

Nicholai Velimirovich: The Chinese Martyrs of the Boxer Rebellion

Saint Nikolai Velimirovich

The Chinese Martyrs

The Crimes of Europe in China

There were times when Europe used to deem herself the most cultured land on the earth. And that wasn't so long ago. It was at the end of the nineteenth century, less than a single human lifetime ago. At that time Europe kept under her dominion all the nations of the globe, with the exception maybe of three or four. Among these few free non-European nations was the Chinese nation too. But, as the wise king Solomon didn't succeed to keep himself on the height to which the mercy of God had brought him, but he fell down into the dust and bowed to the idols, so it also happened with Europe. From the mindboggling height to which she has risen with the allowance of God, so she could serve as light and protection to the smaller and weaker nations, Europe got carried away by the winds of arrogance, and she fell! She has fallen into the dust which was covered with the blood of all the other peoples of God, her brothers. And she still hasn't risen. God knows if she could ever be able to rise from there. In 1897, the German Keiser Wilhelm (who now languishes exiled in a foreign land) alarmed all of Europe with his cry - "Yellow Peril!" It was to mean as if the Chinese were dangerous to the European peoples; consequently, the Chinese should be put under pressure, enslaved and thus made harmless. And to this call of the mighty German Keiser, all of Europe took heed. So, horrific oppression,

enslavement and plunder of the Chinese land and the Chinese people were put into motion. The hands of the white men became crimson red from the blood of their yellow brothers. The innocent blood of the Chinese cried out to the Creator of all men, just as in the first days of human history, the blood of Abel cried out to God against Cain the fratricide. And God said to Cain: "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground!" (Genesis 4:10)

The Boxer Rebellion

But the Chinese are also people of flesh and blood; and still not baptized on top of it, lacking the good doctrine of our Savior. In 1900, a group of Chinese had risen in an uprising against the Europeans in their land, whom they called — "the white devils". Those fighters were called - "Boxers", and therefore their uprising is also known as the "Boxer Uprising". The Boxers started to kill the Europeans as intruders, robbers and tyrants. Anything European was detested by them, even the faith which was brought by European heralds. The hatred for white men became also a hatred for Christians. From then on, the anger of the Boxers turned against their own Christians, i.e. the baptized Chinese, who are thus counted martyrs for the faith, or as we Serbs would put it — "for the Honorable Cross". The suffering and death of those Chinese martyrs we shall try to describe in the current issue of "Little Missionary".

What Does the Eyewitness Say

At that time, and still till today, there is a Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing, the capital of the Chinese Empire. The Head of this Russian Mission was Archimandrite Innokenty, who later

became a Metropolitan. As an eyewitness, he described those bloody events as follows:

"The main day of martyrdom of Orthodox Chinese in Beijing was June 11, 1900. On the eve of that day, all over the streets proclamations were put calling the heathen to kill the Christians. Furthermore, threatened with death were also all those who would dare to shelter the Christians. During the night between June 10th and 11th, and then again in the night between 11th and 12th, the Boxers showed up en masse in Beijing and started to attack the homes of Christians, seizing those unfortunate Christians, torturing them, forcing them to renounce Christ. In the face of torture and death, many did renounce the Christian faith and offered incense to the idols. But there were others who did not fear sufferings, but heroically confessed their faith in Christ. What then happened to them was gruesome. Some had their bellies sliced open, others were beheaded, some were burnt alive in their own homes. The hunt on Christians and their destruction continued for many more days, as long as the rebellion lasted. After burning down many Christian houses, the Boxers led out the Christians beyond the city walls and brought them before temples with idols. Here they were put to the test, and then burnt alive on stakes.

