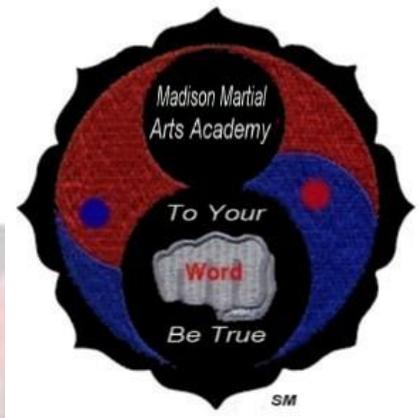


THE WHIRLING OF SWORDS

By: Grandmaster. Michael Neal



Have you ever wondered, “What are the martial arts? The term martial art refers to all of the various systems of training for combat that have been arranged or systematized. Generally, these different systems or styles are all designed for one purpose: Physically defeating opponents and defending against thwarts. In fact, the word “martial” derives from the name Mars, who was the Roman god of war. Before the martial arts were systematized, generals of the Warring States Period (480-221 BC) gained much personal combat experience in the field. As they grew older, they retired to Shaolin Temples to learn new skills from the masters there.

The martial arts began in ancient times in East Asia, but because their beginnings are shrouded in myth and legend, it is impossible to establish their exact history. Kung fu, which may have been based on a fighting style from India, is perhaps the oldest martial art. A form of it was practiced in China more than 2,000 years ago.

In 1898 through 1901, there arose a nationalist movement known as the Boxers, a Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fists. A secret society founded in northern coastal province of Shandong China consisting largely of people who had lost their livelihood due to imperialism and natural disasters. They opposed foreign imperialism and Christianity. They met in secret at night, sang hymns, chanted, recited prayers, practiced martial arts and perhaps used breathing techniques to induce trances. The Boxers came from this secret society known as I-ho chuan, a Li sect of the Ba qua religion group, and were well trained in the martial arts of

Boxing and Calisthenic that they practiced in the belief that this made them invulnerable, and would make them resistant to bullets. The Boxers believed That they had a magical power and those foreign bullets could not harm them. They had a powerful belief in their immunity to death from any type of attack. Their primary feature was spirit possession, which involved the whirling of swords, violent prostrations, and chanting incantations to Taoist and Buddhist spirits.

They claimed that millions of “spirits soldiers,” would Descend from heaven or would soon rise from the dead and assist them in purifying China of foreign influence. The Boxer Rebellion began in north China in the Shantung province. This province was a Germany sphere of influence and Germany dominated the rail lines, factories and coalmines that existed in Shantung. The Germans made considerable profit while the Chinese there were paid very poor wages and lived very poor lifestyles. Gangs of Chinese people roamed the streets chanting “Kill the Christians” and “Drive out the foreign devils.”

Their grievance ranging from Opium traders, political invasion, economic manipulation, to missionary evangelism. Anger rose over unequal Treaties, which the weak Qing state could not resist. They feared that the missionaries and Chinese Christians would take advantage and appropriate lands and property of unwilling Chinese peasants to give to the church. This Fear resulted in violent revolts against foreign interests. One of the targets of the Boxers was the Manchu government. They were seen as being little more as unpatriotic stooges of the European ‘masters’ who did nothing for national pride.

Their cause, at first, was to overthrow the imperial Ch’ing government and expel all “foreign devils“from China. The inspiration behind the Manchu government was the Empress Dowager. She was nicknamed “Old Buddha” but never to her face. The crafty empress, however, saw a way to use the Boxers. Through her ministers, she began to encourage the Boxers. Soon a new slogan-----”Support the Ch’ing, destroy the foreigner!” appeared upon the Boxers’ banner. By late 1899, bands of Boxers were massacring Christian’s missionaries and Chinese Christians. The government of the province of Shandong began to enroll boxer bands as local militia groups. Changing their names to “Righteous and Harmonious Militia” which sounded semiofficial.

As a new century was about to begin, Tsu Hsi, Empress Dowager of the Ch'ing Dynasty, searched for ways to rid her empire of foreign parasites, Who had sunk their teeth into China and was sucking her wealth from her. Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and Russia all claimed exclusive trading rights to certain parts of China. Therefore, while the empress was hoping to close China to foreigners, Americans were also looking for a way in. While the outside powers bickered over who would control China, Tsu Hsi issued an imperial message to all the Chinese provinces:

*“The present situation is becoming daily more difficult.
The various powers cast upon us looks of tiger like voracity,
Hustling each other to be first to seize our innermost territories...
Should the strong enemies become aggressive and press us
To consent to things we can never accept, we have no alternative
But to rely upon the justice of our cause. If our---- hundreds of millions
inhabitants-----would prove their loyalty to their emperor
And love of their country, what is there to fear from any invader?”*

“Let us not think about making peace.”

