

Lesson 6

Question for the Lesson/What you need to know in this lesson:

What is a rebellion? How is it different from a revolution?

What was Boxer Rebellion about? What were the causes/reasons for Boxer Rebellion?

What was the outcome/results of Boxer Rebellion?

What were the repercussion of Boxer Rebellion and its outcome/results?

In what ways and to what extent is Boxer Rebellion a turning point in Chinese History?

IB Questions

Reasons for and Consequences of Boxer Rebellion

1. To what extent was the Boxer Rebellion (1900-1901) **a reaction against the spread of Christianity in China?** (N14)

Reasons for and Consequences of Boxer Rebellion

2. **Analyse the reasons for, and the consequences of,** the Boxer Rebellion (1900–1901) in China. (M12)

Consequences of Boxer Rebellion

3. **Analyse the consequences for the region** of the Boxer Uprising and the Boxer Protocol of 1900. (N04, Q10)

Consequences of Boxer Rebellion on International Relations

4. **In what ways, and to what extent,** did the Boxer Uprising (1900) and the Boxer Protocol (1901) **affect China's position and international relations in East Asia?** (N07, Q10)
5. To what extent did the **response of the foreign powers to the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 demonstrate full international cooperation** in regard to China? (N09 Q10)

Boxer Rebellion as a Turning Point

6. **"A turning point in China's history."** To what extent do you agree with this judgment of the Boxer Rebellion? (M07, Q10) (N12)
-

1. What is a rebellion?

2. Overview of Boxer Rebellion, 1900

The coup at Court in 1898 reversed the entire power structure, restoring reactionary Manchus to office at the expense of both radical and moderate Chinese. Jung-lu (Dowager's

Cixi henchmen) and two other reactionary Manchus entered the Grand Council while the die-hard conservative Kang-i gained increasing favour with the Empress Dowager.

Blind to the international realities of international politics, these men rejected diplomacy and mutual accommodation, advocating instead a policy of hard resistance. **Under their influence, the dowager determined to make no more concessions to foreign powers.** In February 1899, the government managed to reject Italy's demands, which made it convinced that there should be no further concession to the West and the provincial authorities were instructed of this new policy.

Hence, **in the court there permeated a strong resentment against the Western countries/foreigners**, especially after their involvement in protecting and helping the Hundred Day radical reformers Kang Yüewi and Liang Chi-chao to flee the country and also for pressurizing the court in ensuring that Emperor Kuang-hsu was save.

On the other hand, strong anti-foreign sentiments were also permeating the scholars, the officials, the gentry, and the people at large. Half a century of foreign humiliation, in war as well as in peace had deeply **wounded their national pride and self-respect.** This gnawing **sense of injustice generated a burning desire for revenge until it burnt out in a vast anti-foreign movement.** There were also **other larger social, economic, political and religious factors** which contributed to such an anti-foreign movement (i.e. Boxer Movement/Rebellion).

Overall, the Boxer Movement and Rebellion had the support of the Qing court with serious implications.

3. Background to the Boxers

(i) Who are the Boxers?

One View (Hsu)

Boxers was the name given by foreigners to a Chinese secret society called the I-ho ch'uan or the Righteous and Harmonious Fists as members of this organization practiced old style calisthenics (synchronized physical training/boxing). This organization was associated with White Lotus Sect, an anti-Qing secret society, which formented the rebellion of 1796 -1804. The first official mention of I-ho Ch'uan appeared in 1808, described as sword-carrying rascals in Shantung, Honan and Kiangnan provinces. They set up gambling tents in markets and fairs to take advantage of the local people. Despite official prohibition, it spread to Chihli by 1818. In 1890s, this anti-dynastic secret body took on an anti-foreign cast, vowing to kill foreigners. The conservative governor of Shantung, Li Peng-heng, encouraged their activities and his successor Yu-hsien, **equally reactionary**, changed their name in 1899 to the Righteous and Harmonious Militia. Hence, originally, anti-Qing the Boxers in the 1890s became pro-dynastic and anti-foreign. Their slogan changed to 'support the Qing, destroy the foreigners.'

(Jack Gray argues that the change in the slogan of the Boxers seems to coincide with the extension of support to the insurgents by conservative officials/the court.)

Another View

Historians like Esherick argued that Shantung was where the Boxers rose up from. He argued that the Boxers had nothing to do with secret societies and were recruited by the Qing as a militia. It is being argued that desperate farmers and workers affected by economic conditions and natural disasters were recruited into the militia. This view is backed by contemporary western missionaries who declared that the Boxers had no secret society link. Declared that there was never an anti-Qing phase.

