Two opposing factions emerged in the Manchu court when the Boxers launched an anti-imperialist movement in 1900 A.D. The Boxers were supported by the Group led by the Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi. She and her officers had intended to use the Boxers to destroy foreigners in China. Emperor Kuang-hsu, leader of the other Group, sought to eliminate the Boxers and restrain them from attacking foreign embassies and personnel in Peking.

Essentially therefore one Group was pro-Boxers and the other anti-Boxers. Rivalry of these two Groups were devoid of the racial factor as both of them were made up of Chinese and Manchus. Conflict arose basically from differences in ideology — pro-Boxers were anti-foreigners and intended to drive them out of China, anti-Boxers realised that foreigners could not be driven out and that China had to learn to live with them. Most leaders of the latter Group had had contacts with the foreigners through working in the Foreign Ministry or involvement in "foreign affairs" (yang-wu); these contacts enabled them to have a better understanding of world affairs and the military might of the imperialist powers. Thus they were more realistic and unlike the other Group which was also chauvinistic.

Apart from the above differences, the leaders, the Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi and Emperor Kuang-hsu and their members had long standing and bitter feuds. Eventually the pro-Boxer Group seized control of the Foreign Ministry and the Peking Guard, and executed five anti-Boxer
officials. Some ambitious pro-Boxer leaders even attempted to murder Emperor Kuang-hsu with the hope of effecting a coup d'état.

Eventually, anti-foreign activities of the Boxers led to the murder of the German ambassador. An international army, comprising of soldiers from the eight foreign powers, attacked the northern part of China, destroyed the military power of the pro-Boxer government and occupied Peking.

The failure of the pro-Boxer Group could be traced to the following reasons: 1) The governors in the southeastern provinces were anti-Boxers, they went against the Peking government by declaring themselves neutral and arriving at an understanding with the foreigners. In fact, these provinces became semi-autonomous. 2) The imperialist powers would definitely not allow a return to the close-door policy era in China. Thus the blind policy of exterminating Westerners was not workable. The fall of Vietnam and Burma would serve as a good lesson.

The anti-Boxer Group in the southeastern provinces, led by Li Hung-Chung and supported by the imperialist powers, pressurised the Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi to punish the leaders of the pro-Boxer Group, soon after Peking was captured by the West. The leaders of the pro-Boxer Group were given different degrees of punishment. The imperialist powers wanted Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi to hand over power to Emperor Kuang-hsu but this was opposed by a section of the anti-Boxer leaders. Thus, although the pro-Boxer Group was destroyed, yet political power still remained in the hands of Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi.