

The boxer rebellion and the christian response

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The Boxer Rebellion was a vicious uprising against non-Chinese in China during the final years of the 19th century, from November 1899 to September 7, 1901. The areas of conflict included the commercial market, political domain, religious concerns and technological advancements. This extremely unique and glaring because in a very short p of time, thousands of Christians, both Chinese and foreign were killed as a result of the revolt and its suppression. Then ironically, the revolt itself was crushed by the very thing it stood against – foreign influence. About 20, 000 troops came from outside to thwart this movement forever.

“ Thus as 1900 dawned, China was swept by a movement known as ‘ Yao rebels’ who believed that they had been made invulnerable by sorcery and incantation. Screaming mobs, determined to kill every Westerner, were egged on by the Yao society whose title, “ The Fist of Righteous Amity” was translated by Americans and English into Boxers” (Guy, 2006). It is not possible to highlight where this anti-western sentiment in China was actually born, but one may refer back to the opium war between Britain and China (1839-1842) for some indication. In 1839, the First Opium War broke out, and China cut a sorry figure in front of Britain.

Eyeing the weakness of the Chinese, not only the British, but the Russians and the French as well started to exert their respective pressures upon the country. Due to their lack of power and ability to impose their will, China was forced into a number of treaties that subjugated its interest against others. These include: the Treaty of Nanking (1842), the Treaty of Aigun (1858), the Treaty of Tientsin (1858), the Convention of Peking (1860), the Treaty of

Shimonoseki (1895), and the Second Convention of Peking (1898). Obviously, the public voice was against these treaties at large.

Their ego was hurt badly, and their pride seemed to falter in front of the might of the foreigners. As is common in such times, rumors also began to spread away. The foreigners were considered to be responsible for much crime and lawlessness that was prevalent. It was believed that the Church had started exercising more power than the state. It was also felt the Church had started to impose certain Christian practices, and had excluded certain tradition Chinese practices from the society. Thus in the late 19th century, feelings of unrest against the Chinese and the foreigners started to develop at a very rapid pace.

Another major event was a row over a temple. The Catholics claimed that it was originally a church that had later been abandoned. The local court ultimately gave the verdict in favor of the Church. The locals could not tolerate this, as it was their place of worship and also a place to practice martial arts. To add to that, the colonization during the following decades did no good to boost up the morale of China. What was more, Asian powerhouses Russia and Japan also joined the rat-race for territorial supremacy. China came out as a good target for all those hungry to cut a slice of the earth's map for their good.

After the 1895 war of China with Japan, many European powers stepped forward to occupy Chinese territory. All of this mustered up into an intolerable feeling of hatred within the Chinese against their oppressors. “The conservatives then gave clandestine backing to the antiforeign and anti-Christian movement of secret societies known as Yihetuan (Society of

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Righteousness and Harmony). The movement has been better known in the West as the Boxers (from an earlier name--Yihequan, Righteousness and Harmony Boxers). In 1900 Boxer bands spread over the north China countryside, burning missionary facilities and killing Chinese Christians.

Finally, in June 1900, the Boxers besieged the foreign concessions in Beijing and Tianjin, an action that provoked an allied relief expedition by the offended nations. The Qing declared war against the invaders, who easily crushed their opposition and occupied north China. Under the Protocol of 1901, the court was made to consent to the execution of ten high officials and the punishment of hundreds of others, expansion of the Legation Quarter, payment of war reparations, stationing of foreign troops in China, and razing of some Chinese fortifications" (Onwar, 2000).

While external forces were still contemplating a productive way out of the situation, the Chinese rulers came out with a message to the provinces. Given the circumstances and the options the rulers had, the message was by no means peaceful. It stated that the world was after Chinese resources and land, and that the time had come when the last resort should be adopted. Peace, therefore, was not an option to be considered. Meanwhile, in the northern Shandong province, a distressing drought was pushing people to the edge of starvation.

There were not many who were thinking about peace anyways. All this energy had to be vented out somewhere, and hence came the time of catharsis, but in a violent way. Anti-foreign feelings caused the quick outburst of a Chinese secret society that was previously more docile. It was known as the I Ho Ch'uan, meaning the Righteous Harmonious Fists; hence

the name 'Boxers'. Understandably, with their name and mission, the Boxers asked for the expulsion of the external parties, more casually referred to as the 'foreign devils', along with their Chinese Christian converts.

This was the time when conventional Chinese arts and skills thrived, especially martial arts and the use of traditional Chinese weapons. "At first, the Boxers wanted to destroy the Ch'ing dynasty (which had ruled China for over 250 years) and wanted to rid China of all foreign influence (which they considered a threat to Chinese culture). When the Empress Dowager backed the Boxers, the Boxers turned solely to ridding China of foreigners. By late 1899, bands of Boxers were massacring Christian missionaries and Chinese Christians" (Rosenburg, 2006).

The resentment towards foreigners, Christians and Chinese converts started to rise immensely, with a greater tinge of violence. The circumstances forced the external lobbies to join hands, and they lodged strong protests with the government of China. However, the then Empress, Tzu Hsi's response surprised many, when she declared that the Boxers were actually a part of the Chinese society, and hence should not be condemned as such. The reaction was also unexpected because it actually went against the local Chinese army, which was striving against the rebellion, and directed in favor of the Boxers.

This made it inevitable for the external forces to make a show of military might close to China's borders. "The empress dowager publicly opposed the Boxers, but her ministers quietly convinced them to join forces in order to drive foreigners from China. In the early months of 1900, thousands of

Boxers roamed the countryside, attacking Christians. When an international force of 2, 100 soldiers attempted to land in China, the empress dowager ordered her imperial army to stop the foreign troops.

Throughout the summer of 1900 the Boxers burned churches and foreign residences and killed Chinese Christians on sight” (Dowling, 2001). Gradually, the Boxers started to gain autonomy over their beliefs and actions. The government was not ready to curb them, and their views were supported by many in the masses. The only effort that were going were in the direction of strengthening forces against the external attack. Finally, when the pressure was too much, the foreign elements inside started vocally seeking help from outside. It was then that the eight-country attack came into operation upon China.

There were multiple operations, many of them fierce; gradually the Chinese rebellion started to weaken. Over the next several months, the forces from outside started to grow within China. They overtook Beijing (then Peking) and expanded into the country. Ultimately, the Boxers just a local might were no match for the military power of the industrial nations. Ultimately, in early 1901, the Chinese government gave in, and agreed to abolish the Boxer movement completely. Needless to mention, it was not merely an attack on the territory of China, but also on its ego.

Succumbing to the demand of the external powers was worse than actually loosing a battle. Subsequently, due to its recent weakening in the region, China could do nothing in the war of Russia and Japan a couple of years later, and stood watching while Japan proclaimed supremacy in the East. In the entire episode, the United States played a very significant role. This is

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because it had a tactical advantage, having a major portion of its navy already established around the Philippines during the Spanish American War (1898) and the subsequent Philippine insurgent activity.

This was actually a reinforcer for those policy makers in the US who were of the opinion that the US should maintain control in the Far East. It was a very unique time in the history of China, repeatedly, it had to face occasions when foreign invaders came in and took control of her land and might. The emperors were just too weak to make any resistance to this offer. An additional reason was that the foreign armies were far better equipped with warfare technologies and tactics than China was at that point in time. It was a time when the Empress began to reconsider her option regarding removal of these elements from her soil.