

## **The Boxer Rebellion**

### **Source 1**

#### ***Carving up the Melon***

When China was defeated by Japan in 1895, European powers responded with a policy they called, "carving up the Chinese melon." Following the partitioning of Africa among European powers, they turned their sights to what they saw as a terminally weak Chinese government. European powers and America began to scramble for what was called "spheres of interest." These spheres of interest involved holding leases for all railway and commercial privileges in various regions. The Russians got Port Arthur, the British got the New Territories around Hong Kong, the Germans got a leasehold in Shantung, and the Americans got nothing. Concentrating largely on the Philippines and Guam, the Americans had missed the Chinese boat and so insisted on an "open door" policy in China in which commercial opportunities were equally available to all European powers and the political and territorial integrity of China remained untouched.

#### **The Boxers**

The imperial court responded to this foreign threat by giving aid to various secret societies. Traditionally, secret societies had been formed in opposition to imperial government; as such, they were certainly a threat to the Ch'ing government. However, anti-foreign sentiment had risen so greatly in China that the Empress Dowager believed that the secret societies could be the vanguard in a military expulsion of Europeans. This policy reached its climax in 1900 with the Boxer Rebellion.

The Boxers, or "The Righteous and Harmonious Fists," were a religious society that had originally rebelled against the imperial government in Shantung in 1898. They practiced an animistic magic of rituals and spells which they believed made them impervious to bullets and pain. The Boxers believed that the expulsion of foreign devils would magically renew Chinese society and begin a new golden age. Much of their discontent, however, was focussed on the economic scarcity of the 1890's. They were a passionate and confident group, full of contempt for authority and violent emotions.

In reality, the Boxer rebellion could hardly be classified as either a rebellion or a war against the Europeans. China was largely under the control of regional Governors General; these regional officials ignored the Empress Dowager's instructions and put forth every effort to prevent disorder or any harm coming to foreigners. The Boxer Rebellion, then, was only limited to a few places, but concentrated itself in Beijing. The Western response was swift and severe. Within a couple months, an international force captured and occupied Beijing and forced the imperial government to agree to the most humiliating terms yet: the Boxer Protocol of 1901. Under the Boxer Protocol, European powers got the right to maintain military forces in the capital, thus placing the imperial government more or less under arrest. The Protocols suspended the civil service examination, demanded a huge indemnity to be paid to European powers for the losses they had suffered, and required government officials to be prosecuted for their role in the rebellion. In addition, the Protocols suspended all arms imports into the country.

#### ***Reform***

The humiliation of the Boxer Protocols set China on new course of reform that dynamically put into place all of the reforms originally proposed by K'ang Yu-wei. In 1901, the education system was reformed to allow the admission of girls and the curriculum was changed from the study of the Classics and Confucian studies to the study of Western mathematics, science, engineering, and geography. The civil service examination was changed to reflect this new curriculum, and in 1905 it was abandoned altogether. The Chinese began to send its youth to Europe and to Japan to study the new sciences, such as economics, and radical new Western modes of thinking started making their way into China, such as Marxism. The military was reorganized under Yuan Shih-k'ai (1859-1916), who adopted Western and Japanese models of military organization and discipline. Key to this new military was the establishment of the military as a career; a new professional officer corps was created built on a new principle: loyalty to one's commander rather than loyalty to the Emperor.

The provincial assemblies that had originally been proposed by K'ang Yu-wei were established in 1909, the year in which the last emperor, Pu Yi, the Hsüan-tung emperor, ascended the throne. A national, democratically elected Consultative Assembly was established in 1910. Although the Assembly was meant to support the imperial court, in reality it was frequently odds with the interests of the imperial government. This is where things stood in 1911 when an uprising began in Szechwan province in the west. Angered at a government plan to nationalize the railways, the uprising soon grew into a national revolution that would end once and for all imperial rule in China. That, however, is a story for another day.

