

## COVERAGE OF BOXER REBELLION IN CHINA BY NEWSPAPER “DIENAS LAPA” IN 1900

NADĪNA RODE

*Mg. hist.*

E-mail: [nadina.rode@gmail.com](mailto:nadina.rode@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

The current paper offers a review of the ways how the daily newspaper “Dienas Lapa” covered the current events of its time in foreign countries, based on the example of the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900. The author also seeks to determine the possible degree of awareness of the newspaper’s reader about events in China. The published information is studied in terms of regularity, scope, type of information, its sources, authors and accuracy. It was concluded that “Dienas Lapa” regularly published information on Boxer Rebellion in 1900. In addition, the newspaper offered general information about China. The newspaper sourced the information from foreign newspapers, telegraph agencies, as well as few local authors. The regularity with which the information about China has been published shows the ability of the Latvian press to cover most current world developments and society’s interest in them.

**Keywords:** China, Boxer Rebellion, press, “Dienas Lapa”.

### INTRODUCTION

Today, people can access a vast amount of information and the most up-to-date news with a few clicks or swipes. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the public would turn to the daily newspapers for the most current information. At the time, there were multiple newspapers and journals published in Latvian, among these – two daily newspapers. The information published in a daily newspaper provides an insight into the society’s interests at the time, the kind of information offered to it, as well as its sources.

The aim of the research is to examine how the daily newspaper “Dienas Lapa” covers current events in foreign countries, based on the example of

the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900<sup>1</sup>, as well as to determine the possible degree of awareness of the newspaper's reader about the events in China. To meet the goal, an analysis of the regularity, scope, type of information, sources, authors and accuracy of the publications was carried out. This research provides an overview of information available to a "Dienas Lapa" reader about the events in China and contributes to the study of one of two daily newspapers in Latvian language in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which has mostly been studied in Latvian historiography from the perspective of its ideological stance.

## 1. BOXER REBELLION

Boxer Rebellion or the Boxer Uprising was a rebellion of mostly rural people in China in 1899–1901 against foreigners, their influence and everything associated with or introduced by them, including Christianity, and foreigner-built infrastructure objects such as railways (Hsu 2006, 119). The aim of the boxers was to rid China of foreigners and their influence; they also attacked the Chinese who had converted to Christianity (Silbey 2012, 31). The name "boxers" is used in the English language (and at present in Latvian), in Chinese these groups were called *yìhéquán* – "righteous and harmonious fists" – initially several, uncoordinated groups (Hsu 2006, 118), after forming more coordinated groups – *yìhétuán* "Righteous and Harmonious Group" or "Militia United in Righteousness" (Silbey 2012, 27). Since the members of the groups practiced certain martial arts and calisthenics, they were associated with boxers. The newspaper "Dienas Lapa" used both names – "fists" and "boxers" (The latter appeared towards the second half of 1900) (Dienas Lapa, 10.04.1900, 4; Dienas Lapa, 20.06.1900, 1–2; Dienas Lapa, 08.09.1900, 3–4). To defend their citizens living in China and defuse the uprising, the military forces of altogether eight countries – Russia, Great Britain, Germany, USA, Japan, Italy, Austria-Hungary were deployed to China.

## 2. DAILY NEWSPAPER "DIENAS LAPA"

"Dienas Lapa" (Engl. "The Daily Page") was one of two daily newspapers published every day except Sundays and holidays in Latvian in 1890s (Zelče 2015, 163): a progressive, democratic news outlet for its time (Ārons 1922, 20) delivering the most current information in the shortest time. Its target audience was city residents: educated factory workers, young people interested in Western culture, politics, social issues etc. (Zelče 2015, 163). The editors of the newspaper were Pēteris Zālīte (1864–1939) (Egle *et al.*

1977, 103) who oversaw all the periodicals issued by the publisher Arnolds Plātešs (Grigulis, Treijs 1992, 108) and Grigorijs Pašītis (1836–1908) who was directly involved in editing the newspaper. The editor of foreign news was Kārlis Balodis (1864–1931) (Egle *et al.* 1977, 103).

