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The Missionary as Devil: Anti-Missionary Demonology in China, 1860–1930

Thoralf Klein

As a foreign student in China in the early 1990s, I once visited the historical site of Zazhidong camp in Chongqing together with a German friend. This is a place where the Chinese Nationalists, with the help of American advisers provided by the Sino-American Cooperation Organization (SACO), interned and tortured Communists and their sympathizers in the 1940s.¹ It was a cold, grey, January day, and visitors were few. Apart from ourselves, I only recall a middle-aged Chinese couple walking in our direction. As they were passing us, I overheard the man say something to his wife. He was not speaking loudly, yet, perhaps because he mistook us for Americans and counted on our not understanding Chinese, what he said was clearly audible. It was just the two words *yang guizi* 洋鬼子 – ‘foreign devils’.²

This expression will be the focus of my subsequent examination of how European and North American missionaries in China became the object of processes of Othering. I am not suggesting in this article that the Chinese discourse on Europe can be reduced to the demonology implied in the term (*yang*) *guizi*; there existed other terms to denote missionaries and other foreigners, some of which – as we shall see – were more neutral. However, I think that the demonizing discourse on missionaries is important for two reasons: firstly, it was the strongest way in which the Christian presence in China, which was connected with imperialism from the mid-nineteenth century well into the twentieth, was construed as an alien and harmful force; secondly, over the same period, this discourse developed in a way that reflected the profound cultural change taking place in China at the time. As more and more traits of western culture were adopted and adapted in order to create a modern China, so the ways of perceiving ‘Westerners’ and construing images of them changed, and this in turn affected the use of anti-missionary demonology.

¹ For the context cf. Klaus Mühlhahn, *Criminal Justice in China. A History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 133-34.

² This essay uses *Hanyu Pinyin* 漢語拼音 as the standard method of romanization, except in quotations and bibliographic information. In rendering Chinese names, the family name precedes the given name, unless authors have chosen otherwise. [Thoralf Klein is I am](#) responsible for all translations, except where translators are indicated.

I am using the term ‘Westerner’ rather than ‘European’ because at the time under scrutiny here, common Chinese usage made no distinction between foreigners from Europe or from North America. This does not necessarily mean that there was no awareness of the differences between the two – at least in educated circles, at least, clearly there was an awareness of knew about (and there were had words for) the different European nation-states as well as the United States. However, given the nature of the encounter between Chinese on the one hand and Europeans and North Americans on the other, it was perfectly logical from a Chinese viewpoint to lump them together. This is reflected in terms such as *xi* 西 (‘Western’) or *yang* 洋 (foreign or, literally, ‘from across the [Western] Ocean’), or the combination of the two, *xiyang*. By the same token, (*yang*) *guizi* was also applied indiscriminately to all ‘Westerners’, although, in concrete circumstances, it could be rendered more specific by adding references to nationality. The term *yang* also denoted foreign things, such as foreign companies (*yanghang* 洋行), matches (literally ‘foreign fire’, *yanghuo* 洋火) and, last but not least, Christianity, the ‘foreign religion’ or, more literally, ‘foreign teaching’ (*yangjiao* 洋教). The latter was an umbrella-generic term equally applied to both Catholicism and Protestantism, which were most commonly conceptualized as two different teachingsets of doctrines, as is reflected in their two-different-specific names: *Tianzhujiao* 天主教 (literally, ‘Teaching of the Lord of Heaven’, after the name for God prescribed by the Vatican since the seventeenth-century ‘rites controversy’) and *Jidujiao* 基督教 (literally, ‘Teaching of Christ’) respectively.

‘Foreign devil’ or rather ‘demon’ was not an epithet specifically attributed to missionaries, but one generically referring to ‘Westerners’. In this chapter, therefore, I shall also ask to what extent missionaries were portrayed as a particular category of ‘foreign demons’ different from other western foreigners. By examining-analyzing textual and visual material, I will examine how the epithet ‘foreign demons’ became a signifier denoting missionaries, and how its use changed between the mid-nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth. My chapter will focus on topics from three phases of modern Chinese history: in the first section, I will examine one of the major anti-Christian works and its impact on anti-missionary riots, in the second I shall take a look at the Boxer movement of 1898–1901, and the third will be devoted to anti-Christian literature in the context of the anti-imperialist movement of the 1920s. In my conclusion, I will place the Chinese anti-missionary demonology in the broader context of universalism, Orientalism and Occidentalism. I shall begin, however, by identifying the cultural and historical locus of Chinese anti-missionary demonology.

Devils or demons? The cultural and historical framework

Translating (*yang*)*guizi* as ‘foreign *devil*’ can be regarded as creating what Lydia Liu has called a super-sign – “a linguistic monstrosity that thrives on the excess of its presumed meaning by virtue of being exposed to, or thrown together with, foreign etymologies and foreign languages.”³ For the term *gui* 鬼 does not suggest, as does the European concept of the Devil (or Satan), the idea of pure and absolute evil.⁴ Rather, it evokes the idea of strangeness and danger – ‘demon’ or ‘ghost’ therefore would be a far more appropriate translation, and I will use either one of these terms when I refer to *gui* in what follows, except ~~in some quotations~~ where I rely on translations by others.

The world of Chinese folklore is populated by a host of creatures such as demons, fox spirits, goblins and fairies.⁵ On the level of high culture, this is reflected in the ‘Strange Stories from the Studio of Cheerfulness’ (*Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異) by the seventeenth-century author Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640–1715) – innovative and unconventional texts written in difficult literary Chinese and accessible only to the learned social elite of China, the literati. Pu’s treatment of the spirit world is subtle and often satirical; for example, he depicts sexual intercourse between humans and female spirits, often with a happy ending.⁶ To some extent, he draws on Chinese folk religion, which conceptualizes ‘gods, ghosts and ancestors’ as the

³ Lydia H. Liu, *The Clash of Empires. The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 13.

⁴ Surprisingly, an ~~good~~ excellent discussion of this feature of the word, which productively uses recent literature on Chinese history, is found in W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz, *American History Goes to the Movies. Hollywood and the American Experience* (London: Routledge, 2011), 24-25.

⁵ For some of these, cf. Richard von Glahn, *The Sinister Way. The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 4, 78 and passim.

⁶ There exists a plethora of Chinese editions as well as translations into English presenting either the complete text or selected stories. Cf. Pu Songling, *Ershisi juan chaoben Liaozhai zhiyi* 二十四卷抄本聊齋誌異, 2 vols. (Jinan: Qi-Lu Shushe, 1981); id., *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*, trans. Lu Yunzhong, Yang Liyi, Yang Zhihong and Chen Tifang (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1982). For a situation of Pu’s work within literati culture and for a characterization of his language and for the rootedness of his stories in popular culture cf. Chang Chun-shu and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *Redefining History. Ghosts, Spirits and Human Society in P’u Sung-ling’s World, 1640–1715* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 59-62, 73-75 and 151-58; Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Classical Chinese Tale* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993); id., *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth Century Chinese Literature* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 16-18; Y. W. Ma, “Fiction”, in *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. William H. Nienhauser (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 31-48, here 39.

three central categories of supernatural beings with which humans interact.⁷ Of this triad, ancestors (*zu* 祖) and ghosts or demons (*gui*) form the opposite ends of a spectrum of ways in which the living and the dead are tied together. Although things are invariably more complicated than this, suffice it to say here that ancestors are the deceased members of one's own genealogical group whose living descendants take care of them and provide them with everything that they need in their afterlife. Souls of persons who have passed away prematurely, have died an unnatural death, or have produced no offspring cannot be taken care of. Hungry and homeless, they turn into ghosts preying on the living. Since they are outside the bond between the living and their deceased relatives, they are usually external to the all-important family and lineage relations. As Arthur Wolf has written, "[o]ne man's ancestor is another man's ghost." And: "The one [the ancestor] is usually a kinsman, the other is always a stranger."⁸ It is this narrower concept of ghosts that interests us here.

As recent anthropological fieldwork has shown, there is no unanimity among Chinese about whether demons are generally considered evil. There may even be some sympathy for ghosts on account of their unhappy fate.⁹ However, in view of the fluid boundaries between ghosts and ancestors, ~~which has been as~~ emphasised by Wolf, what makes the former at least potentially dangerous is not necessarily their evil nature. ~~Rather, it is~~ their status as outcasts and aliens devoid of any obligations to specific communities and their individual members. At any rate, ghosts' interference with the living points to some sort of irregularity or disturbance ~~such an irregularity or disturbance that~~ must be either prevented or rectified.¹⁰ As a result, villages or descent groups resort to a variety of specific strategies in order to deal with ghosts and forestall any potential harm: As ideal types, we might distinguish between appeasing them through offerings – the best-known example being the Hungry Ghost Festival, where

⁷ Arthur P. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors", in *Studies in Chinese Society*, ed. id. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1978), 131-82; David K. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors. The Folk Religion of a Taiwanese Village* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), 172. For a critical assessment of Wolf's concept and a historical (rather than systematic) treatment of the three categories cf. von Glahn, *The Sinister Way*, 6-7, 19 62-65 and passim.

⁸ Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors", 146.

⁹ Janet Lee Scott, *For Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors. The Chinese Tradition of Paper Offerings* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 91-96. Lee explicitly states that her findings bear out many of the claims made by Arthur Wolf. However, any application of contemporary findings to historical situations must be treated with caution.