**Boxer Rebellion Source 2:** Fei Ch'i-hao, account of the Boxer Rebellion, "The Boxer Rebellion, 1900."

*Fei Ch'i-hao was a Chinese Christian. Here he recounts the activities of the millennialist "Boxers" in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900.*

The people of Shansi are naturally timid and gentle, not given to making disturbances, being the most peaceable people in China. So our Shansi Christians were hopeful for themselves, even when the reports from the coast grew more alarming. But there was one thing which caused us deep apprehension, and that was the fact that the wicked, cruel YU Hsien, the hater of foreigners, was the newly appointed Governor of Shansi. He had previously promoted the Boxer movement in Shantung, and had persuaded the Empress Dowager that the Boxers had supernatural powers and were true patriots.

Early in June my college friend K'ung Hsiang Hsi came back from T'ungchou for his vacation, reporting that the state of affairs there and at Peking was growing worse, that the local officials were powerless against the Boxers, and that the Boxers, armed with swords, were constantly threatening Christians scattered in the country.

From this time we had no communication with Tientsin or Peking. All travellers were searched, and if discovered bearing foreign letters they were killed. So though several times messengers were started out to carry our letters to the coast, they were turned back by the Boxers before they had gone far. It was not long before the Boxers, like a pestilence, had spread all over Shansi. School had not closed yet in Fen Chou Fu, but as the feeling of alarm deepened, fathers came to take their boys home, and school was dismissed before the end of June....

The wicked Governor, Yü Hsien, scattered proclamations broadcast. These stated that the foreign religions overthrew morality and inflamed men to do evil, so now gods and men were stirred up against them, and Heaven's legions had been sent to exterminate the foreign devils. Moreover there were the Boxers, faithful to their sovereign, loyal to their country, determined to unite in wiping out the foreign religion. He also offered a reward to all who killed foreigners, either titles or office or money. When the highest official in the province took such a stand in favor of the Boxers, what could inferior officials do? People and officials bowed to his will, and all who enlisted as Boxers were in high favor. It was a time of license and anarchy, when not only Christians were killed, but hundreds of others against whom individual Boxers had a grudge.

Crowds of people kept passing our mission gate to see what might be happening, for the city was full of rumors. "The foreigners have all fled."

"Many foreigners from other places have gathered here."

"A great cannon has been mounted at the mission gate."

"The foreigners have hired men to poison wells, and to smear gates with blood."

I was staying in the compound with the Prices, inside the west gate of the city, and Mr. and Mrs. Atwater, with their children, Bertha and Celia, lived near the east gate. On the 28th of June all day long a mob of one or two hundred roughs, with crowds of boys, stood at the gate of the Atwater place, shouting:

"Kill the foreigners, loot the houses."

### Source 3 The Boxer Rebellion

#### *Spheres of Influence*

Throughout the nineteenth century, China's emperors had watched as foreigners encroached further and further upon their land. Time and again, foreigners forced China to make humiliating concessions. Foreign regiments, armed with modern weapons, consistently defeated entire imperial armies. Now, as a new century was about to begin, Tsu Hsi, empress dowager of the Ch'ing Dynasty, searched for a way to rid her empire of foreign parasites.

Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and Russia all claimed exclusive trading rights to certain parts of China. They were dividing China into "spheres of influence." Some even claimed to own the territory within their spheres. By acquiring the Philippines, the United States became an Asian power too. Now, with a strong base of operations just 400 miles from China, American businesses hoped to take advantage of China's vast resources. The foreign spheres of influence, however, threatened their ambitions.

So while the empress was hoping to close China to foreigners, Americans were looking for a way in. John Hay, now Secretary of State, had an idea. Since public opinion, strained by the Philippines war, would never support the use of force, he decided to negotiate. He sent letters to all the foreign powers and suggested an "Open Door" policy in China. This policy would guarantee equal trading rights for all and prevent one nation from discriminating against another within its sphere.