In Latvian historiography, “Dienas Lapa” has mostly been studied as the main outlet for ideas of the “New Current” (*Jaunā strāva*) (Butulis 1984; Butulis 2000, 474–492; Zelče 2015, 162–165 etc.) – a Latvian 1890s intellectuals’ movement that defended democratic and socialist ideas<sup>2</sup>. However, in terms of the subscriber count, circulation and other statistical data, the information published in scientific literature regarding “Dienas Lapa” is scarce, therefore it is hard to ascertain how popular exactly the newspaper was among Latvians. Historian Vita Zelče concluded that “Dienas Lapa” was one of the two most popular newspapers in Riga (Zelče 1994, 36). The conclusion is based on a publication in the other major daily newspaper in Latvian at the time – “Baltijas Vēstnesis” in 1890 (Rūjienietis 1890, 1–2). Even though the data available may not permit to draw a conclusion regarding the knowledge of the wider Latvian public about the Boxer Rebellion, given how often China and Boxer Rebellion was mentioned in “Dienas Lapa” in 1900, one can argue that at least the regular reader of the newspaper was informed about the events in China.

### 3. COVERAGE OF THE BOXER REBELLION BY THE DAILY NEWSPAPER “DIENAS LAPA” IN 1900

The research **statistically** encompassed altogether 295 issues of the daily newspaper “Dienas Lapa”<sup>3</sup>, 229 issues containing articles on China were published; over 500 articles<sup>4</sup> contained information about the Boxer Rebellion, 63 articles were dedicated to various topics on China not related to Boxer Rebellion. From the end of May to the end of the year, there was at least one article on China published in every issue.

“Dienas Lapa” mostly **sourced** the information from other newspapers and journals – Russian, British, German, US, French, among others (e.g., “Pravitel’svennyj Vestnik”, “Moskovskie Vedomosti”, “Times”, “Daily Chronicle”, “Morning Post”, “Hamburger Nachrichten”, “Kölnische Zeitung”, “Revue des Deux Mondes”, etc.). It also received messages from Russian Telegraph Agency and foreign telegraph agencies (mostly – Reuters). Foreign newspapers that “Dienas Lapa” obtained the information from reference Chinese officials in China (e.g., Dienas Lapa, 28.06.1900, 6; Dienas Lapa, 19.07.1900, 1), foreign diplomats located in China (e.g., Dienas Lapa, 07.06.1900, 6; Dienas Lapa, 09.08.1900, 6), Chinese diplomats located outside China (e.g., Dienas Lapa, 15.10.1900, 4),

foreign military personnel in China (e.g., Dienas Lapa, 17.07.1900, 6; Dienas Lapa, 20.07.1900, 4), travelers and foreigners living in China (e.g., Lanskis 1900, 4) as their sources. Russian newspapers also source their information from diplomats and eyewitnesses (e.g., Dienas Lapa, 13.08.1900, 4; Jancheveckij 1900, 1–2; Pokotilov 1900, 1–2), military personnel (e.g., Dienas Lapa, 01.08.1900, 4; Dienas Lapa, 03.09.1900, 4) etc.

In terms of **placement within the newspaper issues**, most of the information regarding Boxer Rebellion and China altogether can be found in three places: the column "Foreign Chronicle", "Special Telegrams of "Dienas Lapa"" and "Telegrams". Starting from 23 June, a subsection called "China's Unrest" was published in the column "Foreign Chronicle". Usually, news in this column were a compilation of information from other newspapers and telegrams or special telegrams (The latest information that was published in the newspaper at the very last moment) from the previous day or days. Telegrams were published with a reference to a telegraph agency (in most cases – the "Russian Telegraph Agency") and the information was usually about the previous or sometimes – the current day. Some general information on China can be found in columns "Science and Life" (e.g., Dienas Lapa, 23.07.1900, 4; Vinters 1900, 3–4), "Domestic News" (e.g., Dienas Lapa, 23.08.1900, 2–3; Dienas Lapa, 22.10.1900, 2), "Miscellaneous" (e.g., Dienas Lapa, 19.10.1900, 3; Dienas Lapa, 22.09.1900, 3), "Newspaper Review" (e.g., Dienas Lapa, 24.10.1900, 4; Dienas Lapa, 05.11.1900, 4). In some cases, the information about China was published on the front page of the issue<sup>5</sup>.

