

An International Conference on the Boxer Movement and Christianity in China: Concluding Remarks

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Bridging, Enhancing Communication and Understanding

“The International Conference on the Boxer Movement and Christianity in China” was successfully concluded in June 2004. It was jointly organized by The Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society of Chung Chi College of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Holy Spirit Study Centre of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, and the Research Center of Catholic History, Fu-Jen Catholic University, Taiwan. The Conference consisted of two parts; the first part was held in Taipei on June 10-11, 2004, and the second part was held in Hong Kong on June 14. I was most honored to be one of organizers, attending both parts of the Conference, and am delighted to share my experiences and reflection at the concluding session of the conference.

There were altogether twenty-five quality academic papers presented at the Conference, seventeen at Taipei and eight at Hong Kong. At the Taipei conference, the papers were mainly focused on the themes related to the responses of the Roman Catholics to the Boxer Movement; only two papers dealt with Protestant viewpoints and one was on the Orthodox Church. Among the papers, important and precious French, German, Italian and Russian primary documents, from different archives of churches, dioceses and missions were studied and quoted; some of the primary sources had not been studied or used in any paper before. Although the majority of the presenters were Roman Catholic scholars, the argument of the papers and the discussion throughout the Conference was quite scholarly – being rational, objective and intellectual. This was a real

breakthrough.

For the Hong Kong Conference, we had invited seven presenters from Mainland China. However, four of them, including Prof. Lu Yao (路遙) of Shandong University, Prof. Cheng Xiao (程嘯) of Renmin University, Prof. Qin Heping (秦和平) of South West University for Nationalities and Prof. Li Tiangang (李天綱) of Fudan University, were unable to attend the Conference due to various reasons such as, health problems, heavy duties at their universities and so on. Nevertheless, we were pleased to have Prof. Tao Feiya (陶飛亞) of Shanghai University, Prof. Guo Shiyou (郭世佑) of the China University of Political Sciences and Law, Beijing, and Prof. Tang Kaijian (湯開建) of Jinan University, Guangzhou to present their papers, and they had made a significant contribution to the occasion.

The very presence of Prof. Tao Feiya conveyed a significant meaning to the Conference. Tao started as a student, then was a faculty member at Shandong University, Shandong Province, which historically is an important cradle for research into the Boxer Movement. As a student of Prof. Lu Yao, an experienced and well-known scholar in the field, Prof. Tao devoted almost two decades of study to the field of the Boxer Movement, investigating the anti-foreign and anti-Christian sentiments from a Chinese perspective. After some years researching the anti-foreign and anti-Christian sentiments during the Boxer Movement, Prof. Tao shifted his research interest to the study of the history of Christianity in China. He finished his doctoral degree at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2001, focusing his research on the development of the Jesus Family as an important example of Christianity in China. From Prof. Tao's research experience, I can conclude that research on the Boxer Movement is not necessarily anti-foreign and anti-Christian. On the contrary, profound research into the Boxer Movement requires one to have a certain understanding of the history of Christianity in China. This definitely highlights the theme of our Conference—"The Boxer Movement and Christianity in China." At the Hong Kong Conference, Prof. Tao presented a paper entitled "Another Perspective on Studying the Boxer Movement: The Study of Chinese Papers at International Conferences in the Past Two Decades regarding the Historiography of the Boxer

Movement.” Prof. Tao’s paper was a complete and very comprehensive review of the research on the Boxer Movement from a Chinese perspective in recent decades.

Regarding research on the Boxer Movement, numerous questions and queries are awaiting further study. Some examples are: the origins, the underlining and immediate factors of the Movement, the relations of the Boxers with the Qing Government, with local provincial magistrates, with churches, missionaries, Chinese Christians, and so on. One typical question frequently asked is: “Why missionaries and Chinese Christians were singled out as victims of the Movement?” At the Taipei Conference, Cardinal Shan (單國璽) of Taiwan asked a question, which deserves further investigation: “Prof. Lu Yao has collected a large number of oral records from the witnesses of the Boxer Movement. However, why did he neglect the oral history of the missionaries and Chinese Christians?” Some scholars may claim: “The oral records of the foreign missionaries and Chinese Christians are subjective, and therefore contain a bias in favor of the foreign churches.” However, oral history is a research methodology, which is based on personal experiences, memories and subjective viewpoints, no matter whether they are from the missionaries, Chinese Christians or ordinary Chinese. Hence, no oral historical records can claim to be purely objective.

In the study of the Boxer Movement, bias and irrational viewpoints would develop when studies deal only with selected sources, and quote only from them. Therefore an open-minded attitude to various perspectives and sources is the only proper stance for a sincere scholar to take. Primary sources and perspectives from Christian and secular scholars always complement each other. In 2000, at the 100th Anniversary Conference of the Boxer Movement held at Shandong University, Prof. Philip Leung Yuen Sang of the Chinese University of Hong Kong pointed out that the perspectives of missionaries and Chinese Christians should not be neglected because they were the “victims” of the Boxer Movement.¹ The

¹ Philip Leung Yuen Sang 梁元生, “Cong ‘canju’ dau ‘shenji’: Yihetuan shixue yu Shandong jidujiao” 從「慘劇」到「神蹟」: 義和團史學與山東基督教 (“From ‘tragedy’ to ‘miracle’: The Boxer Historiography and Shandong Christianity”), in *Yihetuan yundong 100 zhubunian guoji xueshu taolunhui lunwenji* 《義

unique perspective of the “victims” has the potential to develop into a stream of “Christian Historiography,” which would probably arouse equal attention as “Boxer Historiography.”² At this June Conference, quality papers were presented. I believe that the presenters at both the Taipei and Hong Kong Conferences were contributors to the development of “Christian Historiography.” I sincerely hope that in the conferences’ aftermath, no matter whether from Hong Kong, Taiwan or Mainland China, the perspectives and viewpoints of both religious and secular scholars will be welcomed and duly respected.

The factors that led to the outbreak of the Boxer Movement are complicated. However, misunderstandings among the Qing government, the missionaries and the Chinese people are the most significant underlying cause of the Movement. Although a century has passed, it is our regret that “misunderstandings” still prevail. However, I still believe that it is the proper time for us to learn how to open ourselves up, whether we are ‘scholars from within the Church’ or ‘scholars from outside the Church.’ It is time for us to move beyond our limited horizons, and learn to communicate and interact with each other, regardless of the boundaries between Christian and secular perspectives. As a matter of fact, the history of Christianity in China should also be part of modern Chinese history. Scholars on either side should be able to listen and interact with scholars from the other side. As the Director of this research centre at Chung Chi College, I am certain that our Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society will strive to the best of our ability to act as a “bridge” between ‘scholars from within the Church’ and ‘scholars from outside the Church.’ We will do our utmost to provide an arena for scholars from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas, regardless of whether they are Christian or secular, to communicate and interact with each other in academic forums.

和團運動一百周年國際學際學術討論會論文集》(上), edited by Su Weizhi 蘇位智 and Liu Tianlu 劉天路 (Jinan: Shandong daxue xhubanshe, 2002), 533-553.

² Ibid., 536-544.