



The Boxer Uprising by Victor Purcell

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The Boxer Uprising. By VICTOR PURCELL. Pp. xiv + 348. Two maps. London: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1963. \$8.50.

Dr. Purcell's book, as its subtitle indicates, is a "Background Study." Only the last of its twelve chapters deals with the "uprising" of 1900, with its "triumph and fiasco," but there the author is hurrying to bring the book to a conclusion: ". . . this chapter, intended merely as a sequel to our main inquiry, will be in quicker motion, attempting to reduce an intricate complex of events to a short, generalized narrative. The time scale will now be about fifteen minutes of reading to a year of historic time" (p. 240).

This shortcoming of the book is particularly regrettable since Dr. Purcell at times shows his impatience with research on the background alone. He has good reasons to feel dissatisfaction with Peter Fleming's *Siege at Peking* (1959): ". . . it contrives to give the impression that China is of interest only in providing a sombre background of barbarism to the shining exploits of a Christian (if not necessarily civilized) West" (p. 323). But Dr. Purcell's success in carrying out his own "purpose" is open to question. "But if it [the siege of the Peking legations] is not reduced to its proportions as a small incident in the vast history of China, the present book at least will have failed in its purpose" (p. 252). To give this incident a proper place in the history of the Boxer Uprising (its place in "the vast history of China" is much harder to determine) would require a book different from the kind that Mr. Fleming or Dr. Purcell has written. While Fleming's approach is onesided and his emphasis perhaps misplaced, Dr. Purcell hardly touches upon this subject in his hurried account of the "intricate complex of events" of the year 1900.

The main contribution of Dr. Purcell's book lies in his research on these two problems: the relation of the Boxers to the secret societies and the anti-dynastic or pro-dynastic nature of the Boxers. Not many scholars before him have indeed discovered a larger number of significant facts relating to these problems or weighed the evidence more carefully. Though Dr. Purcell gives few conclusive answers, he evinces the qualities of a first-rate researcher or "inquirer"—diligence, intense interest in details, and dogged pursuit after facts within a small scope.

However, his book is not a history of the uprising. A historical researcher, unless he combines range with minute attention and a narrative skill with analysis of facts, is not always the ideal person to write history. What handicaps a researcher is his proverbial preoccupation with trees, or with leaves on a tree, which allows him little time to study the forest. Historical researches have no doubt invaluable use; but Dr. Purcell's book, even intended as "a background study" of the Boxer Uprising, could be written on a much broader plan. Dr. Purcell has acquitted himself well as a researcher on a few selected problems relating to the Boxers; but he has not done as well on other problems that demand equal share of scholarly attention.

A "background study" should at least satisfy the requirements set by Alexis de Tocqueville, whom Dr. Purcell quotes in his Conclusion. Said de Tocqueville: "Antecedent facts, the nature of institutions, mental attitudes, the state of morals—these are the materials from which are composed those impromptus which amaze and terrify us" (p. 263). These materials are important, though there are obviously more. For instance, the "geographical background" should, in my opinion, occupy a more prominent position in Dr. Purcell's book. I am speaking not only of the geographical distribution of the Boxers; but their migration from Shantung to Chihli and their invasion of Tientsin and Peking provided a drama, which, if reconstructed in a well-knit narrative, could at least offset the undue emphasis on the almost overworked siege of the legations. The loose organization of the Boxers was due in part to their diverse local origins. Regional differences among the Boxers were perhaps as important a factor as their division into *Ch'ien*, *K'an*, and other groups. The geographical extent of the authority of *Huang Lien Shêng Mu* ("Yellow Lotus Holy Mother") is never clear to me, though Dr. Purcell calls her a "supreme leader" of the Red Lantern groups (p. 239). Her influence might have reached beyond Tientsin—but how far? Dr. Purcell's study does not answer this question. Such an inquiry would be profitable, for it might not only explain the Boxers' lack of unified leadership but probably throw some light on their ambiguity towards the Manchus.