Building Consensus

However, what is key is that **whatever the origin of the Boxers, they had the patronage of the Court during the Boxer Movement and Rebellion, between 1899 and 1900.**

(ii) Influences on the Boxers

The Boxers called foreigners “Primary Hairy Men”, those engaged in foreign matter as “Secondary Hairy Men” and those who used foreign article “Tertiary Hairy Men” and “All Hairy Men” were subject to extermination. The boxers were influenced by both legendary and historical figures such as Jade Emperor (Taoist deity) and Chu-ko Liang (the wise strategist).

Elemental in the Boxers’ program and of primary appeal to the superstitious populace, was the practice of magic arts, by which they claimed immunity to bullets after a 100 days of training and power to fly after 400 days of work. Typical peasant rebellions were often stimulated by beliefs in magic and superstition, which had a very ancient history. Hence, Boxers combined two peasant traditions: boxing and spirit possession. Being anti-foreign and due their belief in their invulnerability, the Boxers shunned the use of guns and instead relied on old-style swords and lances.

4. Causes/Reasons for the Boxer Rebellion?

(i) Antipathy toward Christianity

Imbued with the teachings of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, the Chinese resented the invasion of Christianity under the protection of gunboats. The Treaty of Tientsin in 1858 had allowed its free propagation in the interior and the Conventions of Peking in 1860 granted missionaries the right to rent land and buy land for the construction of churches. **Protected by the flag and the treaties, the missionaries moved about freely in China, although they had great difficulty winning converts. The missionaries resorted to the practice of offering Chinese converts monetary subsidies and provided them protection against officials or when in trouble with the law.** In Shantung, in 1887 there were nearly 17000 converts which rose to 47000 in the late 1890s but the converts tended to be those from the lower classes and those trying to escape government persecution. **This incurred the wrath of the local Chinese as well as the gentry.**

The gentry (upper/ruling class) regarded Christianity as a socially disruptive, delusive heterodox sect. The failure of the converts to kowtow to the idols, to worship Confucius and ancestors, and to participate in local festivals honouring the spirits greatly irritated the gentry.

As self-appointed guardians of Confucian propriety, the gentry resented the inroads made by any foreign religion and philosophy and often they were the secret instigators of religious incidents. Religious incidents include the Tianjin Massacre in 1870 where a French cathedral was sacked and Catholics killed after accusations of Chinese children being ritually sacrificed by the Catholics. Since 1896, the Big Sword Society began attacking native Christians. Backed by anti-foreign gentry and officials, it killed 2 German missionaries in Nov 1897. ***Christianity, as a heterodox faith in China, became a basic cause and focus of anti-foreignism.**

(ii) Impact of Western Imperialism

The influx of foreign imports after the Opium War created a depressant effect on the native economy and the fixed 5 percent ad valorem customs duty ruined China's protective tariff.

Foreign cotton sold for only one-third of the price of the Chinese cloth, driving native weavers and textile manufacturers into bankruptcy. **Handicrafts household industries fared especially badly in the face of foreign competition, casting many workers into bankruptcy. Handicraft household industries fared especially badly in the face of foreign competition, casting many workers into unemployment. The hardships of life accelerated during the Taiping period, with widespread famine and starvation, destitute people became bandits, vagrants or trouble-makers. While many of those in extremity at first blamed their misfortune on the Taipings, they ultimately transferred their hatred to foreigners for having inspired the rebels with the alien Christian ideology.**

In the post-Taiping era, further expansion of foreign trade resulted in an ever-increasing foreign domination of the Chinese markets, and during the Self-strengthening period (1861-95), large number of foreign-style enterprises and industries as well as considerable foreign capital, were introduced. The foreign device of the railway worked havoc on the traditional communications systems. Thousands of bargemen, carters, innkeepers, and businessmen were thrown out of work as they lost out in competition with railways. **In 1899 China suffered a trade deficit of 69 million taels and a government budgetary imbalance of some 12 million taels** (101 million expenditure versus 89 million revenue). **To meet the deficit, the court increased taxes and solicited provincial contributions, the burden of which ultimately fell on the people. By the end of the 19th century, the country was beset by bankruptcy of village industries decline of domestic commerce, rising unemployment, and a general hardships of livelihood.**

***When life became unbearable for those who were already hard-pressed, they sought alleviation in banditry and secret societies. Many attributed the sorry state of affairs to evil foreign influence and its domination of Chinese economy and hostility developed towards foreigners and things foreign.**

(iii) Impact of Natural Disasters

Added to the economic hardship, a series of natural disasters intensified further the difficulty of life. The Yellow River broke loose again in 1898 and flooded villages. It inundated hundreds of villages in Shantung, affecting more than a million people. Similar floods occurred in Szechwan, Kiangsi, Kiangsu and Anhwei. A severe drought also followed in 1900 in most of North China, including Peking.