Since at the time it was not mandatory for the authors of the articles to sign their work, information about the **authors** of most of the texts that mention China is limited. Some authors signed their articles using their initials or surname<sup>6</sup>, but mostly the articles were not signed at all<sup>7</sup>. It is, however, known that a Latvian officer Aleksandrs Vinters (1866–1918) authored at least eleven articles published in "Dienas Lapa" in 1900 on various topics regarding China. Diary entries of a Russian diplomat Dmitrij Pokotilov (1865–1908) written during the siege of International Legations<sup>8</sup>, as well as letters of an eyewitness – a correspondent named "a son of Baltics" in the article – Dmitrij Jancheveckij (1873–1934), who wrote from a hospital in Tianjin (Jancheveckij 1900, 1–2) were published with the names of the authors. It can be proposed that the daily information about China published in the column "Foreign Chronicle" was put together by the editor of the foreign news – K. Balodis.

The published information could be **divided in two categories**. Firstly, coverage of the current events – military operations, casualties etc. during the summer months of 1900. After end of the Siege of International Legations in Beijing in August – peace talks, conditions of the peace agreement, activities

of foreign armies in China etc. Most of the articles in this category source the information from telegrams and other (mostly foreign) newspapers.

Secondly, publication of general information about China – culture, traditions, religion, army, natural resources, population, port cities, the life in China etc. The authors of these articles sometimes argue that general information about China is important because of the significance attributed to the Boxer Rebellion<sup>9</sup>. Many of these articles can be considered original texts, containing no reference that they have been republished from other newspapers. A. Vinters has contributed several articles that introduce readers to China from different perspectives. For example, he describes the key Chinese port cities, many of which are mentioned in the news in 1900 (Vinters 1900, 1–2)<sup>10</sup>.

Since the participants of the Boxer Uprising targeted foreigners in China, it is not surprising that the information in press was mostly presented in an “us-they” juxtaposition and a strong distrust was expressed towards the information from Chinese sources<sup>11</sup>. An article even called the telegrams received from the governor of Shandong province “fairytale” (Dienas Lapa, 13.07.1900, 4). In the articles containing general information about China, the authors often portrayed China as inferior to the Western countries, whilst the Chinese people – as barbarians<sup>12</sup>. Nonetheless, the authors also addressed the inability of the foreign countries to work together as a united whole both during the different military operations and the peace talks. In at least one case, an author condemns the treatment of Chinese by the foreign military forces, stating that it discredited the perception of the Western countries as civilized (Dienas Lapa, 30.12.1900, 6).

It proved challenging to assess **accuracy** of every aspect and situation, given the vast amount of information, however, it can be observed that authors often compared different sources in the articles and were cautious of unofficial information, as well as the information coming from Chinese sources. It must be noted that during the summer months of 1900, the information coming from the Beijing was scarce due to the damage done to the telegraph infrastructure (Hsu 2006, 121; Dienas Lapa, 14.06.1900, 6).

There are cases when initially published information later turned out to be untrue and the newspaper, mostly after receiving additional information, corrected it. Most notable were the news on the fate of the foreign ambassadors and foreigners in Beijing: on 19 July, the front-page title read “Beijing’s Blood Night” (Dienas Lapa, 19.07.1900, 1), reporting that all the foreigners in Beijing had been killed. In the next issue, the aforementioned information was called lies (Dienas Lapa, 20.07.1900, 4). Furthermore, on 8 August in the column “Foreign Chronicles” a separate paragraph “What can be gathered from China’s telegrams?” was published, regarding the veracity of information coming out of China (Dienas Lapa, 08.08.1900, 4). Therefore, it could be concluded that, to some extent, the accuracy of information

was important to the editors and authors of the "Dienas Lapa" articles. Given the circumstances in and around Beijing, publishers tried to publish the most accurate information available, in line with their point of view as one of the involved parties in the matter.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research into the coverage of the Boxer Rebellion in China by the daily newspaper "Dienas Lapa" in 1900 revealed that, starting from the end of May until the end of the year, the newspaper had published at least one article or piece of news about China a day. Considering that, as well as the fact that "Dienas Lapa" was one of two daily newspapers in Latvian language, mostly popular in cities, the author argues that a regular and thorough reader of "Dienas Lapa" was well informed about the events unfolding in China in 1900.

The information about current events was mostly sourced from Russian and foreign newspapers and telegraph agencies. In addition, a considerable number of articles containing general information about China was published. Although, further research into the authors of these articles is necessary, it can be concluded that many articles containing general information about China did not contain an indication that the article has been republished from another source, therefore it can be considered an original text. Regarding the accuracy of the information, one can argue that the accuracy was important for the creators of the newspaper, since the lack of official information was often mentioned, and authors of the articles tried to analyse which sources were trustworthy, and which – not. Considering the involvement of foreign countries and their armies, including Russian Empire, the distrust towards the Chinese information sources is not surprising.

This research suggests that the Boxer Rebellion served also as a reason to publish more general information about China, therefore the reader could have gained additional general knowledge about China. Furthermore, this example shows that the Latvian readers had access to the information that was up to the standards of countries considered modern and highly developed at the time.

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- <sup>1</sup> The year 1900 was chosen due to most important events of the Boxer Rebellion unfolding in this year.
- <sup>2</sup> After the change of the editor of the newspaper in 1895 and during the period this research focuses, "Dienas Lapa" had become more moderate on spreading socialist ideas. See: Šiliņš, J., 2024. Jaunā strāva. *Nacionālā enciklopēdija*. Available: <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/22237-Jaun%C4%81-str%C4%81va>.
- <sup>3</sup> Old style (Julian calendar) and new style (Gregorian calendar) were in use at the time. Newspaper issues reviewed during the research cover the year 1900 according to the new style (Gregorian calendar): 21.12.1899–19.12.1900 to keep track of the events in a more convenient manner, since Gregorian calendar was used in Western countries. When citing articles from "Dienas Lapa" in the text, the date is indicated according to Gregorian calendar, whereas in bibliography both dates are cited.
- <sup>4</sup> "Article" in this research also comprises "Telegrams" and "Special Telegrams" published in the newspaper.
- <sup>5</sup> Kara gājiens uz Pekinu. *Dienas Lapa*, 28.07./10.08.1900, 1. Pekina ieņemta. *Dienas Lapa*, 05./18.08.1900, 1 etc.
- <sup>6</sup> For example, W. F., 1900. Ķīnas tautas nācija. *Dienas Lapa*, 01./13.07.1900, 1. H.S.-r., 1900. Cik liels ir Ķīnas iedzīvotāju skaits. *Dienas Lapa*, 17./30.07.1900, 1. Vinters, A., 1900. Eiropieši Ķīnas galvas pilsētā I. *Dienas Lapa*, 13./26.07.1900, 1–3 etc.
- <sup>7</sup> For example, Ķīnas slepenās biedrības. *Dienas Lapa*, 19.06./02.07.1900., 2. Dievbijība un nežēlība Ķīnā. *Dienas Lapa*, 07./20.08.1900, 1–2 etc.
- <sup>8</sup> Altogether in 15 issues of "Dienas Lapa" (No. 254–256, 259–261, 264–266, 269–271, 277, 281–282) fragments of the diary written by a Russian Empire diplomat in China D. Pokotilov were published. These fragments were republished from the "Government Gazette" (*Pravitel'stvennyj Vestnik*).
- <sup>9</sup> Some authors, e.g. A. Vinters argue that it could be beginning of a worldwide war. See: Vinters, A., 1900. Tagadējā Ķīna. *Dienas Lapa*, 16./29.06.1900, 4.
- <sup>10</sup> For other articles of A. Vinters see Tagadējā Ķīna. *Dienas Lapa*, 16./29.06.1900, 4; Eiropieši Ķīnas galvaspilsētā. *Dienas Lapa*, 13./27.07.1900, 1–3; Amūras upe un Ķīnas

robežas. *Dienas Lapa*, 07./20.08.1900, 3–4. Each of the newspaper articles listed has several parts. It must be noted that A. Vinters had not visited China at the time, but had been close to its borders while traveling in Siberia, which he admits in the introduction of his first article in “Dienas Lapa” on 29.06.1900.

<sup>11</sup> A publication in the subsection “Miscellaneous” titled “A Chinese as Editor” from 06.10.1900 reports a case where the “New York Herold” has contracted an editor of Chinese origin to publish the news from China in Chinese for the Chinese American public and the editor is said to have written untrue information. See Ķīnietis kā redaktors. *Dienas Lapa*, 23.09./10.10.1900, 3.

<sup>12</sup> For example: K. B., 1900. Ķīnas kultūra. *Dienas Lapa*, 07./20.06.1900, 1–2. Briesmu stāsti iz Ķīnas vēstures. *Dienas Lapa*, 24.11./7.12.1900, 2–3.

