chinese Foreign Legion," NCH, 8 June 1861; Bruce to Russell, 3 July 1861, PRRC, 61.

liberated from the Manchus. Li, in fact, had a point, as British “neutrality” was strongly biased in favor of the Qing. The foreign powers threatened the Taipings to keep away from important ports, while the imperial government could use them and their revenues with impunity.⁵⁷

Li's decision alarmed public opinion in Shanghai's International Settlement, as well as the French and British military leadership. All agreed that the Taipings must not be permitted to enter Shanghai, regardless of consequences. However, it was still unclear whether the British and French would fight the rebels only in Shanghai, or also in the surrounding countryside. The China trade might have increased in importance due to the partial loss of the American market during the U.S. Civil War, but it was still relatively peripheral. Its overall value, including local property interests of British subjects, might have justified a military investment to project Shanghai, but not an unlimited intervention deep in the hinterland, which London was still adamant to avoid.⁵⁸

The Qing authorities, both in Shanghai and Beijing, had a clear interest in collaborating with the foreigners to counter the Taiping threat to Shanghai. It was now easier to do so than it had been in 1860, because the Convention of Peking signed at the conclusion of the Second Opium War had been ratified by the humbled Qing court. And yet, the Qing authorities feared that the foreigners might use this opportunity to extend their control beyond Shanghai. The Chinese needed foreigners who fought in an unofficial capacity. In other words, there was again political ambiguity that justified the recruitment of foreign adventurers. Ward and Burgevine were quick to exploit this window of opportunity.⁵⁹

The process was not smooth. Each party lacked reliable information on the true intentions of the other, and all required a protracted negotiation process to make up their minds. The Qing, Ward, and the British authorities were mutually distrustful. The first meeting between Ward and Vice Admiral Hope had probably already been held in January 1862. The American adventurer came prepared with an interesting proposal. Instead of offending the Royal Navy by employing deserters, he would use his military experience to train thousands of Chinese recruits in Western tactics. In return, the British fleet would support him, and even join his operations in the immediate vicinity of Shanghai.⁶⁰

57 Gregory 1969, 101–2, 109.

58 Chappell 2016, 542–43; Platt 2012, xxiv; Dean 1974, 12–13.

59 Bruce to Russell, 18 January 1862, Russell to Bruce, 7 September 1861, *PRRC*, 60; Sir John Michel, commander of the British Army in China, to Bruce, 28 February 1862, *FPRR* 1862, 22.

60 Hire to Hope, 1 May 1861, ADM 125/7, BNA. Hope to Bruce, 22 February 1862; Bruce to Hope, 19 March 1862; Bruce to General John Staveley, 13 and 23 April 1862, *FPRR* 1862, 10, 20, 24–25; Wilson 1868, 82–83; MacGowan 1877, part 1, 105.

Wisely, Ward also tried to assuage the fears of the Chinese authorities. Wu Xu and Yang Fang had feared foreign control of Chinese towns. In order to calm such fears, Ward convinced Wu and Yang to redefine his force as a special unit of the Qing imperial army. This arrangement was also made possible by recent changes in Beijing. The Xianfeng Emperor, deeply xenophobic and mistrustful of foreigners, had always refused to employ Westerners, as he believed that it might incentivize them to demand further concessions from China. Local magistrates could hire them in an unofficial capacity, as before, even without his formal sanction, but they could not integrate them into the dynasty's army.⁶¹

Following the emperor's death in August 1861, his closest advisors, who advocated the anti-Western policy, were ousted in a rapid coup by two of his consorts, Cixi and Ci'an and, most importantly, his brother Prince Gong, a moderate reformist whose views towards collaboration with foreigners were relatively accommodating. Gong and some of his advisors, later to play a part in the reformist "Self-Strengthening Movement," claimed that employing barbarians to fight rebels was an established procedure of previous dynasties, and therefore in accordance with Chinese laws and customs.⁶² The resolution was also propped by the officials and gentry of the two provinces under risk at the time, Jiangsu and Zhejiang, who on January 31, 1862, submitted a memorial to the Qing court, proposing to "use [foreign] forces to assist annihilating [the bandits]."⁶³

