

MARK ELVIN

MANDARINS AND MILLENARIANS: REFLECTIONS ON THE BOXER UPRISING OF 1899-1900

*A lecture delivered at the School of Oriental and African Studies
on 6 June 1979 in memory of Professor Maurice Freedman**

I WAS delighted when Dr Watson asked me to give the first lecture in the new series planned by the Contemporary China Institute. Delighted and surprised. I am, after all, a historian, not a specialist on current affairs. This afternoon's subject, the Boxers, only just falls within the confines of the present century; but it has been chosen in the hope that it may prove of interest not only to historians of politics but also to those whose concern is with the contemporary scene. 'Le vrai historien', said Febvre, 'a deux patries: le passé et le présent.'

The executive committee of the Institute has decided to dedicate this lecture to the memory of the late Professor Maurice Freedman. This is an act of homage to one of the greatest authorities on Chinese society and a

* The text of this lecture was first published in *JASO*, Vol. X, no. 3 (1979), pp. 115-38. Since then, much new material on the Boxers has appeared. The text has nevertheless been left unaltered (apart from minor changes and corrections), both because it constitutes a historical record of a tribute to Maurice Freedman, and because time is not available to me at present for a serious new attack on the problem of the genesis of the Boxer movement. Among the new collections of material now available are *Shan-tung I-bo-t'uan An-chüan* (1980); *Ch'ou-pi Ou-ts'ün* (1983); *Shan-tung I-bo-t'uan Tiao-ch'a* (1980). My former student Mr K. Wei, of the University of Cambridge, has made a number of studies of the Boxer uprising in specific localities. Although our interpretations differ on some points, I have found his work extremely stimulating and would like to acknowledge it here. The comments made by Professor G.W. Skinner on an earlier version of the argument, presented in a paper at the Australian National University in 1978, have also proved most fruitful.

gesture that touches me very deeply, since Maurice was both a colleague and a friend of mine during his tenure of the professorship of social anthropology at the University of Oxford. It is also an honour that, to speak honestly, causes me some apprehension, since I know very well how far what you are about to hear will fall short of the exacting standards that he set.

One of Maurice's most striking gifts, and one much in evidence at his seminars at All Souls, was his ability to reconsider familiar data and draw out of them new conclusions that seemed obvious enough once reached but which had somehow escaped the rest of us. It is in such a spirit of reconsideration that I would like to approach the Boxers, a hackneyed subject if ever there was one. In particular, I want to try to answer two simple but subversive questions, namely, why did they appear where they did and only there; and why were they able to grow and expand in a way not achieved by any other anti-Christian movement in China? In answering them, I hope to show that the rather general explanations for the Boxers given by most historians have to be supplemented by precise and particular considerations and, to some extent at least, replaced by them.

The Boxers of 1899 and 1900 had tenuous historical links with earlier movements bearing similar names as far back as the later eighteenth century.¹ The significance of these antecedents seems slight enough, however, to justify our concentrating entirely on the later 1890s for the purposes of the present discussion.

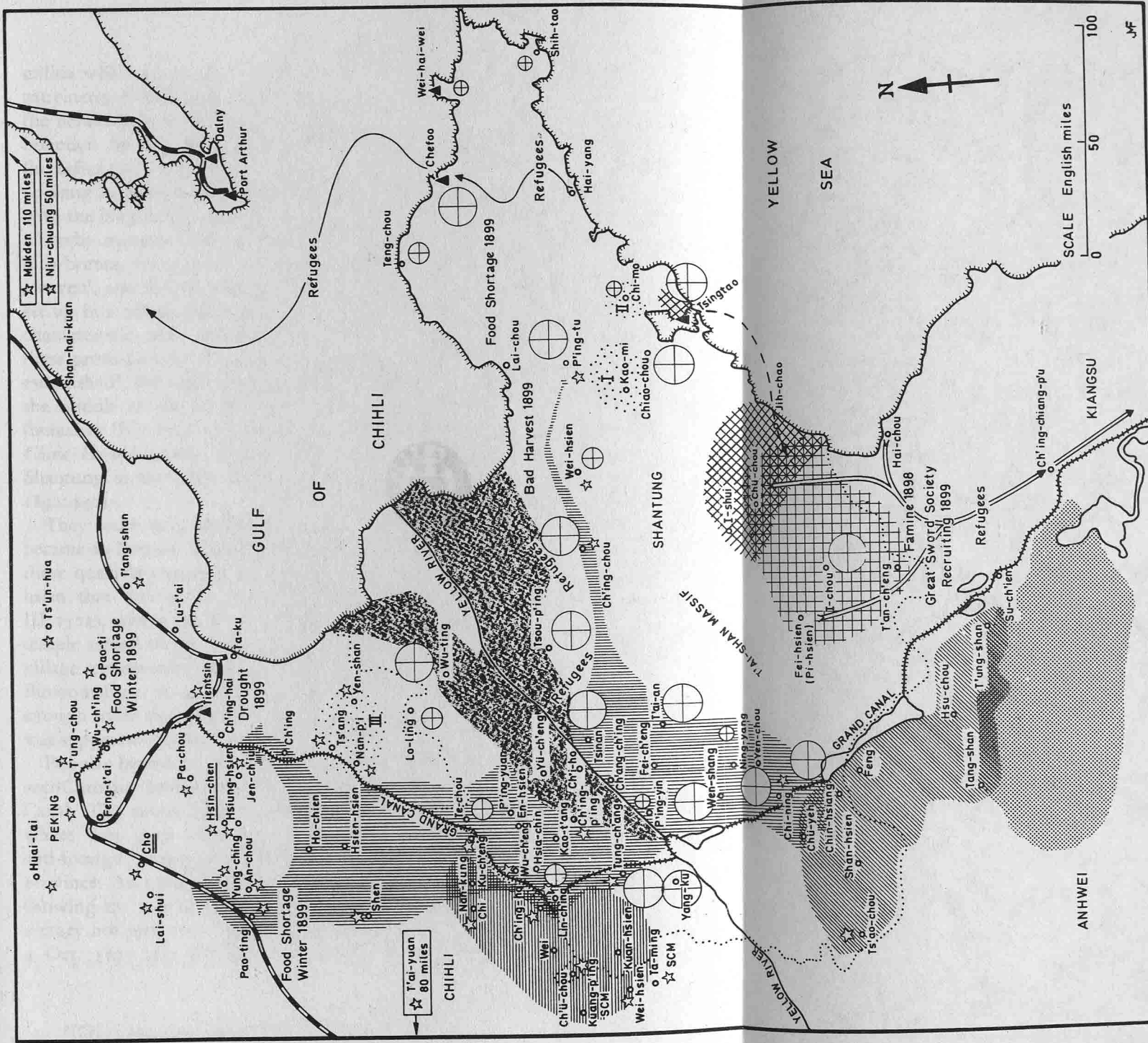
The Boxer movement of this period resulted from the convergence of two earlier and separate paramilitary forces. These were located in the two areas shown on the map as the 'Proto-Boxer Heartland' and the 'Great Sword Society, 1895-97'. These forces expanded, from different directions, into a region suffering from an unusual degree of economic dislocation, demoralization and, possibly, latent popular hysteria. This third region is approximately that shown in the map as the scene of Boxer activities from August 1899 up to and including February 1900.

The first of these two forces was composed of unofficial self-defence

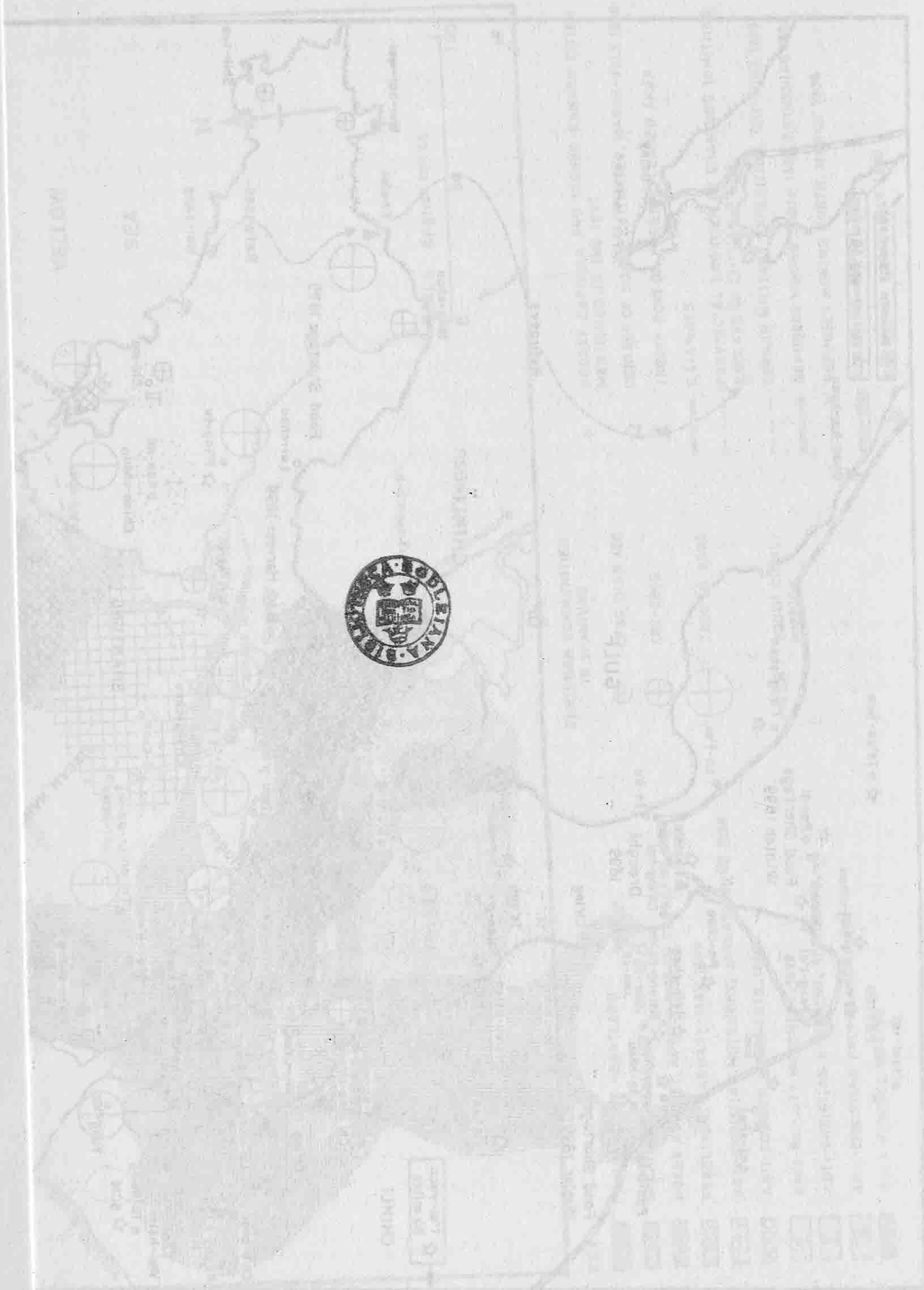
1. One problem lies in tracing the connections between the earlier movements using the words *i* 義 and *ho* 和 in their titles and the later *i-ho-ch'üan* 義和拳 or *i-ho-i'üan* 義和團, which is to say, the Boxers. For three contemporary views on this, see A, I: 237 (Sawara Tokusake); III: 373 (Wu Yung); and IV: 433 (Lao Nai-hsuan). Later analyses are to be found in Sheeks 1947; Tan 1955: 45; Tai 1963: 11; Purcell 1963: ch. 7; Dunstheimer 1959. On the meanings of *i* and *ho*, see Chen 1960: 296. There is a reference to a Boxer leader in the middle of the nineteenth century in Chiang 1954: 45-7. A, IV: 437 also has a reference to the same man, Wang San-lo.