¹⁰ Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, 134-37. It must be noted, however, that families can even be haunted by their own deceased members, often as a result of a disruption of the appropriate family structure; cf. *ibid.*, 138-164.

ghosts are fed and clothed during the seventh lunar month – and exorcising them with the help of religious specialists. Exorcisms are intended to bring about a change of fate or to restore peace, harmony and stability; however, it must be noted that expelling harmful ghosts is only one aspect of these rituals.¹¹

Since demons were thought of as strangers, the concept of demons was readily transferable to foreigners who – from the perspective of Chinese society – intruded into family and lineage circles, interfering with the ordinary patterns of social and religious life. However, the association of the term *guizi* (a reinforced variant of *gui*) with the character *yang* and hence the identification of ‘foreigners’ as ‘demons’ was not a given of the idea that demons were strangers, but followed a historical trajectory. According to Meng Hua, this development can be divided into three stages:¹² In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, during the reign of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the term *gui* reflected popular fear at the appearance of the first foreigners – Portuguese and Dutch – on China’s southern coasts. Some of the Chinese concerns, in particular the aggressiveness of the foreigners and their abduction of Chinese children, may have been the results of cultural misunderstandings. By using a derogatory epithet, Chinese people marked the alterity of the ‘Westerners’. After the Manchurian Qing dynasty (1644–1912) had conquered China, the usage of *guizi* was consolidated and found its way into high literature. However, its association with *yang* did not achieve wide popularity until after the Opium War (1840–42), which marked the beginning of the third stage. In particular, none of the recorded examples of the combination *yang guizi* predates the year 1840.¹³ Since the mid-nineteenth century, this term expressed outrage towards and resentment of the imperialistic methods by which ‘Westerners’ had begun to impose their forms of intercourse on China and shifted the terms of interaction in their own favour. There is a certain irony in this, as the ‘Westerners’ understood the term *yang* to be a neutral description, in contrast to the character *Yi* 夷, which in the early 1830s, ‘Western’ China hands had begun to translate as ‘barbarian’, creating *the* super-sign par excellence

¹¹ For the Hungry Ghost Festival cf. Lloyd E. Eastman, *Family, Fields, and Ancestors. Constancy and Change in China’s Social and Economic History, 1550–1949* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 52. Scott, *For Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors*, 97-101, describes offerings of special paper money and clothing, both during major festivals or irregularly. For exorcism cf. Donald S. Sutton, *Steps of Perfection. Exorcistic Performers and Chinese Religion in Twentieth-Century Taiwan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 130-138; Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, 119-20, 129-33.

¹² Hua Meng, “The Chinese Genesis of the Term ‘Foreign Devil’”, in *Images of Westerners in Chinese and Japanese Literature*, ed. id. and Sukehiro Harakawa (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 25-37.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 35-36; cf. Liu, *Clash of Empires*, 96-107.

according to Lydia Liu.¹⁴ Whereas the foreign powers had finally managed to suppress the use of *Yi* in official documents in the treaties following the Opium Wars, they found it more difficult to control popular usage. There is evidence, however, that foreign representatives ~~did~~ actively attempted to censor the word *guizi* and local variants thereof whenever they heard it being used, sometimes admonishing transgressors, sometimes using physical violence to ‘teach’ them.¹⁵

One might expect that the term ‘demons’ was first applied to Christian missionaries in the first two periods identified by Meng Hua, as Catholic missionaries (in particular Jesuits) were evangelizing in China from about 1600 until Christianity was officially outlawed in 1724. However, anti-Christian tracts from the late Ming period do not seem to have used the term in this way. For example, the ‘Collection on the Exposure of Heterodoxy’ (*Poxie ji* 破邪集), an anthology of anti-Christian writings first published in 1640, uses *man* 蠻 or *yeman* 野蠻 to refer to foreign missionaries.¹⁶ This was one of several terms denoting foreigners outside the realm of the Chinese empire and, although it construed a hierarchy of civilizations (*ye* meaning ‘wild’ and the character *man* containing the radical for ‘worm’, *chong* 虫), it was certainly less derogatory and more dispassionate than *gui*. Christianity, as indicated in the title of the collection, is referred to as ‘heterodox’ (*xie* 邪), i.e. a teaching whose doctrines and practices are not in accordance with the Confucian orthodoxy officially sanctioned and prescribed by the Imperial dynasty.¹⁷ Thus the available evidence suggests that missionaries, as well as other foreigners, were referred to as ‘(foreign) demons’ only in the third period, after 1840. Instead, some of the texts assembled in the *Poxie ji* assume a diametrically opposite perspective, complaining that the foreigners “have no compunction in calling

¹⁴ Zhaorong Peng, “The Image of the ‘Red-Haired Barbarian’ in Official and Popular Discourse”, in *Images of Westerners*, ed. Hua and Sukehiro, 17-23, here 21. Cf. Liu, *Clash of Empires*, 31-69; James L. Hevia, *English Lessons. The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press and Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 57-61.

¹⁵ Liu, *Clash of Empires*, 97-100.

¹⁶ Lionel M. Jensen, “China and the Confluence of Cultures. Overcoming the East-West Mind Set”, in *Beating Devils and Burning Their Books. Views of China, Japan, and the West*, ed. Anthony E. Clark (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies 2010), 107-132, here 122. For the Buddhist background of this and other texts cf. *Handbook of Christianity in China. Vol. 1: 635-1800*, ed. Nicolas Standaert (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 511-13.

¹⁷ Cf. Kwang-ching Liu and Richard Shek, “Introduction”, in *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China*, ed. id. (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 3-4.

Confucius a devil” and also disregard the Buddha or Daoist immortals: “[T]hey insult them all, calling them devils and say that they have all been cast into hell.”¹⁸

In the nineteenth century, echoes of this attack on Chinese religions were found in the Taiping 太平 movement (1851–1864), best understood as a folk-religionized version of Protestant Christianity.¹⁹ The leader of the movement, Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–1864), believed in his God-given mission to rid China of ‘demons’. By the term ‘demons’ he meant the defenders of the Imperial order and of Confucian orthodoxy and, in particular, the alien Manchus, the ethnic group to which the Qing dynasty belonged. As one of the Confucian adversaries of the Taiping stated: “The bandits [Taiping] call the [Qing] officials ‘demons’ [yao 妖], and they call Imperial clothing, Imperial caps, the jackets worn by officials, peacock feathers and buttons indicating rank, ‘demon tools’[...] They also call scholars ‘demon scholars’, soldiers ‘demon soldiers’ and envoys ‘demon messengers’. There is nothing they do not demonize, they even call the local militia ‘demon maggots’; this is a very new name.”²⁰ This was not simply a distorting perspective of the Taipings’ enemies. In the ‘Proclamations by Imperial Sanction’ (*Banxing zhaoshu* 頒行詔書), an 1852 Taiping text, the Qing emperor is explicitly referred to as ‘demon’ (*yao*). The same text also speaks of people who were deluded by ‘demons’ (*yaomo* 妖魔), and tells how God and Jesus “exterminated great numbers of demons (*mogui* 魔鬼) in pitched battle, for how could the demons (*yaomo*) seek

¹⁸ Quoted from Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact. A Conflict of Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), 177-78. Note that Gernet does not seem to be bothered by problems of translatability. For a critical reading of Gernet, albeit with few references to the *Poxie ji*, cf. Paul Rule, “Does Heaven Speak? Revelation in the Confucian and Christian Traditions”, in *China and Christianity. Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, ed. Stephen Uhalley and Xiaoxin Wu (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2001), 63-79.

¹⁹ Liu Ying-hua, “The Folk-religionization of Christianity in China – Hong Xiuquan’s *Yuandao jueshi xun* and the Taiping Rebellion”, in: *Shizijia qian de sisuo – wenben jiedu yu Shengjing quanshi* 十字架前的思索 – 文本解讀與聖經詮釋 [Pondering before the Cross – Reading Texts and Interpreting the Gospel], ed. Wang Chengmian 王成勉 (Taipei: Liming Wenhua 2010), 77-106.

²⁰ Pan Zhongrui 潘鐘瑞, “Sutai milu ji 蘇臺麋鹿記 [Records of the Stag on the Grassy Terrace]”, in *Taiping Tianguo* 太平天國 [The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom], ed. Wang Zhongmin 王重民 et al., vol. 5 (Shanghai: Shenzhou Guoguangshe, 1952), 269-287, here 279; cf. Thomas H. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2004), 138-39.

to rival heaven?”²¹ Two aspects of this discourse are important here: Firstly, Taiping dualism not only drew from Christianity, but also from Chinese popular sectarianism and therefore had “indigenous roots”;²² this is a proof that demonization could be applied to groups within Chinese society, not only to foreigners. Secondly, the Taiping used a variety of expressions to demonize their adversaries, with *yao* referring to their earthly and *yaomo* or *mogui* to their spiritual enemies (to complicate the matter, the character *mo* 魔 contains the radical *gui* 鬼). This distinguishes Taiping rhetoric from anti-Christian demonology, which made exclusive use of the character *gui*, the one that was least associated with concepts of evil and most with a history of mishaps or injustice.²³ Anti-foreign demonology, therefore, was unique, and it is to its anti-missionary aspects that we now turn.

Sex, crime, and panic: anti-Christian tracts, 1861–1892

The first set of materials analyzed in this essay consists of anti-Christian texts and images published or distributed between 1860 and the early 1890s. This was the period when both Catholic and Protestant missions (the former after the effective repeal of the 1724 ban, the latter as newcomers after 1807) established themselves in every region of the Chinese empire. In the Treaty of Beijing in 1860, foreigners had obtained the right to travel in the interior of China, which effectively allowed Christian missionaries to evangelize outside the limits of the ‘Western’ settlements that had developed in the coastal ‘treaty ports’. By manipulating the Chinese version of the treaty, the French interpreter, a Catholic priest, also secured the right to acquire real estate in the Chinese hinterland. Protestant missionaries claimed the same privilege by appealing to the most-favoured nation status of their native countries before their residence in the interior was legalized in 1881. Also, in 1862, the Qing emperor had been forced to issue the last in a series of toleration edicts allowing Chinese Christians to practise their religion unmolested.²⁴

²¹ “Proclamations by Imperial Sanction”, in *The Taiping Rebellion. History and Documents*, ed. Franz Michael, vol. 2 (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1971), 141-151, here 143; I have added the characters from the original version cf. “Banxing zhaoshu (頒行詔書)”, in *Taiping Tianguo 太平天國* [The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom], ed. Wang Zhongmin 王重民 et al., vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shenzhou Guoguangshe, 1952), 155-162, here 160.

