

A Chinese Account of the Boxer Rebellion

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"The drill of militia in all districts for local defence has been introduced into China very long since, but it has not been approved till last year. In Tsae-Chou-Fu of Shantung very often the inhabitants assembled together, and formed bands for evil purposes, which were called the Big Sword Societies.

"They thought their bodies were bullet-proved, and no weapons could wound them. As their societies became greater, they took advantage of militia drill, saying that they would kill the foreigners, and calling themselves Yi-He-Tuan, which means righteous and harmonious militia.

"They expressed that they had the power of taking the souls of spirits into their own bodies when they were boxing, which made the foolish people sincerely believe their doings, but those who were wise still deemed it as superstitious.

"Why were the people so anti-foreign? The case was that the Chinese Christian converts took advantage of the missionaries sheltering them, in lawsuits before the magistrates concerning property. Thus, when these people declared that their resolution was to slaughter the Christians, very many people were glad to join the society.

"The Boxers were gradually spreading to Tientsin, Chi-Chou, Chuo-Chow, and Pao-Ting-Fu and some other districts. Those Boxers who belonged to the Kan (a word for the north direction) group had red cloth on the heads, around the waist and legs; while those who belonged to the Chien (a word for the northwest direction) used yellow cloth instead of red. Their weapons were only spears and swords, which were not sharp.

"It was rumored that they were so easily fed that one pint of rice would be sufficient for several hundred persons, and that they could pass the seas and oceans by means of using pieces of cloth instead of ships. In Tientsin there were societies of red lanterns, which consisted of young girls who could walk in the air if they held a handkerchief in one hand and a red lantern in the other, which could help the Boxers to burn the missionary buildings.

"Most of the people did not believe this, and considered it superstitious conduct, as others could not see them when they were walking in the air. Till then, none of the Pekinese practised boxing. Shortly afterward a merchant of the Chinese city, a native of Chi-Chou, came back from home and learnt how to box. The young men, or rather boys, knowing him, asked him to teach them to box for playing purposes.

"In Chuo-Chow, Chi-Chou, and some other districts round Peking the Boxers prepared altars, which were composed of matsheds, in which they placed tablets with names of spirits written on. In each shed, or altar, there was a certain number of men, and each man got a sword or a spear. Before boxing, the men first knelt down in the yard toward the southeast, burnt a 'piao' (which was composed of three sheets of yellow paper) incense, and knocked their heads.

"After doing so, they again all kneeled down before the tablets, and each made, on purpose as I supposed, a strong breath with a great noise; after one or two minutes all stood up and began to box. Before finishing the boxing, every man had to expose his back for several cuts given by another man with the blade of a sabre.

"The Empress-Dowager knew that it would be harmful, and wanted to suppress them, but did not like to kill all of them, as there were among them good people, who had no real intentions of attacking foreigners, and who were simply induced to do so owing to their want of wisdom, so she sent Kang-Yi and Chao-Shu-Chiao, the leaders, and advised the accomplices to stop boxing.

"During these days the Dowager was living in the Imperial Garden, and was amusing herself as well as possible.

"Since then the Boxers gave more trouble. One of my friends told me that he saw a few Boxers who were admitted to the city, and destroyed two people near the Imperial River bridge. A rumor said that some old women were sent out by the missionaries to put dirty blood on the doors of some of the houses, and that if it were not cleaned by the Boxers the inmates of the house would all become fatally mad.

"Such superstitious power had never been heard of in foreign countries, so I thought it was the Boxers' design to make people know that they could dissolve such calamities.

"Outside the Hai-Tai Gate two women, who were considered to put dirty blood on the door, were killed at once. A rumor said that the red lantern girls could pull down high-storied houses with thin cotton strings, and could set fire to the house simply by moving a fan, and also said they had the power of hanging a rock of several pounds on a hair.

"Upon a certain day there were several Boxers passing along Chia-Min-Hsiang, among whom a young one was captured by the German guards. It was then rumored that this Boxer was so well exercised that he was not slightly wounded, though the Germans tried to dig his eyes out.

"In the evening shortly after my arrival at my house, large numbers of persons, carts, and horses were running eastward from the main street inside the Hai-Tai Gate; all the men of the shops were hurried to shut their doors; some one cried out that the Boxers had entered the Hai-Tai Gate.

"After a moment some concentrated smoke rose to a great height and a noise of firing guns was heard. By judging the noise and direction of the smoke, I knew it was the American missionary building near the entrance to Hu-Tung, inside the Hai-Tai Gate, which was burnt down by the Boxers.

"The Boxers as they were walking northward ordered every shop to burn incense. Then the English hospital, the house of Yu-Keng, present Chinese Minister in France, all the shops thence southward to the entrance of Teng-Shi-Kou, the American church in Teng-Shi-Kou, the French church at Pa-Mien,-Tsao, the dwellings of the professors of the imperial college, were burnt one after the other.

"According to what the people said, the way in which the Boxers burnt the churches was that they only used a bundle of incense, read charms, and told all the bystanders to cry 'Burn!' loudly, and then they threw the incense into buildings which caught at once, but houses next the churches were left in safety.