Another problem is defining the relationship of the Boxers and the Great Sword Society to the other secret societies, sects, associations and militia forces with which they were sometimes said to be connected, such as the Golden Bells, Iron Shirts and Shadowless Whips. See, for example, C, III: 183; Kuepers 1977: 117-19. Yuan Shih-k'ai regarded the Boxers as part of the Li Trigram sect, and from the same source as the White Lotus (B, I: 93). I have not yet attempted to unravel either of these problems.

THE ORIGINS OF THE BOXERS 1898-1900



- KEY**
- PROTO-BOXER HEARTLAND
 - GREAT SWORD SOCIETY, 1896-97
 - BOXER ACTIVITY, AUGUST 1899 TO FEBRUARY 1900
 - REBELLION, JANUARY-MAY 1899
 - ANTI-CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT, JANUARY-JUNE 1899
 - ANTI-FOREIGN MOVEMENTS, 1899
 - ANTI-RAILWAY MOVEMENT, 1899
 - ANTI-CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT, APRIL 1899
 - ANTI-CHRISTIAN PROPAGANDA, 1898
 - AREA FLOODED 1892-98
- CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN SHANTUNG**
- LESS THAN 400
 - 400-2,000
 - 2,000 TO 6,000
 - SCM SOUTH CHIHLI MISSION
- OTHER SYMBOLS**
- COUNTY CAPITALS AND HIGHER-RANKED CITIES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT
 - CENTRES OF BOXER ACTIVITIES, MARCH-JULY 1900
 - TREATY PORT OR FOREIGN LEASED AREA
 - RAILWAYS
 - PROVINCIAL FRONTIER OF SHANTUNG (OMITTING ENCLAVE OF LI-YUAN-T'UN)
 - GERMAN MILITARY EXPEDITION, MAY-JUNE 1899
 - REFUGEES MOVING SOUTH 1898, RETURNING 1899
 - REFUGEES MOVING NORTH, MARCH 1900
 - Hsin-chen BOXER HQ., MARCH 1900
 - Cho BOXER HQ., EARLY JULY 1900
- SCALE** English miles 0 50 100 JF



1: 93). I have not yet attempted to unravel either of these problems.

[Handwritten signature]

militia who were active in the lands that straddle the border between the provinces of Shantung and Chihli, and west of the city of Lin-ch'ing on the bend of the Grand Canal.² The area may be thought of as a triangle bounded by Kuang-p'ing, Nan-kung and Kuan-hsien (*I-ho-t'uan* 1951 (hereafter 'A'): I: 9). Thirty years previously it had been the scene of an uprising by leaders of the Eight Trigram Sect, who had been loosely allied with the Nien rebels. The sectaries were notable for their magical warfare whereby scattered beans were said to become soldiers and stools to turn into horses, for a female military leader, for 'troops and generals from Heaven', and for the assertion of a new imperial authority from a palace set up in a village (*Kuan-hsien* 1934: III: 1565-8). All but the last of these characteristics have obvious affinities with the later movement. As of 1898 these proto-Boxers (if I may so call them) regarded themselves as 'newly established', although they probably went back in some form at least to the middle of the nineteenth century (*I-ho-t'uan Tang-an Shih-liao* 1959 (hereafter 'B'): I: 14-15). Bodies that the Shanghai newspaper the *North-China Herald* called 'village leagues' were not uncommon in western Shantung in the early 1890s for defence against robbers (*NCH* 2 Sept. 1892: 340).

They were not, therefore, anti-Christian from the beginning. They became so because of conflicts with mission converts. The best known of these quarrels occurred at Li-yuan-t'un in an isolated enclave of Kuan-hsien that was in fact inside Chihli province (*Kuan-hsien* 1934: I: 103; III: 1574), where the Roman Catholics acquired and then pulled down a temple sacred to the Jade Emperor some time around 1887. In 1897 the village counter-attacked, led or assisted by a group called the Plum Blossom Fists. A second attack, launched in the spring of 1898, was big enough to be described by the *North-China Herald* as 'open rebellion'. It was suppressed by the troops of Governor Chang Ju-mei.³

Popular hatred of the converts was sharpened in 1898 by the influx of anti-Christian broadsheets from Ts'ang-chou, further north up the Grand Canal. The proto-Boxers encountered this propaganda at the markets where they gave displays of their martial arts (B, I: 15). Mendacious anti-foreign propaganda had, of course, a general circulation in the province. An example is the set of coloured prints pasted up in inns etc. showing the war of 1894 not as a national humiliation but as a Chinese victory not just over Japan but over all the other powers as well (*NCH* 4 Oct. 1895: 567; Kuepers 1977: 98). Several Shantung officials wrote

2. *NCH* 23 May 1900: 966. Cf. Dai 1963: 10. One source in C, III: 184 puts the origin of Boxers in T'ang-i county, just north-east of Kuan-hsien.

3. *Kuan-hsien* 1934: III: 1574-6; Dai 1963: 24-5; *NCH* 14 May 1897: 863; 8 Oct.: 654; 24 Dec.: 1129; 14 May 1898: 410; 21 May: 464; 4 April: 570. Cf. A, IV: 438.

denunciations of the foreigners, including Governor Li Ping-heng and the magistrate of Hsia-chin county, which lies just east of Lin-ch'ing.⁴

Finally, some time early in 1899, the proto-Boxer movement advanced east and north out of its heartland, in the directions of En-hsien and Pao-ting respectively (*NCH* 4 Dec. 1899: 1121).

The second force was the Great Sword Society. More precisely, it was that part of it that was active between Ts'ao-chou, Hsu-chou and Chi-ning.⁵ This area lies to the south of the proto-Boxer heartland and is separated from it by the Yellow River. The Society first appeared as a form of partly practical, partly magical self-defence against brigands, whose depredations had reached a climax in the preceding years. In 1896 and 1897 it led uprisings here that were ostensibly anti-Christian, although their motive may in part have been resistance to the increased tax on opium, which was grown widely in the region.⁶ Their opposition to Christians was intermittent, and punctuated by periods of friendship. They made opportunistic use of popular dislike of the Christian refusal to participate in the customary social rituals. They took advantage of the hostility among landlords aroused by the Church's protection of tenants who were converts. They capitalized on the help sometimes inadvertently given by missionaries to criminals, and on the claims made by some bandits and sectaries in south-western Shantung to be Christians, in order to benefit from the Church's prestige. But they also plundered non-Christians, and flirted with the idea of rebellion. Anti-Christianity was not their only, or even essential, reason for existence.⁷ It may also be of significance that the Great Sword Society rebels were organized in *t'uan* 團 or 'militia-bands', each of a thousand men.⁸ Claims of invulnerability to weapons and the sponsoring of theatrical performances to attract new members were part of their stock-in-trade (*Shan-tung Chin-tai-shih Tzu-liao* 1957 (hereafter 'C'): III: 183).

In the next year, 1898, anti-Christian boxing societies began to be formed in this southern area (B, I: 39). Most observers identified them

4. *NCH* 7 March 1898: 364; 14 March: 409; 20 Feb. 1899: 289.

5. There was a non-active part in eastern Honan province (C, III: 183). The best description of the Great Swords is in Kuepers 1977: 106-32.

6. Opium began to be grown in large quantities in Ts'ao-chou around 1890. The withdrawal of land from ordinary crops drove up the prices of foodstuffs and forced numerous poor people into robbery (Kuepers 1977: 106-7).

7. *Ibid.*: 40-2, 44-5, 50-2, 54-7, 74, 81, 83-6, 94, 113-14, 117, 120, 124, 128-9, 132, 171, 175.