Heroes Put to the Test

According to the testimony of heathens themselves, who saw everything with their own eyes, some of the Orthodox Chinese accepted death with tremendous courage. Thus:

Paul Wang, catechist, died during torture with prayer on his lips. Iya Wen, a teacher in the Mission school, was twice put through

an ordeal. First time, the Boxers had cut all of her body, and thinking her dead, covered her with earth. But she still managed to survive. Hearing her cries, a guard took her in his tent. When the Boxers came back and saw that she was still alive, they cut her all over again, so this time she died. During both of these trials, Iya Wen boldly and loudly proclaimed her faith in Christ the Savior in the face of her torturers.

Ivan Ji, was an eight year old boy, son of a murdered Chinese priest. The Boxers mercilessly tortured and disfigured him. His palms were cut off and his chest was covered in wounds. When the torturers asked him does it hurt, this tiny hero of Christ, replied with a smile: "It is not hard to suffer for Christ!" Then the villains had his head cut off, and his body was burnt.

5. The Life of Martyr Ji Chong (Mitrophan)

This Orthodox martyr was born in 1855. He was baptized as a child, and at the age of 10, he was appointed a teacher. When he was 25, he was ordained a priest by Nikolai, the bishop of Japan. Russians called him Mitrophan. In his childhood Ji Chong was left without his good father who deeply loved him, and the care for him was taken by his grandmother Catherine. His mother's name was Marina and she was a teacher in a girls' school. The then head of the Russian Mission, Archimandrite Pallady took special attention of the young Ji Chong and entrusted him to an experienced teacher — Long Yuan in order to be prepared for a priestly service. Ji Chong was of temperate character, watchful and quite; he was also humble and peace-loving. Whenever it happened to be scolded or accused of something, he did not try to justify himself. He didn't strive to become a priest. He objected and said: "I am a person of little wit and ability — how could I dare

to accept such a high post!?" But implored by the Head of the Mission and convinced by his teacher, out of holy obedience that governs in the Holy Church of Christ he finally bowed down before the will of his elders, though he had premonitions of the difficulties of the priestly service and his end as a martyr. Becoming a priest, Ji Chong was the chief helper of Archimandrite Flavian in the translation of service and theological books into Chinese. Thus he served God and his people for fifteen years. During that time, he was subjected to lot of abuse from the environment, to which he paid no attention.

During the eruption of the Boxer Rebellion on June 1, 1900 (the 17th day of the 5th month according to the Chinese calendar), the buildings of the Russian Mission were burnt down by the rebels. Many Christians who escaped the flames took refuge at the house of Father Ji Chong. Among them there were even some who didn't like this man of God, but the merciful Ji Chong received them and did not send them away. Seeing that many were frightened and disillusioned, he encouraged and strengthened them with the name of Christ. Each day he went out of his house to inspect the burnt down church, and to pray to God on that place.

On June 10, around 10 PM the Boxers came to the house of Ji Chong and surrounded it. At time, in his house there were around 70 Christians. Some of them made their way out and escaped, but those who were either frail or with families stayed inside. Of course, Fr Ji Chong also stayed. He didn't try to hide. He was sitting in the garden and it is there where he met the Boxers. These heathens knowing that he was priest were especially angry at him. Therefore, they attacked immediately and stabbed him on his chest with their knives. The mortally wounded priest fell under a fig tree and gave his soul to God. Then the heathens burst

inside the house and killed all the other Christians who were there.

In 1903, in time of peace for the Chinese Empire, in Beijing a church dedicated to the Martyrs was constructed. The body of the holy martyr Ji Chong, together with the bodies of other Chinese martyrs was buried under the altar. On the spot where Ji Chong was killed, a large cross was erected. Each year on June 10, the Day of the Chinese Martyrs, following the Service in the church, a procession is performed to the Cross, where a solemn commemoration is held. So, this is how gloriously has ended his earthly life the unwavering warrior of Christ and made his abode in the Kingdom of Heaven. From there Ji Chong appeared to his countrymen when they were put to test, and as their protecting angel encouraged and comforted them, showing to them the crowns of glory.

6. The Martyrdom of a Family

The priest Ji Chong had a wife Tatiana from the Li family, and also three sons: Isaiah, Sergius and John. Isaiah was married to his wife Mary. All but the middle son Sergius, who is now archpriest, were killed for Christ at the same time.

