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THE BOXER REBELLION

Who

The Boxers: A group of Chinese people who opposed the foreigners in China. Their full name was “The Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists”. They were called “Boxers” in the West because at the time, Chinese martial arts were known as “Chinese boxing”, and so people who practiced Chinese martial arts were called boxers.

The Chinese government: The Qing dynasty ruled China from 1644 to 1912. In 1899, the emperor was still a child. His mother, CiXi, ruled in his place as the Empress Dowager. The Empress Dowager ruled from 1861 to 1908. In 1900, she sent the Chinese army to help the Boxers.

The Eight-Nation Alliance: group of eight countries whose citizens were in danger in China from the Boxers. The countries were: Japan, Russia, Britain, France, the United States, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.



Modern wax figure of a Boxer soldier.

What

A rebellion in China against foreigners and Chinese Christians. Later the Chinese government joined on the side of the Boxers and had the Chinese army help fight against the troops of the Eight-Nation Alliance.

rebellion: also called an “uprising”

troops: soldiers

When

The rebellion started in August of 1899. It ended in September of 1901, with the signing of the **Boxer Protocol**.

Where

The Boxer Rebellion took place in China, especially the North / Northeast part of the country around Peking (today called **Beijing**).

The foreign-controlled part of Peking (the “Legation Quarter”), where foreigners lived and worked. Boxer and Chinese army forces surrounded the legation for 55 days in 1901.

legation: similar to a “consulate” today — that is, a diplomatic person or area that is a step below an ambassador / embassy.

Why

Many Chinese people were upset with foreigners and foreign influences (such as Christianity) in China. They were also upset that the Chinese government could not resist the foreigners’ demands.

The Boxers believed that their moral superiority and martial training would protect them from the foreigners’ superior weapons

could not resist: At the time, the Chinese military was much weaker than Western militaries. The military by itself could not prevent Westerners from entering China.

Important Ideas

Extraterritoriality: because of the Unequal Treaties, foreigners in China did not have to follow Chinese law. If there was a legal problem, only that foreigner’s government could do anything.

extraterritoriality: Base is “territory”, with prefix “extra” (outside, without, except) and the suffixes “-ial” + “ity”.

Imperialism: a political system in which one country rules other countries (by taking them over).

Also, the way in which a rich or powerful country’s way of life, culture, business, etc. influence and change a poorer or less-powerful country’s way of life.

Both types of imperialism were involved in the Boxer Rebellion.

Nationalism: love for your own country and the belief that it is better than any other country. In the Boxer Rebellion, this was seen by the Boxers wanting to force the foreigners to leave China. Also, the foreigners were working in China to make their own countries stronger by controlling trade with China (this part is also similar to *Imperialism*).

Spheres of Influence: Western countries did not take over all of China directly. Instead, they had areas in the country that they controlled indirectly, through the economy and the existing government.

Unequal Treaties: treaties forced on China by the Western powers and Japan that gave the foreigners land and power in China. China received nothing that it wanted or needed.

Yellow Peril: the idea that the people of Asia, especially East Asia, were a racial threat to Western people and civilization. Many Westerners thought that non-white people were inferior to Westerners. Some of these people were worried that Asians would destroy Western culture.

did not take over all of China:

Some countries did physically take control of some parts of China. The most famous today is perhaps the British control of Hong Kong. That lasted until 1997.

land and power: *spheres of influence* and *extraterritoriality* came from the unequal treaties.

The Boxer Rebellion

The rebellion against foreigners in China by a group of Chinese martial artists is called “The Boxer Rebellion”. It started in August 1899 and ended in September 1901. It was led by the Boxers, a group of Chinese citizens who disliked the strong influence that foreigners and foreign governments had in China.

The Foreigners in China

In the late 1800s and the early 1900s, many foreign countries had strong control over Chinese territory and its government

(*spheres of influence*). These countries were Japan, Britain, Germany, and Russia, and several other, smaller countries. China lost many battles to these countries and had been humiliated by them. For example, China was forced to allow foreigners to live and trade in some Chinese cities (*unequal treaties*). Foreigners in those cities did not have to follow Chinese laws (*extraterritoriality*).

The Boxers

The Boxers were mostly young Chinese men. These young men trained in martial arts, which is why they were called “Boxers” by foreigners. The Boxers were angry about the growing power of foreigners in China. They wanted to force all foreigners, and even some Chinese people, to leave China. Other Chinese people helped them, and the Boxers took their fight all the way to Peking. The Boxers surrounded the areas (the Legation Quarters) where foreigners lived and worked in Peking.

55 Days at Peking

Japan, Russia, Britain, France, the United States, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy made an alliance (the Eight-Nation Alliance) to keep the Boxers out of the part of Peking where the foreigners lived and worked. The Empress Dowager Cixi declared war on all the foreigners. She sent the Chinese Army to help the Boxers. The foreigners were trapped in Peking for 55 days before foreign reinforcements arrived and defeated the Chinese.