8. B, I: 1-5, 9, 13, 38-9; *NCH* 24 July 1896: 142, 145; 31 July; 31 Oct.: 748; 30 Nov.: 831; 7 May 1897: 816.

with the Great Sword Society.⁹ The comment of the censor Huang Kuei at the end of 1899 is typical. 'Broadly speaking,' he wrote, 'the Sword Societies, the Boxing Associations, and the Militia are different aspects of the same phenomenon. When they break the law, they are bandits. When they behave themselves, they are ordinary commoners' (B, I: 45).

None the less, the identification was not complete. During 1899 the northernmost part of Kiangsu was filled with famine refugees, and the Great Sword Society vigorously recruited members there. Its objectives were at least as much self-defence as opposition to the foreigners; and it remained quiet here in 1900 at the time when the Boxers in Chihli were fighting the Powers and occupying the cities of Peking and Tientsin (*NCH* 3 July 1899: 16; 21 Mar. 1900: 498).

In the middle of 1899 there were anti-Christian outbreaks in Chi-ning and then Ts'ao-chou,¹⁰ and some of the Society also began to move northwards.¹¹ In August, the Boxer leader Ch'en Chao led a rising in the area that spans Chü-yeh, Chi-ning and Wen-shang. Disturbances by so-called 'Sword bandits' occurred in the same month in Fei-ch'eng and P'ing-yin (B, I: 39, 50; Kuepers 1977: 172-3).

The point at which the two original forces joined was probably the outbreak at En-hsien and P'ing-yuan in September and October led by Chu Hung-teng. Chu was a rich man either from Chih-p'ing (C, III: 191-2) or from Ch'ang-ch'ing, slightly to the east (A, IV: 504), but there is some evidence that some of his forces came from the south, though his newest recruits were levied in Ch'ang-ch'ing. His training-grounds certainly featured the trademark of the Society, a long sword hung up horizontally. But he had entered an area in which boxing societies had already been established, and it is a reasonable guess that these came from or were inspired by the proto-Boxer heartland to the west (B, I: 35, 39; A, I: 353-5).

The region where this suggested convergence took place had several distinguishing characteristics.

First, it was full of refugees made homeless by the repeated flooding of the Yellow River between 1892 and 1898.¹² The areas affected by floods are shown on the map. Of course, to some extent seasonal migrations

9. e.g. Public Record Office (London), F.O. 17/1412 *passim*, esp. Campbell to McDonald, 4 Feb. 1900; *NCH* 27 Dec. 1899: 1263; 20 June 1900: 1111. Governor Yü-hsien was the exception (B, I: 38).

10. B, I: 59; Kuepers 1977: 171, 174. Some time earlier, in December 1898, an unnamed 'secret society' had led anti-missionary outbreaks in Yen-chou and Tung-lu (*NCH* 23 Jan. 1899: 105).

11. Compare the pattern of movement northwards sketched by Yuan Shih-k'ai in B, I: 94. He does not, however, mention the proto-Boxer heartland.

12. *NCH* 24 Dec. 1898: 1200-1; 8 May 1899: 814; 26 June: 1155; Imperial Maritime Customs 1904, I: map.

from the flooded river plain were institutionalized. The *North-China Herald* observed that 'the stronger members of the family...will deliberately...set off for a winter's campaign of respectable beggary...conducting themselves in an orderly manner' (*NCH* 12 Dec. 1898: 1081). There were also large numbers of refugees in substantially missionized areas such as Tsou-p'ing¹³ that were virtually untouched by Boxerism. For both of these reasons, the contribution made by refugees to anti-Christian violence should not be overestimated.

Secondly, the increasing transfer of the yearly shipments of tax rice that was sent from the Yangtze valley to Peking away from the Grand Canal and on to sea-going steamships had led to unemployment among Canal boatmen and service workers.¹⁴ Private shipments of private goods tended to avoid the Canal because of the heavy transit dues (*NCH* 14 Mar. 1898: 411). At the northern terminus of the Canal, the water and road links between T'ung-chou and Peking had been superseded by a railway in 1897, a development that had destroyed T'ung-chou's traditional transport industries.¹⁵ Over the winter of 1899 to 1900 the water in the Canal was too low to permit large boats to move, and the tax-rice vessels were stranded in Shantung (*NCH* 2 May 1900: 773).

The Canal was the economic artery of the area in which the Boxers were first active. For example, the four hundred ships that carried the Shantung quota of tax grain customarily brought large quantities of illegal, duty-free goods back on the return journey from Tientsin. These were sold at fairs at Te-chou and other cities around the end of the lunar year (*NCH* 2 Sept. 1892: 340). Economic decline also seems to have made parts of the Canal zone dangerous. Both Su-ch'ien in northern Kiangsu and Lin-ch'ing in western Shantung were famous for the sale of rifles and revolvers for personal protection.¹⁶ (We may note in passing that military primitivism, sometimes ascribed to the Boxers, was usually a symbolic act on the part of anti-foreign officials rather than the result of popular taboos.¹⁷)

13. *NCH* 24 Dec. 1898: 1200-1; 8 May 1899: 814 (on Ch'ing-chou).

14. *NCH* 25 June 1897: 1137; 1 Oct.: 617; 27 Feb. 1899: 336.

15. *NCH* 17 Feb. 1898: 175; 16 May: 842; 6 June 1900: 1022. One of the railway bridges was too low to allow most boats to pass through at high water (*NCH* 25 June 1897: 1135).

16. *NCH* 29 Jan. 1897: 161; 18 April 1898: 660. Cf. *NCH* 23 Jan. 1899: 125, on the carrying of arms in the Canal zone in Kiangsu.

17. An example is Governor Yü-hsien's purchase of bamboo shields and spears in June 1899 (*NCH* 26 June 1899: 1155). As Yuan Shih-k'ai pointed out, the Boxers used both muskets and portable guns (B, I: 93). Li Ping-heng's loathing of foreign clocks is a good example of ultra-conservative official technological xenophobia (*NCH* 18 June 1897: 1091). The Golden Bell Screen sect, which appeared in south-western Shantung in 1895 and is said to have used only short spears decorated with a tuft of red hair, may be an example of popular military primitivism (Kuepers 1977: 118). The closely related Great Sword Society

Thirdly, the area was full of *déclassé* elements, marginal and violent men, many of whom became Boxers. There were village bullies and thieves,¹⁸ and probably professional gamblers, seeing that Lin-ch'ing was a centre of organized gambling.¹⁹ Others were disbanded soldiers, for large numbers of demobilized troops had passed through Lin-ch'ing on their way back south after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5, many of them from western Shantung (*NCH* 8 Feb. 1895: 185; 22 May: 434). A few deserters may also have come from Yuan Shih-k'ai's forces when he marched briefly into Shantung in May 1899, enforcing an unpopular degree of discipline on his men. He took the route that the Boxers were to take, in reverse, to Tientsin six months later.²⁰ The two Boxer leaders in Tientsin, Ts'ao Fu-t'ien and Chang Te-ch'eng, were, appropriately, an ex-soldier turned bandit and an out-of-work Canal boatman, both of them from Ching-hai.²¹

Fourthly, the people of the area in which the Boxers were most active in the later part of 1899 and early 1900 seem to have been unusually prone to mass hysteria.²² An early illustration of this is the flood scare of 1872 in the localities south of Pao-ting. The Sheng-hsien sect proclaimed that 'on a certain date a flood of waters would devastate the country, and boats could escape—like another Noah—from the ruin that would overtake the land'. And so, as the *North-China Herald* reported (6 Jan. 1893: 10), 'boats were built in immense numbers... The fated day...came and passed, to the confusion of those whose arks, ready provisioned for a voyage, stood unconcealed before their doors. Many broke up their boats at once, but every here and there in that district you will come across them half-decayed and used for all sorts of purposes.' A later example is the kidnapping panic in the summer of 1897. This was a rehearsal in miniature for the anti-Christian pogrom two and a half years later. It covered a region lying between Tientsin and T'ung-chou in Chihli and Ch'ing-chou and Wei-hsien in Shantung that was almost exactly that subsequently affected by the Boxers. In Tientsin, if not elsewhere, there was some

acquired firearms in 1896 when it was joined by robbers and turned from self-defence to plundering (*ibid.*: 128).

18. *NCH* 9 Oct. 1899: 710; A, III: 374. Cf. *NCH* 20 Nov. 1899: 1011, on the role of this class in fomenting disorders.

19. *NCH* 3 July 1896: 15. Cf. *NCH* 8 April 1892: 457.

20. *NCH* 19 June 1899: 1093. On the presence of ex-soldiers, see *NCH* 6 June 1900: 1022; and A, I: 355.