Victims of natural calamities as well as superstitious scholars and officials blamed the misfortune on the foreigners who they insisted, had offended the spirits by propagating heterodox religion and prohibiting the worship of Confucius, idols and ancestors. Foreigners were accused of damaging the “dragon’s veins” in the land when they constructed railways and of letting out the precious breadth of mountains when they opened mines. **The gentry held the foreigners responsible for interfering the natural functioning of the “wind and water”, thus adversely affecting the harmony between men and nature. Such an evil influence, they argued, must be eliminated if China was to have a peaceful good life.**

As a poor and weak country, China could not possibly expel the foreigners by military means; but **some naively clung to the notion that China could invoke the supernatural powers to neutralize the effect of guns, hence the support of conservative gentry and officials for the Boxers.**

(iv) Court Patronage of the Boxers

In the 1890s the Boxers were particularly active under the name of the Big Sword Society in Shantung where they received secret encouragement from the reactionary governor, Li Ping-heng. He cleverly shielded the incidents they created, including the murder of 2 German missionaries in 1897. He recommended a policy of pacification rather than suppression. But the murder of the missionaries caused the Germans to pressure the court to dismiss Li Ping-heng and was **replaced by Yu-hsien in 1899.**

As anti-foreign as the previous governor, he continued to patronize the Boxers and the Big Sword Society. **Under his aegis, the Boxers raised the banner of support for the Qing and the extermination of the foreigners.** The governor subsidized them with silver and invited them to set up training centre to teach his soldiers boxing. More than 800 such centres sprang up into being, concentrating in the area west of the Grand Council where people suffered most from the floods. Yu-hsien also dignified the Boxers with a new name, Righteous and Harmonious Militia. **Emboldened by official support, the Boxers stepped up their attacks on the missionaries.**

Although removed from his position under foreign pressure, Yu-hsien came to Peking praising the Boxer and condemning any act of suppression of the Boxers. **The reactionary Prince Tuan, Prince Chuang and Grand Secretary Kang-i at court recommended the use of Boxers to the Empress Dowager, who in her frustration with the foreigners readily embraced the idea.** Dowager secretly asked Kang-i to summon the Boxers to Peking and when their invulnerability to firearms was confirmed in a palace demonstration, Dowager ordered court attendants to learn boxing. The princes and nobles now invited the Boxers to their residences as guards and set up tables to burn incense to the Boxer gods. **Half of the regular government troops joined the Boxers, and the distinction between the two was lost. By May 1900, the court patronage of Boxers was strongly established.**

It was in this atmosphere of superstition, economic depression, and extreme privation, public anger over foreign imperialism and resentment of the missionaries, court patronage of the Boxers that a major anti-foreign riot broke out in 1900.

Jack Gray, however, argues that ultimately it was the domination of the court by purblind reactionaries rather than the protest riots of the poor of northern China that was the key to the Boxer Rebellion.

5. What happened during the Boxer Rebellion?

Outbreak of attacks on foreigners and things foreigners began since the late 1880s. Very vicious attacks occurred in Shanxi, Hebei, Henan; Churches were burned down and Chinese converts were killed; the worst attack was in Shanxi where 45 missionaries and their families were massacred in June 1900

On 28 May 1900, the rising tide of anti-foreignism alerted the foreign diplomats in Peking to the precautionary measure of calling in the legation guards from the ships off Tientsin harbour. The first detachment that arrived in Peking on 1 June and 3 June consisted of 75 Russians, 50 Americans, 40 Italians and 25 Japanese.

On 3 June 1900 the Boxers cut the railway between Peking and Tientsin and the situation rapidly got out of control. The British minister sent for urgent help from Admiral Seymour at Tientsin. An international force of 2100 left Tientsin by train on 10 June and encountered the Boxers at Langfang, halfway between Peking and Tientsin. On 10 June the Boxers burned the British summer legation in the West Hills and a day later the chancellor of the Japanese legation, Sugiyama, was killed by the reactionary Muslim troops. **The uncontrolled ravaging and slaving was thus unleashed in northern China.**

On 13 June large bodies of rampaging Boxers swarmed into Peking, burnt churches and foreign residences and attacked and killed Chinese converts. On 14 June the Boxers made several attacks on the legation guards and on 20 June killed the German minister, Clemens von Ketteler. At Tientsin, the Boxers were equally uncontrollable. Facing such fanatic disorder, foreign officers on the ships outside the harbour decided to take the Taku Forts, which they overpowered and occupied on 17 June.