²² Paul Richard Bohr, “The Politics of Eschatology. Hung Hsiu-ch’uan and the Rise of the Taipings, 1837–1853” (PhD diss., University of California at Davis, 1978), 205-06.

²³ For the different concepts and terminology cf. Barend J. ter Haar, *Telling Stories. Witchcraft and Scapegoating in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

²⁴ For these privileges cf. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 276; Helle Jörgensen, “Zum wechselfollen Verhältnis von Mission und Politik: Die Berliner

Among the anti-Christian tracts published in late nineteenth-century China, perhaps the most influential was a book called ‘A Record of Facts to Ward off Heterodoxy’ (*Bixie jishi* 辟邪紀實). It was published anonymously in 1861 by an author styling himself as “the world’s most heartbroken man” (*Tianxia di-yi shangxin ren* 天下第一傷心人), who had taken part in the fight against the Taiping, at a time when missionaries (and in particular Catholics) had just begun to establish themselves in the interior of China.²⁵ In addition to the book itself, which continued to be printed and was often successful in stimulating anti-Christian action, numerous abridged and simplified versions were circulated. One Chinese source estimates the number of the various versions at several hundred.²⁶ Among these is a collection of woodblock prints from the *Bixie jishi* under the title ‘Respectful Obedience to the Sacred Edict to Ward Off Heterodoxy. A Complete Picture Gallery’ (*Jinzun Shengyu bixie quantu* 謹遵聖諭辟邪全圖), published around 1890 and reprinted with English annotations by a missionary press.²⁷ Missionaries attributed the editorship of the Chinese original to a scholar-official from Hunan province named Zhou Han 周漢 (1842 or 1849–1911), whom they suspected of being a chief instigator behind the anti-missionary riots in Central China in

Missionsgesellschaft in Guangdong”, in *Deutsch-chinesische Beziehungen im 19. Jahrhundert. Mission und Wirtschaft in interkultureller Perspektive*, ed. Mechthild Leutner and Klaus Mühlhahn (Münster: LIT, 1996), 183-218, here 186; for the toleration edict of 1862 cf. R. G. Tiedemann, “Christian Missions in Shandong in the Context of China’s National and Revolutionary Development”, in *Missionsgeschichte – Kirchengeschichte – Weltgeschichte*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden and Heike Liebau (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996), 387-404, here 389.

²⁵ An English translation was published under the title *Death Blow to Corrupt Doctrines. A Plain Statement of Facts. Published by the Gentry and the People* (Shanghai: no publisher, 1870). The most thorough treatment of *Bixie jishi* is in Paul A. Cohen, *China and Christianity. The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Antiforeignism 1860–1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 45-60 and 277-81. For two more recent discussions cf. ter Haar, *Telling Stories*, 160-172; Anthony E. Clark, “Rape, Baptism and the ‘Pig’ Religion: Images of Foreign Missionaries During the Late Nineteenth Century”, in *Beating Devils and Burning Their Books. Views of China, Japan, and the West*, ed. Anthony E. Clark (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2010), 49-62. For the author cf. Zhongguo Di-yi Lishi Dang’anguan 中國第一歷史檔案館 and Fujian Shifan Daxue Lishixi 福建師範大學歷史系, ed., *Qing mo jiao’an* 清末教案 [Late Qing missionary cases], vol. 6 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006), 664, and ter Haar, *Telling Stories*, 160.

²⁶ *Qing mo jiao’an*, 635.

²⁷ *The Cause of the Riots in the Yangtse Valley. A Complete Picture Gallery* (Hankou, 1891). The title of the book is translated as ‘Heresy Exposed in Respectful Obedience to *The Sacred Edict*. A Complete Picture Gallery’. The pages in this book are not consecutively numbered.

1891.²⁸ This material is complemented by shorter texts and handbills, which, as Barend ter Haar has argued, may have derived from orally transmitted discourses expressing similar fears about missionaries, rather than from the more elaborate and literary *Bixie jishi*; what is important in the context of this essay, however, is that all of these media share the use of a number of signifiers.²⁹

As will become clear in my subsequent discussion, this book and others of its kind are specifically about missionaries. The latter are referred to as ‘demons’ (*guizi*) throughout, but, interestingly, this is nowhere reflected in the visual record. The foreigners are portrayed as exotic and alien, but they are clearly identified as human beings. The link between text and images is provided not by the signifier *gui*, but by the words *zhu* and *yang*. This is achieved by way of puns playing on the homonyms that are so characteristic of the Chinese language. Foreigners are often, though not always, portrayed as goats because the character for goat (*yang* 羊) is pronounced the same way as the character for ‘foreign’ (*yang* 洋). By the same token, there is a pun on the Catholic name for God, namely ‘the Lord of Heaven’ (*Tianzhu* 天主), as being ‘the heavenly pig’ (*Tianzhu* 天豬), and Catholicism, ‘the teaching of the Lord of Heaven’ (*Tianzhujiao* 天主教) is ridiculed as ‘the squeak of the heavenly pig’ (*Tianzhujiao* 天豬叫).³⁰ With little concern for the niceties of Trinitarian doctrine, however, the role of the ‘heavenly pig’ is attributed to Jesus, as illustrated by another widely published pamphlet, 800,000 copies of which are supposed to have circulated:

“The hog of heaven
Easy to tell:

²⁸ *Cause of the Riots*, introduction and notes to the title page. Cf. Liu Yangyang 劉央央, “Zhou Han fan yangjiao an shulun 周漢反洋教案述論 [A discussion of Zhou Han’s resistance to the foreign religion]”, in *Jindai Zhongguo jiao’an yanjiu* 近代中國教案研究 [Studies of missionary cases in modern China], ed. Sichuan Sheng Zhexue Shehui Kexue Lianhehui 四川省哲學社會科學聯合會 and Sichuan Sheng Jindaishi Jiao’an Yanjiuhui 四川省近代史教案研究會 (Changsha: Sichuan Shehui Kexueyuan Chubanshe, 1987), 373-395.

²⁹ Cf. ter Haar, *Telling Stories*, 160-63.

³⁰ Cf. also “Dr. John on the Hunan Manifesto”, in *The Anti-Foreign Riots in China 1891. With an Appendix* (Shanghai: North China Herald Office, 1892), 196-97.

They worship Jesus the only hog;
Emperor and parents they heed not.”³¹

This apparent focus on Catholicism does not mean, however, that Protestants were considered more acceptable. In fact, the *Bixie jishi* explicitly stated that both Catholics and Protestants were included in the attack, and the attacks against Protestants in the Yangzi Valley in 1891 offer support for this statement.³²

As a visual sign, *gui* or ‘demon’ only worked in conjunction with those other signifiers, ‘pig’ and ‘goat’. This is also borne out in textual evidence, when posters referred to missionaries as “pig-goat-devils” (in the translation by a missionary).³³ As a rule, the ‘ghost’ sign is placed into a wider context. First of all, the title of ‘Respectful Obedience to the Sacred Edict to Ward Off Heterodoxy’ as well as the introduction in *Bixie jishi* explicitly refer to the Sacred Edict (*Shengyu* 聖諭) proclaimed by the Kangxi 康熙 Emperor in 1670, and, more specifically, to the amplified version proclaimed by his son and successor, the Yongzheng 雍正 emperor.³⁴ This is a collection of 16 short maxims addressed to the Chinese population. In the 1670 original the seventh of these maxims runs: “Do away with errant teachings and so exalt the correct doctrine.”³⁵ In his 1724 elaboration of the edict, the Yongzheng Emperor had explicitly stated that “the people from the Western Ocean who venerate the Lord of Heaven [i.

³¹ “Ghost-busting Song”, trans. Eva Hung, *Renditions* 53-54 (2000): 251-52, here 251.

³² For an overview of these riots cf. Edmund S. Wehrle, *Britain, China and the Antimissionary Riots 1891–1900* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1966). Ter Haar, *Telling Stories*, 176-90 gives a fresh interpretation, understanding events mainly against the background of orally transmitted mass scares. For the *Bixie jishi*’s position cf. Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 48.

³³ “An Agreement Entered Into by All Hunan”, in *The Anti-Foreign Riots in China 1891. With an Appendix* (Shanghai: North China Herald Office, 1892), 197-99.

³⁴ For the *Bixie jishi* cf. Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 48.

³⁵ This translation is from William Theodore de Bary and John Lufrano, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition. From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 71. For the Chinese text, which has *yiduan* 異端, not *xie*, to denote heterodoxy, cf. Liang Yannian, ed., *Shengyu xiangjie* 聖諭像解 [A Pictorial Explanation of the Sacred Edict], reprint edition (Beijing: Xianzhuang Shuju, 1995), 2.

Interestingly, this edition of the late seventeenth-century original is based on an 1887 reprint from Hunan, which in turn draws on an 1856 edition from Guangzhou. This can hardly be a coincidence.

e., the Catholic missionaries, Th. K.], are also subsumed under [the label] uncanonical.”³⁶ And although the emperor had conceded that missionaries were employed by the court as astronomers, he had had all but these expelled them from his realm that very same year.

By referring to the official version of Confucian orthodoxy, the anti-Christian texts of the late nineteenth century appear as rallying cries to the defence of orthodox Confucianism, and the title of the *Bixie jishi* establishes a link to seventeenth-century texts, in particular the *Poxie ji*. Both also point to the Confucian and scholarly background of their authors. However, unlike their predecessors, nineteenth-century pamphleteers are less interested in doctrinal niceties and more in the exposure of what they portray as shocking Christian practices, in particular sexual licentiousness, the mishandling of corpses (and sometimes living humans) for ‘scientific’ or medical purposes, and mass poisoning.