The agreement between Ward and the Qing court made things easier for the British as well. Now, when Hope asked for the permission of his own superiors, Minister Bruce in Shanghai and the Foreign Office in London, he could pretend that Ward and his men were not adventurers but rather legitimate officers in the Qing army. Sir Frederick Bruce gave his blessings to the new agreement, with two clear conditions. First, British troops could accompany Ward only within a radius of thirty miles from Shanghai. Second, all liberated towns would be garrisoned by regular Qing troops.⁶⁴

Bruce saw two advantages in this arrangement. First, Ward was not a British citizen, so his involvement was unlikely to drag Britain into an open war with

61 Chi 2015, 268–69; Han 1987, 409; Yuan 1991, 42.

According to Li Shuwei, although the Xianfeng Emperor did not give his consent to the line of "using the [foreign] forces to assist annihilating [the bandits]," he tacitly approved the cooperation between local officials and the powers. See Li 2018, 22.

62 Han 1987, 411–13; Li 2018, 19–20; Yu 1987, 425; Zheng 2009, 64–65.

63 According to Li Shuwei, the proposal to "use [foreign] forces to assist annihilating [the bandits]" was raised beforehand in 1853 by officials in Shanghai, after the Taipings attacked Anqing and put Nanjing and Shanghai under threat, while their allies from the society of the "Small Swords" rebelled inside Shanghai. See Li 2018, 22.

64 Hope to Bruce, 22 February 1862; Bruce to Hope, 19 March 1862; Bruce to Staveley, 13 and 23 April 1862, all in *FPRR 1862*, 10, 20, 24–25.

the Taiping beyond the thirty-mile radius. Second, his army might open the door for Western ideas and serve as a nucleus for a new, Western-trained Chinese army. These Westernized troops, Bruce hoped, could strengthen the Qing dynasty, safeguard British trade, and increase Western influence throughout the empire.⁶⁵

It was Ward's hybrid identity as a Western-born Chinese subject that qualified him to exploit the window of opportunity that opened in early 1862. On February 21, the Chinese authorities rewarded him further for his decisive victory over the Taiping near the town of Gaoqiao. Ward and Burgevine were given official ranks in the Qing bureaucracy (as mandarins of the third and fourth grade, respectively), official robes, and military investitures. The Chinese authorities also bestowed an honorary title on the troops. Henceforth, Ward's force was to be titled the "Ever-Victorious Army."⁶⁶ Even the *North China Herald*, which had castigated Ward only one year before as a ruffian, now hailed him as "Colonel Ward," a celebrated commander in the imperial Chinese army.⁶⁷

In March, amid hard fighting, Ward cemented his alliance with the Chinese merchant community in a more personal way: he married Yang Changmei, the daughter of the banker Yang Fang, his benefactor and financier. This marriage, unlike Ward's previous "marriage" to an unknown girl in Shanghai, was genuine, aimed at consolidating the alliance of Ward and Yang Fang rather than merely providing Ward with protection from arrest by the British. Aside from consolidating his alliance with Ward, Yang Fang was also looking out for his daughter: Yang Changmei had no prospects for marriage with respectable Chinese grooms of similar station, as her previous betrothed died before their wedding. Though she was not formally a widow, respectable Shanghai families would have deemed her an inauspicious bride.⁶⁸

As he was commanding the Ever-Victorious Army, Ward held a plethora of business interests in the lower Yangzi valley through his father-in-law, much of it amounting to corruption. Wu and Yang, both merchants, were very skilled in hiding this kind of dubious dealing behind creative accounting.⁶⁹ The Chinese government and particularly Li Hongzhang, the governor of Jiangsu province, paid for American munitions and gunboats through the agency of Ward's brother, Henry. It was expedient for them to use the Ward family as middlemen,

65 Bruce to Russell, 26 March 1862; Bruce to Hope, 19 March 1862, both in *FPRR 1862*, 8, 11.

66 Xue Huan's memorials to the throne, dated 9 April 1862, FTWP, folder no. 14.

67 *NCH*, 22 February 1862 – editorial, as well as "Attack upon and defeat of the Taiping rebels near Shanghai." And compare with the Taiping point of view in Lindley 1866, 452–53.