"Thus the people believed that the Boxers actually possessed the souls of spirits in their bodies, otherwise the houses in the neighborhood would have caught fire too.

"In the morning of the next day the fire was yet in a fierce state; the smoke was so much that it looked like big masses of clouds. In the street the Chinese Christians were running about because they were too anxious to take refuge.

"In Teng-Shi-Kou several Boxers came crying 'Sha! Sha!' ('kill, kill!') loudly with swords in their hands. As they were passing along, two Christian women, each having a little child in her arms, met with the Boxers. When they were just going to kill those Christians, I was in such a sorrowful state that I could not bear to see them die. Then I turned back on my journey and walked toward the Hai-Tai Gate. In the main street I saw several dead bodies, which I was told had been killed by the Boxers.

"Some time later very concentrated smoke was rising up violently. It was found that the Boxers set fire to the medicine shop in Ta-Cha-Lan, outside the Chien-Men. At first the Boxers did not allow the shops in the neighborhood to remove their goods, saying that the fire would only burn the one which they wanted to destroy, but could do no harm to any other.

"But two or three others began to burn, and the Boxers wrote charms on yellow papers, which, so they said, could stop the fire where they were pasted.

"After a few minutes the fire spread to such an extent that they allowed the shops to extinguish it with water, but it was impossible. In the theatre house a man tried to put down the fire with dirty water, which gave the Boxers excuse; so they said that the god of fire became angry for the dirty liquor, therefore the fire ruined those that were innocent. This fire destroyed about two square li, including a gate of the Chien-Men. Since then very few people believed the Boxers.

"It was reported that forty or fifty Boxers in Shue-Fu-Yuen were shot by foreign soldiers, who, when they were going away, were told by the people that these dead men could become alive again when the old Boxers touched their bodies with their hands. The soldiers, hearing this, turned their way back and spoiled the bodies with the swords on their muskets.

"Tung-Fu-Hsiang suggested that, as the Boxers could not burn the foreign legations, assistance with soldiers should be rendered. This plan suited the mind of Prince Tuan's party, as they presumed the foreigners in Peking were the chief number of all in the world.

"Thus the Chinese troops guarding the legations were increased with orders to resist the Boxers, but virtually they would besiege the legations.

"In the evening the Tsung-Li-Yamen, under imperial orders, sent despatches to the different legations telling the Ambassadors to leave Chiao-Min-Hsiang (Legation Street) within twenty-four hours, for the Admiral demanded from the Chinese the forts at Taku, and thus the

peace had been broken, and saying that if they would not do so bombardment would be inflicted.

"The Boxers and those foolish were very glad, and said foreigners had been enemies for forty years, now it was the time to take revenge by sweeping over all the world. In the streets written informations were pasted on the wall by Boxers saying that the fifth moon was changed to the eighth moon, and Legation Street was changed to 'cut up foreigners' cock-crowing.' In the evening Boxers set fire to the telegraph station outside the Hai-Tai Gate.

"On a certain day before noon I was told that the German Ambassador was shot to death in the main street of Tan-Pai-Lou by the soldiers on his way to the Tsung-Li-Yamen.

"In the evening it was reported that at Taku seven foreign vessels wanted to enter the port, and were shot so they sunk and six were captured. People who did not know much about foreign countries were glad to hear the victory, and said that they were sure it was time for the Chinese to take revenge for their former defeats.

"But I said that this victory could not be true, for we had never gained a victory like this during the war with the Japanese. They said we had the help of the Boxers. I asked them how could they destroy war-vessels?

"They said that the Boxers could burn them simply by pointing at them with their fingers. I knew that they were foolish, but I durst not say any more, or they would tell the Boxers that I was a betrayer.

"The Boxers lately got the power of killing any person they wished; therefore when they saw any man, woman, or child they disliked, they killed at once on the road. Fire continued every day. Some people said that there was very little food and ammunition left in the legations, and that they would die of hunger in a few days.

"Though the attempts proved fruitless, the Catholic Church in Hsi-Shi-Ku had been attacked four days. Some Boxers said that part of it had been destroyed, but very few people believed. Prince Ching suggested that it was against treaty and international law, and also unreasonable, to attack foreign ambassadors; moreover, it would be impossible for a weak country like China to resist several powerful nations.

"Prince Tuan, hearing this, became very angry with him, and said that now so many people arose at the same time they must kill every foreigner in the world.

"Five hundred of Tung-Fu-Hsiang's soldiers were killed and wounded during the attack upon the French Legation. The Boxers could not burn the Catholic Church at Hsi-Shi-Ku, so cannons were necessary to be used.

"The Tsung-Li-Yamen was afraid that Boxers would destroy its buildings, and asked Prince Tuan to send some Boxers to guard it against the soldiers from plundering the treasury. The Boxers at once wanted to kill the head cook, who is, of course, a cunning man, for the food he prepared was very bad.

"The Boxers, as they themselves said, but not all true, could distinguish the Christians from the Buddhists by a mark of a cross on the temple or forehead. During these days rumor said that at present there were some persons who could put a cross mark on one's forehead simply by blowing with the mouth or with a fan.

"On this account most of the people went to the Boxer's altars to be examined. About nine-tenths of the people who did go to the altar had the cross mark on the head. Some people said that in the Chinese city a mark of a cross could not be cleared off without paying a tael of silver for each. People thought that this was the Christian's magic power, but I believed it was the Boxers cheating them, for I had never heard the Christians possess magic power.

"In the streets some yellow papers pasted on the wall said that on the seventh day of the seventh moon all the people should wrap their heads with red cloth, and on these four days - seventh and fifteenth days of the seventh moon, and first and ninth days of the ninth moon - they should not eat cooked food, otherwise Niu-Lang, a spirit, would not help the people to pass the calamity, and also foreigners could not be stopped from firing.

"A proclamation was issued by the metropolitan commander-in-chief of infantry, in which rewards of fifty taels of silver for the capture of a living foreign man, forty for a woman, and thirty for a child were offered.

"One day when I was in the Yamen a man ran in suddenly and said that there were Christians in Chao-Tang-Tsu-Hu-Tung, the lane just opposite the one in which the Tsung-Li-Yamen is situated. The Boxers in the Yamen immediately ran to the house showed to them by the messenger. When they arrived the house had already caught fire. Some yellow Boxers captured the holder of the house, and sent him to Prince Chuang's house to be examined.

Now, no persons could be put to death without being sent to Prince Chuang's house to be examined.

"One day a long succession of firing guns was heard. It was the bombardment of the British Legation.

"In the morning of the twenty-first day, when I was walking in the main street at Tan-Pai-Lou, I saw one of the Jung-Lu's soldiers talking with several passers-by, and I overheard that early that morning a few foreigners came out of a legation (which he could not recognize) and begged a commander of the troops to forgive them, and they would fight no more.

"They promised to stop fighting in Tientsin too. In the afternoon a foreigner came out and was caught by a few soldiers, and he said he wanted to see General Ma. The reason was that their provisions, ammunitions were not sufficient.

"An imperial decree was issued in which the Empress-Dowager regretted the death of the German Minister and the Japanese Chancellor, and ordered the Viceroy of Chih-Li and the metropolitan prefect to arrest banditti and protect the legations, and to send the missionaries and merchants home. On hearing this, the Boxers said the foreigners would soon be all killed, and she was silly.

"The Empress-Dowager ordered the Tsung-Li-Yamen to present some watermelons to the foreign ministers. The Boxers seeing this became very angry, said that it was done by the Yamen privately, but that it was not ordered by her Majesty.

On the twenty-ninth day Chang-Lin, a former vice-president of a board, brought about two thousand Boxers to Chin-Chia-Tun to attack the Christians, who fortified their place with trenches and guns, so the Boxers were wounded before they could go near it, and therefore were defeated.

"Two, or perhaps more, of the students of the Peking University were killed by the Boxers, for they had foreign books.

"On the first day of the seventh moon a telegram came from the American Consul at Chefoo, in which it was stated that very large forces of all nations were at Taku, and that no American was wounded, except a little loss of property; and that he asked Mr. Conger to write with his own hand the true condition of the siege.

"On the second day the Tsung-Li-Yamen sent a good deal of vegetables and about a thousand cattles of flour to the legations. The Boxers in the Yamen looked at this with an angry frown.

"On the fourth day another telegram came from the American Consul at Chefoo, which said that the admirals of all nations were anxious to know the condition of the siege.

"On the sixth day it was reported that the English had promised that the seven nations would inflict no trouble on China. Germany was very angry for the death of her Ambassador; Russia was eager for getting land from China; France allied with Russia; Japan was watching for Russia.

"On the tenth day it was reported that a few thousand soldiers were defeated by the Tartar General Shou-Shan, but that the Russians occupied most of the Manchurian territories.

"In the midnight of the eleventh the Tsung-Li-Yamen wanted me to go to Prince Chuang's house, so I put on my official coats; I doubted very much, because I feared that he would kill me; I could but go.

"On the twelfth day when I arrived there I found that several of my friends had already been there, and I knew that several letters were presented to Prince Chuang by a Chinese who was trusted by foreigners to deliver them in Tientsin.

"Prince Chuang and Duke Lan treated us in a friendly way, for now they understood that people who knew foreign languages were also useful to them.

"They asked us to translate these letters, which they would submit to the Empress-Dowager for her perusal. As these letters came from the legations, I think it is not necessary for me to repeat them.

"A man told me that Li-Peng-Leng commanded one hundred thousand soldiers, who dispersed before they met foreign troops; he felt extremely shameful and committed suicide. Some people who escaped from Tung-Chow said that foreign soldiers were not many, but the Chinese did not fight at all.

"On the twentieth day, hearing the sound of firing cannons and guns, which continued around the city, people knew that foreign troops had arrived, so they were in a state of great excitement. Now they hid themselves so as to avoid the flying bullets.

"The Empress-Dowager escaped, and Prince Ching knew the city could not be defended, and distributed flags of truce to the soldiers, and ordered them to put them on the city wall.

"This is all the news I heard during the siege. I think that all known to foreigners is unnecessary for me to write in details."