In May 1900, the Boxers Rebellion was waging war in the capital of Peking (now Beijing). To help their fellow countrymen and to protect their interests in China, an international force of 2, 100 American, British, Russian, French, Italian, and Japanese soldiers were sent to subdue the rebellion.” In June of the same year, Empress Dowager ordered all foreigners to be killed. Several foreign ministers and their families were killed before the international force could protect them. Nervous foreign ministers insisted that the Chinese government stop the Boxers. The Empress told the diplomats that her troops would soon crush the rebellion. Meanwhile, she did nothing as the Boxers entered the capital.

In June 1900 in Beijing, Boxer fighters threatened foreigner and forced them to seek refuge in the Legation Quarters. They crowded into the British Legation for their own safety. There they were defended by an assortment of 400 European soldiers and sailors nicknamed the “Carving Knife Brigade. “ Working together, they threw up hasty defenses, and with a small force of military personnel, they faced the Boxer onslaught.

In response, the Empress Dowager, urged by the conservatives of the Imperial Court, supported the Boxers, the Boxers turned solely to ridding China of foreigners. Foreign civilians and soldiers and Chinese Christians in the Legation Quarters were under siege by the Imperial Army and the Boxers for 55 days.

The Boxers wore red turbans, sashes, and garters over blue cloth. Around 20,000 Boxers advanced in a solid mass upon the Legation Quarters And carried standards of red and white cloth. Their yells were deafening, while the roar of gongs, drums and horns sounded like thunder. They waved Their swords and stamped on the ground with their feet. When they were only twenty yards from the gate, three volleys from the rifles of the soldiers left more than fifty dead upon the ground.

The Boxers fell back but soon returned. Surrounded, the foreigners could neither escape nor send for help. For almost two months, they withstood the fierce attacks and bombardment. Things began to look hopeless. Seventy-six defenders lay dead, and many more were wounded. Ammunition, food, and medical supplies were almost gone. Then, shortly before dawn, loud explosions rocked the city. Weary defenders staggered to the barricades, expecting a final, overpowering Boxer attack. But instead a column of armed men approached them, they began to cheer. Help had arrived at last.

The United States, eager to rescue its ministers and to assert its presence in China, sent a party of 2,500 sailors and marines. After rescuing another besieged delegation in Tientsin, the international force, marched to Beijing, fighting Boxers and imperial soldiers along the way, taking Peking and subdued the rebellion. Once the international force arrived---the European force, now supported by the Manchu's, took revenge on the Boxers. Those caught were given little mercy and they were beheaded in public. The others Boxers faded away and no more was heard of them. It is believed that many of them took refuge in Taiwan after the rebellion was crushed. The Boxer Rebellion weakened the Ch'ing dynasty's power and hastened the Republican Revolution of 1911 that overthrew the boy emperor and made China a republic.

Disguised as a peasant, the Empress dowager escaped the city in a Cart. She was forgiven despite her apparent treachery, returned a year later, but the power of the Ch'ing dynasty was destroyed forever.

Between 1848 and 1900, over 200,000 Chinese immigrated to America from Guang-dong province. Some stayed in San Francisco's Chinatown. In San Francisco's Chinatown, the secret societies took root again. They became the infamous Tong Brothers. With these refugee rebels grew the first western classical martial arts.

During the mid-1800's Chinese martial arts were cloaked in secrecy, as they had been in China. Outsiders knew nothing of them. Not until much later were they available for the non-Chinese. When the martial arts did come within grasping range of a non-Chinese, they were viewed as a mysterious, secretive, magical practice used strictly for fighting, because that was the image projected by the secret societies. That is no longer the way people view the martial art. Martial arts schools have invaded the western world, and the people are taught the benefits received from the martial arts. The secretive of the arts are no longer mysterious. People today know that it not only is used for self-defense, but you receive physical, mental, emotion and spiritual developments from them. Since the mystery has been taken out, the martial arts are practiced by people of all levels of social classes.