21. B, I: 210; B, II: 17, 25-6; Dunstheimer 1959: 351.

22. The Kuan-hsien gazetteer emphasises the very suggestible nature of the people of that county, in response to both good and evil influences (*Kuan-hsien* 1934: I: 132-3).

rational basis for fearing the theft of children. In the summer, when the grain-ships passed through, boys and girls were stolen and smuggled south. Some of them were deliberately deformed, so that they could serve their owners as beggars. With apprehension of this sort in the background, rumours began to circulate that the foreigners were sending out hypnotists who lured children away and cut out their vital organs. In view of the later use of hypnotism on teenagers by the Boxers, this phobia may have been based on Chinese practices current in the area. County magistrates reacted by issuing proclamations, some of which the *North-China Herald* thought were 'phrased in such a way as to inflame people to madness'. Popular frenzy led to false accusations, judicial murders, lynchings and assaults on alleged kidnappers and on those simply thought to have connections with foreigners. It was over by early October, with the abruptness characteristic of Chinese panics.²³ From cases like these, it might be surmised that the foreigners were apt to be incorporated, as new demonic agents, in the system of popular beliefs already existing in this area and characterised by fears of malevolent magic and general destruction. The oddest twist to the theme of the invisible troublemaker came during the Boxer movement itself. The Governor-General of Chihli reported, presumably following popular opinion, that Chinese Christians had put on red or yellow turbans and actually disguised themselves as Boxers. They had secretly buried explosive mines in Tientsin and its environs, but there was, he said, 'no means of detecting who they were'.²⁴

This spatial analysis of the Boxer movement clarifies to some extent why it occurred where it did, but difficult questions remain about its probable causes. Information is available on the approximate numbers and distribution of both Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian converts in Shantung in 1901,²⁵ and these are shown on the map. On the assumption that the situation was not drastically different from that obtaining in 1899, it is clear that neither the proto-Boxer heartland nor the area of the Great Sword Society uprisings was exceptionally heavily missionized. The map is, however, misleading in that it does not adequately show the presence of the Catholic Christians whom we know to have been present in Ts'ao-chou, Shan-hsien and Ch'eng-wu in the Shantung sector of the Great Sword Society region (or, of course, those in the northern Kiangsu

23. *NCH* 25 June 1897: 1136; 3 Sept.: 448; 10 Sept.: 486-7; 24 Sept.: 580; 8 Oct.: 654; 19 Dec. 1898: 1147.

24. B, I: 366. B, I: 398 gives a case of a Christian in Shansi who pretended to be a Boxer.

25. Imperial Maritime Customs 1904, I: 125. 'Wen-chan' has been tentatively identified as Wen-shang. P'o-li-chuang is in Yang-ku county (Kuepers 1977: 208 (map), 21, 22, 28, 59, etc.).

sector).²⁶ Furthermore, both core areas were about 150 miles away from the nearest non-missionary foreigners, those who lived in the ports of Tientsin and Tsingtao. Unlike the coastal districts, parts of which had suffered from the Sino-Japanese war of 1894 and the German punitive expedition by ship to Jih-chao in 1899 (Schrecker 1971: 91-124; Hummel 1943-4: I: 407), they had never been entered by foreign soldiers. The areas of foreign occupation in Shantung, and about half of the missionized areas, were untouched by Boxerism. The region of maximum Christian concentration, which was Ch'ing-chou, with more than 6,000 converts, was only moderately affected, and mostly in the flood-stricken areas to its north.²⁷ Comparable figures on the quantitative extent of missionary penetration in southern Chihli are not available. Kuang-p'ing and Taming were only served by the Protestant South Chihli Mission, which does not suggest numerous converts (*NCH* 4 Sept. 1899: 485). It therefore appears that the link between Boxerism and the religious and foreign irritant usually supposed to have caused it is nothing like as strong as it should be to serve as a convincingly sufficient explanation.

So far as it is possible to tell, the Boxer movement had no direct connection with the anti-Christian movement led by the gentry of I-chou in the first half of 1899,²⁸ nor with the anti-German outbreaks in this year along the south-eastern coast of Shantung:²⁹ they were separated from it by the T'ai-shan massif.

If it is permissible to judge from the statistics collected by Cochrane for 1912, Shantung was less heavily missionized than Chihli, having at this later date about ten missionaries per million population as against 25 per million for the latter province. Converts numbered about 0.6 per cent in

26. C, III: 183. Catholic missionary activities in south-west Shantung started in the 1880s. The majority of converts were in the countryside rather than the cities, and many of them were former members of Chinese heterodox sects, whose beliefs and practices (such as auricular confession) often had something in common with Christianity (Kuepers 1977: 29-32, 90). Baptized Christians and catechumens together in the Catholic south Shantung area are given in *ibid.*: 209 as just over 53,000 in 1899, whereas Imperial Maritime Customs gives only 16, 531.

27. *NCH* 10 Jan. 1899: 49; 28 Mar. 1900: 554; Imperial Maritime Customs, I: 125.

28. *NCH* 23 Jan. 1899: 115; 30 Jan.: 169; 20 Feb.: 299; 20 Mar.: 478; 27 Mar.: 530; 3 Apr.: 575; 10 Apr.: 199; 29 May: 961; 26 June: 1156; 24 July: 170; 23 Oct.: 812. Chai O (in A, I: 304) puts the Boxers in I-chou, but he was writing in Peking. Chi Pi-hu says that the Boxers began in I-chou (A, IV: 448).

29. On Chi-mo, see *NCH* 24 Apr. 1899: 718. On Germans, see *NCH* 1 May 1899: 764; 8 May: 801-2; 15 May: 862; 5 June: 1013. On anti-railway activities, see *NCH* 26 June 1899: 1159; 10 July: 71; 14 Aug.: 326. Schrecker (1971: 132) also makes the point that the renewed attacks on missionaries and railway workers at Kao-mi, Wei-hsien and Chiao-chou in 1900 were not connected with the Boxers.

Shantung and about 2 per cent in Chihli.³⁰ The 1901 figures were much lower: the 62,000 converts in Shantung in this year were perhaps 0.2 per cent of the province's total population. How did such a small stimulus produce such a violent reaction in the zone linking the proto-Boxer heartland and the Great Sword Society area? And why was there no comparable reaction in more heavily missionized places such as Tsou-p'ing, Wu-ting,³¹ or Chefoo? The most plausible answer is that only in western Shantung, especially north-western Shantung, and the adjacent part of Chihli was there a convergence of all the factors making for social instability that have so far been mentioned. This having been said, it is necessary to dispose of three alternative but unsatisfactory hypotheses.

First, it is tempting to suppose that Boxer claims of invulnerability to foreign weapons and the belief in the demonic nature of foreigners and Christians would have gained credence most easily where people had only a slight knowledge of what foreigners and Christians were really like.³² This hypothesis is put out of court by the enthusiasm with which the Boxer ideology was greeted in the treaty port of Tientsin when it arrived there.³³

Secondly, it might be supposed that there was some pre-existing, underlying pattern of differential propensities to hostility towards foreigners. The Wei-hsien correspondent of the *Herald* observed in 1895 that 'the attitude of the people differs greatly throughout the province'.³⁴ Certain areas in western Shantung were notoriously nasty for missionaries, such as Yen-chou, for example.³⁵ But this approach does not help us to understand 1899 and 1900. Some places where the Boxers were active had periods of good relationships between converts and non-Christians, such

30. Cochrane 1913: 278-91, 304-15. Protestant 'enquirers' and Roman Catholic catechumens have both been included. For the sake of comparison, it is interesting to note that in 1912, Shansi's figures were 16 missionaries per million and 0.6 per cent converted; Kiangsu's (heavily weighted by the concentration of missionaries in Shanghai) were 26 missionaries per million and 1.4 per cent; and Kwangtung's were 18 per million and 0.5 per cent.

31. There was a slight Boxer backwash from Ts'ang-chou, Ch'ing-hai and Yen-shan into north-central Shantung, notably Lo-ling and Hai-feng (modern Wu-tai) in the northern part of Wu-ting prefecture (C, III: 230).

32. As the Kuan-hsien gazetteer put it, the people were 'boxed off in a corner and unversed in outside matters' (*Kuan-hsien* 1934: I: 132).

33. A, II: 7ff. Cities were often more hostile to foreigners than the countryside (Kuepers 1977: 79-81).

34. NCH 11 Apr. 1895: 550. The Wei-hsien referred to here is that in central Shantung, not south-eastern Chihli.

35. NCH 25 Mar. 1892: 276; 3 Dec. 1897: 992. See also Kuepers 1977: 59-105, and especially p. 94, which describes the 'Committee for the Annihilation of Europeans' set up in Tsou county in 1894.

as Lin-ch'ing and Chi-nan, for instance (*NCH* 8 Mar. 1895: 352; 11 Apr.: 545). Some places where there was anti-Christian trouble earlier in the 1890s were untouched by Boxerism. An example is Wei-hai-wei (*NCH* 2 Apr. 1897: 587).

Thirdly, it might be conjectured that it was the novelty of the missionary presence rather than its weight that was provocative.³⁶ The general movement of missionary work in Shantung and northern Kiangsu seems to have been from east to west.³⁷ Thus, the first missions only reached Hsu-chou in 1897 (*NCH* 5 Feb. 1897: 201), at a time when the missionary college in Teng-chou was almost 30 years old (*NCH* 7 Feb. 1898: 176). The rate of expansion of Catholicism in south Shantung was also at its highest in the decade of the 1890s in the year between 1898 and 1899: about 40 per cent per annum for baptised Christians and 36 per cent for catechumens.³⁸ The assumption that, after an initial period of confrontation, converts and non-Christians settled into a more or less stable symbiosis seems to be refuted, however, by the case of the long-established American station at En-hsien, an early focus of Boxer activity (*NCH* 15 Oct. 1897: 696-7).

Thus far, we have been looking at the Boxer movement from the outside. What did it look like from the inside?

In the first place, it was an anti-Christian pogrom. It sought the physical elimination of scapegoats who were regarded as the source of ill fortune. In this respect it had something in common with late medieval millenarian movements. As Professor Cohn has shown, these flourished not so much among peasants and artisans as among what he calls 'an unorganized, atomized population...on the margin of society...people who were not simply poor but who could find no assured or recognized place in society at all' (Cohn 1970: 281). Outbreaks typically took place against a background of natural disaster. The more extreme ideologies prescribed the killing of the ungodly as the believer's duty (*ibid.*: 212). The kinship of Boxerism with such movements is evident from a poster put up in Peking (A, I: 112):

The supernaturally assisted Boxers...have only arisen because devils have plagued the North China plain. They have urged people to believe in Christianity, which is to usurp Heaven. They do not respect the Gods or Buddhas, and are forgetful of their ancestors. These men have no principles

36. The missionary Freinademetz, writing in the 1880s, stressed the difficulty of starting a new mission (Kuepers 1977: 50). Attempts to enforce a total social boycott of foreigners characteristically appeared when missionaries first arrived (*ibid.*: 57-8 (Ts'ao-chou, 1883) and 60-3 (Wen-shang, 1886)).

37. *NCH* 28 Oct. 1892: 637; 6 Sept. 1895: 398; 13 Nov. 1896: 831; 11 Dec.: 1011; 24 Dec.: 1100; 22 Jan. 1897: 104; 5 Feb.: 201; 15 Oct.: 696-7; 7 Feb. 1898: 176.

38. Kuepers 1977: 209. The author's note suggests that part of this apparent increase may be a statistical effect produced by a more complete inclusion of children.

in their human relationships. Few of the women are chaste. These demons are not the children of human beings. If you don't believe what we say, look at them carefully: the devil's eyes all emit blue light. The rain does not fall. The ground has dried up. All this has happened because the Christian churches have put a stop to [the workings of] Heaven. The Gods are angry and the Immortals vexed... If you want to drive away the devils, it will not take much effort. Pull up the railway lines! Cut the telegraph wires! Smash the great steamships!... Once all the devils have been slaughtered, the great Ch'ing dynasty will enjoy a peaceful ascendancy.

Other posters declared that the Christians had offended the Jade Emperor and so brought about epidemics, drought and poor harvests.³⁹ One or two spoke of an imminent day of disaster on which only the good would be spared, and of a coming 'year of destruction' (A, IV: 151; I: 354). This sort of prophecy had been characteristic of the White Lotus sectaries a century earlier (Suzuki 1952: 24, 86, 98, 102, 105, 110). Once again we find the Christians and foreigners being worked into a pre-existing framework of ideas.

There was a morbid fear of spies (*chien-hsi* 奸細), imagined undercover agents analogous to the imagined hypnotists of three years earlier. Anyone who wore unpadded clothing, studied foreign books or simply seemed suspicious was likely to be declared a spy and butchered (A, II: 10, 14). The search for spies was a common pretext for robbery.⁴⁰ The detection and killing of Christians and alleged Christians was almost as capricious. Some of the Boxer masters claimed to be able to see a cross on the forehead of converts that was invisible to ordinary eyes (A, II: 15). So many were killed in Tientsin that the Grand Canal is said to have changed colour (A, II: 18), and many of those put to death were indisputably not Christians (A, II: 14).

Rumours of the poisoning of wells by Christians were widespread;⁴¹ and the popular sense of insecurity was heightened by such Boxer tricks as the stage-managed discovery of iron objects alleged to be land-mines and bombs that would otherwise have blown the city of Tientsin to smithereens (e.g. A, II: 12, 15, 33). These fears were offset by belief in an instantaneous, virtually magical, regeneration and prosperity if the devils

39. A, IV: 147. Cf. Tai 1963: 8, which gives the text of another poster in which the Jade Emperor stated that the coming of disaster was due to foreign devils 'who ought to be decapitated'. Accusations that Christians were responsible for natural disasters pre-date the Boxers (Kuepers 1977: 38).

40. One source reports some bystanders as saying, ironically, to the Boxers: 'There are a lot of rich people in Tientsin. Are you going to label all of them as spies [or 'traitors'], loot their households, and go home rich gentlemen?' (A, II: 151; see also A, II: 26).

41. e.g. B, I: 91. For officially echoed accusations, see B, I: 193, 263, 281. In Ts'ao-chou in 1899, these rumours gained credence because of the prevalence of typhus and 'a certain sort of plague' (Kuepers 1977: 174).

were done away with and Boxer rituals were followed. 'Once the foreigners are swept away,' said a popular slogan, 'the rain will fall of its own accord and the disasters will disappear.' (A, II: 8; Kuepers 1977: 174) According to the anonymous work *A Month in Tientsin*, 'the foolish people told each other that...in the [Boxer's] militia they cooked their rice in a copper cauldron holding about two pints, from which thousands and tens of thousands of people were served without it ever becoming empty'.⁴² Liu Meng-yang's account of Tientsin under Boxer rule describes how believers were told to extinguish their fires, seal their chimneys with red paper, and offer five loaves of steamed bread at midnight, together with a bowl of cold water and a hundred copper cash.⁴³ Thereafter, it was asserted, 'the steamed bread and cold water could be eaten and drunk without their ever being exhausted, and the more cash was spent, the more there would be' (A, II: 11).

The ease with which the ordinary people believed even the most exaggerated Boxer claims is as surprising as the speed with which this credulity vanished. Here is how Wu Yung, the anti-Boxer magistrate of Huai-lai in Chihli, described the initial welcome given to them (A, III: 385):

The masses believed that the Heavenly Gods had come down to earth. The supernatural techniques of the Boxers were taught everywhere.... It was said that they could swallow swords, spit fire, call down winds, and command the rains. They were just like characters from the novel *The Enfeoffment of the Gods*. Women and children in all the villages chattered away, hoping to see them soon.... There was a very warm sentiment in favour of driving the foreigners out.... For this reason, educated scholars and gentry in the county also spoke of their doings with delight.

By June 1900, Boxer practices were all the rage in Peking. According to Chai O,⁴⁴

Training-grounds were set up everywhere. One saw them wherever one turned one's eyes. Previously there had only been one altar to each street...but now there were three or four...or even five or six. Altars were first set up by the followers of bandits. Later on, wealthy folk did the same. From princes and nobles at the top to singers and actors and yamen lictors [i.e. court runners] at the bottom, almost everyone was enrolled in a militia band.

42. A, II: 141. On the magical ability of the Cooking-Pot Lanterns to feed large numbers, see also C, III: 187.

43. The term 'cash' is conventionally used in Western writings on China to designate the lowest denomination of traditional copper coin and is a Pidgin English word derived from the Sanskrit *kārsha*, 'copper'.

44. A, I: 306. See also A, III: 376 on nobles and eunuchs practising Boxer arts.

As is well known, the Boxers claimed invulnerability to bullets and swords, the ability to fly, become invisible, multiply their bodies, and kill at a distance, as well as the powers of healing and bringing the dead back to life. Within a few months, their failure to substantiate these assertions provoked popular anger. According to *A Month in Tientsin* (A, II: 153):

If there were dead and wounded in the Boxer militias, the Masters would not permit people to weep for them, nor to burn paper money.... 'So-and-so has become a spirit,' they would say. 'What is the use of weeping?' At first, people obediently did as they were told, but as the deaths and injuries increased, many disobeyed and cursed the Masters for their lack of magic, which had merely destroyed men's lives.

When the sceptical asked how it was that so many supposedly invulnerable Boxers had been killed by gunfire, the leaders sometimes replied that 'these were persons who were greedy for wealth, and for this reason the gods did not descend to take possession of them'. This brought the retort: 'If those who desire money are vulnerable to firearms, why aren't the Masters and Chief Disciples dead, since they have pillaged more than anyone else?' (A, II: 149). Disbelief in Boxer magic led to desertions, a crime for which the punishment was the cutting off of the culprit's ears, the burning of his home, and sometimes death.⁴⁵ Dislike of Boxer looting caused fighting between Boxers and genuine village militia forces, and the formation of anti-Boxer trainbands (B, I: 94, 288; A, II: 16, 151). Overall, there was a curious combination of simple-minded gullibility, followed by a swift reassertion of common sense.⁴⁶

Previous writers have mentioned the prevalence of teenagers among the Boxer forces.⁴⁷ Even so, they have underestimated the extent to which the movement was a children's crusade, in which the young were manipulated by their elders (B, I: 91, 94; A, II: 161). According to *A Month in Tientsin* (A, II: 145, 148):

There were numerous boys in the militia, some of them only eight or nine years of age, who held swords and went to battle. They themselves declared that after they had practised the magic they were no longer the masters of their own bodies, but felt only the urgency of the [divine] inspiration, and so rushed forward.... When the militia fought the foreigners, most of those who were wounded and killed were these boys.

The basis of the Boxer technique may have been hypnosis, possibly induced by eating a small amount of mercuric sulphide, since they were described as having 'staring red eyes and foaming mouths' (Tai 1963: 25;

45. On desertions see, for example, A, II: 39; B, I: 342-3, 366. On punishment for desertion, at least in the early days, see B, I: 94.

46. Commented on by Yuan Shih-k'ai; see B, I: 94.

47. Smith 1901, I: 172; Sheeks 1947: 63; Dunstheimer 1959: 342, 345; Purcell 1963: 235; Chen 1960: 296; Davis 1977: 96-7.

Smith 1901, I: 169). The hypnotic aspect is evident from a passage in a work called *A Miscellaneous Record of the Boxers*:⁴⁸

The teacher first draws a circle on the ground. He orders those who wish to receive instruction to step inside it.... They stand with their eyes closed, and the Teacher murmurs spells into their ears.... Before long some fall prostrate on the ground. These he teaches. Those who do not fall are regarded as unteachable.... When they practise boxing...the instructor holds a boy's right ear with his hand and makes the boy himself recite the spell three times.... When the spell is completed, the boy lies supine on the ground, almost lifeless. He is then slowly urged to rise and dance about.... Pairs of such boys will fight together as if facing a mighty enemy. In truth, they are like people drunk, or in a dream. After a time, the Teacher will slap the boy in the middle of the back and...he will wake up, and stand there like a wooden chicken, having entirely forgotten the art of boxing.

