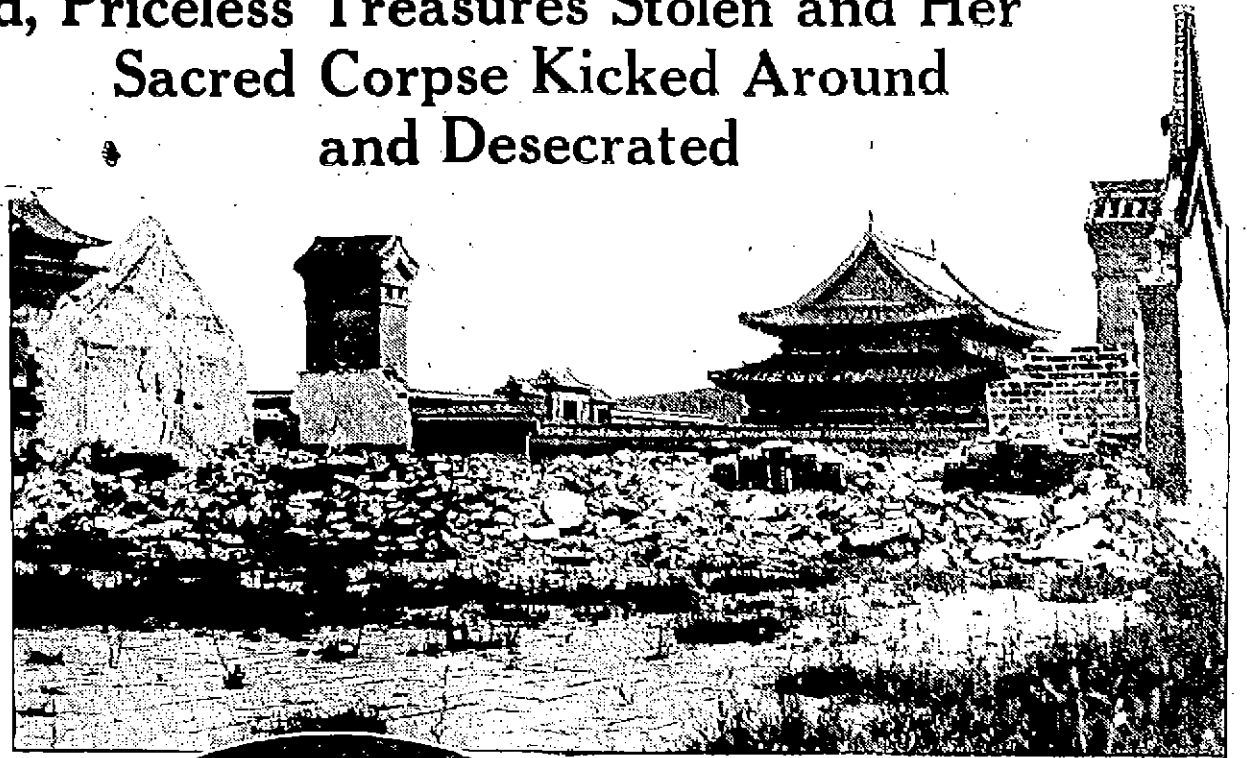


# Last Tragedy of China's Grim Old Dowager Empress

## Her Magnificent Tomb and Those of 36 Empresses Broken Into, Burned and Dynamited, Priceless Treasures Stolen and Her Sacred Corpse Kicked Around and Desecrated



A Remarkable Ancient Chinese Bust and Terra-Cotta Figure, of Which Even More Exquisite Examples Were in the Tombs of the Dowager Empress and Were Destroyed by Looting Soldiers.



All That Is Left of One of the Magnificent and Treasure Filled Shrines Among the "Eastern Tombs" of China, Its Priceless Contents Stolen and Its Carved Woods Burned by the Looters for Fuel.

(Photo by H. S. ("News Reel") Wong, M-G-M Camera Man in China.)

NOTHING could illustrate better the surprisingly topsy-turvy condition of China than the wholesale pillaging of the "Tombs of the East," the burial places of many of the Chinese Emperors and Empresses, near Peking.

The finishing touch is given to this episode by the fact that one of the tombs plundered was that of the Dowager Empress Tze-Shi, sometimes called Tsi-An, the strong woman who ruled China absolutely for many years down to 1908, and who was in the habit of inflicting a lingering death on anybody who showed the least disrespect to her. What would she have done to a wizard who foretold that in a few years her tomb would be pillaged?