A look at the first element in this uncanny triad reveals how nineteenth-century authors went beyond the criticisms of their predecessors. For example, ‘Respectful Obedience’ has an image depicting the Catholic mass as a licentious gathering of men and women (an image that missionaries sought to counter by separating male and female converts in church as best they could³⁷). The caption, “Propagating the squeak in the squeak halls” equates evangelizing with fornication, as the characters ‘propagating the squeak’ are repeated in the lower half of the picture near what seems to be missionaries (and possibly a Chinese Christian preacher) having sexual intercourse with Chinese women ([fig. 1](#)).³⁸ The accompanying text suggests that in church, “[...] people, who, for the most part, are strangers to each other, meet from all quarters, and couple and pair just as they please; human beings and devils, male and female, sleep together on the same pillow.”³⁹ This passage is interesting because it draws a dividing line between ‘demons’ on the one hand and ‘human beings’ on the other, but the missionaries’ alleged attack on the social order and in particular on gender relationships is painted in even more drastic terms in another section of the *Bixie jishi*, which states that, after Sunday

³⁶ My translation is based on the following edition: Zhou Zhenhe 周振鶴 and Gu Meihua 顧美華, ed., *Shengyu guangxun. Jijie yu yanjiu* 聖諭廣訓. 集解與研究 [An Extensive Instruction on the Sacred Edict. Collected Explanations and Research] (Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian Chubanshe, 2006), 290.

³⁷ Cf. Pui-lan Kwok, *Chinese Women and Christianity 1860–1927* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 72–73.

³⁸ “The Cause of the Riots in the Yangtse Valley”, plate 8 and translation.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

worship, “all give themselves up to indiscriminate sexual intercourse. This is the height of their enjoyment. They call it the ‘Great Communion,’ or the ‘Love-gathering.’”⁴⁰

With their clearly sexualized overtones, the *Bixie jishi* and other anti-Christian works depart markedly from their seventeenth-century predecessors. These had criticized the want of propriety in the contact between missionaries and Chinese women, but they had not alluded to sexual relationships between the two. The nineteenth-century tracts probably also referred to other strands of Chinese literary tradition. Anthony Clark, to whose discussion of anti-Christian materials this essay owes a great deal, has drawn attention to the iconographic similarity between the pig in the anti-Christian tracts and visual representations of Zhu Bajie 豬八戒, better known in the West as ‘Piggy’, from the popular sixteenth-century novel ‘The Journey to the West’ (*Xiyouji* 西遊記). While the *Bixie jishi* explicitly portrays Jesus as a licentious man, Zhu Bajie, half-pig and half-man, is punished in the novel for his sexual advances towards a Goddess.⁴¹ Clark’s observation may be accurate, but we will later encounter Zhu Bajie among the enemies of Christianity, and another character type featuring in popular Chinese novels, the lecherous (Buddhist) monk, may also have been a model for ideas about foreign missionaries. For example, chapters 45 and 46 of the popular sixteenth-century novel *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (translated into English under the titles ‘Water Margin’, ‘Outlaws of the Marsh’ or ‘All Men Are Brothers’) contain the story of a sex-hungry monk’s illicit affair with the wife of one of the novel’s heroes. The episode concludes with the following poem:

“Most evil are monks
Who break the commandments
And revel in lust
Day after day.
Strange was this fellow’s behavior.
He shared the lady’s pillow
and ne’er with her would part,
Mad like many monks,

⁴⁰ *Death Blow to Corrupt Doctrines*, 10.

⁴¹ Clark, “Rape, Baptism and the ‘Pig’ Religion”, 50-51 and note 31.

Big and small.

You can see it on the streets.

[...]"⁴²

It is interesting that this parallels a ‘Western’ tradition that dates back at least to Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, a late fourteenth-century text.

The second charge against missionaries, that of carving out organs or gouging out eyeballs from corpses, was no less drastic, but somewhat less sexualized or even gendered – excepting the horror fantasy that missionaries also cut out foetuses from women, either living or dead. For example, the “Ghost-busting song” already mentioned listed the ways in which Christian missionaries threatened men, women, and children respectively. While men are likely to wear the “hat of a cuckold” if they did not beware, the horrors awaiting women are portrayed far more graphically:

“The hog of heaven
Cuts open your wombs,
Drags out your foetuses,
Slices off your nipples:
All goes into the potions they prepare,
Women of every family must beware.”⁴³

The next stanza then conjures up the spectre of missionaries killing children with knives so that they can then cut out their kidneys.

These gruesome fantasies probably originated in the early eighteenth century, but developed into a mass scare only from the 1840s.⁴⁴ In the 1852 edition of his noted “Illustrated World Geography” (*Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志), the distinguished scholar and geographer Wei Yuan 魏

⁴² The translation is from a Chinese-English edition: Sidney Shapiro, trans., *Shuihuzhuan* (水滸傳). *Outlaws of the Marsh* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2003), 1391. For the history of the editions of this novel, cf. Liangyan Ge, *Out of the Margins. The Rise of Chinese Vernacular Fiction* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 2-3.

⁴³ “Ghost-busting song”, 251.

⁴⁴ ter Haar, *Telling Stories*, 159-60.

源 (1794–1857), had famously told of Catholic priests taking out the eyeballs of deceased followers. Apart from his being one of the main sources for the alleged licentiousness of Christian missionaries – he had recorded that men and women spent the night together in church –, Wei also came up with stories of how converts to Christianity not only received money from the missionaries, but also were made to swallow “a pill like a small flaky-crispy pastrypancake” thought to bewitch people so that they would remain loyal to the faith.⁴⁵ It seems that this misconception of the Holy Communion wafer helped to give rise to the third allegation against missionaries – that of mass poisoning of wells, foodstuffs and the like. This was not so much disseminated in book-length texts like the *Bixie jishi*, but, rather, in posters and handbills. For example, a poster distributed in 1892 in Guangdong province repeated the rumour of missionaries cutting out foetuses from their mothers’ wombs for medical purposes, but its powerful opening passage evokes a more general concern for children:

“The foreign demons (*fan gui* 番鬼) hide poison in medicine and sweets.
Children are in mortal danger if they pick them up from the streets.
If somebody⁴⁶ gives you [such] a present, don’t let small children have those treats.
Sometimes [the presents] consist in cash, with the poison hidden in the strings.
Don’t let children bite them open, for sure death this brings.
Sometimes the poison may be hidden in a brush.
Do not sip the ink and the hairs with water wash.
First of all beware and open keep your eyes.”⁴⁷

Somewhat unusually, the author of this pamphlet is known: it was written by a *xiucai* (degree-holder who had passed the lowest level of state exams) and schoolteacher named Zheng

⁴⁵ Wei Yuan 魏源, “Selections from *An Illustrated World Geography* *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志 [An illustrated survey of the maritime countries]”, vol. 2, trans. Tam Pak Shan, *Renditions* 53-54 (2000): 14-17. ed. Guan Qiaoling 管巧靈 and Liu Wen 劉文, Changsha: Yuelu Shushe 2011, here 16881. Cf. the discussion of the passage in Clark, “Rape, Baptism and the ‘Pig’ Religion”, 48-49. For a good discussion of the various editions of *Haiguo tuzhi* and its connections with the older anti-Christian literature cf. also Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 36-40.

⁴⁶ Literally: “the face of a man” (*renmian* 人面). This might be an allusion to the phrase “the face of a man but the heart of a beast” (*renmian shouxin* 人面獸心), which would also denote the missionaries’ not being human.

⁴⁷ *Jiaowu jiao’an dang* 教務教案檔 [Records of Mission Affairs and Missionary Cases], ed. Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo 中央研究院近代史研究所, vol. 5 (Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindai Yanjiusuo, 1977), 2201-02, no. 2188: von Brandt to Zongli Yamen, Guangxu 18/4/29 = 25 May, 1892.

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Xianchen 鄭獻琛 from Huilai 惠來 county in Guangdong 廣東 Province.⁴⁸ His authorship again attests to the role of Confucian literati in instigating anti-Christian activities.

To get rid of the missionaries, the anti-Christian texts propose radical and violent measures. One of the best known woodblocks in ‘Respectful Obedience’ suggests beating the ‘demons’ (probably to death) and burning their books, while others recommend shooting them with arrows or decapitating them. Only one image shows a religious battle in the strict sense, namely a Daoist master exorcising the missionaries.⁴⁹ In another notice posted in Hunan province in 1892, the idea of exorcism seems to have been more metaphorical: To “subjugate the foreign devils and exorcise the evil spirits,” the text suggests killing not only the “foreign invaders” and burning foreign ships, but also those Chinese officials who support them. In particular some of the highest office-holders who advocated the ‘self-strengthening’ of the Qing empire in the 1870s and 1880s are themselves denounced as “devils”.⁵⁰

Thus the anti-Christian literature of the 1860s to 1890s did address missionaries as *gui*, but it was not the term itself that acted as a powerful signifier (especially not in the visual material), and the propagandistic effect did not primarily rest on emphasizing religious differences. Rather, the signifier *gui* worked in conjunction with other signifiers; moreover, it was situated within a context of powerful and often revolting imagery of sex and crime, as well as rhetoric of anxiety and fear. That the foreign practices described [in](#) anti-Christian texts and the accompanying images seemed strange and outrageous to their readership must have reinforced existing stereotypes and prejudices.⁵¹ At the same time, the material reflects a narrow understanding of who the ‘demons’ are: Although the term was no doubt widely in use to denote foreigners of any description, the texts focus on missionaries, with few exceptions. Discussions of Christian missions within the wider context of ‘Western’ economic aggression or directly incite resistance to ‘Western’ businesses and institutions probably date from the 1890s, when ‘Western’ commerce had penetrated farther than before into the

⁴⁸ *Jiaowu jiao'an dang*, vol. 5, 2006-07, no. 2206, von Brandt to Zongli Yamen, Guangxu 18/6/12 = 5 July, 1892.

⁴⁹ *The Cause of the Riots*, e.g. plates 14, 15. The exorcism is depicted on plate 29.

⁵⁰ Tam Pak Shan, trans., “An Appeal to the Hunan Public”, *Renditions* 53-54 (2000): 254-55.

⁵¹ Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 49.