68 Rantoul 1908, 37.

69 Hill vs. Ta Kee," 9 January 1875, in "Ward Claim," 31; Smith 1994, 121.

of course, due to Frederick Ward's hybrid identity and connections with all sides.⁷⁰ The American Minister in Beijing introduced Henry Ward to President Lincoln and asked the White House and the State Department to help him, but things did not go well.⁷¹ The U.S. War Department did not give Henry Ward permission to export arms, which were badly needed for the American Civil War. As a result, a large part of the purchased equipment, including the gunboats, never reached Chinese shores.⁷² Other steamers, bought from Western firms in Shanghai, were used in battle but also exploited for private business. Indeed, along with Yang Fang, Ward used them for shipments of various goods, including (perhaps) opium. And yet, Ward did use his resources and connections to supply Li with military pontoons and boats, especially useful in the numerous creeks and waterways of the Shanghai area, as well as thousands of rifles and several cannon.⁷³

Li Hongzhang was particularly interested in purchasing weapons from the Western powers, since he was reluctant to let foreign officers train Chinese troops. Li had tried to limit the number of his troops that were trained under British and French officers, for a couple of reasons. First, he was concerned that the foreign officers might use their position in order to benefit their and their countries' interests vis-à-vis China. Second, Li was also concerned with negative foreign influence on the Chinese troops, as he believed that training under foreigners might harm their discipline or even loyalty to their Chinese commanders. The frequent instances of misbehavior by Ward's soldiers, and even commanders, as demonstrated for example by Burgevine's later behavior (described below), fully justified his concerns.⁷⁴

70 Yuan Shuyi points out that Li Hongzhang understood the importance of the Ever-Victorious Army and especially of Frederick Ward, due to his international connections with the British, French, and others, and Li therefore sought to enhance his own influence over the EVA in order to gain greater support from the powers. See Yuan 1991, 75.

71 Anson Burlingame, Minister in Beijing, to President Lincoln, 6 March 1862, Legation Archives, Pekin, vol. 37, 415, NARA; Smith 1994, 120.

72 P.H. Watson, Assistant Secretary of War, to W.H. Seward, 23 July 1862, in MLDS, Roll 191, 794–96, NARA. Henry Ward claimed that Wu forwarded just part of the money, so he had to sell the ships to recover his loss. Even if that was true, he failed to return the advance to the Chinese government. See Seward to Twombly, 2 April 1872, Prince Kung to Frederick Lowe, 28 November 1870, and C.J. Ashley's testimony, all in "Hill vs. Ta Kee," 12 January 1875, in "Ward Claim," 4, 19, 33; Edward Cunningham to G.F. Seward, 13 November 1862, Miscellaneous Communications, Consular Posts, Shanghai, China, vol. 45, 14, Record Group 84, NARA; Foster and Lansing 1908, 5–7.

73 Smith 1994, 120; Spence 1969, 67–68; Affidavit of Captain Cooke, 25 March 1863, in Glavis to Bayard, 3 July 1886, MLDS, Roll 710, NARA.

74 Yuan 1991, 68–69, 75.

Ward wrote to his brother that one of his steamships, the *Martin White*, “was at work on the river making money fast, so they say. Have not had time to overhaul accounts, but believe she will clear me 4–5,000 taels per month.”⁷⁵ This money did not lie idle in Ward’s coffers. He and Yang invested in the Qing government’s salt monopoly and in other types of private ventures. Ward also started to build himself a house in Shanghai’s French Concession.⁷⁶ These investments could not proceed without the help of Wu Xu, who almost certainly received a large share of the profits. Though Ward did not receive all of the bonuses promised by the Chinese government, his private business made him very rich. A staunch supporter of President Lincoln, he even offered a donation of 10,000 taels (15,000 U.S. dollars) for the cause of the Union in the American Civil War.⁷⁷

With the capture of Qingpu, the prize that had eluded him for so long, Ward was at the apex of his achievements.⁷⁸ Indeed, he demonstrated an ability to rise up from dismal failures that might have led many others to abandon the cause, maybe even leave China altogether. The key to his resilience was not only willpower and determination, but also skillful navigation of local Chinese customs and Western habits. For Chinese and Westerners alike, he was peculiar enough to evoke fascination and awe, but at the same time familiar enough to enable mutually understandable communications. That, in turn, allowed him to secure the respect even of some of his rivals, and maintain networks of influence – a combination of military, political, family, and business ties that bridged the Chinese–Western divide. Without such a network, he could not have recovered from the setbacks of 1861 to exploit the window of opportunity that suddenly reopened a few months later.⁷⁹

Ward’s otherness, his ability to operate on the threshold between Westerners and Chinese, was manifest in both his look and demeanor. It was unheard of for American-born sailors to become Chinese mandarins, as he and Burgevine

75 Frederick T. Ward to Henry G. Ward, June 1862, in Glavis to Bayard, 3 July 1886, MLDS, Roll 710, NARA.

76 F.T. Ward to H.G. Ward, 10 July 1862, Affidavit of H.G. Ward, 3 August 1865, in Glavis to Bayard, 3 July 1886, MLDS, Roll 710, NARA.