To realize how much ideas have changed in some Chinese minds it is necessary to remember two things. In the first place the Emperors were, until recently, regarded as divine and any disrespect to them was just as bad as desecrating an altar. In the second place all Chinamen worshiped their ancestors and would suffer starvation rather than see an ancestor's grave even neglected, not to say plundered.

The labors of many Chinese artists were formerly devoted to depicting the tortures suffered by those who offended in the slightest way against the Emperor. The inner walls of the Green Cloud Temple at Pi Yun Ssu are covered with green plaster clouds in the hollows of which are set groups of small figures suffering the fate of the sinner in after life.

Here men are being stretched out and sawed in two while still alive; men are hurled down precipices and impaled on the rocks below. Near by, grinning devils with pitchforks poke down those who try to escape from the great vats of oil in which they are boiling.

Some have lost their heads. They are represented as climbing forever up steep mountains, each one dragging along his own head by the hair. All were punished for some offence against the Son of Heaven.

These offenses were often of a very trivial or fictitious character, not to be compared in any way with the conduct of those who have blown up the tombs of several Sons of Heaven and their mothers and stolen their contents. According to the old Chinese theory, the longer ago an ancestor lived, the more wicked it became to show disrespect to his memory.

Even now millions, perhaps, of Chinamen are burning with indignation at the desecration of the imperial tombs. The Chinese newspapers report that the offence was committed by officers of "a certain army," no doubt the victorious Nationalist Army. General Tan Sung-ling, commander of a division of the army, and two others, were arrested for being ringleaders in the outrage.

General Tan confessed that he sold several pearls to the keeper of a curio store in Peking. Most of the loot was kept until they could set a higher price for it. It formed part of the vast wealth of jewelry possessed by the Dowager Empress and buried with her at her funeral ceremonies that lasted many days.

At least sixty-five pounds of pearls of the finest luster were looted, according to a report by the Peking Chamber of Commerce. Of these only 173 have been recovered from curio merchants and jewelers.

The lowest estimate of the value of the loot is \$17,000,000, and from this it runs up to \$50,000,000.

Conspicuous among stolen articles were the two "jade melons" buried in the coffin of the Dowager Empress. They were about the size of the average cantaloupe and made of the finest apple-green jade. They were richly encrusted with diamonds and emeralds of great size, and were perhaps the most valuable jewels in the whole world.

It is curious to learn that the tombs were looted twice. When the first looting became known, a person named Sung went out and falsely represented himself as appointed by the Nationalist Government to investigate the crime. He carried off many of the treasures left by the first robbers, including 242 bronze idols and ten fine picture scrolls from the brush of the Emperor Chien Lung himself.

Old-fashioned Manchu residents of Peking are reported by the Peking Standard to be shocked at the outrage. A delegation of Manchu leaders, headed by Prince Lun and Pao Hi Hsi, called on the Nationalist commander of Peking and lodged a protest.

They said that not only were the imperial tombs looted, but the remains



The Beautiful Tomb of the Dowager Empress Tze-Shi, as It Was Before the Destruction, and Beside It One of Its Dynamited Sections.



of the Emperors and Empresses were desecrated. This they described as "an appalling offense."

An ominous sign of the disrespect for the tombs of the Emperors was reported several months ago. On the way to the tombs are long avenues of colossal animal statues—camels, elephants, lions, etc.—in white marble. Some of the radical Chinese began to plaster these statues with advertisements of new moving pictures and new novelties.

In earlier years these statues shared in the sacredness of the tombs. The desecration of the animals was a step on the way to the violation of the tombs.

The tombs were as large as palaces



A Rare Photograph of the Old Empress Dowager, With Two of Her Pretty Ladies-in-Waiting.

and the pillage was carried out on a great scale by men having the equipment of modern armies. The Empress's tomb was nearly blown to pieces by high explosives to find the chamber containing the jewels.

Altogether the tombs of twelve Emperors and thirty-six Empresses were partly blown up and plundered.

When the Empress was buried her body was attended by a mile-long procession of over three thousand paper figures which were afterward burnt, in order that Her Majesty might find in the next world a retinue suited to her position in this world.

The guards were in purple uniforms and their accoutrements, though of bamboo, paper and thin leather, were complete in every detail. Two military bands followed, every one of whom could have stood as a model in a museum of Chinese military uniforms. Court officials came next dressed in yellow silk costumes.

Mounted on white horses these men escorted a yellow silk palanquin containing tablets describing the virtues of the Empress.

Then came a marvelous model in papier-mache with yellow silk upholstery of the Empress's own palanquin.