Chinese hinterland.⁵² As for the earlier texts, Paul Cohen is no doubt right in arguing that they identify the Christian religion with ‘Western’ culture at large,⁵³ because [at the time](#) missionaries were the one group of ‘Westerners’ permanently present not only in the coastal cities, but also in the remotest corners of the Qing empire. All in all, the anti-Christian discourse in this period was remarkably stable, partly owing to the continuous reprinting of materials from the 1860s.

It would be wrong to assume, however, that this quite homogeneous anti-Christian discourse created a coherent anti-Christian movement. Anti-Christian texts and images as well as orally transmitted messages did inspire anti-Christian hostilities of violent proportions, although their impact is often difficult to gauge. This is particularly true of the longer and more widely circulated texts, as opposed to the shorter and more localized ones.⁵⁴ Most of the so-called ‘missionary cases’ (*jiao’an* 教案) – incidents of attacks on missionaries and also Chinese Christians – were local and fragmented affairs based on intra-communal as well as inter-communal conflicts. Even in cases where attacks on missionaries or Christians were inspired by mass scares based on rumours, resistance came nowhere close to a mass movement. Although the fear of missionaries clearly was related to fears of indigenous outsiders, outbursts against Christian missions were based on processes of Othering, which crystallized in the use of those specific signifiers reserved for foreigners.⁵⁵ However, already in the 1890s, cultural boundaries were perceived to be shifting. In some regions of China (with evidence mostly from the South), Christian missionaries emerged as local power brokers whose presence was functionalized in rural power games; often contending local factions tried to

⁵² For a discussion of Christian missions within a wider context, cf. the Beijing text “The Westerner’s Ten Laments” (*Waiguo yangren han shi sheng* 外國洋人嘆拾聲), in A. Vissière, “Deux chansons politiques chinoises”, *T’oung Pao* 10 (1899): 218-22 (Chinese original plus a French translation); an abridged English translation is available in “The Westerner’s Ten Laments: excerpts”, trans. Ian Chapman, *Renditions* 53-54 (2000): 247-49. This text addresses not only Christianity, but also the opium trade and other commercial ventures of the ‘Westerners’ as well as their advanced technology, somehow foreshadowing the Luddism of the Boxers. “An Appeal to the Hunan Public” also targets Western shipping, and another text from 1892 Hunan threatens foreign enterprises (*yanghang*); cf. “Nanking Riot”, in *The Anti-Foreign Riots in China 1891*, 24-25, here 24.

⁵³ Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 59.

⁵⁴ ter Haar, *Telling Stories*, 160-63.

⁵⁵ In my opinion, ter Haar downplays the role of those signifiers in his otherwise fascinating study; cf. *ibid.*, 169-70.

make use of the schism between Protestants and Catholics.⁵⁶ This produced conflicts of a different sort, but perhaps of even greater complexity. In the meantime, new and dynamic processes in northern China had given rise to the Boxer movement, which developed new patterns of Othering as well as anti-Christian action.

The Boxers and the fear of ‘foreign demons’

The Boxer movement is best described as a religious and social movement that originated in the Shandong-Zhili border region in 1898 and swept all of north China two years later, triggering a diplomatic crisis and, as a consequence, an international military intervention. It shared some features with earlier forms of anti-Christian violence, combining overarching and cross-regionally transferable concepts with reactions to local circumstances. However, it was unique in the way that its dynamics developed against the background of short-term catastrophes, in particular the devastating flood of the Yellow River in 1898 and the severe drought in the spring and summer of 1900.⁵⁷ China’s forcible integration into the structures of transnational imperialism and the missionary presence both played a role as long-term factors.

Boxer sources demonstrate some continuity with the earlier anti-Christian literature, but also display a number of unique characteristics. A case in point is the virtual absence of visual material, in particular in the earlier stages of the movement.⁵⁸ Like much of the earlier popular agitation against Christianity, the Boxer message was transmitted through short posters, ditties that people could easily memorize.⁵⁹ However, the Boxer movement distinguished itself from earlier forms of anti-Christian violence through its specific rituals, in

⁵⁶ There is a vast literature on ‘missionary cases’. Of particular importance for this article are Cohen, *China and Christianity*; Joseph Tse-wei Lee, *The Bible and the Gun. Christianity in South China, 1860–1900* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 119-159; Helle Jörgensen, “Funktionalisierung der Mission durch chinesische Christen: Die protestantische Rheinische Mission im Kreis Dongguan in der Provinz Guangdong, 1896–1902”, in *Deutsch-chinesische Beziehungen im 19. Jahrhundert. Mission und Wirtschaft in interkultureller Perspektive*, ed. Mechthild Leutner and Klaus Mühlhahn (Münster: LIT, 1996), 219-260; Thoralf Klein, “Protestant Missionaries and Communist Cadres as Local Power Brokers in Rural South China, 1890–1930 – A Comparison”, in *Mission und Macht im Wandel politischer Orientierungen. Europäische Missionsgesellschaften und ihre Tätigkeit in Afrika und Asien zwischen 1800 und 1945 in politischen Spannungsfeldern*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden and Holger Stoecker (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005), 285-305.

⁵⁷ Cf. Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys. The Boxers as Event, Experience and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 69-95; Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 223-24, 280-82.

⁵⁸ The most widely used visual material consists of New Year print-like depictions of the war on the foreigners. Cf. Jane E. Elliott, *Some Did It for Civilization, Some Did It for Their Country. A Revised View of the Boxer War* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2002), 203-205; some of the prints are reprinted in this volume.

⁵⁹ Esherick, *Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 216-19, 292-301.

particular through the mass possession by gods from the folk-religious pantheon, popular literature and folk operas; these gods included literary figures such as Zhu Bajie, whom we encountered earlier on. According to a contemporary observer, a man who, after offering incense and reciting charms, “suddenly threw himself on the ground, wriggled in all directions [so that] a great deal of mud stuck to his lips,” was said to have been possessed by Zhu.⁶⁰ A second characteristic of the Boxer groups were their invulnerability rituals, which they believed would aid them to fight even western guns and cannons.⁶¹

The Boxers identified their enemies by different names. The most neutral one was *yang*, which referred, as discussed above, to people ‘from across the ocean’. This word featured in the most common slogan *Fu Qing mie yang* 扶清滅洋, usually translated as ‘Support the Qing [dynasty], destroy the foreign’.⁶² It was in itself a marker for the foreign enemy, as is evident from another rallying cry: “Kill the foreigners, destroy the foreign religioneaching.”⁶³ In the later stages of the movement, a taboo was placed not only on all products of foreign origin, but on the very word *yang* and on all its derivatives, which included references to many goods imported from the ‘West’.⁶⁴ More offensive epithets for ‘Westerners’ were ‘red-haired ones’ (*hongmaozi* 紅毛子) and ‘demons’, whereas Christians were nicknamed ‘secondary hairy ones’ (*ermaozi* 二毛子) or, perhaps less frequently,

⁶⁰ Dong Zuobin 董作賓, “Gengzi yishi 庚子佚事 [Anecdotes from the Year 1900]”, in *Yihetuan shiliao* 義和團史料 [Historical Materials on the Boxers], ed. Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院近代史研究所 and Jindaishi Ziliao Bianjizu 近代史資料編輯組 (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1982), 505-511, here 505. For the wider context cf. Esherick, *Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 218.

⁶¹ For a rather critical discussion of this element cf. Yang Tianhong 楊天宏, “Yihetuan ‘shenshu’ lunlue 義和團〈神術〉論略 [A sketch of the ‘magical’ techniques of the Boxers]”, *Jindaishi Yanjiu* [Modern History Studies] 77 (1993): 189-191.

⁶² For this slogan, cf. Lu Yao 路遙, ed., *Shandong Yihetuan diaocha ziliao xuanbian* 山東義和團調查資料選編 [Selected Materials from the Shandong Boxer Survey], (Jinan: Qi-Lu Shushe, 1980), 316. Alternatively, the slogan ran “Help the Qing, destroy the foreign” (*zhu Qing mie yang* 助清滅洋), “Protect the Qing, destroy the foreign” (*bao Qing mie yang* 保清滅洋), “On behalf of the Qing destroy the foreign” (*ti Qing mie yang* 替清滅洋), and the like, cf. Nankai Daxue Lishixi 南開大學歷史系, ed., *Tianjin Yihetuan diaocha* [The Tianjin Boxer Survey] 天津義和團調查 (Tianjin: Tianjin Guji Chubanshe, 1990), 33.

⁶³ Nankai Daxue Lishixi, *Tianjin Yihetuan diaocha*, 29.

⁶⁴ Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 203.

‘secondary demons’ (*erguizi* 二鬼子).⁶⁵ Sometimes, these words were used interchangeably, as in a nursery rhyme circulated by one of the forerunners of the Boxers: “First we will kill the Catholics, then we will burn the demons’s hall [church].”⁶⁶ Killing was often referred to by Boxers as *zai* 宰, which means butchering – another indication of how Boxers dehumanized their enemies.⁶⁷

As the reference to the Catholics suggests, the Boxers started as an anti-Christian and anti-missionary movement,⁶⁸ and, although the chronology of both the written Boxer texts and the oral testimony is often difficult to ascertain, Catholics and Protestants are usually explicitly referred to as the first objects of attack.⁶⁹ This remained so in the years 1898 and 1899, as the Boxers targeted Chinese Christians, killing or kidnapping them and setting chapels and Christian homes aflame. The first ‘Westerner’, the British missionary Sidney Brooks, was not killed until New Year’s Eve 1899.⁷⁰ But with the drought in the spring and summer of 1900 and the spread of the Boxer movement to the cities of Beijing and Tianjin 天津, the enemy image of the Boxers broadened dramatically to include all foreigners, and now they were made directly responsible for the calamity that had befallen China. This shift had consequences for the Boxers’ demonology, as I will demonstrate using one of the most popular Boxer ditties. I have five different versions of this text at my disposal, two from the province of Shandong 山東 and three from the city of Tianjin.⁷¹ All five tell the same basic story: The Boxers have arisen because the ‘demons’ have raised havoc in the empire; for this reason, the gods are angry, so they descend and possess the Boxers, aiding them in their

⁶⁵ A reference to *erguizi* is in Lu Yao 路遙, ed., *Shandong Daxue Yihetuan diaocha ziliao huibian* 山東大學義和團調查資料匯編 [Collected Materials from the Shandong University Boxer Survey], vol. 2 (Jinan: Shandong Daxue Chubanshe, 2000), 1160.

