



Skill, Organization and Politics: The Evolution of Chinese ‘Boxing’ in the Boxers Movement

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Abstract. ‘Boxing’ as a synonym for Chinese martial arts plays a special role in the Boxers Movement. From the perspective of micro-history, combined with the situation of Sino-foreign relations in the late Qing Dynasty, to explore the evolution of ‘Boxing’ in the Boxers Movement. The results of research are : In dealing with the relationship between the ordinary people, foreigners, and the Qing government, the term ‘Boxing’ has evolved from an initial technical system to an organizational and political appeal, that was eventually negated by ‘boxing gangster’; In the witchcraft ritual, the mobilization and numbness of the people by ‘Boxing’ is completed, and the strength of the boxing force is united; in the context of ‘weak country and weak people’, the Boxers Movement evolves into one tools of ‘showing strength’ or ‘showing weakness’, and showing the invincible light of the Chinese nation.

Keywords: Chinese martial arts; Chinese Boxing; Boxer; Evolution

1 Introduction

Quanshu, as a synonym of Chinese martial arts in the historical period, evolved on the basis of ‘hand fighting’ in the Han Dynasty and came into being gradually in the Song Dynasty.[1]In The West, ‘The Boxer Uprising’ or ‘Boxer Rebellion’ is often called the boxer movement. [2]How did this kind of Quanshu, which ‘seems to have no plan for war’[3], evolve and requisition in the Boxer Movement (also known as the Boxer Movement), lead to the connection between it and the Eight Nations War of Aggression against China?Although the Boxer Movement has a history of nearly 120 years, it is still a controversial topic. The differences between ‘holy’ and ‘demonization’ have not been resolved.[4]In the process of remolding this historical event by historians and witnesses, the Quanshu issues in the Boxer Movement have rarely been systematically interpreted.In his early years, Professor Kang Gewu raised the question of ‘whether Yihequan is a traditionalQuanshu’[5], although Lu Yao once pointed out that ‘Yi-hequan is not a kind of martial arts, but a martial arts group formed under a certain political intention’[6], this group maintains the national dignity by means of violent resistance.However, some scholars believe that the Boxer Movement is a kind of martial arts with ‘religious color’[7]and that people are ‘confused by the strange skills

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of boxers'[8]. So how was quanshu defined and creatively used among the people, the Qing court and foreign powers? How did the transformation of the meaning of 'quanshu' take place in the whole movement? It has not been systematically explained so far.

The conversion of 'boxing skills' in Boxer Boxing. 'Boxing' is in the process of continuous evolution in the Boxer movement, which is accompanied by the mystique and madness of Boxer. The transition from the initial Meihua boxing technical system to the social group force of the people at the bottom against the western religion, from a civil organization's struggle against the legitimacy of the government to the end of being punished as a 'bandit', all show the continuous transformation of the meaning of the boxer boxing between the people, foreigners and the Qing court.

Yanwu Liangquan: A representation of the ritualization of boxing. In the early days of the Boxer Movement, 'martial arts and brilliant boxing' were used to promote themselves and gather people together. However, with the expansion of the organization and the change of movement goals, Boxer gradually combined with witchcraft.[9] Through sorcery and ritualized forms of performance, the Boxer evolved into an organization that relied on mystery to raise its appeal to the masses, while numbing them with magic. The process of using ritual is actually a process of 'obtaining the legitimacy of boxing organization', [10] with the purpose of producing psychological suggestion of identification for boxers and ordinary people. In the end, the people solidified and the organizational strength strengthened in the process of the ritual of Wuwu.

Political boxing: The weapon of the weak and the strong. The Boxer is called a 'volunteer militia', [11] and is widely understood by the government and the people. The Boxer was an act of the lower class of Chinese society to express their dissatisfaction with Western religion, and formed a demand for protest against the inaction of local government. However, under the background of 'weak state and weak people', the Boxer had to present itself as a tool of 'showing strength' or 'showing weakness' in front of the people, the Qing Court and even the foreigners in order to survive, and the people who used this tool were not only the Boxer people, but also the Qing Court and even the foreigners. No matter how to evaluate the Boxer movement, we cannot deny the strength of Chinese civilization implied in it.

2 Method

2.1 Interpretation method

Through the discussion and analysis of the phenomenon of quanshu in the Yihetuan movement, this paper sorts out the evolution of quanshu, and tries to explain the evolution of quanshu from three levels: technology, organization and politics.

2.2 Literature Review Method

Based on the research results of the Boxer Movement at home and abroad, combined with the research results of martial arts in traditional Chinese sports, this paper combs the evolution of boxing in the Boxer Movement from a comparative perspective.

3 Discussion and Conclusion

3.1 A type of martial arts

Paul A. Cohen pointed out that the boxer is a school of Chinese 'boxing', but it is different from the real boxing in China, the 'boxer' mentioned here is considered to be from the evolution of the traditional Chinese boxing - plum Blossom boxing, that is, in 1897, plum Blossom boxing head Zhao Sanduo was invited to lead the crowd to the 'Liangquan' demonstration in Lihua Town, involved in the organization of the church struggle. This event marked the beginning of the Boxer Movement.

Plum Blossom Boxing can be traced back to the Kangxi period in Henan province, a martial arts man named Yang Bing founded, its technical system includes five types of plum blossom pile, five momentum, plum blossom old frame, eight eight steps, etc., its pageants and martial fields, to the Guangxu period evolved into a large-scale 'bright boxing' performance in the spring temple fair. Historically, plum Blossom Boxing has always been 'safe', there has been no heresy intervention, and has not aroused the suspicion of the government. Even in the period when Zhao Sanduo changed 'plum Blossom Boxing' into 'Boxer Boxing' in Guanxian County, Boxer Boxing was only a boxing organization, and there was no religious ceremony of demagogic seance and possession and mantra and charm. When the 'bright boxing' activity was constantly accused and investigated by the church, the plum Boxing masters worried that Zhao Sanduo and his party would 'revolt' or cause trouble, and began to oppose Zhao Sanduo and others acting in the name of 'plum Boxing'. In addition, the Qing Court also appeared to ban plum blossom boxing and disband plum Blossom boxing. Zhao Sanduo had to give up the name 'Plum Blossom Boxing', but why did he change it to 'Yihequan' and not something else? The name 'Yihequan' appeared as early as in the Qingshuijiao uprising led by Wang Lun during the Qianlong period. The 'Yihequan' practiced at that time was a general term covering all kinds of boxing, including plum Blossom Boxing.

In addition to plum Blossom Boxing, the early 'Boxer Boxing' also included other boxing organizations, such as Red Boxing. Red boxing is a kind of boxing organization that appeared in Jining area at that time, which belongs to the authentic martial arts school, and does not involve religious rituals such as invulnerability, reciting spells and swallowing charms. Red boxing is a kind of boxing that originated in Guanzhong, which has been recorded in Ming Dynasty literature.

3.2 From boxing to magic

The invulnerability and seance possession ceremony in the Boxer boxing gradually separated from the meaning of boxing and entered the level of magic, although its technical components were retained, but the spiritual connotation was already beyond recognition, and such changes promoted the folk acrobatics such as boxing to upgrade in the direction of magic. If boxing has the possibility of defeating foreigners from the behavior, then witchcraft is to change the people's fear of foreigners from the cognitive level. As a result, boxing moves from skill to sorcery, with vanity as the ladder, and the transition from ordinary boxing performance to belief system gradually changes the practitioners' ideology and religious belief, promotes the development of boxing to the path of alienation of God, and boxers spontaneously transition from being obsessed with boxing to being obsessed with magic. The myth of the invulnerability of the Boxer persisted despite the fact that many battles showed that the Boxer had no superhuman power. People believe that the boxing can violently defeat the western religion, and enter the value pursuit of believing in the omnipotence of Boxer boxing with the boxing as the entry point.

