Fire in a Distant Heaven: The Boxer Uprising as a Domestic Crisis in the United States

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FIRE IN A DISTANT HEAVEN: THE BOXER UPRISING AS A DOMESTIC CRISIS IN THE UNITED STATES

by
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Boxer Uprising which took place in China around the turn of the twentieth century as a domestic crisis in the United States and the means through which different factions within America shaped the popular perception of the event. It argues that American and Chinese interest groups successfully managed the crisis by developing a narrative that served to further their own interests. These efforts were geared towards convincing an uncertain American public of the necessity and righteousness of particular ways to respond to the crisis. The primary factor in this narrative was a malleable ideal of civilization centered on American concepts of industry, Christianity, and democracy. This thesis maintains that the print media of the day was the essential element for the distribution of this message, which allowed for an explanation to the crisis, the protection of Chinese citizens within the United States, justification for American actions abroad, and a speedy return to the status quo.
For Shea Harris
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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1900 the world was transfixed by events unfolding in China as the Boxer Uprising reached its apex. The Boxers began in 1898 as a peasant movement in response to the tremendous stresses that were being placed on traditional society in northern China. The Boxer movement soon turned towards violently targeting foreign missionaries and Christian Chinese, claiming that their goal was to oust all traces of outside influence and support the Qing dynasty. ¹ For two years the violence in China escalated, culminating in the siege of foreign legations in Beijing and Tianjin with the implicit support of the Qing government. The Boxer Uprising led to a military response by eight nations, including the United States, to rescue their citizens, safeguard their interests in China, and suppress the movement. ²

For all the furor over the Boxer Uprising, the event quickly passed from memory within America. The Uprising is widely regarded as an external foreign policy matter for the United States. Histories of the Boxer crisis only recount American domestic activity when discussing newspaper coverage and the actions of policymakers in Washington. General histories of the Chinese in America do not go into detail on the Boxer years, typically only mentioning the Uprising took place in passing. Yet at the outbreak of the Uprising, there were a substantial number of Chinese in the United States who had endured a long history of racially motivated violence. Questions over the role of the United States in the world were rampant in a new age of

² The term “rebellion” and “uprising” have both been used to describe the Boxer movement. As the Boxer movement began with the slogan, “Support the Qing, destroy the foreign” and authors such as Esherick argue that the Boxers were primarily loyal to the Qing, the term “uprising” is used in this paper instead of the more common “rebellion.” Rebellion remains the more popular choice however as a survey of books relating to the subject on Amazon.com on October 6, 2011 revealed.
imperialism ushered in by the Spanish-American War that strained traditional isolationism. Missionary groups were under fire for their perceived role in the crisis. The Boxer Uprising had the potential to cause significant disturbances in America, through protest, violence, fear, and suspicion.

The domestic calm that marked the reception of the Boxer Uprising in the United States was the result of successful efforts to manage the crisis by American and Chinese parties with a vested interest in maintaining order and the status quo. Working concurrently but not in concert, American and Chinese elites utilized a concept of civilization based on American ideals to create a series of vital distinctions that served to explain the crisis and reassure the public. The distinctions separated Chinese in America from the Boxers, the actions of America from those of Europe, and the benevolent, progressive nature of American civilization from the rest of the world. This idea of differentiation and civilization was based on previous arguments that had been introduced to the American consciousness by the recent Spanish-American War. It was through the print media of the day that the narrative of the Boxer Uprising was interwoven with the discourse on this particular brand of American civilization and the distinctions it created. The print media was not a bystander in this process and formed the final collaborator in the development of this discourse, acting as the arbiter of proper, civilized behavior.

The Boxer Uprising was the result of the terrific internal and external forces unleashed upon China during the late 19th century. It was directly linked to a frustrated, populist reaction to the increasingly difficult impositions made on China by foreign powers and the stark fact that the very cultural and political integrity of the Chinese nation was in jeopardy. This reality was
appreciated by the major groups with a vested interest in China within the United States. In an article in the missionary magazine Watchman, the Boxer impulse to rid China of foreigners is described as not much different than the nativist American desire to purge the nation of Chinese. 

Very real concern existed within the halls of power in the United States that the origins of the Boxer crisis was in fact too understandable. A Harper’s Weekly article “The Boxer insurrection expanded into a national movement, having for its purpose the expulsion of all foreigners—or, as we would express it, China for the Chinese. The average American possesses the candor to acknowledge that, far from being unreasonable, this purpose was patriotic and laudable.”

The American method to manage the Boxer Uprising domestically was to utilize the developing discourse on the crisis to create distinctions by invoking an idea of distinctly American civilization. These distinctions served two major functions. The first was to differentiate American action from that of Europeans to better explain the need for intervention to the public. The second was to establish a difference between Chinese to preserve the narrative of positive American influence working genuine change in China and its people. The underlying cause of the Boxer Uprising as a response to foreign encroachment was problematic for garnering public support for intervention and the preservation of the status quo. To control the discourse on the crisis, and in doing so shape the perspective of the American people, the narrative of an uprising against increasingly demanding foreign powers was recast as a clash of civilization, of backward reactionaries flailing against the coming of progress.

The means through which this drama played out was through the popular mass media of

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the day. By 1900 the American press had been singularly transformed by the events of the Spanish-American War.  

6 The news media was only just recovering from the fierce internecine warfare that raged during the Spanish-American War and the backlash to the outrageous excesses of yellow journalism. Communications technology had advanced to the point where information on far off events could quickly reach America, and spawned a public demanding constant updates on the course of the uprising and the situation of the men and women trapped in the besieged legations. The popular press was a fundamental part of the process of controlling the discourse on the Boxer crisis as it was both the means of educating the citizenry and the medium through which the domestic narrative was shaped during the crisis.

Popular media was also the means through which Chinese and American interest groups formed a dialogue, speaking to each other through the press. The print media was not a passive medium however. Newspapers formed the final partner in the national dialogue on the Boxer Uprising as turn of the century newspapers were at times just as likely to create the news as to report on it.  

7 Reporters and editors imprinted their own ideas upon the news, moving to further their own ambitions and interests. The popular press at the turn of the century was markedly pro-American, with some papers allied with business and government officials, and lent its own voice to the dialogue while also imparting its own stamp on the proceedings.  

8 The press manipulated accounts of anti-Chinese violence through its own rhetoric and tone to further a black and white viewpoint of actions related to the Boxer crisis.

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7 Christopher Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation’s Journalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 122.
8 Daly, *Covering America*, 132.
Manipulation of events in the press had precedent in the Spanish-American War. The imperialistic goals of the foreign powers became that of a coalition of advanced nations working in concurrence against a rogue state. The original use of “rebellion” to describe the Boxer crisis plays into this construction. The Boxers were not rebelling against the Qing but their actions were oppositional to a new Western order. They were rebels against civilization.

The press had already impacted the state of relations between Americans and Chinese before the Boxer Uprising in terms of defining civilized behavior. Depictions of China as operating outside the boundaries of a western model of civilization existed in the image of the yellow peril, which continued during the Boxer years. A narrative of Chinese as dangerous threats to American civilization fueled racial violence and the passing of the Exclusion Acts in 1882. Sensational and attention grabbing yellow peril literature needed to be reconciled with the aims of American forces in the crisis. An emphasis on civilization as a means to distinguish Chinese managed to establish ideas of “good” Chinese who had been changed by American values while also placing the yellow peril in context.

Civilization became the rubric through which the actions of both the Boxers and of the United States in China could be judged and differentiated. Yet the concept of Western civilization on its own was not enough. America shared the foundations of its civilization with rapacious European powers who were roundly criticized in the press and who were for the most part identified as going against American notions of how the world should work. American foreign policy in China was construed by the public to have followed a line that it was different from

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those of the imperialistic European powers, even if in practice there were terrible similarities.

The diplomatic success of the Open Door in maintaining Chinese territorial integrity and access to Chinese trade came just as the Boxer Uprising exploded into prominence. Americans had a cloudy but relatively positive idea of the United States as an advocate for China, although the fundamental reason for Secretary Hay’s work was American national self-interest. 11

Turning the discourse towards civilization also provided legitimacy to American actions abroad. The American way was popularly considered by citizens as a superior one and in a Darwinian form of international relations, an advanced civilization was conflated with power. 12

According to Michael Hunt, it was due to, “the seemingly irresistible process of continental expansion that had in turn legitimized an ideology of manifest destiny and racial superiority.” 13

British consular officer Robert Hart used this view as a justification for action against the Boxers in an essay for Cosmopolitan. “The most powerful states are also the most civilized, not only have they the right, but it is their duty, sometimes to impose their will—only, in proportion as they are mighty and civilized, so should their action be considerate, discriminating and just.” 14

The established narrative of American intentions in China positioned the American civilization in a benevolent, paternalistic light. In the popular imagination, the United States stood apart from imperialist powers, with no territorial designs on China. The Open Door Notes, championed by Secretary of State Hay, were seen as a testament to the American policy of

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11 Hunt, The Making of a Special Relationship, 177.
maintaining Chinese integrity. \footnote{“The Open Door in China,” \textit{The Congregationalist}, April 5, 1900.} American missionaries were spreading the good word in China to a receptive audience while American business concerns presented themselves as operating under the auspices of free trade and the “Golden Rule” of behavior. \footnote{John Ball Osbourne, “A Retrospect of American Diplomacy,” \textit{Harper’s Weekly}, March 4, 1900, 309.} The Open Door Notes themselves were warmly received by the people of the United States as a victory of American civilization over feuding, imperialistic European civilization. \footnote{“A Victory for Civilization,” \textit{New York Times}, January 4, 1900.}

This perception was exacerbated by missionary reports which tended to paint an overly positive picture of the situation in China. When the Boxer Uprising erupted, the idea of a China slowly progressing towards a Western ideal of a civilized, Christian society with a love for America was severely strained and threatened to shatter completely. This presented a serious problem in managing the crisis. The parties invested in China needed to find a way to explain what happened and to safeguard their varied interests. To adequately explain the Boxer Uprising, civilization was retained as means to address the crisis. In some respects, there was little choice. The speed of the Boxer Uprising left no time for any new interpretations of China.

Civilization became the cornerstone around which various factions built their responses to the crisis. Americans were aware of the ideas of civilization in regards to China, and ideas of American civilization pitted against a barbaric other were used to great effect in the Spanish-American War. Civilization was a familiar concept to Americans in the last months of the 19th century, when most everything about China was a mystery. Alongside the prevalence of civilization in the discourse on China, this was also in no small part due to the top-down nature of the response to the Boxer crisis. In all the major groups involved, the reaction to the Boxer
crisis was dominated by elites who were relatively well-informed about the situation unfolding in China. Knowledge about China became a marker of authority, particularly in the press. Familiar with the language of a civilizing mission, familiar with the concepts that marked American interaction with China, these elites tapped into the same ideas to generate a message with familiar undertones for the public. In the hothouse environment surrounding the crisis, the general American confusion over China allowed for the development of malleable ideas of civilization that served different causes.

Yet reliance on a narrative of civilization to explain what had gone so wrong posed a final troublesome hurdle. Great Britain, France, Germany—all the great powers with their hands in China were bearers of their own styles of civilization and were embarked on a similar civilizing missions. Americans believed themselves different, despite the violent, endemic racism had marked interactions with Chinese within the United States. American civilization had to be positioned as different from European civilization. The stress on a difference between American and European civilization laid the groundwork for the use of civilization to develop a blanket explanation for the crisis. This was the way a basic narrative based on civilization emerged that was quickly and effectively manipulated to fit the situation.

Regardless of reality, to most Americans it seemed that overseas actions by the United States government had been for the benefit of China, continuing a perceived legacy of righteousness, exceptional behavior. 18 Although joint action was inevitable to resolve the Boxer crisis, America needed to appear as if it was still standing alone and apart from the other powers. Imbuing the dialogue of civilization with American characteristics not only served to further

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differentiate the motivations and actions of the United States from Europe, it also allowed for an
easier way to explain past and present action in the Middle Kingdom. In the crisis, American
civilization was broadly defined to include the defining aspects of the three major actors with a
vested interest in China, allowing each to support and reinforce the other.

This approach was viable for several reasons. To begin with, a narrative of progressive
expansion, faith in Christianity, technology, and a notion of the underlying validity of American
civilization had been constructed throughout the 19th century. 19 By invoking these elements the
factions seeking to influence the public tied the resolution of the Boxer crisis into the essence of
a developing American identity. This was after all less than ten years after Frederick Jackson
Turner announced his Turner thesis at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. For a nation
in transition, it tapped into the basic question of what made Americans American. The rhetoric of
the time had spoken about bringing “civilization” to the Chinese. The press campaign to manage
the Boxer crisis defined civilization as American and counter to Asian. 20 The American people
were offered a binary choice: civilization or barbarism. Developing the Boxer discourse around
the validity of American civilization was a black and white proposition with no middle ground
which effectively simplified the situation and served to negate criticism. As stated in the *New
York Times*, “there are not two systems in the world deserving to be called civilization, but one
only, and that whatever opposes and rejects this is a higher or lower power of barbarism.” 21

The McKinley administration led the way in this discourse. Communicating official
points of view and seeking to influence events through the new mass media was becoming part

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19 Adas, *Dominance by Design*, 125.
of the arsenal of the government and of special interest groups. Manipulating public opinion and “spin control” over the damaging revelations emerging from the crisis became critical to avoid recriminations and potential political disaster. Business interests, closely tied to overall government aims in China, were able to closely follow the lead of the McKinley administration. Missionary organizations had a more difficult time, as the immediate disconnect between Boxer violence and descriptions of a China that welcomed American ideals soured early public opinion.

By creating a binary explanation predicated on principles of civilization and American exceptionalism as a means to manage the Boxer crisis, Americans opened the door for Chinese to exert their own agency and enter the conversation. Both the Qing government and Chinese citizens had an understandable lack of faith in the American government to act in their best interests after a decade of exclusion and a consistent pattern of violence against Chinese. When the news of the Boxer Uprising broke, America already had a long history of violence against Chinese immigrants, especially in the West. The Exclusion Acts of 1882, put in place by nativist groups blaming Chinese immigrants for a series of woes, stifled immigration from China. Still, in 1900 a large number of Chinese remained in America. It was this large and relatively affluent population that made America a popular destination for Qing Dynasty reformers. Yet even with the nativist victory and the passing of exclusion, violence continued against Chinese well into the 1890s. Racism denied Chinese the chance to integrate into American society and pursue the opportunities that were slowly opening for other immigrants.

Yellow peril literature exacerbated the danger for Chinese. The actions of the Boxers in China fed squarely into the constructed image of the yellow peril, of a dangerous people bent on
violence and conquest.\textsuperscript{22} The dialogue appearing in the print media was already evoking the yellow peril with descriptions of China as an uncivilized nation, acting outside the boundaries of lawful nations. The popular concepts of the yellow peril appeared across a spectrum of popular culture, in racist newspaper cartoons, speculative novels, and essays by American writers.\textsuperscript{23} One form of yellow peril novel depicted an invasion of America by Chinese—the kind of irrational fears the Boxer crisis could produce. For the Chinese in America it vital to differentiate themselves from the Boxers, and separate themselves from the stereotyped image created in the popular consciousness by the yellow peril. Co-opting the American narrative created the means to do so.

A key point that Chinese groups seized upon was the implication that civilization was a transmittable unit.\textsuperscript{24} The American way could be learned, as it was being learned by a wave of European immigrants. The dialogue of missionary groups already spoke of religion as a civilizing engine at a grassroots level, a means for uplift and change. While the Manchu government was intractable, missionaries reported that with individual Chinese much had been accomplished.\textsuperscript{25} However, while the rhetoric on progressive change and assimilation was embraced by missionaries, the cold reality was that Americans were unable to accept many peoples as truly civilized.\textsuperscript{26} The success of the civilization argument during the Boxer crisis depended as much on creating confusion that would create a brake on behavior than a moral

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Adas, \textit{Dominance by Design}, 125.
\item \textsuperscript{23} American author Jack London was a notable author to contribute to Yellow Peril literature. Sax Rohmer’s Fu Manchu is perhaps the most famous of yellow peril characters. London’s work appeared in 1910, while Fu Manchu debuted in 1913, denoting the longevity and strength of the yellow peril idea after the Boxer era.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Adas, \textit{Dominance by Design}, 120.
\item \textsuperscript{25} “Interesting Facts from China.” \textit{Christian Advocate}, July 26, 1900.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Adas, \textit{Dominance by Design}, 105.
\end{itemize}
compass fully accepted by Americans.

Chinese groups made statements that they too subscribed to American ideals and were changed by the civilizing influence of American culture. To cast doubt upon Chinese claims was to cast doubt upon the entire basis of the civilization argument and the potential for Americanization. If the Chinese in the United States, surrounded by all the markers of American civilization, were not accepted as changed than the validity of the foreign presence in China was compromised. If progressive uplift was not the reason the United States was dealing with China, the only other option was naked imperialism. At the critical stage of forming the discourse on the Boxer Uprising, this was an assertion American groups were uninterested in challenging. The agreed upon influence of civilization combined with a general confusion over China aided the cause of the Chinese in America, allowing for a creation of distinct identity separate from that of their countrymen.

