“Some Secret Societies in Szechwan”
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Before the Revolution of 1911, and the organization of the Railway League, the secret societies and notably the "Gowned Brotherhood" (袍哥會) had to be reckoned with. If a renegade of the society was imprisoned the neighbours dared not refuse to bail him out, and often several families were ruined for divulging secrets. The safest policy of all was to humor the brethren and avoid at all costs their wrath and vengeance.

When it was proposed to introduce railways into Szechwan the Society was quickly in the field to make trouble and succeeded in organizing the T'ung Chih Hwei (同志會) or "Railway League," known among the Chinese as "The Society of United Purpose for Protection of the Way". It was a union in effect of the Confucian party, with a strong membership of officials, and the "Gowned Brotherhood", and organized for the definite purpose of opposing the building of a railway financed by foreign capital.

The rebellion broke out first at Kwanhsien, about fifty miles from the capital and near the mountain fastnesses. The lawless firebrands carried anarchy and destruction wherever they went. However they got more than they expected or wanted because the country everywhere was ripe for revolution and rebellion against the Manchu power. As soon as they fell the Society immediately set up the Han Republic. With the new government many of these outlaws received wealth and preferment, were much honored by the Republican Party and became high officials in the new Government. Thus it was that Szechwan became the leading province in the uprising that led to the downfall of the Manchus and the establishment of the Chinese Republic.

Large sums were subscribed for the Railway but a very large proportion went into the pockets of the promoters. Only cheap terminals at Chengtu and Ichang were constructed, along with about six miles of roadbed. Simply a couple of rusty old engines and a few miles of steel can be shown now for the fifteen million and more dollars raised for the grandiose scheme. At this period the people had no court of appeal for redress of grievances because the magistrates had less power than the robbers. Chinese were heard to remark, that "robbery was done according to law." The poor fled from their homes and suffered severe hardships. The rich were blackmailed and treated without mercy. Only those who passed through the experiences know the paralyzing grip of the Society. In the western part of China after the Revolution, everybody, high and low, rich and poor, joined the Society. Membership in the


Christian church was first debarred the members of the societies, but later there was a
rush to the church to try and control this growing power, and get the control of foreign church property into the hands of the Chinese. Many were taken into the church only to be expelled later when the true aims were discovered. Many confessed they were compelled to join the Society. Entire native staffs in post offices and consulates joined the Society. Mail-carriers only as members could pass safely through the country districts.

At meetings of initiation, new members must worship the "Sacred Tablet" beneath lightly suspended swords and take the following oath, "We are met here in solemn conclave tonight; if there be any false ones here come to spy may they die as this incense and perish as this fowl". The incense sticks are then ignited, the white cock’s head is chopped off, and the blood drained into a bowl of wine, and all the company of brethren partake of it. Matters of discipline are then attended to; some members are degraded and some expelled. When time for repentance is allowed, the offender has to kneel before the tablet and apply a dagger to his thigh until the blood flows freely. This is called *p'u ch'ien tao* (撲前刀) "Falling on the Knife". The culprit may choose another way of penitence by putting a board of nails on the ground with points projecting, and then rolling on this spiked board until his body is covered with blood. This is called *kun ting pan* (滾釘板) "Rolling on the Nailed Board". The wretch to whom the tribunal refuses chance for repentance is at once led out to some grove or secluded spot and dispatched with the sword; the body is thrown into the river or left to be devoured by dogs.

As soon as the Revolution was an assured fact in Szechwan the officials gave the order to cut off all queues, as the queue had been the badge of servitude to the hated Manchus for nearly three hundred years. The nation-wide disturbances made it necessary for all foreigners to leave for the coast. The Consular officers arranged with the new officials for the safe conduct of foreigners when it was deemed wise for to seek refuge in Shanghai. By groups they were all evacuated. An interesting incident occurred showing the influence of the secret organizations. On the night of foreign evacuation, when the situation was particularly tense, Yang Shao Ch’üan, President of our Society, an ex-official, and a prominent member of the "clear water" (as opposed to "turbid water") branch of the Gowned Brotherhood, gave to the missionaries, who were being escorted to their boats on the river, the password of the night in the form of large red lanterns on which were printed in conspicuous characters the word Ch'êng for "Upright" (also the name of the first degree). This proved to be the correct password, but it was all unknown to the innocent missionaries. The talisman worked and the strenuous night’s work was successfully accomplished without unpleasant incidents.

The close workings of the "Gowned Brotherhood" were shown as recently as 1923 in Szechwan when Watt and White-side, British missionaries of Maochow, were murdered by members of the Brotherhood, robbery being the presumed motive. Brigadier General Ch’ien, the commander of the Military District, Ex-Magistrate Li, and Captain Teng of the Active Militia were all members of the same branch of the *P’ao Ko Hui* or "Gowned Brotherhood". A high military officer, who was informal witness in the case, declared that Ex-Magistrate Li and Captain Teng of General Ch’en’s own brigade were of higher rank in
the Brotherhood than General Ch'en himself. General Ch'en, while responsible to the Chengtu government for maintaining peace and good order in the Maochow District, was obliged at the same time to take instructions from the Brotherhood, that is from his subordinate Captain Teng and Ex-Magistrate Li, "and in the event of a conflict of orders, those of the Brotherhood must take precedence over the Government". Ma Ting Ying, one of the murderers, after capture, took poison on crossing the border from Maochow; this in accordance with custom to involve another district, and thus free his own from the stain of the crime. Another, Feng Ching Huai, who is supposed to have stabbed Mr. Watt, cannot be traced. It is understood that he is high up in the Society, and was safely hidden away in the mountain fastnesses of the Tibetan Border land.

The Boxers who figured so prominently in the Rebellion of 1900 when 240 foreigners were killed, belong to a group of hypnotic secret sects. Among them are the White Lotus Society, The Arabic, The Eight Diagram Society, The Red Lantern Society, The United Fists Society (Boxers), the Big Sword Society, The Lamp Wick Society and many others. The chief results of their incantations and performances are that they attempt to make themselves and their enemies believe that they are invulnerable to bullets. The Red Lantern Society carry red lanterns at night and believe that they have only to throw the lighted lanterns in the air and they will alight on any house, near or far, that they wish to destroy. On joining the Boxers, a candidate bows to the south-east and says a prayer daily. When he has done this one hundred times he becomes possessed of the power to hypnotize himself at the right moment any time he desires. He makes a bow to the south-east, says a prayer, next begins to shiver, then he can take up a sword and play with it. It is usual for them to hypnotize themselves before commencing to fight. When a candidate joins the Boxers he puts pieces of red cloth round his head, stomach and legs, and dons two shoulder straps on which are characters reading, "Protect China and Kill the

Foreigners". They also have a system of Shamanism, including all manner of sorceries and wizard's arts. Shamanism had its origin in Northern Asia—Siberia among the Tungus. This system has wide ramifications in Central Asia where neither race nor religion seems to debar anyone from joining the secret conclaves. On the Tibetan Border, both Chinese and aborigines make sworn covenants for mutual protection and assistance in business matters. No Chinese could safely engage in trade with Tibetans unless he was a member of this Society. Without it he would probably be murdered on his first journey.

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