On 21 June the court declared war on the foreign powers. The court ordered provincial authorities to organize the Boxers to fight the foreign invasion. The Boxers together with the government troops launched attacks on the legations and the Northern Roman Catholic Cathedral. They saw in the destruction of the legation, carried out with the full knowledge and support of the Dowager, a way to vent their wrath on the barbarians, to rid the capital of the foreign menace and to stimulate general patriotism among the people.

However, this attack on the foreigners did not have the support of Chinese provincial leaders in central and southern China. In the past, such sects like the Boxers were considered illegal and were usually repressed when they become openly active (Jack Gray). Hence, when the court issued the declaration of war on 21 June, the southeast provincial authorities like Li Hung-chang at Canton, Yuan Shih-kai in Shantung, Chang Chi-tung at Wuhan and Liu K'un-i at Nanking (unlike other anti-foreign and anti-Christian gentry such as in the north) collectively refused to recognize its validity, insisting that it was an illegitimate order without authorization of the throne. They made deals with the Westerners to protect foreign lives and property and suppress the Boxers within their jurisdictions, while foreign power would refrain from sending troops into their regions. **Hence, the whole of southeast China was exempt from Boxer disturbance and foreign invasion. The 13**

southeastern provincial authorities collectively urged the court to suppress the Boxers and negotiate with the West.

Allied reinforcements arrived at Taku in late July and on 4 August set out from Tientsin for Peking. This international force consisted of 18000 men. **The powerful Allied forces stormed across the Tientsin-Peking route, dispersing before it the erratic Boxers and governmental troops. Quickly the Western powers defeated the Chinese and the Allied forces charged into Peking on 14 August and relieved the legations. On the morrow of the Allied advance into Peking, the Dowager, the emperor and a small entourage fled to Xian in disguise.**

The Boxer Rebellion finally came to an end, leaving in its wake 231 foreigners dead and many more Chinese Christians slain.

6. Repercussion/Consequences of the Boxer Rebellion

A. The Boxer Protocol

In the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion, Li Hung-chang was given the assignment to negotiate with the West.

Terms of the Boxer Protocol

1. Punishment of the Guilty

- Had to exterminate the Boxers
- Prince Tuan to be banished to Sinkiang for life imprisonment, Prince Chuang was ordered to commit suicide and Yu-hsien was to be executed
- In the provinces, a total of 119 officials received penalties ranging from capital punishment to mere reprimand
- **Suspension of official examinations for 5 years in some 45 cities where the Boxers had been active as a form of punishment for the Confucian scholars**

Implications

Article 10 which suspended the civil service examination in many parts of the country and the other punishments demanded for court and government officials/gentry, **was a blatant interference with the internal administration of China – a turning point as unlike the past where the demands of the foreign powers dealt more with their commercial/trading rights and was limited to treaty ports areas but now their demands interfered with China's internal administration**

2. Indemnity

- The Allies fixed the indemnity at 67.5 million in pounds or 450 million taels, with 4% annual interest – the Qing annual income was around 250 million taels
- To be paid in 39 years, by then it would cost a total of 1 billion taels

Implications

Link it back to China's economic situation prior to the outbreak of Boxer Rebellion.

In addition, the indemnity that amounted to a grand total of about 1 billion over 39 years, was **more than twice the original amount**. And as the payment as to be made in foreign currency instead of Chinese taels, the caused **additional loss of several million taels in the exchange**, especially during the years the value of silver suffered a sharp decline. For instance, in 1903 China had to pay 53.5 million taels instead of 42.5 million as originally agreed upon. **Hence, the Qing seek for foreign loans which severely affected China's economic growth and caused much economic distress.**

Not a turning point – just worsened the existing situation

3. Security for the foreigners in China

- Establishment of a permanent legation guard
- Destruction of the Taku forts from Peking to the sea to ensure that foreign troops could get to Peking quickly
- Stationing of foreign troops in key points from Peking to the sea to protect their nationals (but were quickly withdrawn except for the Japanese whose forces remained even up to 1937)
- Tianjin was occupied for 2 years
- Prohibition of the importation of arms for 2 years

Implications

The Boxer Protocol infringed upon Chinese sovereignty severely

- Article 5, for instance, which stipulated the prohibition of the importation of arms and Article 8 which stipulated the destruction of the Taku and other forts for foreigners easier access to Beijing, Article 7 which provided for stationing of foreign troops in the legation quarter and Article 9 which gave foreign powers the right to deploy troops from Peking to the sea – **all these compromised China's power of self-defense and restricted the free exercise of its sovereign rights – a turning point as the foreign powers and the exercise of their rights to protection of their asset, property and citizen was no longer limited just to the treaty port areas**

B. Partition of China?

1. Russian Occupation of Manchuria

Under the pretext of restoring order and suppressing the rioters/Boxers in Manchuria, the Russians had sent 2000 000 troops in July 1900, with the ambitious design of controlling it. The Russians gained controlled over all Manchuria through the course of 3 months of military operations. The agreement that was eventually signed by the Russian, it promised to evacuate Manchuria in 3 stages at 6month interval.