The success of the response to the Boxer crisis can be seen in the dearth of material on the impact of the Uprising on the domestic affairs of the United States. By effectively managing the crisis and placing it within the context of extant ideas of American civilization, the Boxer crisis was subsumed into the larger debates over imperialism and expansionism of the day. Violence against Chinese was checked by conflating anti-Chinese actions with the same barbarism that was the calling card of the Boxers, while the Chinese in America successfully used the binary narratives created by American interest groups to assume a distinct identity separate from their countrymen. The result was domestic tranquility, the categorization of the entire Boxer affair as an aberrant reaction against the forces of progress, and a rapid return to the status quo.
Background

When the Empress of China sailed into Guangzhou in 1784 initiating contact between China and the new nation of the United States, the primary purpose of the vessels long journey across the Pacific was commercial. The Empress of China also carried aboard the first American consul to China, although an official ambassador would not arrive until 1844. This combination of an official American diplomatic mission with a business venture foreshadowed the tangled connections between governmental concerns and private ambitions that defined the American interest in China. For the next century, American interests in the Middle Kingdom centered on business and missionary endeavors. American foreign policy towards China reflected this bias, operating to ensure American access to the Chinese market.

The McKinley administration sought to preserve Chinese territorial integrity through the Open Door Notes in 1899 primarily for national self-interest. Even while framing American action as beneficial for China, the United States had been more than eager to claim the same rights and concessions that had been granted to other nations when the opportunity presented itself. American paternalism towards China was strong, yet consistently wavered when the opportunity to increase American interests at the expense of China presented itself. After the British victory in the First Opium War, the United States signed the Treaty of Wangxia,

28 A state of affairs that persists to the present day.
30 Hunt, The Making of a Special Relationship 189.
guaranteeing the same rights as conceded to Great Britain. Bonds of race with European powers and racism both blatant and subtle lingered beneath the American presence in China, factors that proved problematic during the Boxer Uprising.

Within the United States, Chinese immigration was marked by xenophobia and violence, with Chinese often becoming the scapegoats for difficult economic times. Violent attacks against Chinese workers went unpunished. While foreigners enjoyed vast privileges in China, Chinese immigrants in the United States faced racism that would eventually become institutionalized. The Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 forced drastic limits to Chinese immigration, imposing strict regulations over the protests of the Qing Dynasty. The number of Chinese in America dwindled but stabilized after the Exclusion Acts, while the missionary endeavor and economic opportunities began drawing more and more Westerners to China. Even so, by the end of the 19th century America still held the greatest number of overseas Chinese in the world.

In 1898 the United States had emerged victorious from a short, decisive war against Spain. The Americans had been able to quickly defeat the Spanish Empire, and in doing so had become an imperialist power by gaining several overseas possessions. The war had also engaged the Americans in a less publicized, protracted conflict against independence seeking Philippine

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32 The modern pinyin spelling is used for Chinese names in this paper except in cases where the Wade-Giles version is the only one found to be available.
rebels. The same year, anger and resentment over the treatment of China by foreign powers was running high among many Chinese, sentiments exacerbated by desperation due to severe drought conditions in Northern China. In contrast to the ascendant and vibrant United States, China under the Qing Dynasty appeared stagnant and moribund to Western observers. China had been defeated twice in the Opium Wars and had recently lost the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, which forced the Qing government to relinquish claims on Korea and Taiwan. The Qing Dynasty's apparent weakness was readily exploited by other powers, as China was forced into signing a series of unequal treaties throughout the 1800s. Foreigners were granted extraordinary rights and concessions on Chinese soil while missionary groups were given leave to actively attempt to convert the Chinese to Christianity. The combination of a faltering Qing government, successive military defeats and the aggressive policies of foreign nations left China in danger being carved up by foreign powers, a scenario that appeared increasingly likely at the turn of the century.

In the northern Chinese province of Shandong, simmering anger and discontent manifested itself in the formation of a secret society named The Righteous and Harmonious Fists. Members of this movement were soon popularly known as Boxers, the name given to

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39 The importance of the Philippine campaign to American efforts in the Boxer Uprising was the proximity to China of a large number of experienced American soldiers, giving the United States a nearby base of operations and the ability to respond with a sizable force. The almost immediate benefits of an overseas base near Asia, a result of victory in the Spanish-American War, was evident to American strategists and the public during the crisis. The authenticity of this assertion has been disputed by several modern scholars, such as Paul Cohen in China Unbound and William T. Rowe in China's Last Empire. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the perception of China as backwards and stagnant by Americans is the important element. The foreign nations encroaching on China were not all Western powers. Japan had become a major force in the region, continuing to have designs on Chinese territory well into the 20th century and contributed the largest number of troops in the Eight-Nation Alliance relief effort.
40 Victor Purcell, The Boxer Uprising, A Background Study (Hamden: Archon Books, 1974), 84.
41 There are various other translations of the name of the movement, the most common being “Boxers United in Righteousness.” In mainland China the appellation Yihetuan Movement is used.
them by Westerners due to the martial arts and calisthenics they practiced. As Chinese martial arts such as gong fu and tai chi were obscure even to foreigners living in China, the closest European discipline available to use as a means of comparison was boxing. The appellation proved quite popular and enduring.

In 1898 the Boxers began a campaign of violence against foreign missionaries and Christian Chinese in northern China, claiming that their goal was to oust all traces of outside influence and support the Qing dynasty. Sporadic attacks on missionaries ensued, with the Boxer movement quickly spreading across nearby provinces and becoming more virulently anti-foreign. Missionaries became the main target of anti-foreign violence as they were most visible and high-profile foreigners most often seen outside of a major city. In addition, missionaries appeared to represent the worst of foreign excesses, making constant demands while actively seeking to convert Chinese to their ways. The resentment was nothing new, as anger over the concessions afforded to foreigners and the impact of Christianity on the fabric of rural life had resulted in sporadic attacks on missionaries prior to 1898.

The Boxers quickly grew in scale, spreading out from the northern rural areas where they originated and transforming from a localized, anti-missionary movement to a widespread, anti-

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44 The shamanistic nature of the Boxer martial rituals, the core beliefs of the movement, and the role of secret societies in China, and within Chinese enclaves in the United States are addressed in detail in Esherick’s *The Origins of the Boxer Rebellion*. The connection to earlier secret societies with similar practices and beliefs such as the Big Swords is also discussed.

45 Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Rebellion*, 136. “Support the Qing, destroy the foreigner,” became the most popular and well known Boxer slogan.

46 One Western observer would ruefully comment that the British hardly stirred upon hearing of the deaths of missionaries, but as soon as a few yards of railroad were destroyed, they immediately sprang into action.

47 Rumor and suspicion surrounded missionaries as well. Many stories circulated involving foreigners stealing children or killing Chinese for organs required in Western medicines. The stories did little to help the perception of foreigners as voracious predators literally and figuratively tearing China apart. Missionary compounds were also relatively isolated and dependent on local authorities from protection.

foreign rising. Qing authorities did little to check the Boxer movement, partly out of a concern that the rising could easily turn anti-dynastic and partly due to sympathetic government elements which eventually included the powerful Dowager Empress Cixi. 49 For the Qing court, caught between the terrific forces of internal dissent and external predation, the Boxers represented a possible hope of expelling foreign influence. In time the Qing would co-opt the movement, lending their support and official sanction. 50 Over the course of two years, the Boxers attacked isolated missionary settlements, killed both foreigners and Chinese citizens, and destroyed railroad lines and other symbols of Western incursion into China. 51

Within the United States the Boxer Uprising moved towards becoming a media sensation by mid-1900. Reporting on the crisis began prosaically but as the violence intensified and the soldiers of a combined eight nation expedition made landfall in China, newspapers reported on every action of the uprising as well as on unsubstantiated rumors to an American public entranced by the troubles in China. While debates over Chinese immigration and the relationship between China and the United States had been present in the American media for many years, the Boxers and the ensuing siege of the foreign legations in Beijing became front page news. In particular the fifty-five day siege of the foreign legations in Beijing became a sensational human drama rife with the stereotypes of the day: the barbaric, backwards East versus the civilized humanity and progressiveness of the West playing out daily for the American public. Again, the news harkened to dark yellow peril fantasies depicted in popular novels. Building upon an

50 William T. Rowe. *China’s Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009), 255.
51 Christian Chinese were called “Rice Christians” as the popular belief was that they converted for food and other gains during the difficult times faced by rural Chinese in the late 1800s. They also represented not only the threat of the missionaries, but the threat to established traditions.
overwhelming demand for news ignited by the Spanish-American War, the new mass media became the primary vehicle for dissemination of information as well as the primary means different groups attempted to control and redefine popular perceptions to further its own agendas.

The uprising culminated in the summer of 1900 with a final wave of violence as the Boxers laid siege to the legations in Beijing and Tianjin, trapping hundreds of foreigners and thousands of Chinese Christians. 52 In response to the crisis, eight nations including the United States mounted military expeditions to rescue their trapped nationals and protect their economic and political interests in China. 53 By June of 1900, the Eight-Nation Alliance had battled its way to Beijing from their landing points near the Dagu forts, quickly lifting the siege and suppressing the Boxers in the capital, effectively crushing the movement. 54 The Imperial court fled Beijing and the Eight-Nation Alliance assumed control over the Chinese capital, dividing the city into occupied sections. Reprisals against Boxers were indiscriminate, with American General Adna Chaffee stating that for every actual Boxer executed, fifteen innocent Chinese were murdered. 55

The Qing dynasty was forced to sign the Boxer Protocol, agreeing to pay the crushing sum of 450 million taels to the allies, as well as agreeing to other concessions. 56 The humiliating end to the Boxer Uprising greatly undermined the confidence of the Chinese people in the government and contributed to the eventual downfall of the Qing Dynasty.

52 Legations were small embassies, established by the Treaty of Nanjing.
53 The Eight-Nation Alliance consisted of the United States, Japan, Russian, Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. The “alliance” was extremely loose and problematic, and in many respects was a case of eight nations acting together on concurrent goals, rather than in concert. This approach is reflected in the handling of the crisis domestically by American and Chinese groups.
54 The traditional view of the military prowess of the Boxers is poor. The peasant origins of the Boxers and their lack of centralized leadership meant they were ill-suited to fighting the well-armed, professional soldiers of the Eight-Nation Alliance. More recent scholarship by authors such as Sibley attributes better qualities to Boxer irregulars.
56 The Boxer Protocol is regarded as one of the unequal treaties. The entirety of the Qing government income for one year was 250 million taels.
Historiography

To begin to understand how the discourse on the Boxer Uprising played out within the United States has been studied, a survey of the literature utilized in this thesis is in order. The background literature used can be divided into three rather broad categories. The first category contains examinations of American policy and studies specifically on the Boxer Uprising. As much of the rhetoric used during the crisis had antecedent in the narrative of the Spanish-American War, works on that conflict and on President McKinley are included.

The second category is comprised of the histories written about the Chinese experience in America and works dealing with internal Chinese history during the era. The questions of racism and racial identity that tinged the conversation on China are part of the connective tissue that binds the discussions on the Boxer to the greater discourse on race in the United States. This section of the historiography provides the critical linkages between the events in China and the development of a distinct overseas Chinese identity in America. It will also illustrate the pivotal differences between the primarily southern Chinese immigrants in the United States and the northern based Boxer movement that come into play during the debates on the crisis.

The third category in the historiography for this thesis covers works that explore the concept of civilization at the turn of the century, the nature of the media in America in 1900, and the discourse over imperialism and the missionary endeavor. The way the American discourse on the crisis utilized technology, religion, and democracy was predicated on an American (and by extension Western European) view of the world deeply linked to ideas of religious and cultural superiority. These books illustrate the nature and strength of those concepts and are discussed
further as part of the methodology for this thesis.

Scholarly attention towards the Boxer Uprising has generally concerned itself with the political and military interaction between the countries of the Eight-Nation Alliance and China or the social and cultural implications of the Boxer movement. These works aim to explain the origins and course of the uprising, comment on the state of internal matters during the late Qing dynasty, describe the allied military campaign and the siege of the legations at Beijing, or to relate the experiences of the missionaries in China. However, historical writing on the American and Chinese reaction within the United States to the uprising has been minimal. The literature specifically on the Boxer Uprising treats the rising as a purely foreign affair without touching its effect on the American perception of China. Aside from commentary from major American political and social figures, the majority of references to the reactions on the Boxer Uprising simply and succinctly describe the widespread shock and anger of Americans at the often lurid news coming out of China. Other literature placed the crisis within the larger debates of imperialism that were going on at the time or discussed the viewpoint of the major interest groups in the face of the disastrous news. How the Chinese in America responded and how they were treated by Americans during the crisis or how they responded to the Uprising is often missing altogether.

Professional histories on the Boxers come soon after the conclusion of the events in China with the 1915 *The Boxer Rebellion* by Paul Clements as a notable example. 57 Originally written as his doctoral dissertation for Columbia University, *The Boxer Rebellion* sets the course for nearly all later studies on the subject by focusing on the internal causes of the uprising and

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the international response, treating the event as within the domain of United States foreign relations and internal Chinese history. Of substantial use for background information is Joseph Esherick’s *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, a work that delves deeply into the conditions that led to the rise of the Boxer movement and enters into detail on the conditions which led to the formation of the Boxers in northern China.  

Esherick also examines the spiritual, social and cultural factors inherent in the Boxer movement. However, the specific conditions in China that led to the Boxer Uprising studied by Esherick are useful in understanding the eventual overseas Chinese creation of a defensive explanation for the crisis and their own innocence in the affair. By understanding that the critical factors that led to the rise of the Boxers in northern China did not translate to southern China aids in piecing together the development of a separate identity for the primarily Cantonese immigrants to the United States during the crisis.

Jane Elliott’s *Some Did It for Civilization, Some Did It for Their Country: A Revised View of the Boxer War* has as its centerpiece a revisionist approach to the Boxer Uprising. As the title of the book suggests, Elliot takes a revisionist stand on the uprising, calling it a war (also fairly rare among Boxer histories), portraying the Boxers in a highly sympathetic light, and giving the military capabilities of the Qing substantial credit. While most of Elliot's arguments are generally in the minority, the placement of the idea of civilization as one of the major engines of the reaction and response to the Boxers is one that forms an essential element of this thesis.  

Elliott also examines the use of civilization in British newspapers as a means to show the lack of respect given China and the Chinese military in the press.

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Diana Preston’s *The Boxer Rebellion*, published in 1999, is indicative of the current state of Boxer Uprising histories. Preston focuses her narrative and analysis on the events in China, centering the book on the siege at Beijing and the allied march on the city. As has been found to be typical of works on the Boxers, Preston only makes passing remarks on the situation and sentiment within the United States. One of the most recent works on the Boxers, *The Boxer Rebellion and the Great Game in Asia* by David Sibley again places the Boxer Uprising firmly in sphere of international affairs by positioning the crisis as part of the clash between European nations. Sibley does expand on the international connections of the Boxer Uprising and the shock waves the event sent through the halls of power from Washington to Moscow, giving the crisis a sorely needed European and multinational outlook.

While histories on the Chinese experience in America are tremendously useful in establishing the relationship between Chinese and Americans in 1900, they rarely if ever mention the Boxer crisis—again, it has been relegated to the status of a purely overseas affair. Iris Chang’s *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* is one such chronicle. Her work only references the Boxers’ impact on Chinese in America when discussing the subsequent loss of influence by Qing officials in the United States. However, Chang’s work is still useful material for understanding the background of the Chinese in America and their relations with Americans in regards to questions of assimilation, violence and exclusion.

Philip Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon Hom examine the American idea of China in *Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese* through the use of images.

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60 Diana Preston, *The Boxer Rebellion* (New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1999)
63 Philip P. Choy, et al. *Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese* (Seattle: University of
Sucheng Chan’s *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* provides an overview of the Chinese experience in the United States leading up to the Boxer Uprising. Jean Pfaelzer describes the nearly institutionalized violence against the Chinese in America in *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans*. Pfaelzer’s account is of great value in this thesis as it lays out the many instances in which violence was used against the Chinese in the late 1800s, which demonstrates the existing potential for violence in America during the Boxer years.

General histories on China address the Boxers, especially in light of the uprising's contribution to the eventual collapse of the Qing Dynasty. A typical example is *China’s Last Empire* by William T. Rowe, which devotes roughly four pages to the Boxers. Rowe posits the Boxers as forming a populist response to foreign imperialism, although he capably sums up the existing arguments and theories on the Boxers in the few pages on the subject. John Keay's *China* discusses the Boxers in a brief three pages with the focus again staying on the topic as a matter of Chinese history. In *Chinese Chicago: Race, Transnational Migration, and Community since 1870*, Huping Ling examines the development of Chinese communities.

This thesis makes use of interpretations of the McKinley administration as effective and capable of solid leadership. Lewis Gould's *The Presidency of William McKinley* and David Trask's *The War with Spain in 1898* present McKinley as a generally effective strategist and as a

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66 Rowe, *China's Last Empire*, 243-246.
leader rather than a president meekly pushed into action by public opinion. The rhetoric of the Spanish-American War provides the origins of an argument for civilization as the justification for armed conflict as well as a precedent for the domestic impact of media coverage. In *The Days of McKinley* by Margaret Leech and *The President and the Assassin* by Scott Miller discuss the relationship between the press, the public, and the government during the war.