77 Ward to Burlingame, 16 May 1862, Burlingame Family Papers, Box 1, Library of Congress; Burlingame to W.H. Seward, 27 October 1862, in Senate, p. 2. Ward died before he was able to forward the donation to the American Minister in Beijing.

78 For a detailed description of EVA military operations in the spring of 1862 see Detrick 1968, 65–69; Guo 1963, 864–94.

79 Schmidt 1863, part 1, 8–9; MacGowan 1877, part II, 120.

had.⁸⁰ Xue Huan, the governor of Jiangsu province, promised the court in Beijing that Ward was ready to adopt Chinese culture, dress, and hair style, sure signs of “turning toward civilization.”⁸¹ But to the court’s chagrin, Ward was never ready to assimilate. He argued, quite sensibly, that adopting Chinese dress and hairstyle (queue and shaved forehead) would make him laughable to Westerners, thus eliminating his vital network of connections with the diplomatic corps and foreign settlements in Shanghai.⁸² Li Hongzhang, Zeng Guofan’s student and the military leader who replaced Xue Huan as governor of Jiangsu province in April 1862, was indeed troubled that Ward had “not yet shaved his forehead nor paid him a courtesy visit,” but he “had no time to quarrel with foreigners over such ‘petty faults.’”⁸³

Ward’s position, juggling in the borderland between the Westerners and the Chinese, eventually invited mistrust. Xue Huan, his erstwhile patron, warned that as a foreigner, Ward’s character was “unrestrained.” He asked for too much freedom of movement, too much money, too much respect and recognition.⁸⁴ Prince Gong, the strongest statesman at the imperial court, wondered in writing whether Ward, a foreigner at heart, could really be trusted. “Although Ward exerts himself on China’s behalf, he is still a foreigner. His nature is basically unrestrained and his heart even more difficult to fathom.”⁸⁵ Were Ward and Burgevine Chinese or foreigners? They were both and neither – a position with both disadvantages and advantages.

Ward’s success paved the way for a Western competitor of Britain, France, to create similar units of Qing recruits trained by French officers. The most famous of these units, known as the Ever-Triumphant Army, was led by Prosper Giquel and fought mainly in Zhejiang province. Like Ward, Giquel was a hybrid figure, a Westerner enamored with Chinese culture and torn between loyalties to China and his homeland, France. However, he did not have to traverse the same arduous road as Ward, as the precedents had already been created by the latter’s trial and error. Unlike Ward, Giquel enjoyed Western (i.e., French) support from the very beginning. After winning some battles and resisting attempts

80 “Attack upon and defeat of the Taiping rebels near Shanghai,” “Translation of extracts from the Peking Gazette, official notices, March 17, 1862,” *NCH*, 19 April 1862, see also *NCH*, 22 February 1862.

81 Smith 1978, 51–54. See also “Translation of extracts from the Peking Gazette, official notices, March 17, 1862,” *NCH*, 19 April 1862.

82 Smith 1978, 54–55, 76.

83 Smith 1994, 121.

84 Smith 1978, 75–77

85 Smith 1978, 77.

to unite his force with Ward's, Giquel's Ever-Triumphant Army formed similar, semi-formal arrangements with local merchants, Qing officials, and the court in Beijing. A year later, in the fall of 1863, it would also win the patronage of Zuo Zongtang, the powerful governor of Zhejiang province, who initially tried to curb it before being convinced of its usefulness.⁸⁶

