

*from*  
**TWO YEARS IN THE FORBIDDEN CITY**  
1911

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*Princess Der Ling*

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After the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, European countries began to divide China for themselves. In response, an old, secret society, “The Righteous and Harmonious Fists,” reemerged in China. This group, known to foreigners as the “Boxers,” received tremendous public support for its hostility to Western ideas, especially Christianity. Western nations reacted by sending an armed force to China in 1900. This force defeated the Boxers and plundered Peking. In the following selection, a princess at the Chinese royal court relates a conversation she had with Dowager Empress Cixi, who ruled China during this period. The empress regretted her actions during the ill-fated Boxer Rebellion.

**THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Analyzing Motives**

Why did the empress decide not to pass laws against the Boxers?

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Her Majesty said: “. . . Do you know, I have often thought that I am the most clever woman that ever lived and others cannot compare with me. . . . What does the Emperor know? I have been very successful so far, but I never dreamt that the Boxer movement would end with such serious results for China. That is the only mistake I have made in my life. I should have issued an Edict at once to stop the Boxers practising their belief, but both Prince Tuan<sup>1</sup> and Duke Lan<sup>2</sup> told me that they firmly believed the Boxers were sent by Heaven to enable China to get rid of all the undesirable and hated foreigners. Of course they meant mostly missionaries, and you know how I hate them and how very religious I always am, so I thought I would not say anything then but would wait and see what would happen. . . . Yung Lu<sup>3</sup> . . . said that these Boxers were nothing but revolutionaries and agitators. They were trying to get the people to help them to kill the foreigners, but he was very much afraid the result would be against the Government. I told him that probably he was right, and asked him what should be done. He told me that he would talk to Prince Tuan, but the next day Prince Tuan told me that he had had a fight with Yung Lu about the Boxer question, and said that all of Peking had become Boxers, and if we tried to turn them, they would do all they could to kill everyone in Peking, including the Court; that they (the Boxer party) had the day selected to kill all the foreign representatives; that Tung Fou Hsiang, a very conservative General and one of the Boxers, had promised to bring his troops out to help the Boxers to fire on the Legations. When I heard this I was very much worried and anticipated serious trouble, so I sent for Yung Lu at once and kept Prince Tuan with me. Yung Lu came, looking very

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1. **Prince Tuan:** the father of the heir to the Chinese throne

2. **Duke Lan:** a Chinese aristocrat

3. **Yung Lu:** an old advisor to the Empress

much worried, and he was more so after I had told him what the Boxers were going to do. He immediately suggested that I should issue an Edict, saying that these Boxers were a secret society and that no one should believe their teaching, and to instruct the Generals of the nine gates to drive all the Boxers out of the city at once. When Prince Tuan heard this he was very angry and told Yung Lu that if such an Edict was issued, the Boxers would come to the Court and kill everybody. When Prince Tuan told me this, I thought I had better leave everything to him. After he left the Palace, Yung Lu said that Prince Tuan was absolutely crazy and that he was sure these Boxers would be the cause of a great deal of trouble. Yung Lu also said that Prince Tuan must be insane to be helping the Boxers to destroy the Legations; that these Boxers were a very common lot, without education, and they imagined the few foreigners in China were the only ones on the earth and if they were killed it would be the end of them. They forgot how very strong these foreign countries are, and that if the foreigners in China were all killed, thousands would come to avenge their death. Yung Lu assured me that one foreign soldier could kill one hundred Boxers without the slightest trouble, and begged me to give him instructions to order General Nieh, who was afterwards killed by the Boxers, to bring his troops to protect the Legations. Of course I gave him this instruction at once, and also told him that he must see Prince Tuan . . . and Duke Lan to tell them . . . that they had better not interfere with Yung Lu's plans. Matters became worse day by day and Yung Lu was the only one against the Boxers, but what could one man accomplish against so many? One day Prince Tuan and Duke Lan came and asked me to issue an Edict ordering the Boxers to kill all the Legation people first and then all remaining foreigners. I was very angry and refused to issue this Edict. After we had talked a very long time, Prince Tuan said that this must be done without delay, for the Boxers were getting ready to fire on the Legations and would do so the very next day. I was furious and ordered several of the eunuchs to drive him out, and he said as he was going out: 'If you refuse to issue that Edict, I will do it for you whether you are willing or not,' and he did. After that you know what happened. He issued these Edicts unknown to me and was responsible for a great many deaths. He found that he could not carry his plans through and heard that the foreign troops were not very far from Peking. He was so frightened that he made us all leave Peking." As she finished saying this, she started to cry, and I told her that I felt very sorry for her. She said: "You need not feel sorry for me for what I have gone through; but you must feel sorry that my fair name is ruined. That is the only mistake I have made in my whole life and it was done in a moment of weakness. Before I was just like a piece of pure jade; everyone admired me for what I have done for my country, but the jade has a flaw in it since this Boxer movement and it will remain there to the end of my life. I have regretted many, many times that I had such confidence in, and believed that wicked Prince Tuan; he was responsible for everything."

**Source:** Excerpt from *Two Years in the Forbidden City* by The Princess Der Ling (New York: Moffat, Yard, 1911), pp. 356–362.