Let us return to de Tocqueville's requirements. Dr. Purcell's book deserves credit for his eminent

work on "antecedent facts" and "mental attitudes" (of the Boxers, but not sufficiently on those of the pro-Boxer Mandarins). As to the "nature of institutions," he relies largely on the works of other scholars. He has dug into an astoundingly large quantity of materials about the Boxer Uprising, but he has not read enough of the first-hand materials concerning the late Ch'ing government and society in general. While the late Ch'ing government and society is a field that has been much cultivated in recent years, there is still much original research work left to be done. Researches in this field, though already begun by other scholars, should be duplicated by a student of the Boxers. When the other scholars do their work, they do not always have the Boxers in their minds; but a researcher on the Boxers has his peculiar interest to serve and specific questions to answer. This reliance on second-hand materials makes the first six chapters of Dr. Purcell's book rather weak. One institution demands particular attention since Dr. Purcell wants to take issue with Mr. G. Nye Steiger, whose *China and the Occident* (1927) maintains that "the Boxers were not a religious sect or secret society at all but [a] legally constituted militia" (p. vii). But the line that separated the village militia from the *fei* (bandits or rebels) was perhaps not so clearly marked as either Steiger or Dr. Purcell assumes. Many local authorities were caught in the dilemma of choosing between a policy of suppression and one of pacification when they came to deal with organized villagers who, Boxers or non-Boxers, took their self-government too much for granted to be ignored. A state of tension, or precarious "peaceful coexistence" was observable between weak local governments and arrogant bands of armed villagers even in provinces unaffected by the Boxers. Such a state of affairs persisted down to the time of the early Republic. To understand better the "bandit character" of the Boxers, the researcher has to study the career of many a lesser bandit gang which sprang from militia organizations or was later reorganized into militia units.

In spite of a general interest in modern China, its "state of morals," a historical factor recognized by de Tocqueville, has not yet become, to my limited knowledge, a subject of systematic study. It is not easy to define what materials should fall into the sphere of such a study, but they should include, besides manners and mores, ethical norm

and vagaries, exemplary conduct and egregious foolery, snobbery and bigotry, impulses and built-in or imposed restraints, the forming of new habits and the falling off of the old. The reader would certainly benefit if Dr. Purcell enriched his book with accounts of certain rural customs that bore especially on the Boxers: religious festivals and processions and the teaching of boxing as a *bona fide* gymnastic exercise at the *ch'üan-ch'ang*^a or boxing studio. *Bona fide* boxing is not to be confused with the "magic boxing" of the Boxers, though such confusion probably existed in the minds of some local officials in 1898 and 1899. Dr. Purcell owes the reader an explanatory note when he mentions the *T'ai Chi Ch'üan*, a respectable exercise, in the same breath with the "Spirit Boxing" and the "Righteous Harmony Boxing" (p. 163).

Within the sphere of the "state of morals," he might also do a more detailed study of the Chinese converts to Christianity, calling attention to the innocent, if not saintly, side of their private and public life since they are nowadays so often maligned as "agents of the Imperialists." There were also the convictions and behavior of officials not necessarily "corrupt" but self-righteous to a fault, men like Hsü T'ung and Yü-hsien. (Were the anecdotes attributed to the latter in the *Travels of Lao Ts'an* rumour, caricature, or fact?) The range and intensity of psychological reaction in different parts of China to the news of the activities of the Boxers should also form an essential part of Dr. Purcell's background study.

He might also make some comment on the bias of the various diaries, chronicles, and eyewitness accounts which he quotes copiously and often effectively. In spite of the efforts of historians in Communist China to vindicate the uprising, these documents, on which they rely for their studies, are almost unanimously unsympathetic, if not hostile, to the Boxers. So these documents are interesting not only as records of the events, but also as samples of a sector of public opinion. If China were to be treated as more than a sombre background to Western chivalry, an examination of the contemporary Chinese public opinion would be helpful to a better understanding of the uprising.