On September 19, 1862, Frederick Ward was mortally wounded in the battle of Cixi, near Ningbo, having arrived there to help Qing and Ever-Triumphant Army forces fight the Taipings in Zhejiang.⁸⁷ Before he passed away, Ward disclosed that Yang Fang and Wu Xu still owed him large sums of money. He bequeathed his property to his brother, father, and sister, and asked to be buried in the Confucian Temple of Songjiang. Finally, he appointed Vice Admiral Hope and Anson Burlingame, the American Minister in China, to manage his estate. The debates on the assets he had left behind, and especially one of the steamers, developed into an ugly legal battle that dragged on into the early twentieth century.⁸⁸

Ward's death prompted mourning on all sides. The soldiers and officers of the Ever-Victorious Army were shocked by the demise of their commander. When his coffin reached Songjiang, the local authorities organized a state funeral, and the local merchants closed (or were forced to close) their shops to show respect. Officers of the British Army and Navy also attended. The man who had once been arrested by Vice Admiral Hope's sailors as a fugitive was now hailed by rifle volleys fired by British soldiers. From distant Washington, D.C., Secretary of State William H. Seward conveyed the sorrow of the American people and President Lincoln's approval of the honor bestowed on Ward, "our distinguished citizen."⁸⁹ Conveniently, Seward neglected to mention that Ward had given up his U.S. citizenship in order to be naturalized as a Chinese. Ward's Chinese employers also praised him in glowing terms in their memorials to the throne. "A wonderful hero from beyond the seas ... has sprinkled China with his azure blood," read the inscription on Ward's dignified mausoleum.⁹⁰

86 Leibo 1985, 3, 22–33, 42–43.

87 Leibo 1985, 35.

88 Bogle to Lee, 17 February 1862, in Rantoul 1908, 51; Affidavit of Major Cesare Moreno, 19 December 1862, in Glavis to Bayard, 3 July 1886, MLDS, Roll 710, NARA; Foster and Lansing 1908, 1–11.

89 "Retrospect of events in North China during 1862," *NCH*, 3 January 1863; Burlingame to W.H. Seward, 27 October 1862, in Rantoul 1908, 55–56.

90 *North China Mail*, 10 March 1877 (reproduced in Rantoul 1908, 60); For a translation of the imperial edict see Senate, p. 3.

6 The Transition of the Ever-Victorious Army

Following the pomp of Ward's funeral, there remained the thorny question of the Ever-Victorious Army's future. Henry Burgevine, who naturally took command after Ward's departure, was strongly supported by the Western diplomatic corps, and his prospects seemed, at first, promising. He used the summer months to recuperate from his wounds, and even tried to integrate into Chinese society by marrying a "handsome and accomplished" local girl.⁹¹ However, Burgevine's tenure was troubled from the start. Li Hongzhang and the court in Beijing both insisted that Burgevine should continue Ward's legacy in attaching himself to the Chinese cause, taking on all obligations of a dutiful Qing subject.⁹² Of course, they beautified Ward's heritage in retrospect. The late commander of the Ever-Victorious Army was never a regular Qing subject but, as we have seen, a Sino-Western hybrid figure.

Burgevine, however, failed to maintain the precarious balance of this hybridity. Unlike Ward, he did not have the cultural literacy necessary to manage complicated interactions with Chinese officials, especially with Yang Fang and Wu Xu. In late 1862 he became increasingly insolent and disrespectful and suffered nervous breakdowns exacerbated by acute alcoholism. For members of the Qing elite such as Yang and Wu, accustomed to strict observance of proper protocol and decorum towards superiors, Burgevine exemplified all the negative stereotypes of the foreign barbarian. More substantial conflicts soon developed. When requested to send his army to Nanjing, Burgevine repeatedly refused, claiming that the force was not properly equipped, and that the soldiers would not go until they received their long-delayed salaries. For the Chinese, Burgevine increasingly became an expensive nuisance. He had outlived his usefulness.⁹³

Li Hongzhang still saw a need for the Ever-Victorious Army, but he now preferred a regular British officer as commander for the force. Interestingly, if after Ward's death he wanted a Sinicized foreigner who was also a Qing subject, now he shifted to the opposite direction and preferred a complete foreigner

91 Burgevine to G.F. Seward, 28 September 1862, DUCS, Roll 6, NARA; G.F. Seward to S.W. Williams, 2 August 1865, Statement of Thomas Vernon, 8 August 1865, Legation Archives, Peking, vol. 41, 218, 556, NARA. "Handsome" would, of course, be "pretty" in today's English usage.