Tatiana was 44 then. On that terrible night of June 10, she somehow survived, but the following day was captured by the Boxers. She was caught together with 18 other Chinese Christians, and they were all lead out of the city through *Andingmen* Gate and taken to the Boxer stronghold of *Xiaoyingfang*. Here they beheaded Tatiana and the others. On that place now there is an Orthodox Shelter for the poor called "Triangle".

Isaiah was 23 years old. He served in the artillery units. On June 7 he was captured by the Boxers. Knowing him from earlier as a Christian, they beheaded him on the main street at *Pingzemen* Gate.

John was only 8. The same night when his father, the priest Ji Chong was killed, the Boxers caught little John and then flayed the skin from his back, cut off his nose and toes. His aunt Mary managed somehow to save him from death and hid him in the lavatory. The next day he was found with no shoes or cloths at the door, and they asked him does it hurt. The youngster replied — "nothing hurts". The power of Christ had subdued the pain. The street children laughed at him and called him — "*ermaozi*". This Chinese word means — "devil's servant". This the pagan Chinese used to call the Christians. Little John answered to this: "I believe in the true God and I am not *ermaozi*." When he asked for water, they didn't give it to him. Protasius Chang and Irodion Xu, then still unbaptized, testified to have seen the child with the wounds on his back and legs. The wounds were very deep, but he didn't feel any pain. When the Boxers caught him again, John peacefully and with no fear followed them "as lamb for slaughter". On the road, an old man saw him and took pity on him, saying: "What is the fault of this child. It is his parents who made him a devil's servant." Others mocked him because of his tattered walk. But John didn't pay any attention to that, and neither did his murderers, the Boxer, who had taken him to be killed.

Mary, the wife of Isaiah and the daughter-in-law of the priest Ji Chong, was 19 years old. Two days before the pogrom, she came to the house of her father-in-law, wishing to die close to him. When on June 10 the Boxers surrounded the priest's house, Mary tried to help the others to save themselves. She led them out of

the house and assisted them in climbing the garden wall in order to escape. At that moment the Boxers and the soldiers burst inside. Then Mary boldly stood up to them and started to denounce them for killing so many people with no trial. The attackers froze and didn't dare to kill Mary. But afterwards she was wounded in her arm and leg. Her brother-in-law Sergius tried three times to convince her to back down and avoid death, but Mary heroically replied: "I am born here near the church of the Most Holy Mother of God, and I want also to die here!" And she stayed there. Later, the Boxers found and killed the blessed Mary.

This is how these Chinese Orthodox Christians were killed and received the crown of martyrdom. Their courage in recognizing Christ as God and Lord before the unbelievers, as well as their fearless and steadfast death, reminds us on the ancient Christian confessors and martyrs in the lands closer to us.

Albazinians

Among the martyrs who had died for our Lord Jesus Christ, there were many Albazinians. They are the offspring of those renowned Albazinians, who in 1685 brought the light of Christ's Orthodox Faith to Beijing, the capital of China. Not everyone can be a martyr for Christ. It is given only to those who cherish a profound love for their Living Lord. Martyrdom, i.e. to die with the death He Himself had died, is a special honor bestowed by Christ. According to the great love and faithfulness of the old Albazinians, our Lord rewarded their posterity with a crown of martyrdom. The Albazinians originate from a Mongol tribe living in the south of Russian Siberia, who in the XVII Century has received the Orthodox Faith.

The Albazinian Kui Ling and Hai Qun, together with their brother Vitus and the Albazinian woman Anna Rui, as well as many other Albazinians, bravely accepted death, fearing not those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul (Matthew 10:20). First, they were tortured and then they were killed in different ways by the heathens. Profoundly moving must have been seeing how these wonderful martyrs prayed on their knees to God to forgive their tormenters who at that moment were preparing their swords to kill them. Such events in XX Century heathen China were identical to those in the first days after Christ in Jerusalem.