As the mass media plays a major role in this thesis, the status and operation of the turn of the century American press needs to be factored in. *Discovering The News: A Social History of American Newspapers* by Michael Schudson chronicles the overall state of the publishing industry in 1900 after the excesses of the frenzied reporting on the Spanish-American War. The *Public Press 1900 – 1945: The History of American Journalism* by Leonard Teel and *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation’s Journalism* Christopher Daly argue that the impact of yellow journalism has been greatly overstated, and that by 1900 American print media was moving towards a new professionalism. Lastly, Max Boot’s *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* places the Boxer Uprising in context along with the many minor military adventures of the United States during its history.

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Sources and Methodology

The framework for this thesis is centered on the study of the discourse on the Boxer Uprising within American print media. It is vital to reiterate that the critical point of investigation for this thesis is the way the Americans and Chinese residing in the United States imbued a discourse of identity, distinction, and civilization into the overall Boxer narrative in the media. As print media was the means through which Americans received information on the Boxer Uprising, it was the natural outlet through which the government of the United States and the special interest groups involved in the crisis sought to influence the discourse. Boxer era reporting covered a great many topics, from the history of China to the logistics of American troop supply. The discourse on civilization was present in the forefront of some stories and as an undercurrent in others. Newspapers and journals will be the primary sources utilized to explore the domestic reaction. They will be examined to determine how Americans and Chinese used the media to disseminate and support their points of view based upon notions of civilization.

The New York Times is the major newspaper that will be utilized in this thesis. The New York Times is particularly useful due to its position as one of the giants of the industry, which meant it had a major role in setting the tone of Boxer reporting in smaller markets. The Times reprinted articles from other newspapers and magazines within its pages, which will aid in determining the way stories on the Boxers were disseminated through the nation. New York also had one of the larger concentrations of Chinese in the United States. Popular periodicals such as Harper’s Weekly and Cosmopolitan will also be incorporated into the thesis research, as the press of the 1900 was able to cater specifically to different groups such as women. Magazines were
often more complete and offered longer articles, as they were not as constrained by the war of immediacy that daily newspapers were engaged in. Although newspapers are often the focus of investigation for their ability to influence the public, Leonard Tell posits that magazines were even more influential than daily papers during the era. 73

Smaller periodicals with specific circulations will be considered such as missionary journals and local newspapers. Examples of these include *Outlook, The Congregationalist,* and *Southern Planter.* These will be used to show the national reach of the discourse engineered by the parties invested in shaping the public perception of the crisis. The use of regional papers is also useful to show the spread of news from the major cities to the outlying regions of the United States. In particular, the route of Chinese statements from high population enclaves such as San Francisco to smaller towns in the American Midwest is of interest. While regional papers were often dependent on the larger papers for news from abroad, the needs of their readership and local perspectives were not absent from their pages. A notable number of immigrant presses existed in major cities, but due to their small runs and insular natures, they are outside of the scope of this investigation.

Along with being the medium through which the Boxer crisis was discussed, the print media was an active participant in the development of discourse on civilization and identity. This central position between American and Chinese makes the print media a useful beginning for this investigation. To understand the role print media played in management of the crisis, the overall state of the industry in 1900 and the role of the press in manipulating the discourse will be addressed in Chapter One. The important connections to the development of the discourse are in

73 Teel, 15.
the role of print media as an educating force with pro-American values, as an arbiter of American civilization, and as a voice of authority able to independently refute arguments against the civilization narrative.

This is followed by examinations of the American and Chinese variations on the response to the crisis. The specific goals and aims of the American government, business interests, and missionary groups are examined in Chapter Two. The central role of the McKinley administration and the individual issues and contributions of the other two factions are used to demonstrate how the discourse was able to develop in an unusual partnership. The way the Chinese entered into the discourse and utilized it to form a defense against potential violence is covered in Chapter Three. The distinct factions at work in the overall Chinese community within the United States is studied to show how the Chinese were both aware of the American ideas of civilization and able to co-opt them for their own purposes.

The theoretical groundwork for this thesis springs from several branches of the literature related to the Boxer Uprising, Chinese-American relations, and American foreign policy. At the core, this thesis uses the idea of civilization as the basis for reordering identity and creating distinctions among the actors in the Boxer crisis. Alice Conklin’s sets forth the idea of civilization and assimilation in *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930.* A more American take on this concept is the Turner Thesis. The ability of America to fundamentally transform an individual was in the popular consciousness due to the popularity of the Frederick Jackson Turner’s ideas. These concepts help lay out how

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an American in 1900 understood concepts of civilizations that were used to great effect in the Boxer crisis.

This thesis looks at a trinity of American characteristics imbued into the discussion of civilization during the Boxer Uprising. Michael Adas presents the case for American technological prowess connecting with directly with America civilization abroad in *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America’s Civilizing Mission*. Adas also connects technology to religion and democracy, the three ideals used in the discourse of civilization. Miwa Hirono provides background on the efforts of religious organizations in China before 1949 in *Civilizing Missions: International Religious Agencies in China*. John King Fairbank also deals with the activities of missionaries in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*. These present the missionary narrative as of 1900 of an enterprise dedicated to uplift and progress through Christianity and American values. The conflicted nature of missionaries, as earnest Christians and as all too human agents driven by more material concerns is also noted. The aims of the United States government to preserve American interests while also engaging in creating an image of a benevolent nation standing apart from the world cased on principle is ably sketched out by Michael Hunt in *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914*. Hunt deals with the misconceptions on both sides about the Sino-American relationship.

Although viewed today as a minor overseas incident for the United States in American history, the timing of the Boxer Uprising coincided with radical shifts in thought among the

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75 Adas, *Dominance by Design*, 84.
76 Adas, *Dominance by Design*, 120.
American people concerning the potential of the United States and their own identity as Americans. The convergence of domestic forces in the United States during the Boxer crisis holds more potential for understanding the effect on the development of Sino-American relations and Chinese American history than has been previously addressed by professional histories. This thesis will ultimately attempt to understand how Americans, Chinese, and the print media worked in unusual synchronicity to utilize extant concepts of civilization to develop distinctions in motivation, race, and action. In doing so, they were able to advance their own agendas, successfully manage public opinion, and diffuse potential violence during the Boxer Uprising.

77 The Boxers fare differently in the historiography of mainland China.
CHAPTER ONE: THE ARBITERS OF CIVILIZATION

The American print media occupied an unusual position in the development of the Boxer discourse. The media itself served as the mechanism for dissemination of the message developed during the crisis, as a common ground where American and Chinese voices could create a dialogue, and as an independent actor capable of influencing the discourse. The stigma of yellow journalism in 1898 caused a significant change in Boxer reporting, toning down fabrications and sensationalism yet retaining pro-American bias. The print media was able to comment on the assertions raised by American and Chinese groups, and in doing so reinforce what was deemed civilized behavior. The authority of the media presented itself as a means to guide Americans through a confusing situation at home and abroad. These factors gave the media the ability to quiet dissent and to subtly ensure a consistency in the discourse by acting as a filter on the news. It was through these processes that a consistent national narrative emerged.

In the words of an editor at *Cosmopolitan*, “The world has never known a more dramatic situation than that presented by the foreign community within the walls of Peking while cut off from communication with their countrymen.” 78 Henry Adams opined that the, “the drama of the legations interested the public as much as though it was a novel by Alexandre Dumas.” 79 Hyperbole perhaps, but the sentiment rang true in the summer of 1900. The Boxer crisis was the biggest story to hit American print media since the Spanish-American War--and it was arguably bigger and far more fantastic to the imagination. The crisis read like fiction in the pages of

78 Robert Hart, “The Peking Legations,” *Cosmopolitan*, December 1900, 121. Forerunner to the current *Cosmopolitan* magazine, although in 1900 it was a general interest periodical.
American periodicals. The major player was a renegade, mysterious nation whose people were still sometimes referred to as Celestials arraying itself against the combined forces of the civilized world. There was the human drama of hundreds of foreigners caught behind the walls of the Beijing legations, under siege from the might of an entire empire. Finally, the crisis presented a quarrelsome, ad hoc force of the Great Powers, an “army of civilization,” fighting its way from Tianjin to Beijing, displaying a unity that would be shattered in less than two decades.

The conflict was portrayed by leading newspapers as China “at war with the world.” Indeed, by the hot summer of 1900 it appeared the entire world was moving against the Middle Kingdom on a mission to stop what today would be deemed a rogue nation acting outside of a mutually agreed upon code of conduct. The crisis was front page material and how the Boxer Uprising was handled in the American press was the crucial connection between the twin narratives of American and Chinese interest groups that sought to define a faraway conflict on their own terms. The media disseminated the views and opinions of the pro-China factions while lending its weight and authority towards producing a consistent narrative based on a shared conceptualization of American civilization. Print media was the connection between the American people, the machinery of government and the desires of special interests.

It was within the pages of newspapers and journals that the conversation between invested parties played out and where Americans learned about the origins of the crisis.

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80 A notable subgenre of invasion literature had been in print for some time prior to 1900.
81 The enormity of the crisis and the sheer volume of first person accounts that emerged in the aftermath seems to have sated the public appetite for news of the crisis, as very few fictional works based on the uprising were to follow in the next century despite an ongoing trade in “China invasion” and yellow peril literature.
83 “China is at War with the World,” *New York Times*, June 19, 1900.
media explained the crisis and the rationale for intervention and restraint to the American people. The media was also invested in maintaining a narrative where it was instrumental in defining the nature of any world event and America itself to new and old citizens. Through the print media, the response to the Boxer uprising was shaped into a unified, cohesive narrative. The press defined, clarified, and reinforced the precepts of civilization that the management of the Boxer crisis relied upon—and when the public threatened to act outside of the agreed script, the media acted as a corrective force.

**American Print Media in 1900**

As with the American and Chinese people, the American print media in 1900 was not a single machine nor easily categorized. The newspapers, journals and periodicals of the era served different agendas and audiences, competed against each other for dollars and at times influenced the course of events rather than simply reporting on them. Newspapers such as the *New York Times* appealed to the wealthy and those who aspired to be wealthy with a genteel, serious approach to the news. On the other end of the spectrum, William Randolph Hearst's *New York World* was the epitome of the age of yellow journalism, awash with lurid headlines, bright colors and a following that was thought to include many immigrants. Regional presses and small town papers picked up on the resources of the larger papers though the developing news syndicates of the day while adding their own locally generated, generally conservative

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85 Long term studies of newspaper circulation and readership have found that while immigrants did read the *New York World*, rising circulation came from readers subscribing to multiple papers.
commentary. While newspapers outside of New York followed the lead of the giants in some respects, they were controlled by more conservative publishers, marketed to small town America, and did not feel the constant pressure to exaggerate and invent that marked reporting in the big city papers. Across the countrymen, most editors delivered the news “in fashion more intellectual than the public wanted, and appealed to the mind rather than the heart.” The press of the American heartland was opposed to the yellow brand of journalism radiating out from New York.

Periodicals filled in the gaps that were left by the fast pace of the daily papers. They were more expensive, less immediate in their reporting on events, and occasionally outdated by the time they hit the streets, but the magazines offered more complete commentary. As speed was not a factor in their sales, periodicals tended to downplay sensational elements. This was due in part to the specific audiences periodicals catered to. Missionary periodicals such as Outlook kept their subscribers informed as to the good work being done in China. General interest magazines such as Harper's Weekly catered to a new desire for information and printed stories that were specifically geared towards women and other interest groups, a result of America's growing wealth and high literacy rates. The North American Review featured sober analysis, with longer pieces on American foreign policy, domestic issues, and other matters of concern to the United States. A healthy immigrant press also existed, keeping America's newest inhabitants informed of

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86 Christopher Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 149
87 Daly, *Covering America*, 149.
88 Daly, *Covering America*, 7.
events while also striving to teach them the fundamentals of English and of the republic they had joined—way stations between their Old World past and their New World future.

Prior to the outbreak of the uprising the medium of print had not been without its share of news on China and of anti-Chinese sentiment. The potential consequences of Asian immigration had been discussed for decades in magazines and newspapers. 91 The yellow peril was a persistent and popular image of Chinese, one that threatened the safety and security of Chinese in America. A potential Chinese invasion of the United States hovered on the fringes of the popular imagination thanks to a subgenre of “invasion literature” that encapsulated the threat of the yellow peril 92 Novels such as *The Last Days of the Republic* (1880), *The Chinese Invasion* (1873), the wonderfully titled *Short and Truthful History of the Taking of California and Oregon by the Chinese in the Year A.D. 1899* (1882) and *The Recovered Continent: A Tale of the Chinese Invasion* (1898) told stories of four hundred million Chinese unleashed on America. The yellow peril was a continuing motif in pulp literature throughout the late 1800s. The events of the Boxer Uprising had many similarities to the fictional yellow peril with stories of valiant Westerners making heroic last stands against an onslaught of overwhelming Chinese numbers. Arguments against Chinese immigration appeared frequently in the press, warning of the terrible consequences to the republic if the tide was left unchecked. 93

However, anti-Chinese sentiment in the West and popular ideas about a yellow peril had some opposition in periodicals supporting Chinese and arguing against exclusion. 94 Many

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91 “Chinese immigration,” *The Round Table*, February 27, 1869, 132.
92 The invasion genre existed in both the United States and Great Britain. Although focusing on an alien invasion, H.G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* is perhaps the most famous example of this particular literary trend.
newspaper and magazine articles were generally sympathetic to Chinese, disapproved of Exclusion, and strongly condemned violence often by appealing to ideas of American justice and inclusion. The arguments against exclusion were generally couched in ideals of American Christianity, democracy, and exceptionalism—again reflecting concepts that were used in the Boxer crisis. The debate over exclusion, interest in China generated by the news, and increased missionary activity meant a steady stream of information and commentary on China appeared throughout the 1880s and 1890s. A factor in the American public's difficulty in understanding what went was wrong in the summer of 1900 was that much of the pro-Chinese literature painted a picture of China and the missionary effort that was far too rosy and optimistic.

While the popular memory of media during the last decade of the 19th century is permanently colored by the abuses of the press during the Spanish-American War, a trend popularized by the term yellow journalism, the reporting on the Boxer Uprising had marked differences. Yellow journalism had come close to exhausting its welcome in the throes of the 1898 war. Driven by competition for readers just as much as the savage internecine warfare between Hearst and Pulitzer, the Times and the World barely survived the Spanish-American War. The costs of reporting on the conflict destroyed the profits margin of the papers, already damaged by a price war that drove the cost down of both papers to one cent. The rising circulation brought on by war reporting could not keep pace with rising costs. A weary public quickly tired of the original shock and awe tactics of yellow journalism, coming to understand at

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97 Yellow journalism itself was a reference to Richard F. Outcault's early comic strip The Yellow Kid.
98 Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 92.
the end of the war that the truth was the first casualty of the conflict. Others called into question the tactics employed during the reporting of the conflict in the yellow papers both during and after the war. Edwin L Godkin, editor in chief of the New York Post, stated “nothing so disgraceful as the behavior of...these newspapers in the past week has ever been known in the history of American journalism.”

These postwar stresses meant the print media underwent a significant change in the two short years before the Boxer Uprising. In response to criticism from the excesses in reporting the war in 1898 papers toned down the vitriol and bloody imagery. John Pulitzer regretted the role his New York World played, continuing with the strong reporting his paper was originally known for. By 1900 Pulitzer and Hearst were embarking on a new tack, “clothing themselves in public responsibility.” The change of heart was not completely driven by a damaged conscience. Yellow journalism had come close to destroying both papers financially and John Teel described the about face as seeking to “profit from credibility.”

As the yellow papers slowly retreated from the brand of journalism they had created, a second major wave of change was shaking up the newspaper industry. American journalism was moving towards a new professionalism as two competing brands of reporting maneuvered for supremacy. Older, veteran reporters approached their work as a “good story” of human drama while a new generation of reporters viewed the news as information. The sensationalism of

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100 Schudson, Discovering the News, 30.
101 The Spanish-American War did not create yellow journalism but the nationwide impact of the reporting went beyond the lurid crime and sex reporting that the name had been associated with before 1898.
102 Teel, The Public Press, 133.
103 Teel, The Public Press, 3.
104 Teel, The Public Press, 3.
105 Daly, Covering America, 138.
the past was going head to head against a developing professionalism as journalism reformed and developed a code of ethics.\textsuperscript{106} The debates over yellow journalism accelerated this process. Despite the changes towards professionalism and information over “story,” Michael Schudson notes that this did not translate into a new sense of objectivity.\textsuperscript{107} Newspapers were independent actors who followed their own agendas, the will of their publishers, and the biases of their reporters. Boxer crisis reporting was deeply impacted by this schism between old and “new” journalism. The Boxer crisis was a rare melding of the need for both. The violence and trapped foreigners made the uprising a \textit{story} echoing the past Spanish-American War that sold papers for the \textit{New York World} while the sober questions on imperialism, foreign policy and China was \textit{information} that was perfectly suited for the more conservative pages of the \textit{New York Times} and the regional presses.

Caught up in a clash between old and new philosophies of news reporting, humbled by a devastating war for profits, chastised for inappropriate tactics, and imbued with the optimistic patriotism and social responsibility of the age, print media followed a different course in reporting the action in China. American print media handled the Boxer Uprising with generally more civility and less creativity with the truth than the Spanish-American War. The kind of manufactured stories that were common in 1898 were nearly nonexistent in 1900, in part due to the true human drama stories already available and the fact the large numbers of Americans in China could (eventually) verify a story relatively quickly. The levels of violence in China provided plenty of lurid headlines without the need to resort to much embellishment. It should be

\textsuperscript{106} Daly, \textit{Covering America}, 150.
\textsuperscript{107} Schudson, \textit{Discovering the News}, 120.
noted that the excesses of yellow journalism has tended to obscure the fundamentals of reporting at the turn of the century. The *New York World* possessed a competent reporting staff that produced solid, quality news coverage. \(^{108}\) The reputation of the *World* reporters was strong enough that when William Hearst arrived in the city to take the helm of the *New York Journal*, his first action was to hire away the entire staff away from Pulitzer. \(^{109}\)

The strength of the turn of the century media is often referenced as a driving factor in the decision to go to war with Spain. While the power of the media was undeniably considerable, Christopher Daly notes it is an overstatement to say the press caused the war, but it did contribute to a pro-war climate of public opinion. \(^{110}\) The ability to swing the mood of the American public in one direction or another lay at the heart of managing the Boxer crisis.

What did not change was media's enthusiasm for supporting the policies and ideals of an ascendant United States. Boxer reporting worked along a highly pro-American line, which aided in the suppression of dissenting opinions. An existing narrative of American exceptionalism and the primacy of Christian civilization was in place in the media before the Boxer Uprising. As such, the idea of civilization easily entered the media as the centerpiece of the struggle against China. Acting as the educators and arbiters of this idea of civilization, the newspapers helped define the ineffable qualities of being an American in opposition to the forces being unleashed in China. In doing so newspapers helped create a consistent narrative of the Boxer crisis. By defining what actions were “uncivilized,” the newspapers were able to urge restraint within the American population and actively discouraged mass incidents of violence against Chinese

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\(^{110}\) Daly, *Covering America*, 132-133.
immigrants.

While American print media delivered background information on China quickly and generally without issue, reporting on the current situation and providing up to date news on the events of the Boxer crisis was more problematic. Transatlantic cables added an immediacy to the conflict and the standards of journalism as a profession were not yet in place. The Boxer crisis had brought about a true war of immediacy between periodicals, where each scrap of news was seized upon and printed in attempt to stay one step ahead of rivals, a situation exacerbated by the news cooperatives that fed the same stories to outlets across America. 111 Magazines, less bound by a need for speed, were more successful in screening their material.

The immediacy of news hurt the credibility of the leading Qing official in the United States, Minister Wu Tingfang. Americans found it hard to believe he was not in possession of fresh and up to date intelligence. The speed in which news arrived in the United States damaged the position of the Qing government when official declarations conflicted with “known” facts. In a new era flush with news where information was a valuable currency in an extremely fluid environment, the beginnings of a credibility gap was formed based on the speed that information could be delivered combined with the perception of accuracy. It also strengthened the argument of missionaries who were armed with a stream of accounts from their colleagues in China. 112

The retreat from yellow journalism, a trend towards professionalism, and a mix of story and information did not weed out false reports from being published. As an example, the New

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111 The amazing exploits of the American unit tasked with building a telegraph system alongside the advance of the Alliance forces has not yet been fully explored in Boxer literature. While all the commanders of the expedition agreed communication was a primary concern, consensus could not be reached on which nation was to control the vital telegraph lines. Ultimately, the Americans were given the responsibility as they were seen as the power with the least to gain—or the least likely to use the telegraph lines to gain an advantage over the others.

York Times reported the Boxer Uprising had been crushed by Imperial forces in a brief note in March 1900. However, unlike the Spanish-American War, false reports were generally mistakes or errors from correspondents in China, and not fabrications invented to sell papers. Perhaps the most egregious false reporting of the fall of the legations and the subsequent death of all foreigners. The story was not only a fabrication but genuinely threatened the lives of the besieged as the relief column in route to Beijing slowed its pace in response to the news. For the media, the printing of unverified stories was a measured risk. The distances involved and the cordon around Beijing and other besieged cities meant that verification, if at all possible, would take time—time in which a rival could seize a story. Yet unknowingly printing an incorrect report versus inventing the news was a distinction that was better accepted by the American people. After the Spanish-American War news outlets fared poorly in the court of public opinion. After the Boxer crisis, despite some missteps, newspapers emerged as having reliably reported on the uprising. The reporting of the Boxer era was a move towards repairing the credibility gap left by the Spanish-American War.

The Past as Precedent: Print Media and the Spanish-American War

Civilization was an essential element of the domestic narrative on the Boxer crisis. However, the use of civilization as a justification for war and a rubric of behavior did not

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114 Daly, Covering America, 135.
116 Boxer irregulars and Imperial Chinese forces gave relief column serious trouble en route to Beijing. Only miles from Beijing, the Allied relief expedition was relying on information about the conditions within the city transmitted to them from Shanghai, the United States, and other Western nations.
originate during the Boxer Uprising. While much of the sensational elements of yellow journalism that characterized the Spanish-American War were toned down during the Boxer Uprising, the language of civilization and differentiation used in 1898 were retained to explain the new conflict. Elements of reporting on the Spanish-American War were mirrored in the Boxer crisis, giving the uprising familiar notes to the public.

The use of civilization as justification for intervention appeared in the build up to the war with Spain. America was positioned as a civilized agent fighting against a barbaric Spain which was oppressing the Cuban people. 117 Civilization carried with it a duty to action. 118 As part of an argument for intervention, Yale law professor Theodore Woolsey claimed that it was inconsistent with American civilization to allow the suffering of the Cuban people to continue. 119 In an address to Congress printed in the New York Evangelist, President McKinley invoked themes that reappeared two years later. “In the name of humanity, in the name of civilization, in behalf of endangered American interests which give us the right and the duty to speak and to act, the war in Cuba must stop.” 120 Spain was, “out of sympathy with and antagonistic to modern civilization.” 121

Spain is referred to as a medieval power who has “flouted civilization” in another article. 122 As with China in 1900, reports described Spain as a backward, medieval power facing a technologically superior United States. The government was depicted as corrupt, the people

120 “Message of the President to Congress on the State of Cuba,” New York Evangelist, April 14, 1898, 8.
121 “Spain and Modern Civilization,” The Methodist Review, July 1898, 513.
indolent, and the nation as a whole fallen from glorious past. 123 Similar accusations were leveled against China. Keeping with religion as a central element in the Boxer crisis, many reports in 1898 conflated civilization and progress with more progressive American Christianity. An article on the history of Catholic Spain stated the country's opposition to modern Christian society had left it far behind the rest of the world. 124 As with China, Spain stood apart from the world in the rhetoric of division.

A final element stands out that makes the role of print media in the Boxer crisis different from Spanish-American War. Although the press did not compel the nation to war in 1898, its influence was undeniable. According to David Trask, the decision to go to war would have been impossible if it was not for the public outcry stoked by the papers after the destruction of the USS Maine. 125 In the Boxer crisis, no such action was required by the activist press. American lives and interests were at stake and the question of intervention was not one of when but of how.

The Voice of Authority

More than Cuba, more than the Spanish-American War, the crisis in China was a puzzle that the print media could guide Americans through. With the question of intervention almost a foregone conclusion with American lives at stake, the reporting focused on other matters—how the uprising occurred, why it occurred, and what would be the consequences for China and the world. Boxer reporting was information wrapped in an epic storyline. Questions were being

asked by the public and the print media was in a position to provide the answers. The emotional punch of the crisis was leavened with information at each turn. Through reporting, articles by experts and the media's own editorializing, the American people were presented with a fairly complete although highly manipulated picture of the Boxer Uprising. This high level of available information within biased articles built an environment that guided the American people towards the conclusion that the government and the other special interest groups desired: a return to the status quo after the conflict had been resolved. It also reassured Americans that the problems in China were the result of unwarranted resistance against progress. The flip side was the reassurance that there was anything inherently wrong with American civilization either.

Information on the Boxer crisis was a major selling point of the papers. As with Spain, a great deal of ink was spent on articles offering information on the current crisis, and the history and culture of China. A July 1900 article listing major names and places of the Boxer crisis exhorted the reader to keep it “by you” to better understand the “puzzling Chinese news.” 126 Another article offered to clear up the “Mystery of Chinese Names” by offering a short lexicon and definitions. 127 The key to the Boxer puzzle was not just the article; the key was the media itself. China in 1900—as today—was generally a mystery to most Americans and the print media’s role as a biased instructor allowed the narrative to be influenced in directions favorable to the parties most interested in China.

Print media served as guide and interpreter, navigating the reader through alien shoals and perilous seas. As with all filters, the papers put their own distinct mark on the information

126 “Keep This By You: The Puzzling Chinese News Can Be More Easily Read With This Key,” New York Times, July 8, 1900.
they reported, skewing it in certain directions with inflection and language. Many newspaper articles were conspiratorial in tone, like an older brother or a Cyrano de Bergerac stage whispering instructions to a Christian de Neuvillette who was in a situation clearly out of his league. Whether it was in the tone of a trusted friend imparting a piece of crucial insider information or as an authoritative source lecturing on the thoughts and machinations of the power elite, print media created an atmosphere of expectations for behavior while inviting the reader into a shared confidence.

As another Cosmopolitan article stated, “Every eye has latterly been turned to China, and every language has had its vocabulary enriched by a new term.” 128 The media was the conduit through which these new terms and new ideas were being taught to the American citizenry. Yet reporters were scarcely authorities on China. To provide the necessary background information on China and the Boxers, newspapers turned to expert sources. These sources were men and women with experience in China: missionaries, government officials, and long term China residents. In giving China experts a platform to authoritatively speak on the troubles boiling within the Middle Kingdom, the media was also disseminating and endorsing their positions. Between 1899 and 1901 there was no shortage of informational pieces on the causes of the Boxer troubles, articles which tended to place the blame on internal forces working against progress or European malfeasance. A few examples will illustrate the nature of the articles and the commonality of the writers.

George Smythe, president of the Anglo-Chinese College in Fuzhou penned, “Causes of

Anti-Foreign Feeling In China,” for The American Review. 129 Smythe was a Methodist minister and on the faculty of the Anglo-Chinese College, a Christian university. John Foord of the American Asiatic Association wrote, “The Meaning of the Unrest in China,” for the New York Times. 130 The magazine Asia, published by the Association, stated in 1898, “The ignorance of our people in regard to the countries of the Far East is unquestionably a serious obstacle to the legitimate extension of American influence.” 131 W. P. Bentley’s “The Boxer Movement in Northern China,” appeared in the Ohio Farmer. 132 Bentley was an artist active in China and collected the biographies of Chinese converts to Christianity.

Professor Issac Taylor Headland of Peking University contributed, “How the Chinese Have Been Imposed On,” to the Christian Advocate. 133 Headland was an ordained Methodist - Episcopal minister and author of several books on China, including a translation of Chinese children's stories that garnered the attention of Minister Wu. In “A Moral Dilemma,” Bliss Carman, a Canadian poet, described the slippage between the actions of fallible human missionaries and the infallibility of the doctrine of Christ to explain the role of religion in the Boxer Uprising.

Arthur Smith answered “Why the Chinese Dislike Foreigners” for Outlook. Smith was a Congregational minister and perhaps one of the more notable missionaries involved in China and

133 Issac Taylor Headland, “How the Chinese Have Been Imposed Upon,” Christian Advocate, May 23, 1901. Headland had connections within the Qing government and was familiar with certain Qing officials. He had been recognized for his work, including receiving a note from Minister Wu for translating Chinese children's stories into English.
the Boxer crisis. Present in Beijing during the siege of the legations, he authored several books including *China in Convulsion*, an early account of the Boxer Uprising. Francis E. Clark offered up, “The Righteous Harmonious Fisters of China” for *The Independent*. Clark, although not particularly associated with China, was the founder of the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavour, an early youth ministry which would eventually include branches in China. The Reverend George T. Candlin wrote, “The Associated Fists: The Society Which Caused the Riots, And Led to War in China.” Candlin worked as a missionary in northern China. As an indication of the importance attached to expert testimony, articles by China experts carried the authors name while most pieces on the Uprising went unattributed. The demand for expert opinion on China led to reprinting articles creating a circular narrative where ideas were reinforced by strength of repetition. As an example, in 1900 articles by Arthur Smith appeared in *Outlook, The Missionary Herald, The Congregationalist, the Pioneer Express,* and the *Graham Guardian*. He was quoted in several other periodicals such as *Dial* and *The Living Age*.

Missionaries were not the only ones whose voices were featured in the press. Announcements by the government were front pages news. Secretary of State John Hay made frequent remarks on the crisis outlining the position of the government. The McKinley administration had great success with their message, bolstered by the lingering impact of a successful war and the Open Door Notes, and proved competent at utilizing the press to shape public opinion. McKinley's popular narrative was one "of liberty and law, of peace and progress" that was shaped by a nationalist ideology and the existing ideals of exceptional

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American civilization. A favorable American belief in the strength of their nation and the righteousness of their cause allowed the McKinley administration to go forward with its efforts in China.

The experts on China who provided information and opinions to the public and the press were drawn from the ranks of those who had visited China or with extensive knowledge of the country. The print media also served as the primary vehicle for advertising books on China and publicizing lectures by experts on the crisis. In reviews of books and in advertisements, the media created another circular narrative where news articles were incorporated quickly into books and the information in the books spawned new articles, lecture tours, or were quoted in other works. There was a similarity in news reports across America due to reprints of the commentary articles by experts, common sources such as the dispatches from the front, the reporting from reporters in Shanghai, and the collective information networks of the early news syndicates. The advertisements meant to draw the attention of consumers also meant the same voices and same stories saw multiple printings and multiple avenues for dissemination. The articles and statements became cross-pollinated, with the strength of repetition adding to the creation of an overall narrative based on the writings of a relatively select group of experts—again, Americans with a vested interest in China. As such, a New York newspaper reader would encounter the same advertisements and often the same story from different outlets.

What was most pressing about these articles, lectures and books was the significance the media placed on the consumption of information—a key element of the prevailing debate in

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1900 over journalism's role in American society and a legacy of the reporting on the Spanish-American War. To make people want to read their product, the media created a zeitgeist where information was the key to being a well-informed American citizen. Simple yet effective marketing instilled a sense of urgency, a sense that understanding the Boxer crisis was a necessity. Not only was the crisis front page news, it was a topic of discussion throughout all levels of American society, from power brokers in Washington to recently arrived immigrants. 139

Knowledge of the crisis was a marker of being an informed citizen. It was also the mark of an authority on China, whether they were Chinese or American. Since hard knowledge on China was scarce, information became a commodity and information became the currency in which the print media dealt. An advertisement for a series on books on China in the general interest periodical Harper's Weekly read:

No matter where you are going for your vacation, the papers will reach you. Judging from the present indications, the situation in China will be the one absorbing item in the news. Unless you have traveled more widely than the ordinary man, it is not probable that you are posted on the conditions leading up to the present trouble. There are a number of recent books which will give you just the information you require. 140


139 “Keep This By You: The Puzzling Chinese News Can Be More Easily Read With This Key,” New York Times, July 8, 1900.
140 Advertisement, Harper's Weekly, July 7, 1900, 635.
141 Advertisement, Harper's Weekly, August 8, 1900, 762.
142 Advertisement, Harper's Weekly, September 1, 1900, 827.
the *New York Times* comments that while the book had nothing to offer on the Boxer crisis (and the advertisement is extremely clear on that matter) the copy reads, “It does, however, inform us as we have not before been informed.” 143 Aside from books, periodicals also advertised in each others pages, such as the *North American Review*’s ad in *Harper’s Weekly* claiming, “There is no other source from which a more clear and comprehensive grasp of the conditions which now exist and have existed in China than from the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.” 144

By positioning the news as hard information, the civilization discourse was able to attain a legitimacy. Many of the same authors who wrote on China during the crisis would dominate the discussion afterward with their books and postmortem dissection of the event, especially in light of accusations of greed and un-Christian conduct by missionaries and troops. 145

**The Arbiters of Civilization**

Through printing hard information and expert testimony tinged with an effective pro-American bias, print media actively helped fashion the narrative that developed between Chinese and American interest groups. A key goal of the narrative was to mitigate any violence against the Chinese in America. For the most part, the effort was successful as few incidents against Chinese within the United States were reported during the Boxer Uprising. When anti-Chinese activities did occur during the crisis, reporting on the cases used a fairly uniform set of concepts

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145 Unchecked looting by Alliance soldiers and seemingly overbearing demands for compensation by missionaries eroded a great deal of the positive capital the anti-Boxer endeavor had generated in the United States, causing the narrative to fall squarely into hands of the opposing arguments of anti-imperialists who questioned the nature of the conflict from the beginning.
to describe offenders in order to correct such behavior. In modern terms, this included a level of shaming the perpetrators. This was an existing practice by pro-Chinese articles in the decades before the Boxer crisis. An 1869 issue of *Friend's Review* reported that assaults on Chinese were perpetuated by “a class of men—some not yet naturalized—who fled from oppression and want to find freedom and comfort here. Certainly, the spirit which prompts such deeds is thoroughly un-American as well as unmanly.” 146 The *Friend's Review* article painted men who attacked innocent Chinese as unmanly and not American, as their actions went against the ideals of American civilization.