## BOKSERU SACELŠANĀS ĶĪNĀ ATSPUGUĻOJUMS AVĪZĒ "DIENAS LAPA" 1900. GADĀ

NADĪNA RODE

*Mg. hist.*

E-pasts: [nadina.rode@gmail.com](mailto:nadina.rode@gmail.com)

### ANOTĀCIJA

Raksta mērķis ir konstatēt, kā laikraksts "Dienas Lapa" atspoguļo informāciju par notikumiem ārvalstīs, konkrēti – Bokseru sacelšanos Ķīnā 1900. gadā, kā arī konstatēt laikraksta lasītāja iespējamo informētības pakāpi par notikumiem Ķīnā. Pētījumā raksturota regularitāte, ar kādu informācija tiek publicēta, tās apjoms, informācijas veidi, tās avoti un tekstu autoru jautājums, kā arī informācijas precizitāte. Iegūstot informāciju no telegrāfa aģentūrām un ārvalstu laikrakstiem, ko papildināja oriģināli vietējo autoru teksti, "Dienas Lapa" 1900. gadā regulāri atspoguļoja norises Ķīnā, kā arī publicēja vispārīgu informāciju par Ķīnu. Regularitāte, ar kādu informācija par Ķīnu tiek publicēta, liecina par latviešu preses spēju atspoguļot aktuālākās pasaules norises un sabiedrības interesi par tām.

**Atslēgvārdi:** Ķīna, Bokseru sacelšanās, prese, "Dienas Lapa".

### KOPSAVILKUMS

Latviešu dienas laikraksts "Dienas Lapa", sākot no 1900. gada maija beigām līdz gada beigām, regulāri atspoguļoja informāciju par Bokseru sacelšanos un ar to saistītām norisēm Ķīnā, publicējot vismaz vienu rakstu dienā. Lasītāji galvenokārt tika informēti par jaunākajiem notikumiem Ķīnā. Papildus aktuālo notikumu atspoguļojumam laikrakstā publicēta vispārēja informācija par Ķīnu, tās kultūru, tradīcijām, pilsētām utt.

Informāciju par aktuālajiem notikumiem laikraksts ieguva no citiem krievu un ārzemju laikrakstiem, kā arī no telegrāfa aģentūrām. Tika konstatētas arī vairākas publikācijas, kas uzskatāmas par oriģināltekstiem un "Dienas Lapā" publicētas bez norādes par pārpublicēšanu no cita avota. Visbiežāk publikācijas par Ķīnu ir pieejamas sadaļā "Ārzemju hronika". Vispārīga informācija par Ķīnu lielākoties atrodama laikraksta slejās "Zinātne un dzīve" un "Sikumi". Grūtības sagādāja autora noteikšana lielākajai daļai šādu tekstu, jo nebija prasības autoriem parakstīt savas publikācijas. Veids, kā pieejamā informācija laikrakstā atspoguļota, pēc iespējas cenšoties izvērtēt avotus, liecina par to, ka tās izdevējiem bija svarīga informācijas kvalitāte.

Lai arī, balstoties uz pētījumā iegūto informāciju, nav iespējams izdarīt pamatotus secinājumus par visas latviešu sabiedrības informētības pakāpi par norisēm Ķīnā, tomēr sabiedrības interese par notikumiem pasaulē, jo īpaši Rīgā, kuras iedzīvotāji bija galvenā “Dienas Lapa” mērķauditorija, bija. “Dienas Lapa” bija viens no diviem latviešu dienas laikrakstiem, kas regulāri publicēja ziņas par ārvalstu aktualitātēm, un 1900. gadā viens no svarīgākajiem un atspoguļotākajiem notikumiem bija Bokseru sacelšanās Ķīnā. Publicētās informācijas regularitāte un apjoms liecina, ka sabiedrībai bija interese par norisēm Ķīnā, visticamāk, ārvalstu, tostarp Krievijas impērijas un tās armijas, iesaistes dēļ, kā arī norāda uz paša laikraksta spējām plaši un ātri atspoguļot jaunāko informāciju, kā to dara dienas laikraksti Rietumvalstīs. Tāpat pētījums ļauj secināt, ka Bokseru sacelšanās bija iemesls, lai laikrakstā publicētu papildu informāciju par Ķīnu.