Repose, O Lord!

In the bloody year of 1900, the Orthodox community of Beijing was quite small. It consisted of only 1000 Orthodox Chinese. During the persecution and trials imposed by the Boxers, some of them got scared and lapsed from the true faith, offering sacrifices to the idols. But 300 of them were killed. Truly, it was a great loss for such a small community. Almost a third of it! But it was a blessed loss. In fact, it could be counted not as a loss, but rather as a gain. For those who die for Christ become mightier in heaven than they were on earth. They possess great freedom before God to ask anything they want on the behalf of their relatives and compatriots in the Church on earth.

And God answers their implorations and prayers. With the prayers of the Chinese martyrs we could explain the growth and spread of the Orthodox Church in China after 1900. Instead of only one church, now in China there are plenty of Orthodox churches. Instead of a single archimandrite as Head of the Beijing Mission, today there are three Orthodox hierarchs serving on Chinese soil. There are now Orthodox Chinese priests and deacons, teachers

and evangelizers. There are several Church-run hospitals, orphanages and schools. Therefore, thanks to the blood of the Chinese martyrs, the faith of Christ grows and prospers in the land of yellow men. In China, as well as in all other lands, the truthfulness of the words — "the blood of the martyrs is seed of the Church" has proven itself. Let us offer our prayers to the Most High for our brothers of same faith, the martyrs of China: Repose, o Lord, Thy servants! And let us exclaim: Glory to those glorified by Christ! Glory to the Orthodox Chinese martyrs for ever and ever! Amen.

9. What do we Know about the Chinese

We know so little!

We know that there are around 400 millions Chinese. Far more than all of the European nations together, Russia included. The Chinese are for the most part agriculturalists. They are renowned as the best gardeners in the world. There are very numerous and thus they live densely in their land, so they were forced by the circumstances to produce a high yield from a relatively small plot of land. Following the World War, an agricultural mission from America went to China in order to teach the Chinese the "rational" method of farming. The head of that mission was a famous professor of agricultural science. When they returned to America, this learned professor stated: "We didn't have to teach the Chinese anything, but we have learned much from the Chinese."

In addition, the Chinese are engaged in commerce and many different crafts. Their largest cities are Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing and Guangzhou.

Their staple food is rice and they drink tea.

The Empire of China is ancient indeed. According to the accounts of the Chinese themselves, their realm existed 2,000 years before Christ. From the northern side, China is defended by one exceedingly thick and high wall equipped with towers and guard posts. According to the tradition, this wall was built by Qin Shihuang, circa 200 years before the birth of Christ. Although before him there were also kings and kingdoms, the Chinese call him the First Emperor, since he succeeded to unite the different warring states and rule over united China. The Great Wall in the north was built by him for the defense of the country from the wild Tartars. And truly, this Wall was of good use to the Chinese. It is said that he has built the Wall in ten years. Furthermore, the Wall helped them to preserve their character and mores from foreign interference almost until modern times.

What Have the Chinese Invented?

With the exception of the true faith, which we as Christians have, it could be said that the Chinese are more civilized nation than the Europeans. According to their tradition, the Chinese civilization was developed 2,000 years till the birth of Christ. Their literature can be traced back 1,500 years before Christ. Two centuries before the birth of our Lord, the Chinese imperial library numbered 2,705 books. The scientific "theory of relativity", which only 10 years ago started to be talked about in Europe, was known in China 330 years before Christ. This theory was proclaimed by the philosopher [Zhuangzi](#).

The Chinese discovered in advance of the Europeans the wheeled carts, the potter's wheel, the navigation compass and the

musical notes. All of these inventions the Chinese ascribe to one of their great emperors who is said to have lived two and a half thousand years before the Christian era. The Chinese also invented the ocarina.

Some of the fruits and herbs which were transferred from China to Europe are: peach, tangerine and tea.