⁶⁶ Lu Yao, *Shandong Yihetuan diaocha ziliao xuanbian*, 316. Lu Yao, *Shandong Daxue Yihetuan diaocha ziliao huibian*, 843, has a different version attributed to the ‘Spirit Boxers’ (*Shenquan* 神拳): “First we will kill the foreign demons, then we will rob the Catholics.”

⁶⁷ Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 185.

⁶⁸ Esherick, *Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 165.

⁶⁹ A late example is, Chen Zhen 陳振江 and Cheng Xiao 程獻, ed., *Yihetuan wenxian jizhu yu yanjiu* 義和團文獻輯注與研究 [Comments and Studies on Boxer Texts] (Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 1986), 22-23.

⁷⁰ H. Matthews, “Sidney Brooks’ Martyrdom”, *The Mission Field* 45 (1900): 167-69.

⁷¹ The two Shandong examples are from Lu Yao, *Shandong Yihetuan diaocha ziliao xuanbian*, 249 and 315; the three Tianjin versions are from Chen Zhen and Cheng Xiao, *Yihetuan wenxian jizhu yu yanjiu*, 30-35.

righteous cause. Railway and telegraph lines as well as steamships will be destroyed. When all ‘foreign demons’ have been killed, peace and stability will be restored throughout the empire.

What is interesting is that only in the more elaborate Tianjin versions is there an explicit reference to Christianity, whereas all five versions mention the necessary destruction of ‘Western’ technology. In Tianjin sources, Christianity is clearly identified as the religion of the *guizi*: “They persuade [people] to believe in their teaching [so that they] insult Heaven, do not venerate the gods and Buddhas and forget ancestors and immortals.”⁷² The reference to Heaven – the non-personal deity of Confucianism – is a reflection of Confucian orthodoxy, as is the claim that the Boxers “are not heterodox” (*xie 邪*).⁷³ The ditties explain this further by pointing out that the Boxers have no connections with popular sectarianism, in particular the White Lotus Teaching (*Bailianjiao* 白蓮教), the adherents of which had staged a large-scale rebellion that depleted the Qing dynasty’s finances and sapped much of its strength between 1796 and 1805: “We are not the heterodox White Lotus Teaching,” as one version sums it up.⁷⁴ Rather than condemning Christianity as heterodox in the tradition of the seventeenth century, the Boxers are thus attempting to forestall criticism of their own movement. Furthermore, they do so not by referring to Confucian concepts, but by describing folk religious practices, probably in order to demonstrate that these are in harmony with the religious precepts of the Imperial state: “They recite magic formulas, they follow true words, they raise yellow paper [in order to make an offering], they burn incense, and they invite all kinds of spirits and immortals.”⁷⁵

Moreover, although the Boxers claimed to rise in support of the ruling dynasty, this does not mean that they supported the scholar-officials, the paragons of orthodox Confucianism. In

⁷² Chen Zhen and Cheng Xiao, *Yihetuan wenxian jizhu yu yanjiu*, 31 and 33, with an identical version. The former adds: “The churches hate the people and impede the Venerable Heaven (*laotian* 老天).” The third version *ibid.*, 34, runs somewhat differently: “They persuade people to believe in their teaching, and [these], instead of believing in Heaven, don’t believe in the gods and forget ancestors and immortals.”

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 31. For the White Lotus cf. Kwang-ching Liu, “Religion and Politics in the 1796 White Lotus Rebellion in Hubei”, in *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China*, ed. Kwang-ching Liu and Richard Shek (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 281-320.

⁷⁵ Chen Zhen and Cheng Xiao, *Yihetuan wenxian jizhu yu yanjiu*, 33. The other two Tianjin versions differ slightly from this one and from each other.

fact, some Boxer texts are remarkably hostile towards state officials.⁷⁶ As I have shown in the above section, this was not without precedent; however, in the case of the Boxer movement, it both stemmed from different preconditions and had different consequences. First of all, the Qing Imperial court directed its officials to suppress the Boxer groups throughout 1899 and into the first half of 1900. After the Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧 (1835–1908), the *de facto* ruler of China at the time, and her advisers had decided to ally with the Boxers against the foreign powers, Boxers could more openly turn against mandarins and humiliate them, forcing them to dismount from horseback or sedan chairs. Officialdom split into rivalling pro-Boxer and anti-Boxer factions. As a consequence, the Boxer War in the summer of 1900 was not only a war of the Qing government and the Boxers against an eight-power invasion, it was also an outright civil war in parts of North China.⁷⁷

This does not mean, however, that the Boxers did not distinguish between different kinds of enemies. For one thing, the majority of Boxer texts mention only the foreign *guizi* and their Chinese followers as enemies. And whereas the Boxers' hatred of officials is informed by differences in social status, Boxer texts draw a clear line between humans and the foreign 'demons'. Two of the three Tianjin ditties discussed above claim that the foreign 'demons' are "not born of men", whereas the third alleges that the 'demons' children were conceived as a result of son-and-mother sex. Using almost identical words, all three texts refer to the 'demons' blue eyes to highlight their difference from human beings; all three also describe the immorality and lewdness of 'Western' men and women, echoing a popular theme from earlier anti-Christian literature.⁷⁸ Another [theme-topic](#) that was picked up from earlier anti-Christian texts and created a veritable mass panic in the spring and summer of 1900 was the fear that the foreigners were poisoning wells, as well as spreading diseases, to which Boxer posters readily offered antidotes.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ A fine example is translated in Arthur H. Smith, *China in Convulsion* (New York: Revell, 1901), 201.

⁷⁷ For Qing officials trying to suppress the Boxer movement cf. Esherick, *Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 246–306; for the relationship between officials and Boxer and the state of civil war cf. Mark Elvin, "Mandarins and Millenarians. Reflections on the Boxer Uprising of 1899–1900", in *Another History. Essays on China from a European Perspective*, ed. id. (Broadway, NSW: 1996), 219–24. For the humiliation of officials cf. also Sir Claude Maxwell MacDonald, *The Siege of the Peking Embassy, 1900. Sir Claude MacDonald's Report on the Boxer Rebellion* (London: The Stationery Office, 2000), 50–51.

⁷⁸ For the allegation of incest cf. Chen Zhen and Cheng Xiao, *Yihetuan wenxian jizhu yu yanjiu*, 34.

⁷⁹ Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 167–72. Such antidotes are described in Alfred Forke, *Translation of a Boxer poster, 7 May 1900*, in Bundesarchiv, Deutsche Botschaft China R 9208 372/27; William A. P. Martin, *The Siege of Peking. China Against the World* (New York: Revell, 1900), 70.

While there were continuities from the late nineteenth-century anti-Christian literature in Boxer texts, the Othering of 'Western' missionaries by the Boxers displayed a number of significant and distinctive characteristics. Firstly, as a signifier, the epithet 'demon' appears somewhat stronger and more clearly defined than in the late nineteenth-century texts. However, it competes with interchangeable signifiers such as 'red-haired ones' or the all-encompassing *yang*, which has now clearly ceased to be simply an explanatory ~~addendum~~ signifier connected with 'demons', having become a negative signifier in its own right. Secondly, these signifiers are wrapped in an imagery that not only repeats the sexual overtones of the older anti-Christian literature, but also reinforces the sense of anxiety and panic created by allegations of mass poisoning in that earlier literature. For, the Boxer texts and utterances that have been preserved interpret an ecological and economic disaster (the floods and droughts in the years up to 1900) as a cosmological crisis caused by the foreigners. Thirdly, it is likely that the application of the signifiers mentioned above varied across time and space. As in the case of the anti-Christian literature of the 1860s to 1890s, (*yang guizi* does not allow for a distinction between different groups of foreigners. Texts from the urban areas of Beijing or Tianjin, which display a comprehensive understanding of the term, date from a rather late phase of the Boxer movement and arose in a context where the Boxers were confronted with a great number of 'Westerners' who were not missionaries, such as diplomats, soldiers, merchants, and engineers. This attests to the dynamic spread of the Boxer movement and would also suggest a gradual broadening of the range of images it used in understanding and constructing the enemy. That popular rhymes from rural Shandong should exhibit the same, fuller understanding of 'Westerners' *qua* enemy may indicate that they date from a late stage of the movement, or it may even point to influences from the Beijing-Tianjin area. In fact, the trajectories along which these songs and texts moved are often difficult to reconstruct, as the bulk of this material was gathered through oral history surveys. It is therefore possible, even likely, that in some areas *yang guizi* still predominantly or even exclusively denoted Christian missionaries. Fourthly, this impression is confirmed when we look at the practical effects of the Boxers' anti-foreign propaganda. Despite the fact that the sieges of Beijing and Tianjin were the most spectacular episodes of the Boxer War (and they were mostly conducted by Qing Imperial troops rather than Boxer groups), most of the damage was done in the countryside. Although the spread of the Boxer technique has rightly been likened to a prairie fire, what actually moved across North China were boxing

techniques, rituals, and rumours, not people.⁸⁰ Boxer activities were thus for the most part local – with the exception of Beijing and Tianjin – and consisted in attacks on Chinese Christians and their property and on ‘foreign’ missionaries wherever these could be apprehended. So, while, by the early summer of 1900, every ‘Westerner’ had become a potential target of the Boxers, the brunt of the attack was borne by the 250 missionaries and the thousands or even tens of thousands of Christians who lost their lives.