An account of a July 1900 attack on Charles Sing in New York City was laced with commentary on his attackers. The instigator was described as a “very small boy” or a “youth” while the attackers themselves as a “gang of toughs.” 147 The incident was finally broken up by a Joseph Kennedy, a veteran of the Spanish-American War described simply as a “big man.” 148 In the Sing incident, language is used to differentiate between the reckless lower ranking members of society who were ignoring the *noblesse oblige* of the civilized world and respectable Americans. Akin to the prominent imagery of the United States as an adult and Cuba as a child that characterized newspaper editorials on the Spanish-American War and late 19th century American imperialism, the culprits of anti-Chinese actions were usually labeled as children.

For Americans, both old and new, the media presented itself to serve as an arbiter of actions, judging what was and was not correct behavior in a civilized nation. Chinese statements occasionally delved into the same territory. As reported in July of 1900, Chinese in New York

were quoted as stating, “while they felt sure that Americans in general did not blame the Chinese here for anything that might occur in China, they realized that considerable feeling was being stirred up against them among irresponsible Americans.” 149

The pattern repeats several times. The reporting of the New York Times on the Carl Karno incident described the attackers as boys and young men. 150 An attack on a Chinese laundryman named Young Gee was blamed on twelve year old Nicholas Ageno, the Italian-American leader of a gang of neighborhood boys who rallied his followers to look for Boxers on the night of the assault. 151 Trouble in Chicago such as the breaking of windows in Chinatown or assaults on Chinese citizens was the work of hoodlums and “half grown boys.” 152

Another article cites the concerns of local Chinese in New York over a spate of vandalism, with the perpetrators being, “irresponsible Americans”, “drunken sightseers” and “gangs of toughs from the Bowery.” 153 A gang of young men was reported to have gone through Mott Street in Chinatown singing and slapping Chinese men—hardly respectable or responsible behavior. Major Richard Sylvester of the Washington D.C. Police department, when explaining his decision to place plainclothes police officers on guard at the Chinese embassy, stated, “Cranks appear everywhere in times of unrest and Washington has had its full share of them.” 154

Although his comments are in line with the general relaxed attitude American authorities took towards the protection of Chinese citizens, it also shows a marginalization of anyone acting outside the boundaries of acceptable behavior to the fringe.

Reporting on the Boxer crisis resulted in a binary construct of “child and adult”, “native and foreign”, “American and un-American”, “civilization and barbarism.” This binary construction also extended to the relationship between the media and its readers / consumers. As a voice of authority, the media represented the conduit to government and to experts who could provide an explanation for events. The print media of 1900 lacked objectivity. The language employed typically used “us” and “our” in discussion of foreign policy matters. The newspapers acted as the middleman not only between Chinese and Americans but also between the American people and the apparatus of their own government. When the media spoke of “us” or “our” interests, the reader was invited to think of himself as part of a larger America. If he did not, he stood outside the community of American society—and in the Boxer crisis, deviation meant standing apart from civilization and with the forces of barbarism.

“What will an American be and do who embodies American traditions and governs his life by the true philosophy of the republic?” 155 The newspapers provided that answer. Paired with an existing educational drive in New York papers towards making immigrants citizens and informing elites of duty and responsibility which was spread by the regional press, the print media reinforced a particular set of American values. These values discouraged action against Chinese citizens while also endorsing the actions of the American government and missionaries abroad as agents of positive change and civilization.

The individuals with the credentials on China and the information the print media and the public craved were generally in the groups that wished to see the status quo upheld. Outside of American experts, Chinese voices were sought to explain the crisis as well. This desire for

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155 Grammar and capitalization original.
information led the media to give Chinese a platform to express their opinions which allowed them to enter into a discourse with the American groups involved. Outside of the hothouse atmosphere of New York and the major cities, the regional papers continued with the themes of the large dailies and national press. In smaller cities and small towns the majority of Americans read papers which printed more informative pieces. Yet due to the limited resources of the regional press, there was a mass repetition of stories that originated in the larger dailies. Smaller papers could not always send a reporter to China. At the same time, the missionary enterprise had sent young men and women to China from all over the United States. Hometown children were now at risk in a foreign land and many small town papers were therefore cognizant of the need for information leavened with caution and concern. The relatives and friends of those at risk were the consumers reading the papers.

The churches and missionary institutions who had sent young men and women to China had local branches and could be pressed for a statement. The advent of the news syndicates such as the Associated Press meant that the reports of Shanghai based reporters were available nationwide. The same went for the articles and other pieces written by China experts for the larger papers. Reports of statements and commentary by American and Chinese leaders flowed through the wires and the syndicates. Away from Chinese populations, away from the conflict areas in the West that defined the nativist push for exclusion, the China problem was both personal and academic. The narrative supported a positive view of the work of small town sons

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156 The battles over readership and profits were no less pronounced in the smaller markets than in the major cities. However, in New York Hearst could rule over a media empire disconnected from his readers and his reporters remained anonymous (in general practice reporters did get a byline) but the editors and reporters of the small regional presses faced their communities daily. In addition, the idea that the New York World and other papers catered to immigrants was not something small papers could argue.

157 In general, barring the vicious wars over access to the reports of the syndicates fought within markets.
and daughters and the perceived role of America as a special champion of a new, just order.

Quieting Dissent and Assuring Victory

Americans and immigrants in the processes of becoming Americans who acted contrary to the parameters of behavior established by the unified narrative on the Boxers were not the only groups targeted by the media. Little room was left in the middle and anti-imperialists opposed to the situation in China found themselves pushed into the negative extreme—the world of Major Sylvester’s cranks and of irresponsible Americans. Anti-imperialists found themselves at odds with the general tone of reporting and discussion on the Boxers. Forces opposed to imperialism had attempted to move ahead with their agenda during the Boxer Uprising, pointing the finger at American interference in Asia and missionary activity for the trouble in China. Their criticism was responsible for a good deal of the early apprehension over the missionary role in China and the notes of opposition to intervention.  

It was this burgeoning blame that a great deal of the missionary narrative sought to deflect, as there was validity in the charges being bought against churchmen. Anti-imperialists and missionaries had been engaged in a protracted public debate on the American presence in China, exacerbated by the conflict in the Philippines. With the Boxer troubles returning Asia to the front pages, the print media leaned heavily on the side of American power projection and expansion. This bias put the anti-imperialists squarely on the “wrong” side of the debates on the conflict. Stories of missionary

suffering and of Boxer violence undercut the anti-imperialists. Even isolationism and remaining
apart from Europe faltered before the need to preserve American lives and interests.

An example of this bias in the newspapers is a political cartoon depicting a toga clad
musician playing a lyre emblazoned with the words, “Anti-Patriotic League,” a play on the
American Anti-Imperialism League. The musician is being interrupted by a Boxer with a gong,
upon which is written, “Riot murder of American women and children.” The caption reads
simply “the Boxer music rather spoils his tune.” 161 The anti-imperialists were labeled as
unpatriotic, and un-American, their tune spoiled by the realities of Boxer violence against
innocent fellow Americans. Print articles veered into aggressive territory. When discussing anti-
imperialist literature, a Harper’s Weekly column commented, “We trust, however, that it may be
kept out of the hands of the young, for any-thing more essentially unmoral and unpatriotic has
yet to be developed.” 162

As another means to directly counter anti-imperialist statements, news outlets struck a
position that became common in the American media in the 20th and 21st centuries after a major
foreign policy crisis. Media sources spoke of the need for unity and for faith in the institutions of
the United States to weather the trying times. A Harper's Weekly article succinctly summed up
the situation. “It is not a time for flying at another's throat. It is a time for discussion. It is not
true that because men believe in carrying our institutions overseas that they are therefore enemies
of their country; and it is very far from being true that those who are opposed to this policy are
not intelligent patriots.” 163

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Reducing the impact of the anti-imperialists was one matter. Educating the public on the situation in China included diminishing the Boxers and the armed forces of the Qing Dynasty as a viable threat. Described as often cowardly and ill equipped due to the corruption of their officers, the Imperial Qing forces were posited as an inept enemy. 164 The Boxers and Qing forces did put up reasonable resistance but reports in the paper placed the West and the reader in a position of strength—holding all the cards at the table. By making the Boxers an aggressive but ultimately impotent foe against all but women and children, the media reduced—for the time being—the rhetoric of the yellow peril which warned of dangerous Asian hordes.

The cartoon of the gong bearing Boxer emphasized the attacks on women and children, which was calculated to inflame emotions but also reinforced a notion of the Boxers as being able only to prey on the weak. If China could not hold off a relatively small foreign armed force from taking its capital, was China a genuine threat outside its borders? 165 A second cartoon in the *New York Times* depicted Uncle Sam facing off against a dagger wielding Boxer while stating, “I occasionally do a little boxing myself.” 166 His arms improbably terminate in a pair of battleships—a symbol of power projection in the great game of imperialist expansion and a symbol of the technological side of American power and identity. The message contrasted the technological might of the United States against the primitive weaponry of the Boxers. These references to the weakness of the Boxers and ineptitude of Qing forces helped reduce the idea of Chinese in America posing a threat. Yellow peril fears stalled in the face of foreign troops scaling the walls of Beijing.

165 The Eight-Nation Army was composed of approximately 50,000 troops. The Qing responded with a force of 100,000 with an estimated Boxer 100,000 to 300,000 irregulars.
Lest any readers wonder if it was not better for Western powers to maintain control of China once military victory was at hand, the media continued to press the idealization of an American end to the crisis. An intact China under the control of its own people was a triumph for the American ideal of how affairs in China should be conducted. 167 Supporting Chinese territorial integrity was an extension of the Open Door Notes, a continuation of policy, and served as a moral lesson for the powers of Europe. 168 American civilization was a model of uplift not just for China.

Common Ground

In creating a single narrative for the Boxer Uprising, the media acted as a common ground where the statements of American and Chinese groups could mix and eventually reinforce each other into a cohesive whole. American experts on China found in the press a stage eager to print their ideas and thoughts. As the nativist anti-Chinese segment of the American public had little knowledge of China aside from the fact they wanted the Chinese out of the United States for a variety of reasons, their commentary was far from relevant as hard information goes. Anti-Chinese and anti-imperialist groups did not fit in with an image of necessary, just war and was problematic when comparing the overall incidents of anti-Chinese violence in the United States with anti-foreign violence in China. Violence against Chinese in the United States during the crisis would weaken the moral authority and position of the American

government. Dissenting voices were pushed to the margins as they offered story but not hard information, although the pendulum swung back in their direction after the resolution of the crisis. 169 Elites from the major interest groups shaped the response to the Boxers.

If civilization, honor, patriotism, and duty did not suffice, print media had one final stark warning concerning American involvement abroad. An article in *Harper's Weekly* opined that “China's crime is that she has consistently adhered to a Monroe Doctrine of her own, and that her position is exactly what the anti-expansionists would have the United States occupy.” 170 China had fallen behind in the great game being played by the major powers. Industrialization, engagement with the world, imperial power projection, and overseas territorial acquisition were all essential parts of empire building in the late 1800s. Meiji Japan had followed the script and had emerged as a well-regarded regional power, often used to contrast the perceived backwardness of Qing Dynasty China.

With the Great War a decade and a half in the future, the idea of a powerful United States taking up a crucial role on the world stage was in keeping with an optimistic idea of the next phase of American expansion now that the frontier was closed. 171 In a retrospective statement on recent American diplomatic and foreign policy efforts made after the Boxer crisis had abated in 1901, Secretary of State Hay declared that, “The briefest expression of our rule of conduct is the Monroe Doctrine and the Golden Rule.” 172 American civilization was intertwined with a perception if not a reality of a fairly benevolent, non-expansionistic, non-European, Christian

171 The Census of 1890 declared the frontier had vanished. The repercussions of a lost frontier to America were addressed by Frederick Jackson Turner in his Frontier Thesis in 1894.
new world.

In reporting the news of the Boxer Uprising, the American media left its fingerprints on its subject. Through the efforts to move papers and the emphasis on hard information as part of the ongoing debates between old and new journalism, the media created an interwoven web of news and information that complimented and reinforced itself. The blowback from the reporting on the Spanish-American War and the monumental costs involved created a press that was seeking to repair a credibility gap. The news syndicates of the day provided information for papers who could not afford to send reporters to China. Through the repetition of articles, the reliance on experts who hailed from the special interest groups and the medias' own self-appointed role as a designator of “American-ness,” print media welded together the separate narratives of Chinese and American interest groups with their own reporting of the news coming out of China. The media smoothed out the rough edges and created a dialogue between the players upon which a national narrative emerged, surprisingly consistent from New York to San Francisco. Through the media's entreaties for calm, couched in the language and signs of civilization that formed the core of the argument for intervention in China, the overall potential for violence towards Chinese in America was diminished, and the public moved towards acceptance of the narrative developed for them.

173 The major players were the Associated Press and the United Press.
 CHAPTER TWO: THE TRINITY OF INDUSTRY, CHRISTIANITY, AND DEMOCRACY

An August 1900 article in The Independent deconstructed the Boxer crisis. “That great strife between the past and future has come in that empire is clear. It is virtually the old China seeking to dominate the new, and there will be no peace in China or the world until victory rests with the party of progress.” 174 In the discourse created during the Boxer Uprising, victory lay with the progressive and there was no greater force for progress than American civilization. Business concerns, missionary groups, and the government of the United States used a concept of civilization that incorporated the American versions of industry, Christianity, and democracy to form the core of an argument that spoke to the public. Tapping into the ideals of a developing national identity, this concept of civilization managed the crisis by framing the crisis as a binary choice between progress and barbarism. Americans were invited to consider themselves as a special breed, whose influence was able to change the world. This power brought with a responsibility to act within certain constructed parameters which steered the American people towards supporting the interests of the trinity of American forces at work in China.

News of the Boxer Uprising shocked the American public. Part of the reason for this can be traced to the general American perception of China in 1900. As historian Michael Hunt wryly noted in The Making of a Special Relationship that by the 1890s, the American public—if they thought about China at all—believed the Chinese people held them in high regard as friends and benevolent benefactors. 175 The uprising flew in the face of the existing constructed narrative for

174 “The Boxers,” The Independent, August 30, 1900.
China that the primacy of the American way of life as an enviable model that was welcomed by
the Chinese for social, cultural and economic uplift.\footnote{176} Unfortunately, the impression of the American public were built upon accounts
manipulated to foster a sense of accomplishment in China, a lack of hard information, and
simplistic assumptions.\footnote{177} Accurate information on China was relatively scarce and the majority
of information came from individuals with vested interests in a continued American presence in
China.\footnote{178} As a result a great deal of the narrative coming from China before the Boxer crisis
served the interests of particular parties with experience and ambitions in the Middle Kingdom.
The core of the American presence in China were the American government, missionary
organizations, and business enterprises.

When the Boxer Uprising erupted, these parties found it necessary to somehow explain
the discrepancies between the rhetoric at home that had painted a rosy picture of the American
presence in China and the violence occurring on the ground without upsetting the status quo in
the future. A disconnect had opened between the idea of China and America's role in the Middle
Kingdom that had been perpetuated domestically and the reality of the escalating violence. The
Boxer Uprising challenged notions of isolationism and the wisdom of American expansion. It
was the need to explain this disconnect that led to the formation of the American domestic
response to the Boxer Uprising. The conduit for government, business, and missionaries to reach
out to the American people and attempt to effectively manage the crisis was the popular print
media of the day.

Making of a Special Relationship, 33-35.
\footnote{178} Hunt, The Making of a Special Relationship, 36.
The explanation to the citizens of the United States took the form of an appeal to the ability of American civilization to uplift and civilize, an ideal of particular resonance with new immigrants. 179 It was through American civilization that, “our education of the people will bring about the gradual downfall of the awful system of squeeze and extortion which is the official lifeblood.” 180 Centuries of westward expansion had developed a world view where Asians were, “backward but redeemable,” and the American civilizing mission that had begun on the continent as, “one without geographical bounds.” 181 According to Michael Hunt, “the seemingly irresistible process of continental expansion that had in turn legitimized an ideology of manifest destiny and racial superiority.” 182 The American way was a superior one and in a Darwinian form of international relations, an advanced civilization was conflated with power.

To understand how the media was used and what messages were put forth to the American public to defuse the Boxer outrage, the parties involved and their motivations should be understood. As the crisis unfolded overseas, the motives of the three were relatively straightforward. The McKinley administration was obliged to protect the lives of American citizens and maintain American interests, part of which included the preservation of China as a sovereign state. However, to handle the crisis meant involvement with European powers and unpleasant connections to European style imperialism. Missionary groups were under pressure for their role in the crisis and needed to explain what went so very wrong while preserving their role in China in the future. Business interests had the easiest time as their operations in China


180 “Interesting Facts from China,” Christian Advocate, July 26, 1900.


were relatively unquestioned compared to the activities of missionaries. The goals of business interests were rapid restoration of operations.