The Chinese were the first to invent paper and printing. They also first started to use banknotes. Till the time the process of printing was for the first time discovered in Europe by Guttenberg († 1468), the Chinese have already been in possession of printed books for more than 500 years. The first ever seismoscope (instrument for measuring earthquake strength) was discovered in 132 AD by the Chinese astronomer [Zhang Heng](#).

The pottery making among the Chinese rose to such perfection as nowhere else in the world. The best porcelain is still made in China.

China is also the homeland of silk. According to the tradition, the first Chinese woman who started growing silkworm and took silk out of it was Empress Xi Ling ([Leizu](#)) 2,000 years before the birth of Christ. She also invented the first loom.

11. The Wisdom of China

The Chinese had many wise people, among who in highest esteem are held: Confucius, Laozi and Mencius. Their wisdom doesn't claim to possess the Divine truth, but it focuses entirely on the human ethos, the art of ruling a country and preserving the traditions. In addition, there is a large corpus of oral, folk wisdom

derived from life experience. We shall mention here few Chinese sayings:

"The army is trained for thousand days only to be used just during one day.

*Man doesn't travel very far when thinks he knows the way.
Person who doesn't have smile on his face shouldn't to open a store.*

If you care about not being cheated, ask for the price in three different stores.

To see something with your own eyes once is worth more than reading about it thousand times.

Fortune and misfortune stand in front of every man's door; it's on the man to decide which of them he will invite.

*It's easier to find thousand warriors than one good strategist.
When man is seventeen he is like candle in wind.*

When you want to say something, first twice think it over and still be reluctant to speak.

It's easy to open a store, but it is difficult to keep it open.

*In a house where concord rules, happiness grows of itself.
Even if you win a lawsuit, you will still lose money.*

If you doubt a man, do not employ a man; but if you have employed do not have doubts in him.

A lousy blacksmith takes arguments with his hammer.

To die of hunger isn't dishonorable; to lose honesty is a worse misfortune.

You can learn till old age and still there will be much yet unlearned.

If you have two loafs of bread, sell one and buy a lily (see how the Chinese love flowers).

It is more meritorious to do works of charity in your own neighborhood than to go on a pilgrimage to a faraway shrine."

Chinese Beliefs

It is sad to think that the Chinese people still doesn't know God and has idols. Such a gifted people, with such a great culture and immense life wisdom and yet still not knowing the One Living God. This case with the Chinese serves as a proof that no nation, regardless how high a culture it possesses, cannot attain the Divine truth by itself without being revealed from upon high. Everything that could have been learned on earth the Chinese have learned it quite well, but the earth couldn't teach them the mysteries of Heaven. Their sages had penetrated almost to perfection into the secrets of the natural world, but they couldn't breach the confines of Heaven and know the heavenly mysteries.

The general beliefs of Chinese include magic, idols and spiritualism. In addition to the legendary deities, both male and female, in human and animal form, they also worship their own

ancestors. Every Chinese has in his house or his yard small stone or wooden statues of his deceased ancestors. Incense and candles (made of paper) are burnt in front of them. The Chinese believe that the spirit of each man lives after death. Of course, compared with the dull European materialists who deny the existence of spirit and soul, such a Chinese belief could be considered quite correct. But this correctness goes for a short while, and then delusions take on. Namely, the spirits of deceased people are here on earth forever, and there is no other place where they abide. They inhabit the houses, the air, the stones and trees, rivers and mountains. These spirits can often be restless and evil, so they have to be appeased with sacrifices. Obviously, what the Chinese consider the spirits of their ancestors are nothing more than demons in disguise. Such is the case with spiritualism too.

Since among the Chinese there are different beliefs, so there are also different ethical theories. There are three renowned ethical theories, belonging to Confucius, Laozi and Buddha. However, there are also many variants of them. Most important is Confucianism, then Daoism and Buddhism. In addition, in China lives a large number of Muslims.