The first stage of evacuation was carried out on schedule, but when the second stage came due in April 1903, the Russians did not leave. In addition, they demanded new monopolistic rights and reoccupied some of the evacuated cities, such as Mukden and Newchang – **partition of China; issue of sovereignty of China**. This Russian incursion into Manchuria foreshadowed the war with Japan

However, the Allied occupation of Peking and the Russian advance into Manchuria threatened the partition of China and sharpened international jealousy and rivalry. There developed a growing fear among the powers of conflict between themselves and a deep concern over the future of equal commercial opportunity in China. This resulted in a general international desire to reduce tension and maintain the status quo in China

The United States declared **the second Open Door Policy in 1900** with a view of preserving “Chinese territorial and administrative entity” and to safe-guarding “for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese empire.” In addition, the **Anglo-German agreement in 1900** stipulated that the signatories would refrain from seizing territory in China and other powers were invited to adhere. The **subsequent stalemate in imperialistic activities prevented an immediate breakup of China. – a turning point as it stalled the further partition of China**

C. Late Qing Reforms VS Revolution

In a struggle for survival, the Manchu court instituted some constitutional government (get more details from Lesson 7) – **(a turning point as it becomes convinced of the need to introduce the reforms proposed during Hundred Day Reform, which was then seen as radical)**

On the other hand, many Chinese witnessing the hopelessness of the Manchu leadership turned to revolutions as the only hope for their country (get more details from later lessons) Dr Sun Yat-sen’s advocacy of a forceful overthrow of the Qing dynasty, regarded by respectable Chinese as an unlawful movement to eschew, now received increasing sympathy and support The image of Dr Sun Yat-sen reversed from that of a disloyal rebel to that of a high-minded, patriotic revolutionary.

As a result, the pulse of revolution quickened, precipitating the ultimate down fall – another direction towards which China was moving. Hence, Boxer Rebellion is a turning point as it brought about the appeal for revolution – a complete overthrow of the Manchu regime

D. Nationalism

The Boxer Rebellion was propelled by the combined forces of the reactionary Manchu court, the die-hard conservative officials and the ignorant and superstitious people. It was a foolish and unreasoned outburst of emotion and anger against foreign imperialism, yet **one cannot overlook the patriotic element inherent in it – turning point** (refer back to the forces that motivated/gave impetus to the Boxer Movement and the Rebellion - aim of the Boxers, causes of Boxer Rebellion and their actions) **Marxist Historians today consider the Boxer**

Rebellion a primitive form of a patriotic peasant uprising, with the right motive but the wrong methods.

Peter Zarrow :

The Boxers could be read forward or backward. Backward, they displayed ignorance and superstition. But they convinced the modern looking Chinese for the need for a complete national regeneration (a new direction – therefore, a turning point)

Forward, the Boxers patriotically stood for Chinese resistance against the forces of imperialism- (a new direction from the SSM and Hundred Day Reform as they attempt to compromise with the foreign powers – therefore, a turning point – Birth of Chinese Nationalism)

E. Growth of the Centrifugal Forces

The court's patronage of the Boxers to attack the foreigners did not have the support of Chinese provincial leaders in central and southern China. When the court issued the declaration of war on 21 June, the southeast provincial authorities Li Hung-chang at Canton, Yuan Shih-kai in Shantung, Chang Chi-tung at Wuhan and Liu K'un-i at Nanking collectively refused to recognize its validity, insisting that it was an illegitimate order without authorization of the throne. They made deals with the Westerners to protect foreign lives and property and suppress the Boxers within their jurisdictions, while foreign power would refrain from sending troops into their regions. **Hence, the whole of southeast China was exempt from Boxer disturbance and foreign invasion. The 13 southeastern provincial authorities collectively urged the court to suppress the Boxers and negotiate with the West.**

Implications: Marked the growth of the independence of the provincial leaders vis-à-vis the central government – a turning point. The provincial leaders clearly ignored edicts of the central leaders calling for the provincial leaders support for the Boxers – would later herald the warlord period (refer to later lessons)