The famous Red Lanterns of Tientsin were mostly unmarried girls under 17 years of age, often thought to have been controlled by a fortune-teller known as the Sacred Mother of the Yellow Lotus.⁴⁹ They were reputed to travel through the air by waving fans or riding on copper bowls full of water. Their speciality was leaving their homes at night to burn the houses in the foreigners' own countries, and they defied parents who tried to remonstrate with them (A, II: 9, 19-20, 37, 141).

Many Boxer operations were political theatre. A number of the gods whom they worshipped, or by whom they claimed to be possessed, were heroes from operas and novels. Their speech was often declaimed in operatic fashion. Their costumes were modelled on the military characters of the stage.⁵⁰ Carefully contrived happenings were performed by their leaders before the marvelling multitudes. Thus, after firewood and kerosene and accomplices had been hidden inside a church, the Boxer masters would arrive and ignite it from outside by seeming magic with a wave of the hand and the cry of 'Burn!' (A, II: 12).

The taboo placed on foreign articles extended even to names. Rickshaws, or 'eastern ocean carriages' (*tung-yang ch'e* 東洋車), had to be

48. A, I: 238-9; Tai 1963: 26; Dunstheimer 1959: 362.

49. A, I: 241; II: 36-7; Purcell 1963: 238; Chen 1960: 298. Both authors are perhaps a little over-confident in the certainty with which they assert her leadership. A, II: 448 ascribes leadership to a 'Lin Mei-erh'. See also A, II: 144, which mentions General Tung Fu-hsiang's younger sister as a Red Lantern leader. Whether she was a fortune-teller or, as some say, the proprietor of a brothel (A, II: 146), the Sacred Mother had a style of her own: 'One day a turtle put its head out of the water near her boat. The Yellow Lotus Witch said to it: "You have come to be enfeoffed. I bestow upon you the five-hundredth circuit. Go quickly to the estuary to take control. Be sure you make no mistake!" After this the word went round: "The Holy Mother really comes from somewhere! Even the turtles come to her to get their official positions. You can imagine what rank she must have!"' (A, II: 37).

50. A, I: 238, 243, 299, 307, 354; II: 8, 19, 142, 485; III: 373-4, 385; Dunstheimer 1959; Purcell 1963: 223 ff.

renamed 'great peace carriages' to avoid the word *yang* 洋, meaning 'foreign', and to carry red labels to that effect (A, II: 10, 18). New ideographs were created. The character for *yang* itself, which has a water radical on its left-hand side, was given a fire radical (*huo* 火) on its right, to show that the foreigners were now between fire and water (A, I: 308). Only on the foreign rifle was the taboo in practice lifted (A, II: 15).

The Boxers would have been no more than a local nuisance if they had not received a measure of official approval and sponsorship. Some well-informed observers suspected that Li Ping-heng, who was Governor of Shantung between 1894 and 1898, and Yü-hsien, who governed the province from 1898 to 1899, covertly played a part in actually creating the movement.⁵¹ Since the Great Sword Society openly proclaimed that its authority came from Yü-hsien, the most likely hypothesis is that, late in 1898, he prompted the Society to pursue what was in a sense a moderate course: namely, to harass and rob Chinese Christians, but not to kill them, so that they would break off relations with the Europeans. He probably thought that foreign governments would only intervene to protect Westerners. This was quite an astute conception, and it might have had some success if the masses had not escaped from his control (Kuepers 1977: 170-9).

What is certain is that Boxer determination to kill or drive out the foreigners in China and eliminate the foreign religion touched a chord of sympathy in a number of ultra-conservative officials.⁵² Most of them were members of the nobility, the Grand Secretariat and the Han-lin Academy, men with little exposure to the responsibilities of regional administration.⁵³ They were allured by the vision of taking advantage of this upsurge of popular enthusiasm, of manipulating it, and of ridding China of treaty ports, foreign trade and Christianity. They dreamed of returning international relations to the golden age of the Ch'ien-lung reign. The conflict between this vision and the more reliable assessment of the

51. A, III: 373 and I: 353, 360-1 are blunt statements by anti-Boxer county magistrates in Chihli and Shantung. Sawara Tokusake thought that Li's and Yü-hsien's ineffectual attempts to control bandits by conciliation had been at the root of the trouble (A, I: 237, 262). Although Li was worshipped by the Boxers (A, III: 373) and sometimes dressed like one (A, III: 382), his real influence over them seems to have been slight (A, I: 21). Hart (1901: 6) says that the movement was 'carefully nurtured and fostered' by Li Ping-heng (see also C, III: 207-11; Smith 1901, I: 168; Schrecker 1971: 93).

52. Prince Tuan also had a personal motive for hating the foreigners. They had intervened to prevent the deposition of the Kuang-hsu Emperor and the assumption of the imperial dignity by Tuan's 14-year-old son, who had been declared heir-apparent on 23 February 1900 (C, III: 227; see also Smith 1901, I: 186-7).

53. The six strongly pro-Boxer memorials before 19 June 1900 in B, I are (in one case jointly) by a Prince, a Grand Secretary, a Board President and Prefect of the Metropolitan Prefecture, and three Censors.

Boxers provided by other officials, namely that they were impossible to depend upon, heterodox and basically rebellious,⁵⁴ remained unresolved for many months, and this led to a period of indecisive policy at the top.⁵⁵ The limp formula adopted by the Empress Dowager during the spring of 1900 was that the authorities should only suppress the bad elements among the Boxers who behaved like bandits. Membership of a boxing society was in itself acceptable, even praiseworthy.⁵⁶ This irresolute attitude allowed the movement to grow in the metropolitan province of Chihli, to occupy Peking, and in the end to become so dangerous that direct repression would have been hazardous.⁵⁷ The crucial difficulty was that not only notables, like Prince Tsai-lien, who had been told to put down the Boxers, but many of the capital's constabulary and regular troops soon became sympathetic to the Boxers (B, I: 122, 146, 160-1, 187). As Sheng Hsuan-huai said on 5 June, the loss of government control was the result 'of no decision being taken as to whether to exterminate them or to conciliate them'.⁵⁸

The attacks made on the thinly defended diplomatic legations in Peking⁵⁹ by the Boxers and by regular troops under General Tung Fu-hsiang obliged the six foreign powers with naval forces off the North China coast⁶⁰ to organize an expedition for their relief. This expedition captured the Ta-ku forts down-river from Tientsin on 17 June, and by so doing transformed the Chinese internal political situation.⁶¹ China had been attacked, and was now at war. The ultra-conservatives soon had the better of the argument at Court, even if they did not win explicit imperial

54. e.g. Yü-lu on 17 May (B, I: 90-2) and Yuan Shih-k'ai on 19 May (B, I: 93-5).

55. Echoes of the debate in Peking may be heard in the memorials of Hu Fu-chen on 28 April (B, I: 83) and T'an Chi on 12 June (B, I: 131).

56. The formula 'pay attention only to whether they are or are not bandits, not to whether or not they are members of a society' occurs in B, I: 82, 118. Typical decrees distinguishing 'good' and 'bad' elements are in B, I: 106, 132, 167 and 206-7.

57. This is stated bluntly in a decree of 26 June (B, I: 187). On the problem of maintaining order in Peking during the Boxer occupation, see B, I: 97-8, 121-2, 126, 127-8, 134, 136-7, 140-1, 150.

58. B, I: 117. The Dowager admitted as much herself (B, I: 186-7).

59. On 16 June a decree belatedly ordered Jung-lu to organize military protection for the legations (B, I: 144).

60. Britain, Germany, Japan, Russia, Italy and Austria.

61. Hart (1901: 133): 'We were terribly taken aback when we heard the news in Peking, for we saw it would precipitate matters, and push the military into line with the Boxers, and it did so.' On 19 June the Dowager told Yü-lu, Governor-General of Chihli and up to then an opponent of the Boxers: 'Hostilities have started. You should enlist righteous braves as a matter of urgency.' On 21 June a previous decree to General Ma Yü-k'un to suppress the Boxers was explicitly rescinded (B, I: 153, 157, 164).

endorsement for all their views. Chinese Christians were designated 'religious bandits', potential allies of the invader who should either recant or be killed.⁶² Foreigners in China should be exterminated, including those in the legations (B, I: 180, 188, 196, 217, 245, 248, 255). The Boxers were indispensable allies of the official army, representatives of the people's will who could form an invincible rampart against aggression (B, I: 160-1, 163, 176, 178). Officials who advocated peace negotiations and the protection of foreigners and Christians were traitors (B, I: 181, 216, 255-7, 266-7, 394, 396). Denunciations of military officers who had been trying to suppress the Boxers grew more vociferous (B, I: 245). As a result of this political shift at the centre, the controversy within the Chihli bureaucracy over the Boxers turned into a virtual civil war. Anti-Boxer officials were murdered legally by decrees and illegally by Boxer assassins, either at their own whim or at the urging of pro-Boxer officials.⁶³ Regular troops from pro- and anti-Boxer factions fought with each other as well as with foreigners (B, I: 396).

Once the Court had given its backing to the Boxers in late June and told governors and governors-general to levy and arm Boxer militias (B, I: 161-3, 176, 215), the authorities in Honan and Manchuria, who had hitherto been suppressing the movement (B, I: 171-2, 175, 183, 192), observed a limited compliance (B, I: 192, 200, 236, 295-6). A sceptical note can sometimes be detected beneath their dutiful expressions of enthusiasm.⁶⁴ Yü-ch'ang, the Governor of Honan, observed that 'those who have the ability to be unscathed by sword-blades, and still find it hard to resist gunfire, do not have the pure art; and should be encouraged to train further' (B, I: 193). From Kirin, General Ch'ang-shun confessed to being 'startled' at the Court's change of policy. He criticized the backing given to the Boxers by General Tseng-ch'i at Mukden as 'rash' (B, I: 248). He had taken a personal look at the art of a few boxing masters and it did 'not appear to be entirely supernatural'. He added tactfully that no doubt the real experts were still in Chihli and Shantung and too busy to come north (B, I: 251; also 401-2). None the less, he and a colleague set up altars (B,

62. B, I: 193, 196, 206, 215, 239-40, 260, 264-5, 281, 463. The counter-argument that converts had taken up arms in self-defence because they had been attacked was little heard (e.g. B, I: 253).