Christianity in China

700 years ago there sprang an opportunity for all of the Chinese to embrace the Christian faith. At that time the Chinese realm was governed by Kublai Khan. He was visited by a noble Venetian, Marco Polo, the famous world traveler. Marco Polo left a good impression on Kublai Khan, so the latter often invited him to his court for a friendly conversation. When Kublai Khan inquired Marco on the faith of the European peoples, Marco with great zeal

and erudition exposed before the ruler the revealed doctrine of Christ our Lord. Following the long conversations and thorough deliberations, the ruler said to his guest that he is willing together with his people to receive the faith of Christ. Rejoiced by what the emperor had said, Marco explained to Kublai Khan there will be needed priests for that, and that he is willing to return home and arrange all which is necessary in order to send Christian priest to China. So, he bid farewell to the emperor and went back to Venice and then to Rome. However, there he experienced profound disappointment. When he started to talk about China as a great empire, larger and more populous than Europe, about the yellow men and their arts, the plants and animals still unknown in Europe, everyone mocked him and called him a liar. His own closest friends thought he was crazy. And thus, this great man died in bitterness, despised and rejected by everyone.

Even before Marco Polo, the Gospel has been preached in China, but usually among the ordinary people. According to tradition, the first Good News of the Son of God was brought to China by the so-called Saint Thomas' Christians, i.e. the Christians from India where Apostle Thomas used to preach. Little more successful, but not too much, were the Nestorians, Christian heretics, who were exiled from the Byzantine Empire, came to the Far East and made their way to the yellow empire. If Marco Polo had succeeded during the lifetime of Kublai Khan to introduce Christian priests, then most probably the whole of the Chinese people would have been baptized. But, maybe by the providence of God, this work was postponed. The Roman Catholic Church afterwards also used to send missionaries to China, among them Jesuits. But later with their infightings, the Jesuits scandalized the Chinese, so some of them were killed and others were exiled. Following the Roman missionaries, Protestant missionaries from England and

America also arrived. Finally, an Orthodox, Russian mission made its way, about which we have discussed earlier.

A Colporteur from Belgrade – Chinese Bishop

In China, there are between 20 and 30 thousands Orthodox Chinese. If all of the Orthodox Chinese could be gathered to live in a single city, that city would be of the size of our Prilep. The Russian Mission there has three bishops: His Eminence [Victor](#) in Beijing, [Yuvenaly](#) in Tianjin and [John](#) in Shanghai.

The present bishop of Shanghai, John, first has studied law in Russia. During the godless Revolution, he together with his parents took refuge in Serbia. His father Boris, a former distinguished noble, found himself in Belgrade with no means of support. The mother of Fr John, Glafira Stefanovich Sevastianovich, is of Serb origin, stemming from the Serb refugees who have fled to Russia. In order to help support his family, John started to work as colporteur in Belgrade. While doing this job, he also graduated from Belgrade Theological Faculty in 1925. Afterwards, he was appointed a secondary school teacher in Velika Kikinda. Soon he took his monastic vows at Milykovo Monastery.

He received his tonsure from the famous elder Archimandrite Amvrosy. Then he was ordained a priest by the archbishop of Chelyabinsk Gabriel. In 1927, he went to become a teacher at the Seminary in Bitola. Here he served till 1934, when he was elected the Bishop of Shanghai. The consecration was performed on the second Sunday after Pentecost in the Russian church of the Holy Trinity in Belgrade. The memory of Fr JOHN is inerasable in the hearts of all Orthodox people in Bitola. When he used to live in

Bitola, he beamed like a star with his own life's example. Even the immense distance from Bitola couldn't dim the brightness of this star. In the Holy Annunciation Church, where Fr John used to serve for two years on daily basis, his name is still constantly mentioned during the Services and in people's conversations. His prayers bore fruit, his love was captivating, and his asceticism drew admiration.

So, such a man was chosen by the Lord to be sent into the realm of China in order to serve as His Evangelist and light-bearer. We all wish him good health and many years!

Source: http://www.orthodox.cn/saints/nikolaivelimirovich/1934-38littlemissionary_en.htm