At one point in the book Dr. Purcell could be more careful about his quotations. It concerns the execution by the Boxers of the alleged followers of the White Lotus Sect (pp. 220-221).

He quotes three diarists (incidentally, the name of the first is Chung-fang,^b instead of Shih Chung-fang as he is called by Dr. Purcell), but he makes no mention of their doubts, noticeable in the Chinese text, as to the veracity of the accusation. The incident of execution is found in another source, Yun Yü-ting's *Ch'ung Ling Ch'uan Hsin Lu*. Yün, as an Expositor of the Hanlin Academy, protested against the insufficient evidence on which the arrest was made and the threat of death penalty to the possible innocents (*IHT*,* I, p. 50). His memorial to the throne spoke for justice; he was not supposed to be pleading for the lives of heretics and rebels. Dr. Purcell is right in pointing out the manifest antagonism, at least at a certain period of the uprising, between the Boxers and the White Lotus but he accepts too readily that the beheaded victims of July 1900 were proven followers of the Sect.

A more serious mistake is about the "real name" (p. 197) of Chu Hung-têng, because Dr. Purcell builds his theory of "reincarnation" (p. 153, p. 160) upon a misreading of the text. The evidence that Dr. Purcell cites (*IHT*, I, p. 356) is something to the effect that if the magistrate had not done his best to prevent the disaster in time, then the local rebel leader Chu Hung-têng might have become another Li Wen-Ch'êng (not Li Wench'ing) and the district of P'ingyüan in Shantung might have suffered from consequences as serious as those experienced by Hua-hsien in Honan in 1813 when the notorious Li started his rebellion.^c Chiang K'ai, the magistrate who suppressed Chu Hung-têng was speaking merely of a hypothetical case. There is no suggestion of either "alias" or "reincarnation." It is true that rebel leaders in China did at times make claims to reincarnation, but there is no evidence to support this in the case of Chu Hung-têng.

Another mistake occurs on p. 213 where Dr. Purcell comes to "the earliest reference to the slogan 'Support the Ch'ing; Destroy the Foreigners.'" He says that he discovers this in Liu T'ang, "A Record of Religious Case of Tung-p'ing" under the date of 23 September 1899 (K25/8/19). But the year cited in the source is not 1899, but 1901 (*Hsin-ch'ou*, the twenty-

seventh year of the Kuang-hsü reign). (See also *IHT*, IV, p. 543.) Dr. Purcell gives Yü-hsien as the name of the governor of Shantung in his translation of a quoted passage. Yü-hsien was governor of Shantung in September 1899; but in 1901 he was not, and his name is not found in the original text.

Although I do not consider it necessary to dwell on typographical errors, there are two which need correction since they might cause factual confusion. Li Lai-chung came from Shensi and later returned to Shensi. Shensi is twice misprinted as *Shansi* on p. 212. Again, the founder of the Chin (not Ch'in, p. 226) dynasty reunified China after the period of the Three Kingdoms. Another source of confusion is the inconsistency in the translation of the term *shih-hsiung*.^d On p. 197 we have "Their leader, whom they addressed as Great Teacher Elder Brother (*T'ai Shih Hsiung*). . . ." On p. 218 there are "*Ta Shih Hsiung* (Elders Teacher-Brother)" and "*Êrh Shih Hsiung* (Second Teacher-Brother)." Then on p. 225 comes the sentence ". . . they address one another as *Shih Hsiung* (fellow students of the same master). . . ." To translate *shih-hsiung* literally as "teacher-brother" is misleading.

The following factual errors should be corrected:

1. "At the head of each Board were two ministers (*Shih-lang*)" (p. 5). The ministers were *shang-shu*.
2. "Each of the eighteen provinces had a governor" (p. 14). There was no "governor" (*hsün-fu*) in Chihli, Fukien, Hupeh, Kansu, Kwangtung, Szechwan, or Yunnan.
3. *Shui Hu Chuan* or "Water Margin" does not extol the exploits of "Triad heroes" (p. 166).
4. The main theme of *Fêng Shên Yen I* (*The Enfeoffment of the Gods*) is not the "harmonious triangular alliance of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism" and its "victory over heresy" (pp. 223-224). But the book does tell a story of the defeat of one Taoist sect by another Taoist sect in alliance with what looks like Buddhism. There is no triangular alliance, and Confucianism does not even appear.
5. Huang Fei-hu ("Flying Tiger Huang") was not a "historical figure" (p. 226).
6. Kuan Yü did not have a chance to "rejoin the Prime Minister" (Ts'ao Ts'ao) before his death (p. 227).

* Abbreviations: *IHT*—*I Ho T'uan (The Bowers)*, 4 vols., Shanghai, 1951. *IHTTA*—*I Ho T'uan Tang An Shih Liao (Source Materials in Despatches Relating to the Bowers)*, 2 vols., Peking, 1959.

7. Shu Han of the Three Kingdoms has no semantic relation to "Minor Han" (p. 228).

8. Chang, the Chief of the Taoists, was not known as "The Heavenly King" (p. 232).

9. On 19 June 1900 the court received Viceroy Yü-lu's (not "Viceroy Jung-lu's") memorial (p. 251).

Several other errors come from a misreading of the Chinese text:

1. "According to his statement, they [the sects] were very numerous in the districts of Yinchow and Po in Kiangsu, in Hsüchow in Honan, in Kueitê in Shantung, and in Ts'aochow, Ichow and Yenchow . . ." (p. 161). The names of the places in the original are: "Yinchow, Po(chow) and Hsüchow in Kiangnan, Kueitê in Honan, Ts'aochow, Ichow and Yenchow in Shantung" (*IHT*, IV, p. 123).

2. "Liu K'un-i reappears the same day in a telegram to Peking reporting more burnings by the Great Sword in Hsüchoi and Taofu" (p. 189). Hsüchoi (for Hsüchow) is obviously a misprint; but Taofu^e is not a proper name, but a combination of *tao* (the circuit or its intendant) and *fu* (the prefecture or the prefect) (*IHTTA*,* I, p. 2).

3. "One of the leaders, Ch'ên Wu-ai, had fled to the Tan district" (p. 189). Ch'ên Wu-ai was killed in action; it was the remnant of his band that fled to the Shan^f (not Tan) district. (*Ibid.*)

4. "In recent years they had changed it [the name] back to *I Ho* or *I Min*, but they regarded themselves as a newly established society" (p. 194). The original reads: "In recent years they had changed it back to *I Ho*. But the name became *I Min* in the rumoured reports; so they were mistaken to be a newly established society" (*IHTTA*, I, p. 15).

5. "On arrival in P'ingyüan he was informed of the activities of the *I Ho Ch'üan* in Szeching-chêng, in the neighboring Ên district" (p. 197). *Szu-ching*^g is not the name of a *chêng* (town) (which character is not found in the original), but means "four boundaries" or "all around" (Mathews, no. 5598).

6. "Red was still (*shang*—as if to signify that it was changed later) their colour" (p. 198). *Shang*^h means "to esteem." Mathews (no. 5670) gives as an example "to esteem red or to esteem black."

7. The final protocol of 7 September 1901 did not provide that "China was to erect an expiatory monument in each of the foreign international settlements that had been 'desecrated'" (p. 260). The provision was for the erection of an expiatory monument in each of the foreign or international cemeteries that had been desecrated. (*IHT*, IV, p. 495.) (See also Chester Tan, *The Boxer Catastrophe*, p. 234.)

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a. 拳廠

CHINESE CHARACTERS

b. 仲芳氏

Cf. Editor's note in *Keng Tzû Chi Shih (Records of 1900)* (Peking, 1959): "The author's *tzû* (style) is known to be *Chung-fang*; his real name is not known" (p. 9).

c. "夫朱紅燈，一李文成也；平原，一滑縣也。
楷雖非強忠烈，不敢不以身塞咎。"

d. 師兄

f. 單縣

h. 尚

e. 道府

g. 四境