

Document 7.6: Interviews with individuals recalling the Shining Red Lanterns movement

The Shining Red Lanterns were the female counterparts of the Boxers. They participated in anti-foreign sentiment and, like the Boxers, believed themselves to possess special powers that shielded them from things like swords and bullets. In 1899 and 1900 they rose up throughout China to resist foreigners, often killing both foreigners and Chinese Christian converts. The following interviews were conducted in the 1960s by the Modern Chinese History Section of the History Department of Shandong University and compiled in 1980.

1. The Shining Red Lantern got started a little later than Spirit Boxing. Around here Spirit Boxing started in 1898. The Shining Red Lantern started either in 1899 or 1900. I just remember that it was a year or so later. When Spirit Boxing was about finished, the Shining Red Lantern started.

The Shining Red Lantern also set up a practice field. Majiafang had one and all the people who went were unmarried girls in their teens and twenties. They also practiced spirit possession. Fenglou had two or three sent there to learn.

In 1900, or maybe 1899, the Shining Red Lanterns took their spears and knives and went to the county seat to register. That is to say, they wanted to report their names and villages to the county magistrate and get him to do something. But the county magistrate didn't pay attention to them.

[Reminiscence of Dong Yuyao, age 86, from Houzhang Village of the Chengguan Commune of Renping County, January 1966.]

2. When I was ten, I went to Fenglou to watch people play with the Shining Red Lantern. Their practice ground was set up in a house and it was really exciting and crazy! Liu Laizhu's old lady was running things. She was all dressed in red and it was really dazzling. She was teaching a dozen or so seventeen or eighteen year old girls.

All these big girls were dressed from head to toe in red. Their footbinding cloths were red, their socks were red, their shoes were red, their pants were red, their shirts were all red, and they wore red hair wrapping. Why even the little string to tie on the head wrapping was red! They carried red lanterns and waved red fans. Sometimes they practiced during the day and sometimes at night. They were all girls from poor families. Some couldn't afford to buy red clothes so they tore off strips of cloth from their bedding and dyed it to make their red costume.

[Interview with Liu Shaocheng, age 73, from Wangzhuang Village, the Zhuwang Brigade of Chengguan Commune, Renping County, December 1965.]

3. Fenglou had the Shining Red Lantern. All the Shining Red Lanterns were women who dressed up completely in red. They waved red fans and carried red lanterns and they could get wind or rain or ride the clouds and call in the mist. Two women facing each other would wave their fans and while waving them would ascend into the sky. That was the kind of thing they did...I used to go to watch the hustle and bustle.

[Interview with Zhang Yuqi, age 82, Ma Village, Sanlitun Commune, Renping County, January 1966.]

4. The Shining Red Lanterns were all women. All of them were unmarried girls about eighteen or nineteen years old. They dressed all in red and when they waved fans or bowls they could go up to heaven. They could ride clouds in the sky and become magic fairies!

[Interview with Feng Jinyu, age 84, Feng Village, Wulizhuang Commune, Renping County, January 1966.]

5. Girls who joined the Boxers were called "Shining Red Lanterns." They dressed all in red. In one hand they had a little red lantern and in the other a little red fan. They carried a basket in the crook of their arm. When bullets were shot at them they waved their fans and the bullets were caught in the basket. You couldn't hit them! Some

were also possessed by spirits and would say that they were Ma Guiying or Hu Jinchan¹.

[Interview with Zhu Yunze, age 82, Zhu village, Yenguantun Commune, Renping County, December 1965.]

6.

In every village there were girls who studied the Shining Red Lantern. In my village there were eight or ten of them. They all carried a red lantern in their right hand and a red fan in the left hand. They'd wave the fans and go up into the sky. They didn't want people to watch and so they'd practice at night when it was dark. There was a song then that went:

“Learn to be a Boxer, study the Red Lantern.
Kill all the foreign devils and make the churches burn.”

[Interview with Li Mingde, age 74, Liuli Temple, Liuli Temple Commune, Gaotang County, January 1966.]

Source: Cheng, Pei-kai, Michael Lestz , and Jonathan Spence, ed. *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. 185–186.

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¹ Ma Guiying and Hu Jinchan were famous women warriors who were often portrayed in popular dramas in North China.