After the fighting ended, some foreigners went wild to get revenge. Some foreigners stole from Chinese people and raped

martial arts: karate, judo, and taekwon do are examples of martial arts that are well known in the USA. (These are NOT Chinese martial arts. “Gung Fu” and “Wushu” are common general names today for Chinese martial arts.)

Peking: was the capital of China, so very important to both the Chinese government and the foreigners trying to control China.

Empress Dowager: the mother of the child emperor

reinforcements: extra fighters brought from somewhere else to join a battle.

Chinese women and girls. The commanders of the various countries' troops knew about these crimes. However, they sometimes could not keep their troops (and other people from their countries) under control. Sometimes, they did not care about stopping the crimes. This made many Chinese even more upset with the foreigners, but they were powerless to do anything.



Figure 1: Drawing showing soldiers of the Eight-Nation Alliance attacking Peking Castle in 1901.

Aftermath

The foreigners were very angry with the Chinese government. They decided that China had to pay them a lot of money. They also told the Chinese government to execute every Boxer. Chinese leaders had to agree, because their army was too weak to fight back against the foreigners. A few years later in 1911, the Qing Empire collapsed.

execute: to kill, often when the victim cannot fight back or defend themselves.

In More Detail

The Boxer Rebellion was an anti-imperialist uprising which took place in China towards the end of the Qing dynasty between 1899 and 1901. The Boxers were motivated by nationalism and opposition to foreign influence, including Christian missionary activity. The Boxers believed that they were invulnerable to foreign weapons.

In the late 1800s, China was going through a severe drought. When there was rain, it was often too much and floods happened. In both cases, many Chinese people suffered. The growth of foreign influence in China's politics and economy also caused suffering and anger for many Chinese people.

For several months in 1900, there was violence against the foreign and Christian people in North China. In June 1900, Boxer fighters went to Beijing, with the slogan "Support Qing government and exterminate the foreigners." For safety, foreigners and Chinese Christians went to the Legation Quarter, an area in Peking that the major foreign powers controlled. The Boxers surrounded the area.

In the beginning, the Empress Dowager Cixi was not sure if she should support the Boxers or not. When she heard that the foreign powers were sending an army to attack them, however, the Empress Dowager decided to support the the Boxers. On June 21, she declared war on the foreign powers. The Chinese army joined the Boxers in besieging the foreign diplomats, civilians, and soldiers, as well as Chinese Christians, in the Legation Quarter. The siege lasted for 55 days. Foreign reinforcements sent by the Eight-Nation Alliance reached Peking, defeated the Boxers and the Chinese army, and lifted the siege.

invulnerable: can not be hurt

severe drought: when an area doesn't get enough rain or snow for a long time.

Christian people: Chinese and foreign Christians.

exterminate: to kill every person (or animal) in a group, so that the group no longer exists

besiege: to surround a city (or other area) with military force until the people inside let you take control

During the rebellion, before the foreigner reinforcements reached Peking, Chinese officials were split — some wanted to continue supporting the Boxers. Others thought it would be better to work with the foreigners. This second group was led by Prince Qing.

The Eight-Nation Alliance, after being initially turned back, brought 20,000 armed troops to China (the reinforcements). Those troops defeated the Imperial Army and, on August 14, 1901, captured Beijing. This ended the siege of the legations.

When the Western reinforcements arrived, the Empress Dowager and a few members of the court retreated deep into China, far from Peking, which was soon controlled by the Westerners.

Aftermath

Foreign soldiers began plundering the capital and the surrounding countryside. They also raped many woman and girls and executed many people they thought might be Boxers. Some people from every country involved took part — including soldiers, diplomats, clergy, and civilians. Some Chinese people also took advantage of the situation to get revenge on their own Chinese rivals or enemies.

plunder: steal from or loot, especially by military troops

Some advisors recommended continuing to fight, but the Empress Dowager decided it would be better to end the war. The foreigners assured her that she and her family would continue to rule China and that China would not be forced to give up more territory. The treaty was called *The Boxer Protocol*. It was signed on September 7, 1901 and required the government to:

assured: promised

1. execute government officials who had supported the Boxers;
2. allow for foreign troops to be stationed in Beijing; and

3. pay 450 million *taels* of silver (about 17,000 tons) — more than all the tax money that the government collected in a year — over the next thirty-nine years to the eight nations involved.

tael: an old Chinese unit of measure.

The Empress Dowager decided to support the Boxers because she hoped that they would be able to at least reduce the power of the foreigners in China. However, even with the government's own troops to help, they were unable to defeat the foreigners. Instead of strengthening the government, the Boxer Rebellion weakened it. In 1911, a new government was created by anti-Qing Chinese groups. The Qing dynasty officially ended in 1912.

Important point: The Boxer Rebellion ended up **weakening** the Qing Dynasty.

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