Behind the transformation of boxing to magic is the imagination of the people to change their identity. Through participating in the ritual activities with the nature of witchcraft, they can get close to the identity of 'divine power', which is also the key means of attracting the people. Taking advantage of the superstition of the people, the leaders of the Boxer propagated the mysterious color of boxing, and used the hard Qigong performance in boxing to publicize the magical effect that 'God will help' can be obtained by 'God will help', and encouraged people to fight with foreigners holding foreign guns and artillery through practicing boxing. Boxing deterrence can be divided into two kinds, one is the boxing technology as the center, to defeat the opponent; The second is to show the function of sorcery by the movement of boxing, to use the connotation of sorcery of boxing, through the ceremony to show the intimidation of foreign teachers. Any witchcraft activity will bring a moderate sense of fear and oppression to participants and onlookers, so people will not easily challenge the taboo rules in witchcraft, and fear those surreal beings, especially fear of public condemnation, which is also the reflection of collective consciousness in witchcraft activities.

3.3 From boxer to boxing bandits

After the eight-nation allied forces invaded China, the Boxer Movement was once called 'Boxer Rebellion', and the boxers were called 'boxing bandits'. Although the word 'fist' is still there, the meaning of 'righteousness' has been completely deprived, and the concept of 'bandits' has been constantly highlighted and strengthened, and even the books and articles written by intellectuals at that time have the word 'bandits'. Harold S. Quigley wrote *China and the Occident, the Origin and Development of the Boxer Movement*. The rebellion of the Boxer Rebellion was the product of angry people. Is an unforgivable outrage [12]. In ancient China, banditry has always been a major social problem. In modern times, banditry has become more and more prevalent, and the existence of banditry often reveals social unrest. People can't help but derive the

meaning of 'boxing bandits' when they associate the Yihequan with bandits and gambling bandits. Due to the backwardness of political ideas, in the new situation, the Qing Court adopted the policy of 'people' and 'bandits' in dealing with the Yihe Fist, and the standard of 'people' or 'bandits' was completely decided by the local government.

In addition to words such as unruly people and boxing bandits, Yihequan was also labeled by foreigners with derogatory meanings. As early as the fall of 1899, reports of the Boxer Rebellion began to appear in foreign newspapers, and American newspapers subsequently dubbed it the 'Yellow Terror.' [13] After the Opium War, the Western image of China as a 'sleeping lion' was unexpectedly shattered by the Boxer Movement - the Chinese Empire, constantly under attack and almost paralyzed, suddenly broke out from the lowest level of society, a mysterious and dangerous organization, a brutal and overwhelming revolt. This resistance is understood as the devouring of the faint light of civilization in a way that Westerners cannot or dare not imagine.

When the Boxer resisted the invasion of the eight-nation Allied forces, although the slogan was 'to destroy the ocean', with the defeat of the war, its resistance activities were explicitly denied because of the label of 'chaos' and 'bandits'. The word 'bandit' covered the 'righteousness' before the war, which not only excused the invasion of China by the foreign powers, but also said that it helped the Qing government to pacify the unruly people; For the Qing Court, it proved that the war was triggered by such 'boxing bandits' and was not launched by the Qing Court, so as to avoid the responsibility of the Western Empress who declared war and the Qing Court. Therefore, the evolution of boxing people into 'boxing bandits' is in line with the common interests of the powers and the Qing court.

3.4 Martial arts boxing and the state

Through the discussion, the research believes that : The Yihequan, organized by Quanshu(Martial arts skills), evolved 'Quanshu' into a kind of group organization and political symbol in the whole movement, constantly resisting and compromising among the public, foreigners and the Qing court. Just like the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement in 2011, in the absence of leaders and programs, everyone launched a prolonged 'riot' according to different issues. In the process of anti-foreign, anti-Qing and looting of common people, the Boxer also swept over half of China as an 'unorganized organization', resulting in nearly half a century of 'boxing and terror'. Between a stable social structure and drastic historical changes, as a product of the bottom of society, quanshu constantly changed forms, gathered the public with the help of rituals and witchcraft, and went between 'anti-foreign' and 'anti-Qing' in accordance with the needs of some people. In the debate between a clash of civilization and a clash of ignorance, as a non-military power of China, the Boxer Fists were submissive to the Qing government, and then turned from 'righteous people' to 'rebellious bandits'. According to the perspective of 'historical sympathy', 'quanshu' is only an affiliate of political power and a violent wing. While safeguarding the rights and interests of farmers and rural order, it is also defending the dignity of the Chinese nation with its 'weak and not weak' identity.

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