An immense procession for the purpose of honoring the dead Empress was also formed on the river. Palaces, tombs, pagodas, palanquins, gilded lions, devils, dragons and other figures, all made of bamboo and paper, were placed on immense boats which paraded the stream.

All these constructions cost upward of \$500,000. They were burned when the Empress was actually buried with the expectation that their spirits would

go up in the air to receive Her Majesty on her arrival in the other world.

The "Tombs of the East" are situated at Hsi Lung, near Peking. The tombs are enclosed in a walled park, 100 miles in length. The country within is wild and abounds in game. At one end it rises to a lofty range of mountains.

Hitherto these tombs have been regarded as sacred by the republicans and revolutionists who have struggled for mastery in China in recent years. A member of the former imperial family is always in residence in the park to see that the tombs are treated with proper respect.

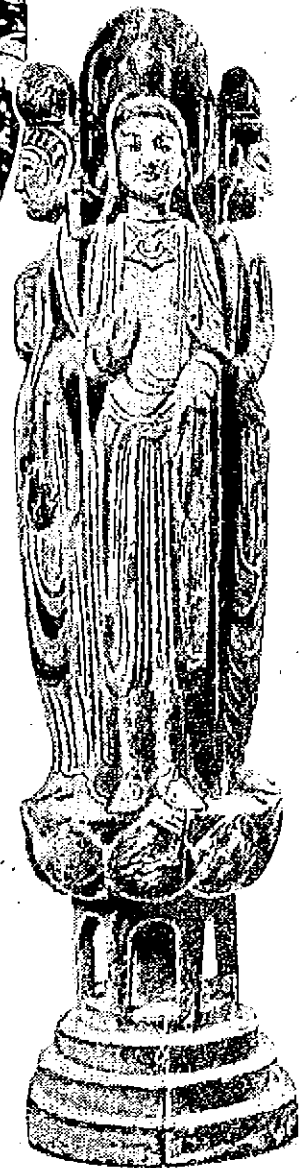
He was there when the recent outrage happened, but it never occurred to him that anybody would dare to commit such an infamous act.

The approach to the tombs through the avenue of sacred and more or less mythical animals produces a feeling of awe or at least strangeness in a normal person.

Describing the avenue of these monsters on the way to the tombs of the Ming Emperors one who visited them says:

"These monoliths are grouped in fours, and consist of lions, unicorns, elephants, camels, horses, military mandarins, civil mandarins and priests."

"The statues impress one by their great size—one of the elephants is some thirteen feet in height and four-tear in length—and again on account of the material used, for all are carved



Another Rare and Exquisite Tomb Carving Like Those Stolen by the Hundreds From the Desecrated Tombs of the Empresses.

from single blocks of fine white marble."

The tomb of the Emperor Chien Lung, the artist Emperor, is the most beautiful of all these buildings. It is a masterpiece of marble, gold, jade and other beautiful materials, with fantastically carved roof lines.

The mausoleum of the Empress Dowager, however, exceeds all others in splendor and costliness.

An American traveler who had an opportunity to visit the tombs of the Emperors recently gives a glimpse of the treasures contained in one of them:

"It contains personal relics of the Manchu Emperors, a great accumulation of jeweled arms, ancient bronze mirrors, jewels and precious stones, crystal, enamel, bronzes, and more than ten thousand paintings of the Ming and early Ching dynasty."

"They seem to have the strongest feeling for the money value of these treasures and relics, and give one plain figures when they produce the great seals of Kienlung—a pair of solid gold cubes four inches square, with crutching, dragon-like tortoiseshell through with imperial yellow cords, the characters of the imperial cipher cut sharp and clear."

"They show one the imperial yellow satin robes of Kienlung, embroidered with the finest gold thread, the dragons worked in seed pearls; his overcoat of plum-colored satin, with more gold thread and seed-pearl dragons; his Mogul helmet of black lacquer encrusted with gold, set with pearls and rubies; his diamond-hilted Indian daggers and his jade-handled swords."

"Best of all is his rosary, or official necklace, of 108 half-inch pearls. The four regent beads of this rosary are lapis lazuli, the pendant 'disciple strings' are coral, with large sapphire 'dewdrops' at their ends. The reliquary, or central medallion, has one huge, burning ruby in a circle of creamy button pearls, and a last and largest pear-shaped pearl hangs from that cord."

It is startling to imagine what will happen if the millions of China lose all their reverence for the dead and begin looting the tombs of their ancestors on a great scale. Far more wealth is believed to be buried in China than in any other country.