The question for all three groups was how to balance the conflicting nature of their goals and predicaments. Protecting trade and lives was simple enough to explain, but what about European entanglements? How could missionaries explain the disconnect between the reality in China being splashed across newspaper headlines and their decades of inflated claims? How could authorities protect the Chinese in the United States when the media was painting a picture of terrible travesties abroad? To put down a final hurdle, a small but vocal segment of Americans were actively protesting the American shift towards imperialism with the acquisitions of the Spanish-American War. Redefining the mystery of China was not an option in the limited amount of time elites within each group had to make their case.

The Civilization of Christ or the Civilization of Confucius

The solution came by subordinating all the elements of American efforts abroad under the single umbrella of “civilization.” Business interests, Chinese sentiment, religion, missionary actions, American expansion, European entanglements—all these disparate and difficult concepts did not have to be addressed individually if they could be configured as part of an overall binary construction of right or wrong, progressive or barbaric, civilized or uncivilized. By framing the Boxer issue as a matter of a progressive civilization encountering resistance, a black and white matter of right versus wrong, a solution was offered that was not only an all-encompassing explanation for the crisis but also a means to resolve the issues the crisis had raised domestically.
This framing also worked to restrain potentially violent actions by American citizens towards Chinese. The strategy was not without successful recent precedent.

During the Spanish-American War in 1898, Spain was also vilified as a nation acting outside the bounds of civilization. In articles on Spain during the run-up to war, civilization was marked as a quality of America. A letter to the editor of the *New York Times* under the curious name of SIGMA stated, “For Spain to war with America to retain Cuba is therefore for her to war with civilization itself, with the spirit of liberty and progress.” A second article positions Spain as outside the circle of civilized nations by claiming, “The spread of civilization and the illumination of men's minds by the principles of human liberty have not in the least affected Spain.”

The element of Christianity was added to the mix of liberty and progress that were put forward during the Boxer crisis as defining characteristics of the United States. This also evident in the successful integration of Hawai‘i into the United States, which stressed Christianity as a prime factor in the Americanization of the island. In a series of articles on Spanish history, the fantastically named Eliphalet Nott Potter of Cosmopolitan University in New York declared that, “Spain's opposition to modern Christian civilization left that nation far, if not fatally, behind the march of humanity's advance.” The use of civilization in the Spanish-American War meant the concept was already an established one for the American people in 1900. Framing the Boxer

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183 As with the Boxer crisis, articles in American print media helpfully informed the public on the history and politics of Spain during the war in 1898.
crisis under the aegis of a clash of civilizations reduced the potential effectiveness of the nuanced arguments of anti-imperialists and left the American people with a simple choice. It also inadvertently opened the door to allow the Chinese in America to add their voices to the narrative.

As stated previously, this idea of civilization in the Boxer crisis tapped into existing notions of progress, development and the primary position of the Western world in general and the United States in particular. To give the argument additional weight and a direct connection to the American people, during the crisis distinctly American characteristics were stressed in the overall notion of civilization. It was vital to include these elements not just for easier domestic consumption but also to maintain a distance from the potential fallout from European actions—a major concern for the McKinley administration. The squabbles between American Protestant and European Catholic missionaries and the American preference for an intact China were two examples where the New World and the Old were already at odds. 188

A binary viewpoint existed in the United States towards progress and development that was fashioned by experience and national myth making in the preceding century of Western expansion and the recent victory in the Spanish-American War. 189 Development was positioned as a progression from barbarism to civilization, from backwardness to enlightenment along a Western model intertwining technological superiority with Christianity. 190 For Americans in particular the Spanish-American War was ample proof of the power of an exceptional United States and the strength of arguments that claimed “underdeveloped” peoples needed and

welcomed American support. \(^{191}\) In such a narrative, the discourse could be manipulated towards establishing a baseline of right or wrong with no middle ground.

To effectively use this notion of civilization, notably a particular brand of civilization with distinctly American characteristics, the arguments raised during the crisis contrasted what was American to what was not American. The overall effect was to create distinctions, which mirrored the effort to point out the differences between the United States and Spain in 1898. These distinctions were between Europe and America, between “good” Chinese and “bad” Chinese, and between progress and barbarism. The United States had, and still does to an extent, defined itself by what it was not. \(^{192}\) America was not Europe. American civilization was not Asian barbarism. American Protestantism was not European Catholicism. American Christianity was not Chinese superstitions. The American way was laudable and progressive, Chinese traditions were backwards and stagnant. The imperialist ambitions of Europe were not those of the United States. \(^{193}\)

As John King Fairbank stated in regards to the opinion of many Chinese reformers, “the trinity of industry, Christianity and democracy seemed to the secret of Western power and the best way to save China.” \(^{194}\) During the Boxer crisis those qualities were given an American character, encapsulated in business interests, the missionary endeavor, and the government of the United States itself. Under that rubric it was very simple to lay out the case for the American people as a matter of black and white without the troublesome gray areas that eventually

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\(^{193}\) “Attitude of this Country,” *New York Times*, July 20, 1900.

hampered post-crisis efforts to restore the status quo. 195 Michael Adas provides further support for the interconnected nature of technology, Christianity, and democracy as part of a belief in the exceptional nature of American civilization and its transformative power.

And for those determined to share the gospel with “heathen” peoples, the telegraph and the railway were “noble inventions” by which “civilization, republicanism and Christianity” could be disseminated. These technological wonders and the scientific discoveries associated with them were further validated for the faithful by the largely uncontested assumptions that they had been devised exclusively by Christian peoples and that they demonstrated the unique receptivity of Christian civilization to creativity, innovation, and critical thinking. 196

The use of civilization as the argument to manage the crisis also had a second, equally strong advantage. Civilization was defined as transmittable. It could be learned, it could be taught, and it could be spread. 197 As with claims made about the progress of missionary efforts in China, these statements were engineered by parties advocating intervention in Cuba such as expansionistic factions. This process was already ongoing within the United States for the millions of European immigrants entering the country. 198 This view placed the failure in China not on American civilization but rather due to angry, uninformed forces attempting to resist against the inevitable and railing against progressive thought and the future—the same charge brought against Spain.

195 Consider how in popular culture, “Truth, Justice and the American Way” has worked extremely well for Superman for over seventy-five years without having to worry too much about explaining what exactly is the “American Way.”
196 Adas, Dominance by Design, 120.
197 Adas, Dominance by Design, 165-166.
The American Public in 1900

Before delving deeper into the way civilization acted as the focal argument of the major factions that constituted the American response to the Boxer crisis, it is vital to ask who were the American public and why did they need convincing. As with the Chinese population in both China and the United States, it would be incorrect to ascribe a monolithic quality to the American people in 1900. 199

While each of the American interest groups involved had their own dilemmas, strategies and approaches, the unifying factor for the success of the messages and the management of the crisis discourse of the day was its amazing and powerful impact on a nascent American identity. This was after all less than five years after Frederick Jackson Turner announced his Turner thesis at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. For a nation in transition, it tapped into the basic question of what made Americans American.

Newspapers and journals, the very items that spread the news of the Boxer Uprising, were also the instrument of a new unity. 200 However different, these disparate immigrant groups did have one major thing in common: they were strangers in a strange land, alien to the Americans who were now their countrymen, and to other immigrants in the same situation. Immigrants were seeking to fit in and adapt to a new world in hopes the attendant privileges and chances for advancement that the nation promised could be theirs. 201 For a new population, a nascent

199 Or today, for that matter.
200 Christopher Daly, Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 117.
201 Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White, 2-3. Although there are many scholarly works on the impulse and motivations to immigrate to the United States, a wonderfully prosaic pop culture reference is in the musical number “There Are No Cats in America,” from the animated film “An American Tail.”
national culture and social engines were at work teaching the fundamentals of what it meant to be American; the same ideas that were also at work writing the narrative of the Boxer crisis. It is these lessons on the strength of American civilization and its ability to positively transform that the discourse on the Boxer Uprising sought to tap into.

The American people would be offered a choice: side with the precepts of civilization and be counted among the progressive people of the world, or acquiesce to the dark forces of superstition and barbarism. This was accomplished by a campaign in the media that was based on the concept of civilization, defined quite simply as what the West was and the East was not. For the immigrants seeking to become Americans, the message was a subtle signal as what kind of behavior was expected of a new citizen. To go against the grain in this case was to reject the plausible basis of American identity that was being presented. Aside from teaching, the print media enforced these qualities during the Boxer crisis to impress the importance of following the line and to correct aberrant behavior. This action by newspapers covered the final subset of Americans who had little or no interest in ideals of nation or civilization, but were still constrained by the rules of behavior imposed by society.

To examine how the troika of American interest groups tackled the three major domestic issues unleashed by the Boxer Uprising, the efforts of the American government should be considered first. It was the means through which the interests of missionary and business groups were advanced in China, and was the overall representative of the ideas of American civilization.

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202 Daly, Covering America, 117.
In some respects the United States government had already laid the course for the Boxer response in its dealings with the Middle Kingdom since the Empress of China sailed into Guangzhou in 1784 bearing the first American envoy and opening the Old China Trade. Business and official government activities were closely linked. The government narrative up to the start of the crisis stressed how different the actions of the United States were in China by citing the popular Open Door Policy.  

The times however, were changing. With the conclusion of the successful Spanish-American War, the United States was in the sticky situation of having become an imperialist power, engaged in a difficult war against Philippine rebels.  

Voices had begun to question the activities of the government and the reason why Americans were involving themselves in the affair of foreign nations given the tradition of isolationism. The acquisition of the Philippines had also “shook the credit of United States with the Orientals.” The actions of the United States was displaying an aggressive and hostile attitude towards China, despite American claims otherwise.

Managing a Global Crisis for a Domestic Audience

The Boxer crisis was a foreign and domestic challenge for the McKinley administration. The situation appeared deceptively simple; American citizens and interests were in danger and in need of assistance. However, foreign and domestic complications forced McKinley to tread carefully. In the media, unwanted pressure by missionary groups for a fast response was battling

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206 Or freedom fighters, depending on the viewpoint of the observer.
208 Hunt, The Making of a Special Relationship, 187-188.
with a pervasive public attitude that the missionaries in China had made their bed and now they had to lie in it. 209 American foreign policy sought to keep China open for American business and so preferred to see China emerge intact and stable from the crisis, a difficult proposition as the situation deteriorated and European powers were seen as on the verge of tearing China apart. A history of violence against Chinese posed a problem at home as it would be difficult for the United States to retain any kind of moral high ground in the crisis should new attacks against Chinese ensue. The moral high ground was essential in ensuring the narrative of civilization did not degenerate into a narrative of naked imperialism. US commerce at also at risk, as textile exports had sharply dropped from $10.3 million in 1899 to $5.2 million in 1900. 210

To thicken the plot, the United States could not resolve the crisis alone and containing the Boxers required unpleasant entanglements with European powers and even more unpleasant questions at home. However, acting in concert with Europeans was not just politically problematic, it was anathema to American principles. Scott Miller summed up the sentiment in *The President and the Assassin*. “American troops, shoulder to shoulder with Europeans, killing Chinese—it wasn't how Americans saw themselves. Americans were special, above the colonial style butchery that Europeans employed to keep their subjects in line.” 211 The rousing success of the Open Door Notes domestically was also in danger as the Boxer crisis was also an opportunity for other powers to dismember China. 212

The McKinley administration needed to explain to the American public why intervention

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211 Miller, *The President and the Assassin*, 258.
212 Miller, *The President and the Assassin*, 258.
was needed, why working with imperialist European powers was necessary, why Chinese should be protected, and why China should be returned to the pre-crisis status quo even after the sensational actions of the Boxers. McKinley also had to balance the need for action with the political reality of the upcoming election. Political opponents were likely to seize upon any missteps but unlike 1898, intervention in the Boxer crisis was made an easier policy decision by the American lives in danger.

In McKinley's favor, the experience of the managing the Spanish-American War imparted great two lessons. The media had become a powerful force and even a small war required substantial, “social exertion.” 213 McKinley was aware of the strength of the media to garner public support for any overseas adventure. The deep connections to interests entrenched in China gave the administration a solid if imperfect picture of the situation in China. Experience with the media and a reliable perspective on China allowed the government to craft a case for armed intervention based on previous arguments from the 1898 war. 214 From the government's lead, missionaries and businessmen took their cue. It was not merely a game of follow the leader—the response of the government was based upon the closely knit experiences of all three groups and the unifying principles of American civilization. As a result, the efforts of all three groups closely supported each other.

Despite the furor in the press and anti-missionary sentiment, the United States could not fail to protect its citizens—especially since it was not only missionaries under siege in China but also government officials and businessmen with their families. The greatest concern for

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213 Miller, The President and the Assassin, 67.
214 William McKinley, Address to Congress, April 15, 1898.
American officials was how to operate in an inevitable coalition with Europeans powers. American policymakers were keen on ensuring a, “flag not stained by complicity,” by any actions by European powers. 215 The United States faced the difficult situation of maintaining its appearance as separate from Europeans in intent and action.

Any untoward action by the Great Powers would reflect on America. Should Russia make a grab for land or Germany insist on retaining troops in Beijing, the United States would be tainted by association as well as winding up on the losing end of a revived scramble for China. 216 Aside from foreign policy dilemmas, a European grab for territory in the midst of a rescue operation would play extremely poorly in the press. The American public's trust in Europe was in short supply as well, evidenced by Mark Twain's statement that he would rather shake the devil's tail than shake hands with a member of the European concert. 217 Negative sentiment over the role of European powers in the crisis compounded the issue, as evidenced by statements pinning blame on the actions of imperialist nations in the post-Uprising article “How the Chinese Have Been Imposed” on by Issac Taylor Headland. 218

Early on, the State Department was able to use the need for caution when dealing with European nations to explain its early reticence to send troops to rescue beleaguered Americans. 219 It quickly seized upon the difference between America and Europe to form the justification for intervention, even at the cost of strange alliances. 220 America needed to be involved because

220 While Japan was also a member of the alliance that moved against China, its ambitions played a secondary role in the American press when compared to concerns over Europe.
it was the only power whose motives could balance out the rapacious Europeans in China. As a New York Times article declared, “We are the only power which has applied 'anti-imperialistic' which is to say American, sentiments to the situation in China.” 221

By looking to hallmarks of American civilization, Americans could set themselves apart from Europe. The New York Times summed up the concept for the public by pointing to, “our style of government, our style of diplomacy, and the fact that we can point at the vast areas unfilled by our population as warrant that we shall not act in an aggressive way.” 222 The creation of this point of distinction served to separate American actions from those of the other powers involved in the crisis. The American government had been keen on establishing itself as a nation “controlled by a sense of religion and honor.” 223 To maintain this moral high ground, the State Department sought to differentiate American action from European activities in the Boxer crisis by repeatedly assuring the public that the McKinley administration was following its own agenda. 224 The ability of the United States to operate independently from Europe in philosophy and action served the interests of both the American and Chinese people. 225 Newspapers told readers that there was, “no valid reason why Europe should expect America to look with tolerance on a partition of China.” 226 The core and goals of American civilization were quantitatively different from Europe. That difference was the key to justifying intervention that inextricably tied to working with European powers. An article in Outlook noted the need for the

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United States to take part in any action.

There is one Power concerning which no jealousy need be felt by the others, a Power seeking in return for services rendered no territorial compensation, not even a sphere of influence, but a Power which will sternly guard existing treaty rights and insist upon unequivocal maintenance of the open door. That Power is the United States of America. It has already been called a world power, and by the epoch making events of 1898 and 1899 it has indeed become such. 227

The United States entered militarily into the Boxer crisis under a policy of acting “concurrently but not in concert” with European powers, a move that foreshadowed the American Associated Power strategy in World War I. 228 In practice, the distinction was generally lost in the Boxer crisis on the ground in China but managed to play well at home. A January 4, 1900 article in the New York Times article lauded American efforts to maintain the Open Door and Chinese integrity as a, “Victory of Civilization.” It was not a victory over Chinese civilization the article referred to, but American civilization over European imperialism. 229 As with the Spanish-American War, appealing to the need for unique and exceptional American action to solve a moral quandary and counter an outrage was sufficient to temporarily suspend misgivings over the breaking of America’s isolationist stance. 230

Having made a case for intervention aboard while also justifying a foreign adventure with European powers, on the home front the American government found it politically expedient to protect the lives of Chinese in America. Violence against Chinese in America while the government was mobilizing a military response to rescue Americans from violence in China was

227 “The Crisis in China,” Outlook, July 21, 1900, 693.
230 Trask, The War with Spain, 475.
a conundrum the McKinley administration did not want to deal with. As a result the State Department, while sharply criticizing the Qing and justifying its intervention in China, acknowledged the danger to Chinese in the States and moved to protect them through statements that implied willingness to use federal troops. The reason for America’s stance lay in government officials looking ahead towards the end of the Boxer crisis. Once the situation was under control—and the American government had little doubt of victory, only concerns over the eventual fate of the trapped foreigners in Beijing—then the difficult work of obtaining reparations and maintaining the balance of power in Asia could commence. If the Qing government could claim that harm was done to Chinese citizens as a result of reprisals for the Boxers then the Western case for intervention and reparations would be seriously undermined.