63. B, I: 392, 399, 439-40, 468. A, I: 15-21, 252, 257-9, 311-14; II: 10, 11, 22, 24-5, 162, 483-4, 489-90, 492, 495-6; III: 376, 378. Among the odder episodes in this factional struggle was the religious kangaroo court held at the General Altar of the Boxers in Peking, under the guidance of Prince Chuang. Spirits allegedly descended and found Li-shan, President of the Board of Finance, guilty of 'having had relationships with the foreigners' (B, I: 312).

64. Ch'ing-jui, in Mukden, was still openly hostile to the Boxers in early July (B, I: 220-1).

I: 410). The only unqualified enthusiast for butchering foreigners and converts was Yü-hsien, now Governor of Shansi (B, I: 281; Smith 1901, II: 611).

The other provincial authorities, in Shensi, Kansu, Shantung, Anhwei and all of the south, simply refused, with varying degrees of suavity, to sponsor Boxerism (B, I: 211, 231, 257, 258, 261). From the Yangtze valley, Governors-General Liu K'un-i and Chang Chih-tung spoke to the Throne with severe realism: the Boxers were unreliable; the Powers could best be controlled by exploiting their mutual rivalries; China was ill-prepared to fight a war; external hostilities could easily create the conditions for an internal rebellion (B, I: 194-5). Taking advantage of a decree of 21 June telling each province to 'make its own plans' to block the foreigners (B, I: 156), they signed an independent agreement with the Powers, providing protection for foreigners and Christians in the areas under their jurisdiction in return for military non-intervention (B, I: 356; Tan 1955: 76-92; Purcell 1963: 255-6). This bold disobedience presumably saved China from dismemberment.

Our next task is to try to understand the conservative radicalism that nearly brought China to this latter condition.

The ultra-conservatives believed that the will-power of the mobilized masses, under suitable control, and a heightened ideological consciousness could together overcome adverse objective circumstances. Yü-hsien argued at Court that 'the position of our country is continually declining because the will of the people is not being developed. If we go on killing the boxing folk it is no different from cutting off our own wings, or opening the door and bowing politely to robbers' (A, I: 262). T'an-chi, tutor to the heir-apparent, urged the moderates with whom he disagreed to 'think of China's overall situation, which relies wholly upon the resolution in men's minds. The spirit of righteous anger is sufficient to repress insults' (B, I: 131). 'The foreigners', declared the Throne, 'depend on cruel strength. We depend on the people's minds.' With more than four hundred million people all willing to die, 'what difficulty can there be', it asked, 'in extinguishing the blazing fire of their evil-doing?' (B, I: 163).

There was the vision of a nation in arms, of 'the will of the masses' as a rampart (B, I: 176, 192). 'The Righteous and Harmonious Militia who have helped in the fighting', said one decree, 'have not cost the state one soldier, nor consumed one ration of food. Even young lads have grasped weapons to defend their homeland' (B, I: 161; also 156). In the eyes of such ardent pro-Boxer officials as Kang-i, Chao Shu-ch'iao and Wang Hui-li, the Boxers were 'knights of righteousness' who had 'the spirit of the knights-errant of old' (B, I: 109-10, 140, 266; A, I: 10). The supernatural aspects were rationalized. Censor Lu Chia-mo averred that 'the mind is man's spiritual part. When spirits act through men, they affect them through the mind. The completely sincere can have a reciprocal

influence [upon spirits].'⁶⁵ Prince Tuan was more pragmatic. When Li-shan objected that most of the Boxers' magic did not work, the prince retorted: 'It is only a matter of using their feelings. Why do you talk about their magic?'⁶⁶ The first attempt at mass mobilization in modern Chinese history was thus the work of reactionaries.

The logic of extremism envisaged a final solution to the problem of Christians and foreigners. Censor Hsu Tao-k'un argued that missionary activity was designed 'to lure away our people', foreign trade 'to seize our wealth'. 'Inevitably', he went on to say, 'they will coerce all the people of the Empire into being their soldiers' (B, I: 255). Converts were therefore potential rebels (B, I: 81). Their efforts at self-defence against the Boxers and in some cases, official troops, made it easy to brand them as 'religious bandits' (B, I: 193, 196, 234, 239, 260, 263, 264, 268, 283, etc.). This justified extermination, but the Censor Ch'en Pi objected that there were too many Chinese Christians 'for them all to be killed'. He proposed creating what he called 'self-renewal offices' where converts who trampled on the cross and denied their faith would be allowed to live. Only those who refused to recant would be put to death (B, I: 206). This idea was adopted in a decree of 1 July. How can it be, the Throne asked rhetorically, that all converts 'are really enamoured of alien races, and take death upon themselves of their own accord? If they can change their faces and wash their hearts, there is no reason why they should not be released from the net.'⁶⁷

P'u-liang, Vice-President of the Board of Finances, wanted to exterminate the foreigners in the treaty ports for fear that they might stir up the converts and even march on the capital (B, I: 181). Grand Secretary Hsu T'ung and others called on the Throne to 'root out the evil races' and 'alien breeds', in other words, to order a massacre of Westerners and Japanese.⁶⁸ Two Han-lin compilers wanted to abolish international law, treaties, foreign trade, concession areas, loans and indemnities, and to kill all barbarians in China, so that 'not a single one is left' (B, I: 216). Their proposals were often infused with a nostalgia for the technology of the past. They demanded the destruction of the railways, the restoration of the traditional system of communications by relays of horses and riders, and

65. B, I: 177. He continued: 'Perhaps these events are Heaven's help to the common people, who have assembled the strength of their multitudes in order to encompass their revenge?' (B, I: 178).

66. A, I: 14. Chao Shu-ch'iao spoke of 'making use of their spirit of daring to act' (B, I: 110).

67. B, I: 215. Yü-hsien tried to persuade converts to become 'commoners' again in this way, but without success (B, I: 225; see also B, I: 240, 242, 253, 265).

68. B, I: 196. The decree of 6 July to the Governor-General of Chihli, calling for 'the total extermination of foreign bandits', should be seen in the context of the war in that province (B, I: 248). On efforts to massacre foreigners, see Smith 1901, II: 594-5.

the renewed manufacture of antiquated weapons like 'cloud ladders' (in other words, scaling-ladders) and 'fire eggs'.⁶⁹ But perhaps the most faithful guide to the wishful thinking of the educated classes is the considerably less bloodthirsty and archaic fake treaty published by the Boxers as a propaganda measure, probably somewhere in the Yangtze valley. Among the many provisions to which the foreigners had allegedly agreed are the following: the Powers to pay indemnities to China; Japan to present tribute; foreigners and missionaries banned from the interior; doubled rental for treaty ports; Chinese control of the Imperial Maritime Customs; Westerners to kowtow to Chinese officials; and the demolition of the Trans-Siberian railway (A, I: 259-60). The temptation before these impatient patriots was the prospect of immediately reversing China's painful international situation.

But the Boxers would not submit to official control. What occurred instead was a political saturnalia in which the roles of ruler and ruled were momentarily reversed. In Tientsin, and probably several other cities such as Cho-chou, they took over the administration. The city was divided up into sectors, each ruled by different bands of militia under a unified command.⁷⁰ Officials in sedan-chairs or on horseback had to dismount and stand respectfully to one side when the Boxers went by (A, II: 10). They smashed down many of the government offices and released the criminals from the county jail (A, II: 14; B, I: 366). In Peking they looted the houses of senior officials and shot or stabbed to death lesser officials and army officers in retaliation for fancied insults or treason (A, I: 311-12, 307). One of their vows followed the promise to uphold the dynasty's laws with a pledge 'to kill corrupt officials'.⁷¹ According to a contemporary Japanese account, the Boxers referred to the Peking mandarins as 'the three hundred sheep' and thought only eighteen of them did not deserve death (A, I: 261).

The powerlessness of the high-ranking pro-Boxer officials to exercise effective influence over their protégés was evident as early as mid-June, when Grand Secretary Kang-i went to Liang-hsing and Cho-chou, to try—quite vainly—to stop the unauthorized killing of foreigners and

69. B, I: 217-18; see B, I: 169 on destroying railways.

70. A, II: 143. On Cho-chou, see B, I: 113, 138; and Smith 1901, I: 208.

71. A, II: 142. The full text of the oath was: 'Do not covet wealth, do not lust after sex, do not disobey the commands of your father and mother, do not violate the laws of the dynasty, destroy the foreigners, and kill corrupt officials. When you go about in the markets, bow your head and look neither to left or right. If you meet a companion in the way, join hands.' The famous Boxer slogan 'Support the Ch'ing and destroy the foreigners' seems to have been borrowed from the anti-Christian movement in Hupei in 1898. See NCH 31 Dec. 1898: 1235; 16 Jan. 1899: 49. Ah-ying (1959: I: 5) says that the original Boxer slogan was 'Exterminate foreigners, kill corrupt officials'. For a Boxer placard attacking corrupt officials and even the Emperor, see Smith 1901, I: 201-3.

converts and the destruction of government property (A, I: 306). Once large numbers of Boxers had entered Peking, partly owing to the help of Prince Tsai-lan (B, I: 153), there was carnage and confusion there. Many non-Christians were killed (B, I: 197, 240, 244), and business life came almost to a standstill because of the destruction or closure of the money-shops (B, I: 140, 143). On 23 June Prince Chuang, Kang-i and others were appointed to lead the Boxers in the area between Peking and Tientsin (B, I: 140, 150). This had no beneficial effect on the situation (B, I: 176). As Chai O, the chronicler of Peking's agony, tells it, 'corpses were piled up like mountains', outrages of unmentionable obscenity were practised on Christian women, and the Han-lin Academy was burned so that, in Chai's phrase, 'the old books and documents flew off like butterflies' (A, I: 307).