92 Smith 1994, 121–22.

93 Statement of Thomas Vernon, 8 August 1865, Statement of William B. Preston, 21 February 1866, Legation Archives, Peking, vol. 41, 556, 563, NARA; G.F. Seward to W.H. Seward, 21 February 1866, DUCS, Roll 7, NARA; Wilson 1868, 92–93; Detrick 1968, 99.

supervised by the Chinese authorities. The time of hybrid figures such as Ward and Burgevine had passed. As Jonathan Spence writes, Li wanted somebody “for whose loyalty he could hold British officials responsible.”⁹⁴ Back in 1860, the Chinese feared that the direct involvement of regular British officers could serve as a cover for malign imperialist plots, and therefore preferred freelance adventurers. By late 1862, however, the situation had changed. The Second Opium War was long over, and the xenophobic Xianfeng Emperor was dead. The British and the Chinese had been cooperating in Shanghai since January that year, and the unstable Burgevine was perceived as a liability. Li knew that the British would not be averse to doing away with Burgevine. In fact, senior British officers had secretly schemed for the latter’s removal, as they wanted one of their own as the commander of the force. Viewed in retrospect, Burgevine’s erratic behavior only accelerated an ongoing tendency: the political ambiguity of 1860 was, as in 1861, once again clearing, this time via direct British-Qing collaboration rather than Taiping-British engagement. Both Chinese and British preferred formal cooperation over the informal employment of dubious adventurers.⁹⁵

In January 1863, Burgevine was finally sacked after a wild brawl with Yang Fang over the salaries of the troops.⁹⁶ Li Hongzhang accused Burgevine of assaulting Yang Fang and forcibly seizing a great amount of money to pay his army, and sacked him from his position. Li also condemned Wu Xu and Yang Fang for their failure to maintain order and control, and dismissed them temporarily.⁹⁷ Sir Frederick Bruce initially tried to intercede for Burgevine but was eventually convinced that his dismissal was best for all parties. In a letter to General Staveley, the outgoing commander of Britain’s land army in China, the Minister admitted that “the great amount of foreign property at Shanghai renders it desirable that this force should be commanded and officered by men who are not adventurers.... Otherwise we should be constituting a force which would be as dangerous to us as the insurgents themselves.”⁹⁸

As an American diplomat in Beijing later observed, the role of adventurers was to ply uncharted territory that more responsible leaders were reluctant to

94 Spence 1969, 80; Smith 1994, 128–29.

95 Bruce to Russell, 22 August 1863, PRO 30/22, 79–82, BNA.

96 On the incident that led to Burgevine’s dismissal see Medhurst to Bruce, 8 January 1863, *FPRR 1863*, 159–60; Burlingame to W.H. Seward, 23 June 1863, *Diplomatic Dispatches – China*, R21, NARA. Compare with Li Hongzhang’s report, 7 January 1863.

97 Yuan 1991, 75.

98 Bruce to Staveley, 12 March 1863, in *Papers Relating to the Affairs of China, 1863*, 68; Bruce to Gordon, 28 July 1863, Charles G. Gordon Papers, British Library, London, Manuscript no. 52386, 65–66.

navigate. After the adventurers had charted a route, and a convenient political solution had been found, the political ambiguity cleared, the gray zone disappeared, and the adventurers became redundant – and a liability.⁹⁹ The journalist Andrew Wilson summarized this approach well: “perhaps it was well for the Imperial Government of China that he [Ward] was removed at this stage of the rebellion, and that his work was left to be completed by one [Charles Gordon] who, though his equal in courage and in coolness, far surpassed him in all the higher qualities of a soldier.”¹⁰⁰ That is the natural order of things: adventurers go first when the risk is high, soldiers follow and take over.

Burgevine’s own fate was tragic. Following his dismissal, his addiction to liquor rendered him a useless drunkard, immersed in fantasies of grandeur and revenge. Colonel Charles G. Gordon, the new commander of the Ever-Victorious Army, purged it of many of Burgevine’s old friends and redesigned it as a Chinese force under professional British command. Many of the dismissed joined Burgevine, who led them into a misadventure in the service of the Taipings. But the rebels, too, had no use for the deluded adventurer. The British eventually expelled Burgevine to Japan. In 1864, after failing to find employment in the ongoing war between the Shogun and the rebellious domain of Chōshū, he returned to China, was arrested by the Qing, and died under suspicious circumstances.¹⁰¹

7 Conclusion

This article has explored the complex interaction between military adventurers and state power through the story of Frederick Townsend Ward, Henry Andrea Burgevine, and the Ever-Victorious Army. We have seen that the history of Ward’s force can be divided into three distinct stages. In its first incarnation, as the Foreign Arms Corps (spring to summer 1860), Ward won the trust of the Qing authorities in Shanghai, who agreed to employ him in an informal capacity through the local business community. The British in Shanghai were hostile, but not yet certain that Ward endangered their vital interests. Therefore, their attempts to disband his force were hesitant and feeble.

For the court in Beijing, too, it was unclear whether the benefits in hiring Ward outweighed the political costs of cultivating a force of foreign barbarians.

99 S.W. Williams to W.H. Seward, 6 April 1866, Legation Archives, Peking, vol. 41, 515, NARA.

100 Wilson 1868, 109. For similar sentiments see *NCH*, 10 January 1863, as well as “Affairs in China,” *Saturday Review*, 2 April 1864, 401.

101 On Burgevine’s downfall see Detrick 1968, 147–214.

In comparison to other armies in the field, his ragtag force was tiny and inconsequential, and Shanghai was far from being the only front in the war. However, because Ward did serve a local interest, the court was ready to adopt a “wait and see” attitude. For the local authorities and business community in Shanghai, however, employing the “Foreign Arms Corps” was deemed the only way to forestall a disaster, as other means of foreign military assistance were not yet available.

The second incarnation of the force, the Shanghai Foreign Legion (spring to summer 1861), was perceived as a direct threat to British interests. Therefore, the Royal Navy acted against Ward resolutely and without regard to legal niceties. Nonetheless, the local Qing authorities in Shanghai were still keen to protect him. Without formal support from the court in Beijing, however, their protection was no match for British resolution to destroy the force. Ward’s military failure in the field further aggravated the situation and brought about the disintegration of the Legion.

In the third stage (January to September 1862), Ward reestablished the force as the Ever-Victorious Army. This time he was careful to align his policy with the interests of the authorities in Shanghai, the court in Beijing, and the British alike, thereby winning formal status, political influence, wealth, and prestige. Similarly to the French officer Prosper Giquel, who trained Qing troops at the same time, Ward’s achievement stemmed not merely from his military victories and impressive ability to seize opportunities, but also from his hybrid status, nebulous Western-Chinese identity, and ability to maneuver between the state powers around him.¹⁰²

Testing the waters was the main contribution of Ward and Burgevine to the Taiping war. In a larger view of the conflict, their victories and defeats were of small to medium importance. They mostly fought in a narrow strip near Shanghai and Ningbo, and many of the areas they occupied were retaken later by the Taipings. Their importance, instead, lay in the realm of local politics. By being at the right time and the right place, they served as the medium for an informal political compromise, allowing all sides to use foreign help against the Taipings, withstanding political difficulties by keeping plausible deniability. They served as a temporary probe or a bridgehead for a larger British intervention that would be far more consequential, especially on the Shanghai front.¹⁰³ But Ward, Burgevine, and other adventurers were and remained a temporary tool, to be discarded when the gap between the British, the local

102 Leibo 1985, 3.

103 Spence 1969, 73–74, 91–92; Gregory 1969, 131, 167–68.

Qing authorities, and the court in Beijing had narrowed enough to permit formal cooperation. After Ward's death, Burgevine fell from grace not only due to his personal defects, considerable as they were, but also because the role of military adventurers like himself had already become redundant.

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 DSCD-S Department of State Consular Dispatches – Shanghai. NARA.
 DUCS Documents of US Consuls in Shanghai. NARA.
 FTWP Frederick Townsend Ward Papers. Yale University Library (Manuscripts and Archives), New Haven, CT.
 MLDS Miscellaneous Letters of the Department of State, 1789–1906. Record Group 59, Microcopy 179, NARA.
 NARA National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
 Burlingame Family Papers. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
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- FPRR 1863 Further papers relating to the Rebellion in China, presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty*, 1863. London: Harrison and Sons, 1863
- NCH North China Herald*, Shanghai.
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