

**Document 6.6: Excerpts from a report by the commissioner of three northern ports describing the Tianjin Massacre, June 1870**

*This report was written by the Commissioner for the Three [Northern] Ports (Tianjin, Zhifu, and Niuzhuang) and Senior Vice-President of the Board of War.*

I find that in the Tianjin region, since summer began the weather has been hotter and drier than usual, and the popular mood is unsettled. Among the populace, rumors have been rife. There are those who say that [the foreigners] use medicine to kidnap youths and children. There are those who say that there are cases of the corpses and bones of youths and children being exposed in the public cemetery. There are those who say that the exposed corpses are all those abandoned by the church. Also, there are those who say that the Catholics gouge out eyes and cut out hearts. Rumors spread in great confusion, but without any firm basis. Subsequently there were apprehended in Tianjin County two bandits who kidnap children, Zhang Xuan and Guo Guai. They were fully investigated and executed. Talk about kidnapping became more and more widespread among the populace. Because of this, the streets and alleys were not tranquil.

Subsequently the populace apprehended and sent in a “reader” from the church, Chen Xibao. He was beaten and sent to the magistrate. Through the Tianjin prefect, Liu Jie, he was interrogated. In reality, he was leading students home, and was not kidnapping them, and was subsequently released....

Subsequently, according to a plan, discussed a day later when the priest Xie Fuyin came to your servant’s office, with an aim to pacifying relations between the people and the church, your servant discussed clearly with the priest that henceforth if people die from disease inside the church, they must report it clearly to the local authorities, who can verify the burial through ‘joint viewing.’ Those who study or are raised inside the church must also be reported to the officials, who can verify as they see fit, so as to dissipate popular doubts. The priest agreed to follow all these procedures.

After the priest had left, your servant was just at the point of making a public appearance so as to pacify the people's hearts, when I suddenly heard some idlers amongst the masses come to watch having an argument with the people of the church. They were throwing bricks and beating them. I then sent military officials to suppress them....

The [French] consul entered the [the commissioner's] room and began breaking things with his hands, roaring without stopping. Your servant again and again went out to see him, and with good words told him that the people's mood was clamorous and panicky; in the streets and markets people were gathering with a great sense of antagonism, and there were already several thousand. I urged him not to go out, for fear that something unfortunate would happen. The consul was impetuous, with no concern for his own personal safety. He said he did not fear the Chinese people. Thereupon he went out in a great rage. Your servant feared this would lead to stirring up trouble, so order [sic] military officers to escort him back in safety.

Who would have thought that on the street the consul would meet up with the Tianjin Magistrate Liu Jie, who was returning from putting down the disturbance at the church. The consul again fired toward him and missed his mark, but mistakenly hit and wounded Liu Jie's servant. The masses caught a glimpse of this, and their wrath was already extreme. The group then beat Fontanier [the consul] to death. People from everywhere were summoned by gong. The church was burnt down, and also the Renci Hall outside the Eastern Gate was destroyed by fire. In other places, "preaching halls" were pulled down. Missionaries and those practicing the faith, both Chinese and foreign, were injured and killed. Your servant rushed to supervise with the local civil and military officials and also sent troops to put down [the disturbance]. Alas, the masses were [too] numerous, with the force of a mob, and in a short while the killing, wounding, burning, and destroying were already *faits accomplis*. The members of the church had already fled in great disorder. Your servant and the other officials exhorted them to be peaceful. On the one hand, we took part with our subordinates in beating out the fire, so as to prevent it spreading and burning down the people's houses. There were several places where churches were burnt and destroyed, and several Catholics, both Chinese and foreign,

were injured and killed.

I ordered the Tianjin authorities to make a rapid and detailed investigation and present a report. The initial cause of this affair was in the burying of children and spreading of rumors about gouging out eyes and cutting out hearts. It was also because the bandit kidnappers who were apprehended gave evidence against the people of the church, such that the masses harbored doubts and piled up indignation. It was from this provocation that the affair occurred. Now it would be appropriate to enlighten [the people]. The masses have already gradually dispersed.

This is a matter of the utmost importance. We ought to request an order that the Zhili Governor-General Zeng Guofan come to Tianjin and make an accurate investigation so as to pacify the locality.

Source: Gengyin Chonghou, untitled memorial, 23 June 1870, trans. Howard R. Spindel. Full text available at <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/spendelh/china/TJ700623.htm>.