Additionally, despite years of anti-Chinese violence in the United States, part of the developing narrative that condemned the Boxers hinged on the idea of unwarranted savagery by the Chinese compared to the enlightened ways of the West. The violence against foreigners in China could not be allowed to incite reciprocal violence against the Chinese in America. If indiscriminate violence was the hallmark of the Asian mind, a defining and negative characteristic, then Christian values of forgiveness and temperance were the correct response. Unchecked violence was now painted as the tool of the uncivilized while justifiable violence was

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232 Confidence on the ground in China was another matter, as American commanders found resistance stronger than expected and the allied forces at the mercy of national rivalries and inadequate supply. David Silbey gives an excellent account of the often overlooked tribulations of the relief forces and the strong defense put up by Boxer irregulars and Qing soldiers in The Boxer Rebellion: The Great Game in China.
234 Americans had found plenty of other reasons for acts of violence against Chinese which had gone unpunished in the years after the Civil War. Under an international spotlight however, the consequences were problematic for an uneasy American government.
in the form of mighty, disciplined armies bearing the banner of civilization swooping down like avenging angels to punish the wicked. The religious nature of the rhetoric is not to be understated as it formed a fundamental element of what was defined as Western civilization.

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president's policy. “While the legations were fighting for their lives against bands of infuriated fanatics, the President decided we were at peace with China; and while that conclusion did not hinder him from taking the most energetic measures to rescue our imperiled citizens, it enabled him to maintain close and friendly relations with the wise and heroic viceroys of the south, whose resolute stand saved that ancient Empire from anarchy and spoilation.”

The Boxer crisis was drawn quite simply as a war against civilization itself. To respond to the Chinese in kind would be tantamount to betraying an ideal of American civilization. While all the newspapers reported that world leaders had decided China needed to be taught a lesson, that lesson was of the rule of law and of the tenets of Western civilization. With this world view in mind, even the poorest laborers and workers could see themselves as the light of civilization against the darkness. The emphasis on legality and civilization also worked to curb any potential acts of revenge or violence against Chinese.

The China Trade and the Business of America

The American government and business were most closely linked in China. The close relationship in activities and intent meant business interests were able to latch on to the State Department's explanations as the crisis unfolded. One of Secretary Hay's early statements on American priorities during the Uprising outlined three goals: safety, the preservation of Chinese territorial integrity, and the protection of business opportunities. “To seek a solution which may

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bring about permanent safety and peace to China, preserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity, protect all rights guaranteed to friendly powers by treaty and international law, and safeguard for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese empire.” 239

Business was regarded as an enterprise that bore no designs on China. It was an elemental part of American civilization, a solid motivation that promised benefits, a doorway for that positive civilization to spread and an undertaking in which an open and intact China was the best possible situation. “We hold our own with the Chinese if we shall give them reason to believe that our ambition is solely connected with commerce,” an article in the New York Times declared. 240 The letter to the editor by SIGMA during the Spanish-American War made the point two years earlier. “Commerce in this instance, as always, has, in effect carried the institutions—the civilization of the dominant power to the weaker.” Business, commerce, trade—they were elements of a reciprocal relationship that benefited both parties, an attitude American citizens thought befitting the United States and its fair policies towards Asia. Business interests wished to continue to support a positive view of China so as to not disrupt lucrative contracts and opportunities, ensure their continuing access to China and obtain compensation for damages and losses. 241

In a postmortem of the Uprising in 1901, the actions of the government to preserve trade was applauded. “From the first, the President and Secretary Hay have been intent on two things—the maintenance of the integrity of the Empire, and the opening of China to the

commerce of the world, and, necessarily therefore, to the influences of Western civilization.” 242  

The dissection of American diplomacy after the fact reveals the manufacturing of ties between America's business interests and the cause of American civilization—the two being inextricably connected in the troika of industry, democracy and Christianity. 

    Helping the matter was that business was spared much of the criticism focused on missionaries. Business concerns shared some common ground with missionaries and even counted some missionaries among their number, yet managed to stay out of the spotlight during the crisis. 243  The answer to this incongruity can be found within the very public face of missionary work compared to the anonymity of the business enterprise in China. Missionaries actively sought the support of the general public for their work and as a result they were active in trumpeting successes and publicizing missions in China to gather more donations for the cause. Missionary work needed to be public and indeed it was very public, with churches from New York to California involved in raising funds for missions to China. The ongoing message coming out of China needed to remain positive despite disappointing results. 

    Young men and women were recruited from small towns for work in China and when the Uprising erupted those small towns suddenly had a very real and visceral connection to the Boxer violence. This very public face meant that the actions of missionaries were held to higher scrutiny as their actions reflected a higher doctrine compounded by a long running narrative of ongoing success. Straying from that script, as occurred in the buildup to the Boxer crisis and beyond, had extremely negative consequences which had to be managed.

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243 The dual occupation of some missionaries as businessmen was a cause for derision and did not help the missionary cause in the aftermath of the crisis.
On the other hand, business endeavors abroad were the realm of the wealthy as well as a fundamental part of American identity. The machinations of railroad building in China or the exact nature of the intricacies of trade agreements were hardly what most Americans read newspapers for or what the average American in Kansas was concerned with. The success of business was also a measure of the success of American civilization. The stunning growth of Imperial Japan from feudalism to technologically advanced regional power in forty years helped showcase the benefits of imparting the advances of the industrial age to Asia. For Americans, the Japanese were a model of a people that had adopted Western ways and flourished—a point that became relevant in the Boxer discourse. Unlike the missionary cause, the expansion of business into China directly translated into strength and prosperity for the American republic and power was just as much of a marker of progress as was steel production. Nationalism was a motivating factor for both old and new Americans, and the Boxer crisis fanned this fervor.244 The United States was a nation that was rapidly becoming a world power of the first rank and part of that growth was on the back of technological advances and business acumen. Michael Adas places this confidence and belief in technology at the core of both American identity and of the American civilizing mission.245

While the uncomfortable parts of American ascension to the status of world power were still partly unresolved, the growth of industrial might was a source of pride and an easily understandable priority to protect. Due to this close connection, action by the government to protect American business interests was protecting America itself. The connecting of business

245 Adas, Dominance by Design, 74, 120, 207.
interests and thus national self-interest to the cause of civilization started with the assertion of the fundamental nature of business in the development of a civilized, first rate nation. “Never forgetting that commerce is the life-blood of the material force of a nation,” a Harper's Weekly article explained to its readers. That material force was what drew immigrants to the New World and was a source of pride for turn of the century Americans. To repudiate it was not only contrary to American principles, it was dangerous as such action could leave the United States in the same position China found itself in—beset by predatory powers. 246 Business considerations helped define American exceptionalism. It is fortunate for the world for the U.S. to be involved in the Boxer troubles, John Barrett declared, as the nation was free from the network of complications, rivalries and clashing interests of the other powers and was instead focused on exclusively commercial interests, desiring not territory or influence. 247 There was a purity of action in pursuing a business agenda.

As a sign of the importance of China to America's “material forces”, news articles described what was at stake in the China trade. “America's direct trade with China amounted in 1899 to $33,000,000, or one-tenth of the total foreign commerce of $330,000,000. This is an increase of 100 per cent, for America and China respectively in ten years. If we include $10,000,000 trade with Hongkong we have the comparatively large annual total of $43,000,000 with China, which makes us third in the race... On the ground of commerce we have more right to interfere at Peking than the Continental Powers of Europe.” 248 The conclusion was laid out for the public. Commerce was vital for the United States, a cornerstone of American civilization, a

means for the transmission of values, and America had the right to take action to preserve that commerce. Diplomat John Barrett wrote in a *Harper’s Weekly* article explaining the possibilities that lay before the United States in China. “In the face of the immediate necessity of protecting life and property, it is well to remember furthermore that America has more at stake…than any other nation except Great Britain.” 249 Justification for action was being developed through the connection to the core values and needs of the American nation.

**Bearing the Cross at Home and Overseas**

The McKinley administration and business interests found general acceptance for their arguments from the beginning of the Boxer crisis as they were easily linked to an existing narrative of American progress based on industrialization and democracy that had developed over the last century. Missionary groups were dealt a much more difficult starting position. Christianity had been banned in China in 1724 but the ban was lifted in 1846 after the first Opium War. The treaties that ended the Second Opium War expanded the privileges afforded to Western religious organizations, and missionaries were given the freedom to delve deep into China to spread their message.

By 1894 Catholic missionaries in China numbered 750, with 400 native priests and 500,000 Chinese converts. 250 The Catholic missionaries were primarily European. The Protestant effort, which included the British contingent and most Americans, stood at 1300

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250 Fairbank, *The Missionary Enterprise*, 222. While 500,000 converts seems a laudable number for the missionary effort, it accounted for .125% of the 1900 Chinese population of 400,000,000
missionaries maintaining 500 stations and 60,000 Protestant Chinese converts. Other sources put the number by 1900 at a combined 2800 American and British missionaries with 85,000 Chinese converts. The operating costs of the missions, which included schools, churches and hospitals, were partly paid for by donations and subscriptions by American church-goers. Other costs such as printing and shipping Bibles to China were also a consideration. Despite a notable lack of widespread acceptance in China, the missionary endeavor continued unabated.

Missionaries believed they were the greatest hope of bringing China into the fold of Christendom and in doing so bring the country into the civilized society of nations. Missionary Karl Gutzlaff encapsulated this sentiment in his writings with the statement, “Where other means have failed, the gospel will triumph; this will fraternize the Chinese with the rest of mankind.”

As the highest profile foreigners in China; with an agenda that stood apart from business and government concerns, missionaries eventually faced the brunt of criticism domestically and were blamed by some elements as part of the cause for the Uprising. The criticism centered not on religion but on the manner in which missionaries conducted themselves and their affairs. As more information about missionary activities became available in the wake of the crisis, it appeared that the missionary endeavor was acting in ways contrary to American interests and detrimental to China. The problematic disconnect between the stated claims of missionaries and their actions in China was not lost on the American people—a people who had been funding the endeavor with their children and their dollars. An August 5, 1900 New York Times article laid

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251 Fairbank, The Missionary Enterprise, 222.
252 Miller, The President and the Assassin, 256.
253 Karl Gutzlaff, A Journal of Three Voyages Along the Coast of China in 1831, 1832 and 1833 (Westcliff on Sea: Desert Island Books, 2002), 54.
out the rising sentiment towards missionaries and their particular demands for intervention. “The churchmen do not care much about foreign policy or international considerations, but are deeply interested in action to protect their property and agents, no matter what such action may cost the Chinese Empire or the American policy.”

To respond to these accusations missionary groups needed to justify their presence in China, absolve themselves of culpability, and build a narrative that would allow them to continue their work (and keep funds flowing) after the dust had settled. A major factor in the angry sentiment towards missionaries at the start of the crisis was the American public's sentiment that they had a vested interest in missionary work. The missionary cause was carried out by the efforts of American sons, daughters and dollars in the name of Christianity and the ideals of the United States. For a deeply religious country, Americans displayed a surprising unease over the evangelical effort during the crisis. The McKinley administration was engineering a motivation for intervention based on duty to principle, responsibility to citizens, and the protection of business interests that was the lifeblood of the nation. Missionaries sought equally strong ideas for their defense.

American missionaries began by stressing their role in a progressive and transformative humanitarian effort. As Gutzlaff described, religion was the key to converting China as a whole into a functioning member of a larger family of Christian nations. No other tool at the disposal of the United States had that ability. “Missionaries are a great and useful force for civilization in China.” Mistakes had been made, but in the end who else was there to carry the banner of

civilization to China? The Europeans and their own brand of progress through conquest? To give up on the missionary endeavor was to give up on, “a promise of victory to come for Christ in China.” 258 The missionary aim was reconnected to the broader ideals of America and benevolent American purpose aboard. This brought the missionary presence back into the safety of the unquestionable fortress of Christianity as an underpinning of American civilization. One writer argued that should the missionary endeavor be wrong in spirit then, “When we withdraw our missionaries, let us withdraw our merchants. Christianity and civilization in their forward movement appeal to us in this crisis even more than commercialism and trade conquest...When we check the messengers of Christianity, let us recall the messengers of commerce.” 259

Reminding the public of the missionary cause as part of a troika of American identity was not enough. Christianity was a touchstone of life for the turn of the century American general public but individual missionaries and organizations still could be faulted for their actions. To counter the public relations nightmare the Boxer crisis was developing into, Missionary writers actively worked to turn the debate away from themselves and to reframe the crisis as the result of external forces beyond their control. 260

In one tract, Rev. John R Hykes of the American Bible Society laid the blame for the Boxer Uprising on the actions of governments. In doing so he insisted that China was only acting in self-defense out of a fear of being divided up by the rapacious world powers.

If justice—elemental justice—were done to the Chinese as a people by us, we should have no greater friends and admirers than in the Celestial empire, and it is quite probable that under such conditions our citizens out there, both missionaries and others, would not

be compelled to suffer with Europeans, in the political crimes of whose governments against China we have happily not been sharers. 261

In absolving themselves of major responsibilities, missionary groups addressed the thorny issue of who was responsible. Following in the footsteps of the McKinley Administration, the solution came in making a distinction between altruistic American endeavors and European greed, and the Qing government and the Chinese people. Missionary writers pointed to deep connections between imperialist European states and the efforts of European missionaries as a cause for the Boxer troubles that unfortunately undermined American missions by association—a concern that was also being established concurrently by the State Department. In an editorial for the Christian Observer in late 1901, American missionary Rev. Arthur Smith faulted Catholicism as having a political aim and being a political agent for European governments. 262 Catholic officials were accused of taking undue liberties with their way of dress and indulging in displays of power that infringed on those of Chinese officials, eliciting apprehension and jealousy. 263 To many Chinese the missionaries were the, “ideological arm of foreign aggression.” 264 On the other hand, Protestantism was depicted as free from blame due to a long history of operating under a constitution and established practices which showed no political bias. 265 Missionary work carried out by Americans reflected the American preference for democracy and freedom. Even in religion, the taint of imperialism clouded European civilization.

264 Fairbank, The Missionary Enterprise, 221.
This defense painted resentment aroused by this unseemly collaboration of aggressive state expansionism and religion as the bitter heart of the Boxer hatred of the missionaries. 266 Even when not directly linked, the actions of Europeans harmed the missionary endeavor. A review of three books on China in Outlook notes that University of Wisconsin professor Paul Samuel Reinsch pointed to the threat of partition by European powers as the spark that drove the Boxers and China into its madness. 267 The secular threat from European greed was weakening the ability of Christianity and American civilization to work its influence. “The Chinese are not adverse to Christianity, rather it has become entangled with politics,” reported an editorial in The Open Court. 268 The Boxer rising was the result of foreign powers at work in China which made the Boxers an anti-foreign not anti-missionary movement. 269

There were mistakes and errors perhaps, a refrain which is repeated in other accounts, but the core of the American missionary endeavor was presented as progressive and apolitical. Catholic missionaries on the other hand, were thought to have unduly concerned themselves with business matters and acted as lords over the Chinese rather than shepherds. 270 The charge had resonance with rhetoric Americans had heard two years earlier. Although the American public had quickly burned out on the overblown excesses of yellow journalism during the Spanish-American War, a recurring theme in the press was the barbarity of the Spanish. Catholic Spain had inflicted great cruelties on their subject people in Cuba. 271 This existing wariness over the

266 “The Crisis in China,” Outlook, July 21, 1900, 693.
267 “The Crisis in China,” Outlook, July 21, 1900, 693.
268 “The Chinese Problem,” The Open Court, October 1901, 608.
motivations of Catholic envoys in colonial lands bolstered the argument.

As much of the hard information coming out of China came from missionaries, the criticism of the Chinese government was easier to manage. Rev. George D. Wilder, in a letter to the American Board, described the situation in China and claimed the Boxers had received Imperial sanction. The Qing were described as complicit in the actions of the Boxers and Prince Zaiyi named as a Boxer leader within the court. The involvement of the Qing government made the uprising less of a peasant movement against perceived infringements by missionaries and more of an instrument of policy by a government beleaguered by foreign powers.

Missionary groups were quick to point out that a definite divide separated the majority of the people of China from the Boxers and the Qing. The description of the Chinese people as being quite different from each other from region to region was put forth in Forum and repeated throughout narratives of China. Even the government is not completely disparaged, as minority elements within the Qing were described as being reform minded. Emperor Guangxu and reformer Kang Youwei were noted as being friends to Western civilization, while reform movements are described as strong in the south. The fact that the Uprising was largely confined to northern China was a chance to paint local authorities in other Chinese provinces as law abiding and against what the Boxers represented—if not completely pro-Western.

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272 “Told to 'Create Disorder’,” New York Times, July 24, 1900.
276 Reinsch, “China Against the World.”
277 Hart, “The Boxer Movement.”
complete regime change would not be necessary as the progressive minority elements within the established Chinese bureaucracy represented a way for both China and the West to move forward.

To reinforce the notion of the otherness of the Boxers and their alien nature to Christianity, the extreme religious aspects of the Boxer cause were stressed such as the more extravagant claims of spirit soldiers and invulnerability to firearms. 278 The Boxers’ aims were described as, “to exterminate the Christian religion and the people who brought it.” 279 Missionary writings on the Boxer crisis wished to show that Christianity was not inimical to the Chinese, but that religion was a great transforming force, which once permitted to permeate a nation’s life will inevitably completely alter it. 280 Christianity was the engine of uplift that American civilization promised.