Devils and the rhetoric of anti-imperialism

The next outburst of anti-Christian activities in China took place in the 1920s. The difference between the events of 1900 and those of the 1920s was greater than the one between late nineteenth-century anti-Christian literature and the anti-Christian agitation of the Boxers, not only because there was a longer time lag. Firstly, the anti-Christian movement of the 1920s ended what the Chinese historian Gu Weimin 古衛民 has called the “golden age of Christian missions in China”.⁸¹ After the horrors, atrocities, and humiliation brought about by the foreign intervention that followed the Boxer crisis, China’s monarchy had embarked on an audacious reform programme in which missionaries played an important role, especially in the health and educational sectors. I am arguing here, not for the first time, that the alliance between Christian missionaries and Chinese reformers was based on common interests and mutual benefit rather than on transcultural understanding.⁸² It was therefore established on somewhat shaky foundations. Secondly, the modernization programme in which the missionaries so readily took part was paralleled by a rise in anti-imperialist consciousness that challenged the ‘Western’ preponderance in China on the basis of modern political theory. Its leaders and activists were neither Confucian scholars nor pugilists steeped in popular religion and culture, but intellectuals and students, who had begun to emerge as a social group after 1900. As a modern political and scientific vocabulary began to take root in China around the turn of the century, changing the Chinese language profoundly, it paved the way for the emergence of a nationalist rhetoric of anti-imperialism, which centred around terms such as the ‘vanishing of the nation’ (*wanguo* 亡國), the ‘carving up [of China]’ (*guafen* 瓜分)

⁸⁰ ter Haar, *Telling Stories*, 175; cf. Esherick, *Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 275-77.

⁸¹ Gu Weimin 古衛民, *Jidujiao yu jindai Zhongguo shehui* 基督教與近代中國社會 [Christianity and Modern Chinese Society] (Shanghai: Renmin Chubanshe, 1996), 351.

⁸² Cf. Thoralf Klein, “Linking Up with Local Society: German-speaking Missionaries and Modernization in Local [sic!] South China, ca. 1900–1930”, *Berliner China-Hefte* 35 (2009): 48-63; cf. Lawrence D. Kessler, *The Jiangyin Mission Station. An American Missionary Community in China 1895–1951* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 43-66.

‘survival or perishing’ (*cunwang* 存亡), ‘selling [or betraying] the nation’ (*maiguo* 賣國) or ‘saving the nation’ (*jiuguo* 救國); ‘national humiliation’ (*guochi* 國恥), a crucial term for decades to come, first appeared in the wake of the Boxer War and achieved widespread popularity during the demonstrations against Japanese imperialism in China in the year 1915, when the first ‘days of national humiliation’ were proclaimed.⁸³ After China had failed to attain international parity at the 1919 Paris peace conference, despite having become a Republic in 1912, there was a new wave of anti-imperialism. This time it was based on Marxism and the historical precedent set by the establishment of Soviet Russia. It was only a question of time until the role of Christian missions, hitherto regarded as a partner in modernization, would be called into question. The process by which this happened was marked by the founding of the Anti-Christian Student Federation in 1922 and the Soviet-sponsored National Revolution between 1925 and 1927, and, unfortunately, it is a process that I cannot examine in more detail here.⁸⁴

The critics of Christian missions pointed to their cultural role in the construction and maintenance of ‘Western’ imperialism. An article that appeared in a youth magazine in June 1926 sums up this argument and illustrates the political language of anti-imperialism at the time: “The aim of imperialism is aggression; its interests are fundamentally different from those of the oppressed nations. [...] Cultural aggression is one type of imperialism’s colonial policies, and mission schools are its base camps (*dabenyang* 大本營). The imperialists have seen with their own eyes that when the weak and oppressed nations cannot bear their oppression [any more], they are prone to revolt, and they [the imperialists] think that political and economic aggression is too obvious and might easily meet with antipathy, so they have thought out a clever method – cultural aggression. With this method of cultural aggression,

⁸³ Mary Backus Rankin, “Nationalistic Contestation and Mobilization Politics. Practice and Rhetoric of Railway-Rights Recovery at the End of the Qing”, *Modern China* 28 (2002): 315-361, 339. There is meanwhile a plethora of literature on *guochi*, partly because of its revival in the 1990s; cf. Luo Zhitian, “National Humiliation and National Assertion: The Chinese Response to the Twenty-One Demands”, *Modern Asian Studies* 27 (1993): 297-319; Paul A. Cohen, “Remembering and forgetting national humiliation in twentieth-century China”, in *China Unbound. Evolving Perspectives on the Chinese Past*, ed. id. (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 148-184. The latter essay reprints some items from a cartoon series entitled ‘National humiliation pictures’ (*guochi tu* 國恥圖) and published by the periodical *Anhui suhuabao* 安徽俗話報 in 1904.

⁸⁴ For the intellectual and political context, cf. Jessie Gregory Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions. The Anti-Christian Movements of 1920–1928* (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Cultural Publications, 1988); Ka-che Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students. The Anti-Christian Movement of 1922–1927* (Bellingham, WA: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 1980).

they can reap great fruits without moving a single soldier, without firing a single bullet. In order to eradicate (*xiaomie* 消滅) the national revolutionary spirit of the Chinese masses, they have set up the Bible and prayer as important subjects, and in order to make the Chinese masses worship (*chongbai* 崇拜) Western material civilization, they have built beautiful dormitories and classrooms [...].”⁸⁵

This language points to conflicts between students from secular and mission schools, but also between students and teachers within mission schools. In the mid-1920s, students were joined by education associations and the Nationalist and Communist parties together with their party army, the Soviet-trained National Revolutionary Army, in their demands to abolish mission privileges in education.

What is interesting in the context of this chapter is not so much the concrete political demands of this movement, but the way that demons were lurking behind this political rhetoric. As early as the autumn of 1923, an anti-Christian article remarking on the “lies” (*guihua* 鬼話, literally, ‘demoniac words’) of the missionaries may have sought, deliberately or subconsciously, to evoke the spectre of ghosts.⁸⁶ More important for our discussion, however, is a poster entitled ‘Anti-Christian Special Issue’ – a title not infrequently chosen for publications of the kind – and issued by the Political Commissariat of the First Army of the National Revolutionary Army in December 1925 and distributed in the northeast of Guangdong province.⁸⁷ This army served as the military arm of the Nationalists and Communists, and sought to distinguish itself from the warlord armies it fought through its intensive use of propaganda, which was designed to mobilize the population in its support. This again relied on processes of Othering, in particular on the spectre of a collaboration of foreign and domestic enemies: “The foreign demons (*yangguizi*) are in collusion with the warlords, and [both] want to harm us; how should we not deeply hate the foreign demons? Let

⁸⁵ Tong Bingrong 童炳榮, “Fandui jiaohui xuexiao yapo xuesheng [Resist the oppression of students by mission schools]!”, *Guangdong qingnian* (15 June 1926): 23-25, here 23.

⁸⁶ “Jidujiao yu renge jiuguo 基督教與人格救國 [Christianity, Personality and National Salvation]”, *Zhongguo qingnian* (3 November 1923): 3.

⁸⁷ *Fan Jidujiao tekan* 反基督教特刊, [1925 copy, ecopy in possession of the author's private archive](#). For the context of the poster cf. Thoralf Klein, “Anti-Imperialism at Grassroots: Christianity and the Anti-Christian Movement in Northeast Guangdong, 1919–1930”, in *The Chinese Revolution in the 1920s. Between Triumph and Disaster*, ed. Mechthild Leutner et al. (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 289-306.

us smash the foreign demons, compatriots; do not look at us as if we were a devastating flood or bloodthirsty beasts, do not detest us as if we were enemies [as deadly as] snakes and scorpions. [...] Compatriots! You must not fear us, you must even less hate us. Soldiering is no crime, the crime is that of the foreign demons who have colluded with the warlords to wage war [on us].”⁸⁸ The emotional nature of the appeal is elsewhere reinforced by introducing a new signifier: Alleged collaborators such as warlords and also Chinese Christians now became known as the ‘running dogs’ (*zougou* 走狗) of the foreign demons.⁸⁹

The December 1925 ‘Anti-Christian Special Issue’ consists of four drawings and one ‘Anti-Christian song’. Three of the four drawings present variations of the same topic – the false masks of the missionary and his real face (fig. 2). While the masks represent positive values such as ‘peace’, ‘equality’, ‘freedom’ and ‘compassion’, the unmasking of the missionary, a glance behind the black curtain or a look into the magic mirror reveal a werewolf-like monster, which is, the accompanying song explains, “the vanguard of the great powers and of [their] aggression against China; the tool of cultural aggression”.⁹⁰ Compared to the late nineteenth-century woodblocks, it is interesting that the relationship between text and images has been reversed: the ‘demon’ has now become a visual sign, which is coupled with signifiers taken from the new, rationalistic language of political anti-imperialism (and indeed there are many appeals to reason in the text). This language is (or at least is intended to be) emotive, yet it is simultaneously more abstract and descriptive.

This becomes more evident as we compare the crude drawings from the poster with another image from a special issue of ‘Eastern Miscellany’ (*Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌), a widely read and politically rather moderate magazine. This image, published in July 1925, bears the caption ‘The false mask of civilized man exposed’ (*Wenming ren de jia mianju jiepo le* 文明人的假面具揭破了), with the word ‘exposure’ echoing the tradition of anti-Christian literature. The unmasking of civilized man reveals a devil whose iconography is drawn from

⁸⁸ Chen Yipei 陳以沛, Zou Zhihong 鄒志紅 and Zhao Liping 趙麗屏, ed., *Huangpu Junxiao shiliao: xupian* 黃埔軍校史料: 續篇 [Historical Materials on the Whampoa Military Academy: Supplement] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 1994), 377.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹⁰ Fan Jidujiao tekan.

‘Western’ demonology, in this case Christian iconography of the devil.⁹¹ In contrast to the ‘Anti-Christian Special Issue’, which was distributed in rural areas, publications such as *Dongfang zazhi* catered to educated urbanites, many of whom would have been sufficiently familiar with ‘Western’ culture to understand this iconography.

