“Uprisings of the Boxers or Red Lantern Society”

*Journal of the West China Border Research Society,*
Vol. VIII (1936), pp. 142-144
(III) Uprisings of the Boxers or Red Lantern Society

In Szechwan there have been several lesser Boxer uprisings since the great Boxer movement of 1900. The largest of this kind occurred near Kueifu (康 府), in the region of the Yangtse Gorges, in 1923. The people were mostly farmers and laborers. They were exasperated by the oppression of the soldiers, who fought battles, commandeered men, occupied homes, temples, and school buildings, collected exorbitant taxes, and looted as they pleased, in total disregard of the rights and welfare of the people. The Boxers, who numbered about five thousand men, used incantations and ceremonies which they thought would make them impervious to bullets, bayonets, or swords. They attacked the soldiers, and, since they were very poorly armed, were easily defeated. It is estimated that between five hundred and one thousand Boxers were killed.

A second Boxer uprising occurred near the Yangtse river, west of Suifu, about the year 1928. Military oppression was again the cause. In addition to the grievances mentioned above, the people were compelled to plant opium, and a heavy "lazy man's tax" was collected from those who did not plant the drug. The movement was mostly among the farmers, but communists helped to fan the flame. The people believed that the use of certain incantations and ceremonies would make their bodies invulnerable. Armed with clubs, hoes, knives, and a few rifles, they attacked the soldiers at Anpien (安邊) shouting "Rifles can not penetrate, swords can not pierce (槍打不進, 刀殺不進)." They were shot down, and the rebellion soon subsided.

A third manifestation of boxerism occurred at Chuehki (褒溪) in April, 1935. In that locality was a large band of robbers that had repeatedly defeated the government troops. There were Boxers among the robbers, and also among the soldiers. It was thought that at a certain time of day, as a result of certain ceremonies and the repeating of incantations, the Boxers became invulnerable.

Near Hanchow there was also a small Boxer outbreak in the spring of 1935. The motive was opposition to the government because of exorbitant taxes. The Boxers were armed with large knives, such as are used to cut up straw or grass for fodder, and with wooden swords. In preparation for battle they burnt paper on which charms were written, and poured the ashes into water, which they drank. They also repeated incantations. They carried yellow flags on which charms were written. They had as their chu sst (主師), or leader, a wooden pek measure, covered with cloth, which they carried with them. They thought that at a certain time of day, as a result of the charms, incantations, and ceremonies, they could not be injured. Even their enemies shared this belief.

Several hundred soldiers attacked the Boxers, of whom there were said to be less than
fifty. The soldiers were very careful to attack them before the hour when they were expected to be invulnerable. All the Boxers were killed.

In April, 1936, there was a Boxer rebellion in the region of P'ing Shan and Fu Yen Ch'i, west of Suifu on the Yangtse River. There were about two hundred and forty or fifty Boxer soldiers, of whom between forty and fifty were killed by the militia and the government troops. The Boxers worshipped idols, repeated incantations, and drank holy water over which incantations had been repeated, expecting that these things would make them invulnerable to wounds of bayonets, swords, and bullets. Afterwards the militia and government soldiers destroyed many of the idols in that region, saying that the worship of idols is superstition and likely to result in Boxer uprisings.

Beliefs that make Boxer uprisings possible are still commonly held in Szechwan. It should be noted that there has been nothing anti-foreign in these disturbances, and that they have occurred only in backward country districts among the least intelligent of the population, for education and enlightenment are making it more and more impossible for such things to happen in the large cities.