Ch'ang-tsu, Vice-President of the Board of Finance in charge of granaries, wrote a sceptical appraisal of his own efforts to organize the Boxers at T'ung-chou (B, I: 269; see also B, I: 418):

The militia people use spiritual means to establish their teaching, and so basically do not accept official control. When one begins to recruit them and win them over, one has also to restrain the mob to be sure that nothing untoward happens. They come and go as they please; and rough behaviour has become a habit with them. All that I could do was to go in person to the various militia and in complete sincerity make known to them what loyalty and righteousness were. I gave them as effective a lead as was possible under the circumstances, in the hope that they might come under our jurisdiction. I have now set up a General Militia Defence Board, and deputed officials and gentry to have joint charge of it, the intention being that [the Boxers] may be joined to us in a spirit of unity. But their attitudes are deeply ingrained, and I do not dare to expect that they can be transformed.

Liu En-p'u, another granary official, who was trying to organize the Boxers near Peking, observed that less than half of the militia leaders would co-operate with him even to the extent of reporting their men's names.⁷² Perhaps the only effective official leadership of the Boxers was that of Circuit Intendant T'an Wen-huan at Tientsin (B, I: 279; A, II: 9, 16, 17-18). In Tsun-hua department, the Boxers under the Han-lin Bachelor Yang Hsi-lin engaged in robbing and killing (B, I: 656); and the private Boxer militias set up by two members of the imperial clan had to be suppressed by Prince Chuang for indiscipline (B, I: 392). And, as numerous memorials reported, many so-called Boxers were only ordinary criminals taking the chance to give their crimes the cover of legitimacy (e.g. B, I: 90-1, 93, 106, 206-7, 293, 294, 366, 398).

Let us draw the threads together. Our survey hints at a certain bimodality in Chinese political behaviour whereby long periods of tough

72. B, I: 279. Prince Chuang claimed some positive results (B, I: 348).

but flexible pragmatism alternate with occasional intense moments of radicalism and irrational excitation.⁷³ The Boxer uprising is an unusually clear case of such a moment. Examples of other moments, the Cultural Revolution perhaps, will occur to anyone familiar with modern Chinese history. To make it easier to draw comparisons between such episodes, and to define contrasts, it is useful to list the particular characteristics of the Boxer period as follows:

1. Hatred was used as the basis for mass mobilization.
2. Scapegoats for misfortune and suffering were invented and then killed.
3. There was a morbid fear of spies and other, all-but-invisible enemies.
4. The leaders had faith in the effectiveness of the will-power of the mobilized masses, and discounted the importance of superior technology.
5. Ordinary people believed in a more-or-less magical ideology that promised the accomplishment of superhuman feats.
6. Activists were obsessed with the symbolic purification of words, dress and objects.
7. There was a general desire for ideological unity, and the government sponsored a crude programme for compelling deviants to reform their thoughts.
8. People tended to expect an instant, almost miraculous, restoration of well-being once the evil-doers had been destroyed.
9. Theatrical devices were used to arouse the emotions, and drama and real life flowed into each other.
10. The enthusiastic young were the most numerous recruits to the cause, and possibly those who eventually suffered most.
11. The mass movement only developed as a result of a measure of encouragement from a part of the government apparatus.
12. The civil and military bureaucracies split into two factions, one for and one against the mass movement, and deadly feuds arose from this antagonism.
13. The mass movement was ostensibly loyal to the Throne, but in practice resisted official attempts to control it, and even created a skeletal administration of its own at the local level.
14. The criminal underworld used the mass movement as a cover.
15. Popular support was widespread but shallow, and collapsed under pressure as initial credulousness gave way to common sense.

73. Metzger (1973: 74-80) has suggested a somewhat similar distinction between 'realistic' and 'radical' types of official personality.

With this check-list, we must take our leave of the Boxers. Whether Maurice Freedman would have approved or not of the arguments offered here under his auspices, I do not know. I miss, and the profession misses, his kindly but incisive criticism.

REFERENCES

- A: see *I-bo-t'uan* 1951.
 B: see *I-bo-t'uan Tang-an Shib-liao* 1959.
 C: see *Shan-tung Chin-tai-shih Tzu-liao* 1957.
- A-YING 阿英 (pseud.) (ed.) 1959 [1938]. *Keng-tzu Shib-p'ien Wen-hsueh Chi* (A Collection of Literary Writings on the Crisis of 1900) 庚子事變文學集, Peking: Chung-hua Shu-chü (2 vols.).
- CH'ÊN, J. 1960. 'The Nature and Characteristics of the Boxer Movement: A Morphological Study', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. XXIII, Part 2, pp. 287-308.
- CHIANG, S. T. 1954. *The Nien Rebellion*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Ch'ou-pi Ou-ts'un* 1983. Chung-kuo She-hui K'o-hsueh-yuan Chin-tai-shih yen-chiu-so and Chung-kuo ti-i li-shih tang-an-kuan (eds.), 'Ch'ou-pi Ou-ts'un': *I-bo-tuan Shib-liao* ('Chance Survivals from the Strategist's Brush': Historical Materials on the Boxers) 籌筆偶存: 義和團史料, Peking: Chung-kuo She-hui-k'o-hsueh-yuan Ch'u-pan-she.
- COCHRANE, T. 1913. *A Survey of the Missionary Occupation of China*, Shanghai: Christian Literature Society for China.
- COHN, N. 1970. *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, London: Paladin.
- DAVIS, Fei-ling 1977. *Primitive Revolutionaries of China*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- DUNSTHEIMER, G. 1959. 'Religion et magie dans le mouvement des Boxeurs d'après les textes chinois', *T'oung Pao*, Vol. XLVII, pp. 323-67.
- HART, Sir Robert 1901. *These from the Land of Sinim': Essays on the Chinese Question*, London: Chapman & Hall.
- HUMMEL, A. (ed.) 1943-4. *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
- IMPERIAL MARITIME CUSTOMS 1904. *Decennial Reports 1892-1901*, Shanghai.
- I-bo-t'uan* 1951. Chien Po-tsan et al. (eds.), *I-bo-t'uan* (The Boxers) 義和團, Shanghai: Shen-chou Kuo-kuang She (4 vols.).
- I-bo-t'uan Tang-an Shib-liao* 1959. *I-bo-t'uan Tang-an Shib-liao* (Historical Materials on the Boxers in the State Archives) 義和團檔案史料, Peking: Chung-hua Shu-chü (2 vols.).

- Kuan-hsien 1934. *Kuan-hsien Hsien-chih* (Kuan-hsien County Gazetteer) 冠縣縣志, repr. Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Ch'u-pan-she 1968 (3 vols.).
- KUEPERS, J.J.A.M. 1977. *China und die Katholische Mission in sud-Shantung 1882-1900: Die Geschichte einer Konfrontation*, Steyl: Drukkerij van het Missiehuis.
- METZGER, T.A. 1973. *The Internal Organization of the Ch'ing Bureaucracy: Legal, Normative, and Communication Aspects*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- NCH (*North-China Herald*), an English-language weekly, Shanghai.
- PURCELL, V. 1963. *The Boxer Uprising: A Background Study*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SCHRECKER, J.E. 1971. *Imperialism and Chinese Nationalism: Germany in Shantung*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Shan-tung Chin-tai-shih Tzu-liao* 1957. Chung-kuo Shi-hsueh-hui, Chi-nan Fen-hui (ed.), *Shan-tung Chin-tai-shih Tzu-liao* (Materials on the Modern History of Shantung) 中國史學會, 濟南分會, 山東近代史資料, Chi-nan: Shan-tung Jen-min Ch'u-pan-she (3 vols.).
- Shan-tung I-ho-t'uan An-chüan* 1980. Chin-tai-shih Tzu-liao Pien-chi-shih (ed.), *Shan-tung I-ho-t'uan An-chüan* (Archival Documents on the Boxers in Shantung) 山東義和團案卷, Chi-nan: Ch'i-lu Shu-she (2 vols.).
- Shan-tung I-ho-t'uan Tiao-ch'a* 1980. Shan-tung Tou-hsueh Li-shih-hsi (ed.), *Shan-tung I-ho-t'uan Tiao-ch'a Tzu-liao Hsuan-pien* (Selected Materials from an Investigation of the Boxers of Shantung) 山東義和團調查資料選編, Chi-nan: Ch'i-lu Shu-she.
- SHEEKS, R.B. 1947. 'A Re-examination of the *I-ho-ch'üan* and its Role in the Boxer Movement', *Papers on China* I, Dec. 1947.
- SMITH, A.H. 1901. *China in Convulsion*, Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier (2 vols.).
- SUZUKI Chūsei 1952. *Shinbō Chūkishi Kenkyū* (A Historical Study of the Mid-Ch'ing Period) 金令木中正, 清朝中期史研究, Toyohashi: Aichi Daigaku.
- TAI Hsuan-chih 1963. *I-ho-t'uan Yen-chiu* (Boxer Studies), Taipei: Chung-kuo Hsueh-shu Chu-tso Chiang-chu Wei-yuan-hui 戴玄之, 義和團研究, 中國學術著作獎助委員會.
- TAN, C.C. 1955. *The Boxer Catastrophe*, New York: Columbia University Press.