Crucial to the understanding of this second image is the context in which it was published: The special issue was printed in response to an outrageous event that had taken place in Shanghai on 30 May, 1925. On that day, British Indian policemen had fired into a crowd of Chinese protesters, sparking the largest mass movement that China had witnessed so far. The May Thirtieth Movement sparked a wave of anti-imperialist resistance that fostered the rise of the National Party (Guomindang) in the years 1925 to 1927, and ultimately fostered the demise of ‘Western’ imperialism in China. It is the firing on unarmed civilians that the editors of *Dongfang zazhi* (and other publications as well) perceive as a break with civilization on the part of the ‘Westerners’.

Clearly, the depiction of ‘Westerners’ as demons (or, in this case, outright devils) was not at the centre of anti-imperialist discourse in 1920s China. Nonetheless, it is remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, the emotional appeal of such populist imagery behind the inflammatory yet rationalistic rhetoric of anti-imperialism merits attention as a phenomenon in its own right. Secondly, and more importantly, the image from ‘Eastern Miscellany’ and images from other publications of the same genre⁹² reflect a central motif of the anti-imperialist discourse in 1920s China: the attempt to reverse ‘Western’ notions of cultural superiority. The dichotomy between ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarism’ or ‘savagery’ underpinned much of the colonial discourse and had been acted out on various occasions, including the Boxer war, when China was accused of having relapsed into barbarism. This claim had directly legitimized foreign intervention. On the other hand, news of the Allied atrocities committed in China had led critics of imperialism – there were always critical groups such as pacifists, socialists and left-

⁹¹ *Dongfang zazhi* 22 (1925), no. 12a, special issue, quoted here from Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students*, 43.

⁹² For text-image combinations also entitled *Wenming ren de jia mianju jiepo le*, cf. *Zhongguo chuban shiliao. Xiandai bufen* 中國出版史料. 現代部份 [Historical materials on Chinese Publishing. Modern Section], vol. 1 ed. Zhang Lisheng 張立升 et al. (Jinan: Shandong Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2001), 502; Hong Jiulai 洪九來,

Kuanrong yu lixing: “Dongfang zazhi” de gonggong yulun yanjiu 寬容與理性. 《東方雜誌》的公共輿論研究 [Tolerance and Rationality. Studies on “Eastern Miscellany” and Public Opinion] (1904–1932) (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2006), 93.

leaning liberals – to discover the ‘barbarian’ in the civilized ‘Westerner’. Although this anti-colonial critique was somewhat self-serving and no less Eurocentric, it was picked up in China two decades later, probably transmitted through Socialist channels, and was at least occasionally coupled with the idea of the foreigner as ‘demon’. In this context, the Boxers were evoked again, but rather as an example of barbarism. The ‘Western’ imperialists, the argument went, had behaved worse than the Boxers, a view that was also acknowledged by some ‘Western’ publications.⁹³ The imagery of the ‘Western’ imperialist as demon fulfilled a similar purpose: Turning the ‘Western’ discourse on civilization on its head, it supported a view that distinguished between ‘Western’ culture on the one hand and the politics of ‘Western’ imperialism on the other. The connection between the two cartoons in *Fan Jidujiao tekan* and *Dongfang zazhi* would suggest that missionaries were included in this imagery alongside other ‘Westerners’. It was only the more precise language of political rationalism that enabled Chinese anti-imperialists to define for their purposes the cultural role of Christian missions within the broader political and military project of imperialism in more precise terms. In other words, in the period that saw the rise of Chinese intellectuals as a social group, the signifier *gui* alone was even more insufficient to convey the significance of anti-Christian agitation than in the period up to 1900. It had to be combined with other signifiers, many of which were more ‘scientific’.

The impact of this ‘modern’ anti-Christian discourse is again hard to gauge. Whereas the new political language was likely to work with the urban educated class, it was far remote from the life experiences and worldview of the rural population. The cartoons in ‘Anti-Christian Special Issue’ no doubt were an attempt to politicize and mobilize a largely illiterate population on its own terms. However, although the encounter of the Chinese peasantry with the Chinese Nationalists and Communists from the mid-1920s was a complex issue that involved a great deal of mutual learning, there are indications that the new language was making inroads even among peasants who may barely have understood their significance. In Northeastern Guangdong, where *Fan Jidujiao tekan* is known to have been distributed, local peasants would consider avoiding both sending their children to mission schools and

⁹³ Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 254-259, for the discursive reversal cf. also Thoralf Klein, “Strafexpedition im Namen der Zivilisation. Der ‘Boxerkrieg’ in China (1900–1901)”, in *Kolonialkriege. Militärische Gewalt im Zeichen des Imperialismus*, ed. Thoralf Klein and Frank Schumacher (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), 145-181, here 167-69, 177-78.

associating with missionaries in any other way because the latter were imperialistic.⁹⁴ However superficially, the move away from a conventional demonology to a political criticism of ‘Western’ missionaries did not leave the rural population untouched.

Conclusion

In the rhetoric of Chinese anti-Christian agitation, the concept of ‘demon’ (*gui*) became a tool of Othering. In the evocation of popular religious demonology, a clear line was drawn in which the ‘demons’ appeared as being outside the realm of human beings (equated with the Chinese). As a signifier, ‘demon’ was not effective *per se*, but had to be coupled with other signifiers and imagery pointing to the sexual debauchery of Christian missionaries, their mishandling of corpses and poison scares in the late nineteenth century. To these signifiers, Boxer propaganda added to the charges against ‘Westerners’, including missionaries, the bringing about of a cosmological crisis. Before the early twentieth century, the signifier ‘demon’ seems not to have been translated into a visual sign. Late nineteenth-century woodblocks clearly show the ‘demons’ as humans, as do [the relatively few Chinese](#) images produced during the Boxer war, the captions of which do not even contain any reference to demonology. Interestingly, anti-Christian images from the 1920s do portray missionaries as ‘demons’, but both the visual record and the textual argument seem to have been inspired by ‘Western’ [political](#) ideas, which were now being adapted to suit China’s political and social revolutions. The rationalistic language in which much of the critique was clad (its emotional appeal notwithstanding) suggests there was little if any continuity from earlier periods.

At the same time, anti-Christian literature reflects an ever-increasing sophistication in discussing the relationship between Christian missions and ‘Western’ culture. Whereas the majority of mid-nineteenth-century Confucian scholars, who authored many of the pamphlets denouncing Christianity, seem to have conflated the two, the Boxers were more aware of the different aspects of western religious and material cultures. The student agitators of the 1920s sought to pinpoint a specific function of missionaries within the broader project of foreign imperialism.

To say that representations of ‘Westerners’ as ‘demons’ were misrepresentations, construed either intentionally or for want of better understanding, amounts to a truism. Anthony Clark,

⁹⁴ Klein, “Anti-imperialism at Grassroots”, 297.

who deplores the unnecessary violence arising from distorted portrayals of the foreign Other, seems to acknowledge this by also stating that misrepresentations can be acknowledged as such only with the benefit of hindsight.⁹⁵ Paul Cohen, in his extensive writing on the Boxers, has adopted a universalistic perspective, arguing that the anxiety and anger that Christian missions met with in China is no different from similar phenomena in other societies, including the seemingly more ‘modern’ world of the nineteenth and twentieth-century ‘West’.⁹⁶ While this may indeed lead to a more ‘human’ perspective on the adversaries of Christianity in China, it does little to explain the specific cultural formats by which this anxiety and this anger found their expression.

More specifically, the question arises whether anti-Christian agitation in China may be theorized as a case of ‘occidentalism’. This concept has many facets: it may simply be viewed as a dehumanizing caricature of the ‘West’ and a rejection of the modernity it transmitted to the world (often forcibly). Alternatively, it may be conceptualized as a counter-discourse of Orientalism, a construction of the ‘Western’ Other by which the Orient – including China – has been able actively and creatively to take part in processes of self-appropriation – a discourse, moreover, which different groups have put to different political ends. In other words, societies outside the ‘West’ have developed their self-image in comparison and contrast to a stylized image of the ‘West’.⁹⁷ However, the case of China is more complicated: Anti-Christian caricatures must be seen not only as a reaction to western dominance, but also as the outgrowth of a Sinocentric tradition that dates back to Chinese antiquity. As Jeff Wasserstrom has written: “Western imperialists, for all their faults, did not teach the Chinese how symbolically to dehumanize others, after all. Long before [Western imperialism], Han Chinese were incorporating the symbol for dog [and other animals for that matter, Th. K.] into the characters for neighboring ethnic groups.”⁹⁸ Likewise, Laura Hostetler, in her study on Qing colonialism, has argued that “the politics of representation encapsulated in the idea of

⁹⁵ Clark, “Rape, Baptism and the ‘Pig’ Religion”, 66-67.

⁹⁶ A condensed version of Cohen’s argument in his magisterial *History in Three Keys* can be found in id., “Humanizing the Boxers”, in *The Boxers, China, and the World*, ed. Robert Bickers and R. G. Tiedemann (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 179-199.

⁹⁷ For the various concepts cf. Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism. A Short History of Anti-Westernism* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), 5-7; Chen Xiaomei, *Occidentalism. A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, 2nd edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 2-3; James G. Carrier, “Introduction”, in *Occidentalism. Images of the West*, ed. id. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1-32, here 6.

⁹⁸ Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, “The Chinese Revolution and Contemporary Paradoxes”, in *Human Rights and Revolutions*, ed. id. et al., 2nd edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 21-44, 42.

‘orientalism’ is not simply a feature of Western modernity, but of the colonial encounter itself, wherever colonial relations are played out. This capacity or inclination to ‘orientalize’ is not unique to the Western world.”⁹⁹ In fact, the way the notion of missionaries as ‘devils’ changed between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflects the transition from a Chinese (or rather Qing) imperial discourse in its own right to an anti-imperialist counter-discourse.

⁹⁹ Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise. Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 99.