The nations replied that they liked the concept of the Open Door, but that they could not support or enforce it. Hay's plan had been politely rejected. Nevertheless Hay announced that since all of the powers had accepted the Open Door in principle, the United States considered their agreement "final and definitive."

#### *Fists of Righteous Harmony*

While the outside powers bickered over who would control China, Tsu Hsi issued an imperial message to all the Chinese provinces.

The present situation is becoming daily more difficult. The various Powers cast upon us looks of tiger-like voracity, hustling each other to be first to seize our innermost territories. . . . Should the strong enemies become aggressive and press us to consent to things we can never accept, we have no alternative but to rely upon the justice of our cause. . . . If our . . . hundreds of millions of inhabitants . . . would prove their loyalty to their emperor and love of their country, what is there to fear from any invader? Let us not think about making peace.

In northern Shandong province, a devastating drought was pushing people to the edge of starvation. Few people there were thinking about making peace. A secret society, known as the Fists of Righteous Harmony, attracted thousands of followers. Foreigners called members of this society "Boxers" because they practiced martial arts. The Boxers also believed that they had a magical power, and that foreign bullets could not harm them. Millions of "spirit soldiers," they said, would soon rise from the dead and join their cause.

Their cause, at first, was to overthrow the imperial Ch'ing government and expel all "foreign devils" from China. The crafty empress, however, saw a way to use the Boxers. Through her ministers, she began to encourage the Boxers. Soon a new slogan—"Support the Ch'ing; destroy the foreigner!"—appeared upon the Boxers' banner.

In the early months of 1900, thousands of Boxers roamed the countryside. They attacked Christian missions, slaughtering foreign missionaries and Chinese converts. Then they moved toward the cities, attracting more and more followers as they came. Nervous foreign ministers insisted that the Chinese government stop the Boxers.

From inside the Forbidden City, the empress told the diplomats that her troops would soon crush the "rebellion." Meanwhile, she did nothing as the Boxers entered the capital.

Foreign diplomats, their families, and staff lived in a compound just outside the Forbidden City's walls in the heart of Beijing. Working together, they threw up hasty defenses, and with a small force of military personnel, they faced the Boxer onslaught. One American described the scene as 20,000 Boxers

advanced in a solid mass and carried standards of red and white cloth. Their yells were deafening, while the roar of gongs, drums and horns sounded like thunder. . . . They waved their swords and stamped on the ground with their feet. They wore red turbans, sashes, and garters over blue cloth. [When] they were only twenty yards from our gate, . . . three volleys from the rifles of our sailors left more than fifty dead upon the ground.

The Boxers fell back but soon returned. Surrounded, the foreigners could neither escape nor send for help. For almost two months, they withstood fierce attacks and bombardment. Things began to look hopeless. Seventy-six defenders lay dead, and many more were wounded. Ammunition, food, and medical supplies were almost gone. Then, shortly before dawn, loud explosions rocked the city. Weary defenders staggered to the barricades, expecting a final, overpowering Boxer attack. But as a column of armed men approached them, they began to cheer. Help had arrived at last.

After a month of no news from their diplomats, the foreign powers had grown worried. They assembled an international relief force of soldiers and sailors from eight countries. The United States, eager to rescue its ministers and to assert its presence in China, sent a contingent of 2,500 sailors and marines. After rescuing another besieged delegation in Tientsin, the international force marched to Beijing, fighting Boxers and imperial soldiers along the way.

The international troops looted the capital and even ransacked the Forbidden City. Disguised as a peasant, the empress dowager escaped the city in a cart. She returned to the Forbidden City a year later, but the power of the Ch'ing dynasty was destroyed forever.

Because it had participated in the campaign, the United States participated in the settlement that followed. Hay called for an expanded "Open Door," not only within the spheres of influence, but in all parts of China. He also recommended that the powers preserve China's territory and its government. Other powers agreed, and the Open Door policy allowed foreign access to China's market until World War II closed it once again.