While Americans may not have been thrilled with the missionaries, they were certainly not interested in supporting a religion diametrically opposed to their own, especially one that had the destruction of Christianity as a foundational tenet. After the crisis, as missionaries formed a major segment of the participants, they continued to work their message into the after-action accounts. Several missionaries testified that, “the Boxer Insurrection was not the fault of missionaries, nor due primarily to Chinese dislike of Christianity, but to poverty, ignorance, and superstition in China.” 281

To further accent the duality of Chinese society as civilized/barbaric, the suffering of Chinese Christians was often referenced during the crisis. Accounts advanced by missionaries in

280 “The Boxers,” The Independent, August 30, 1900.
the press told of Chinese nuns in the city of Yingkou in Liaoning province having been burned alive and the strength of one Dr. Ting who refused to renounce Christianity after 2000 lashes.\textsuperscript{282} Even after the crisis was over, stories of the indignities suffered by Chinese Christians persisted in papers. \textsuperscript{283} Fund raising at one event for Chinese Christians after the crisis were reported to have netted $265.07. \textsuperscript{284} The less than charitable treatment of Chinese Christians by the foreigners in the besieged legations later undermined these assertions to a degree but only after the Boxer Uprising was suppressed.

The actions of the missionaries, although immensely useful for their defense, was not entirely based on self-interest, as fundamentally most missionaries believed they were doing the right thing and were in favor of supporting Chinese both domestically and abroad. The existing body of missionary writing in American media established a pre-crisis narrative and positing the Boxer trouble as an aberration bought on by outside forces was made easier by earlier positive depictions of both Chinese and missionary work. Missionary groups and publications had long questioned the morality of the Exclusion Acts and had argued for the protection of Chinese citizens in America. \textsuperscript{285} Other tracts entreated Americans not to consider the Chinese as a monolithic unit, providing the basis for the creation of a class of “good” Chinese. \textsuperscript{286} An 1899 article in the missionary journal \textit{New York Evangelist} on Chinese attendants aboard Admiral Dewey’s fleet quoted the admiral as stating the Chinese, “fought with the greatest zeal and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{283} “How a Christian Chinese Family Kept the Faith,” \textit{Congregationalist}, April 6, 1901.
\bibitem{286} “Chinese Hatred Not Universal,” \textit{Congregationalist}, October 18, 1900.
\end{thebibliography}
enthusiasm for the nation whose laws do not permit them to enter its territory.” 287 The article revealed the admiral’s hope the men should be granted special dispensation for citizenship. The Evangelist was in agreement, adding that some of the men were possibly part of a mission and hence Christian. This splitting of the Chinese people into different groups was convergent with the response of American government and the Chinese in America. It reflected the McKinley's administrations own binary construction of the Chinese and China's government, a practice that remains a notable element of American foreign policy. The general unfamiliarity of the American people with China helped the message work for a time. 288

Concurrent but not in Concert

In the American narrative, the old China was a land of fearful Mandarins presiding over a stagnant civilization. The new China was based on the forces of reform that promised to transform the nation into a vigorous, modern realm, a movement which looked to the West for guidance and inspiration. 289 Until then however, it was the duty of the “powers of Christendom” to hold the line in China until the victory of the, “progressive men of the empire in opposition to this horde of superstitious fanatics.” 290 Once that occurred the rest of China, “must be civilized as a measure of protection for the rest of the world.” 291 It was indeed in the best interest of China to accept the guidance of the West, and in the best interests of America to offer that

290 “The Boxers,” The Independent, August 30, 1900.
guidance. “The only way in which the yellow races can conquer the world will not be by force, not by hordes, but by peacefully developing, as the Western World has done, a higher civilization.” 292 The means of that peaceful development were the engines of American civilization: business, religion and democracy.

The interwoven narratives of the McKinley administration, missionary groups and business interests came together to form a surprisingly effective and cohesive story. While due in part to business and missionary groups taking their cue from the McKinley administrations effective efforts to prepare the nation for intervention, the foundation for their arguments tapped into an existing notion of American identity. American civilization was different from that of rapacious, barbaric Europe, imbued with power and noble purpose. 293 The rhetoric of the Spanish-American War was rife with depictions of Spain as a cruel, despotic imperialist power ruling over long suffering colonized peoples and much of the narrative was borrowed for the Boxer crisis.

When the situation in China was stable, the American presence was generally unchallenged by the majority of the population of the United States. As the Boxer crisis exploded across the headlines throughout 1899 and 1900 the need to justify the American presence became an imperative. While the conversations that steered American involvement in the crisis went on at the highest levels of power and across diplomatic channels in the drawing rooms, the media became the field where the conflict was presented and dissected to a wary American people on the throes of a national cultural shift in a manner that appealed to the existing narrative of

American civilization and the patriotism of an ascendant power.

Military action in China required the expenditure of lives, hard currency and a seeming repudiation of the very principles that made the United States different from the acrimonious and imperial ways of old Europe. The media allowed the major domestic forces involved to align themselves together behind the McKinley administration to manage the crisis and push for resolution on their own terms. However, in playing a game of social engineering, damage control, and public manipulation, the American interest groups reinforced a binary construction of Chinese identity. To do otherwise was to deny the very validity of the missionary cause and the underlying tenets of a morally superior American civilization as a means of change.
CHAPTER THREE: STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND

The Boxer Uprising forced the development of new ideas of Chinese identity in the United States. This came about as a means of defense against any allegations of complicity with the Boxers, and as a way to harmonize Chinese efforts with the larger discourse on civilization and identity spearheaded by the American government and special interests. Unlike American efforts, the process was not as smooth within Chinese communities as fragmentation between government officials, ordinary citizens, and reformers pushed the discourse into more radical directions. The Boxer crisis sparked the construction of a new Chinese identity based upon the same trinity of civilization being put forward by American groups and the narrative of assimilation into American society that was open to Europeans. By declaring themselves changed by the engines of American civilization, Chinese were able to argue they were different from the Boxers and Manchu leadership.

Far from home, the Chinese in America set about their lives. Considered journeymen by most Americans, building insular communities within American cities, laboring against the forces of institutionalized discrimination, their lives ran--in a common theme throughout the Boxer crisis--concurrently but not in concert with Americans. 294 The Exclusion Acts suppressed legal immigration by Chinese to America yet despite these efforts by 1898 and the start of the Boxer troubles the United States still had one of the largest overseas Chinese populations in the world. 295 As with the American people however, it is unwarranted to think of the Chinese living in the United States as one monolithic group. The ambiguity of China to most Americans was a

295 Exclusion prevented immigration. Only a minority of Chinese were American citizens.
critical element in the narrative against any accusations of complicity during the Boxer crisis. It was also key in the discourse that sought to recast Chinese identity in a new American mold.

The majority of the Chinese living in America were transplants from southern China, brought to America by the promises of work. Ethnically they were Han, distinct from the ruling Manchu dynasty, a fact that came into play during the crisis. Many spoke Cantonese, a distinct dialect of Mandarin. This difference in language also became an element in the development of a separate identity during the crisis. A small but influential number were reformers, in the United States to raise funds or to escape the long arm of the Qing court. Over 95% of the Chinese in America were men, as women were one of the major targets of the Exclusion Acts. However, even before the exclusion era few Chinese women hazarded the trans-Pacific voyage to America. Of 100,000 Chinese estimated to be in the US in 1880, only 600 were women.

Newspapers of the era placed the number of Chinese in New York as between five to six thousand, three thousand of which were concentrated in Chinatown. Nationwide, the population was estimated to be 100,005 or roughly the same numbers as the 1880 census. The numbers are an indicator of the efficacy of exclusion in stabilizing, although not reducing, the number of Chinese in America. The numbers given by contemporary newspapers are also useful as they show what the public understood about the prevalence of Chinese in American society.

When the Boxer Uprising began, the Chinese in America grew concerned over the

298 “Chinatown for America,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1900.
possibility of reprisal attacks and anti-Chinese violence. 299 The mood across America was growing increasingly hostile towards China as the news from Asia continued to dominate headlines. The history of anti-Chinese violence in the United States was long and tragic, with events such as the 1885 Rock Springs attacks which killed 28 and the 1887 Hell’s Canyon massacre of 31 gold miners occurring within recent memory. 300 With the mood towards China souring and the rhetoric for an armed response growing, the need arose for Chinese communities to address the crisis. The situation in China itself was already being explained by American experts but an alternative narrative could be presented regarding the character and motivations of the Chinese in America. The presence of Chinese in America brought the threat of the Boxer Uprising to the streets of New York or San Francisco, and so a response served a dual purpose: to protect the lives of Chinese and to mitigate to a degree the damage the Boxer crisis was doing to the overall American concept of China and the Chinese nation.

Racism against Chinese was endemic in the United States. Chinese were consistently denied even the slimmest chances offered other immigrants. Violence was common, as in anti-Chinese riots which claimed the lives of 400 in 1880. 301 Although many papers and Americans advocated for Chinese, the forces of racism proved formidable and deeply ingrained. 302 With immigration frozen, rights constantly denied, and often official deafness to pleas, Chinese were being all but driven out of America. The Boxer crisis was all too fitting within racist ideas, and

302 Choy, Coming Man, 147-148.
held the potential to unleash a new wave of anti-Chinese rage across the nation.

The Boxer crisis was front page news and it was through the media that a message of differentiation could have the greatest impact. It was also from the media that Americans drew their information about the crisis, and the McKinley administration was already working towards developing their own version of events. The voices of three distinct groups of Chinese emerged during the crisis. Like their American counterparts, they were not all similar in motivation and background but certainly united in general purpose for at least the duration of the crisis.

The first and most prominent group were Qing government officials, duly appointed representatives of the Manchu court. The major political figure during the crisis was Minister Wu Tingfang in Washington, although lesser officials such as Consul-General Ho Yow of San Francisco also entered into the debate. Qing officials had the most difficulty in conveying their message as they had to operate carefully between their roles as Qing envoys and as advocates for the Chinese in America. They had the hardest time dodging questions about the Boxer crisis, as they were seen to be a direct conduit to the workings of the court in Beijing. Any contradictory statements or professions of ignorance on a particular topic were seized upon as disingenuous at best and intentionally deceptive at worst. Overall, the most interesting and salient commentary came solely from Minister Wu, undoubtedly so as to present a unified governmental response and avoid conflicting statements that could provide fodder for the papers and militant factions among Americans. The new media was an unforgiving microscope and daily dissection of the crisis was the order of the day.

303 Ho Yow is a Wade-Giles translation. An official pinyin version has proven elusive.
The second group were established bodies such as local business associations, Chinese Christian groups, and the “self-governing and self-defense structures” of immigrant communities. The On Leong Merchant and Laborer's Association of the St. Louis Chinatown was one such structure. Included in this group were ad hoc committees of local leaders and others in unofficial capacities issuing resolutions and making statements to the press as the need to create a buffer between the Chinese in America and the Boxer troubles became more and more apparent. The third and final group were extant reform organizations that had been seeking to fund and engineer internal change within China, most notably the Chinese Empire Reform Association among others.

Unlike American groups where smaller factions within the three major interest groups and lone experts could weigh in on the situation, the Chinese response was dominated by influential members of the Chinese community. The basic reasons for this was the language barrier and the need for authority to lend a message weight to mainstream America, whether that authority was bestowed by a government or by community. In the case of Americans lecturing or speaking on China, government service, a religious background, educational level, or the simple fact of having lived in the Middle Kingdom lent the speaker the authority they required. Chinese voices required some form of authority as well. An example is the case of Tom Lee who was described in the papers as the “self-styled mayor” of Chinatown, giving a private citizen an unofficially official title. In a similar instance in Philadelphia, a Lee-Toy was named as the

306 Huping, “Governing "Hop Alley.”” 50.
307 “Chinatown is Restless,” New York Times, July 10, 1900. Lee was described by the article as playing American poker when encountered by the reporter, red and blue chips in a tidy pile in front of him.
“reputed Mayor” of that city’s Chinatown in statements to lend his comments a semblance of an official statement. 308

One of the first actions many communities took was to form protective associations and even go as far as arming themselves. A report from Chicago stated that there had been “a considerable increase in the sale of firearms” to Chinese buyers and that Chinese only moved in groups of two to three, always armed. 309 Concern over safety were not baseless as sporadic attacks had already occurred across America. In the hot summer of 1900, a Chinese man was attacked in New York by a mob of young boys who pelted him with stones. Only the intervention of a police officer prevented any escalation of the incident. 310 Other reports spoke of roving gangs looking for fights in New York’s Chinatown, striking Chinese citizens and breaking windows, ostensibly in the name of revenge for the Boxer outrages. 311

American government officials confirmed the potential for violence in statements to major newspapers and were acting to prevent any large outbreaks of anti-Chinese actions from occurring, although most of the action came in the form of forceful, yet tactically ambiguous statements rather than any armed response. 312 Even so, given the lack of government zeal in protecting Chinese in the West before exclusion it is doubtful that the word of the American government was enough for most Chinese to entrust their lives to. While arming themselves and forming protective associations was a means of defense against attack, it could only counter

309 It is interesting to note that despite fears over Boxer violence, weapons were still easily available to Chinese in America and there was little problem noted in the newspapers over Chinese citizens obtaining firearms during the crisis. Perhaps a case of profit trumping prudence or sympathetic weapon merchants?
violence with violence. To prevent violence from ever occurring, and to secure their lives and fortunes in the event of complete disaster overseas, the response of Chinese communities across American evolved into a two pronged approach in the public sphere to argue in their defense.

Organizing a Defense

The first approach was the simplest: denunciation of the Boxers and of the violence in China. The second approach was the most difficult and involved, to separate themselves completely from the Boxers and to a large degree the Qing Dynasty as complicity of the Chinese government in the crisis became more apparent. By claiming an identity distinct from mainland Chinese, an identity that was in synch with American values and one that deeply condemned the atrocities being committed by the Boxers, Chinese communities attempted to align themselves with the forces of “civilization” against the perceived barbarity of the Boxer hordes. 313 These sentiments would be announced through public declarations, statements, and resolutions which were picked up and disseminated by newspapers. The role of the media was vital, as it established a nationwide dialogue on Chinese identity, rather than confining it to cities with significant Chinese populations. Once in the media, the declarations of Chinese groups began to form a cohesive commentary with that of American interest groups.

This approach took into account the current American bewilderment over China and the confusion over Chinese--and for that matter Asian--identity that tinged the American notion of China. As one report on Chinese immigration bluntly stated, “all Chinese look alike to even the

skilled inspector.” By creating and supporting the idea that all Chinese in America were different from those in China, Chinese communities hoped to avoid any kind of violence by establishing a simple baseline for identity. The dangerous, shadowy “uncivilized” Boxers who had not been exposed to American values or had rejected those values were far and away in China. The Chinese in the United States sought to project an image of themselves as law abiding and peaceful, influenced by the magnificent power of American civilization.

An incident involving a Japanese sailor named Carlo Karno illustrates the potential danger for Chinese, and the problems of establishing a separate identity. Carlo Karno was a Japanese sailor with a residence in New York. While walking through the city he was spotted by a group of young men. One of the group shouted “He’s a Boxer! He’s one of them fellers that burns our soldiers in oil. Wipe the street up wid [sic] him.” The alarmed Karno hurriedly fled the scene with the young men in pursuit. After a short chase, Karno collided with a longshoreman leaving a bar. In a panic, Karno disabled the man with a blow and then continued to flee. Eventually, Karno ran into a group of policemen, who rescued him from the mob but arrested the Japanese citizen for the assault committed on the longshoreman.

The attack on Karno illustrates Gail Nomura’s assertion that Asians were the accepted target of “nativist-racist antagonism,” which served to unify the increasingly heterogeneous white population in the U. S. West. This antagonism, existing yellow peril rhetoric, and

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315 Carlo Karno is not a traditional Japanese name. It is likely an Americanization of his Japanese name.
316 It is a recurring theme that most of the anti-Chinese attacks that did occur were by groups of young men and boys uniformly described as local “roughs.”
simple ignorance led to a difficulty in differentiating between different nationalities. Making out
different ethnicities within a single nationality was even harder. However, Nomura points out
that the differences between Asians and Americans of European descent were useful for helping
newly arrived European immigrants to assimilate.

An American ethnicity could be achieved through the assertion that it was not Asian.
Asians were a necessary "Other" in defining who was an American. The idea of
assimilability was utilized. Europeans were assimilable. Asians were declared
unassimilable. In arguing for the unassimilability of Asians, exclusionists aimed to affirm
a racist foundation for the American nation. Overriding all other factors in the
construction of this exclusive definition of "American" was the assertion that Asians were
unalterably alien, naturally inclined to Oriental despotism, and incapable of assimilating
to democratic self-government.

This was the major hurdle to be overcome by the Chinese in America. Without ethnicity
to fall back on as a key to acceptance, Chinese sought to prove they had adopted all the other
aspects of American civilization. This “us and them” approach also served to link the Chinese to
being part of the Western cause rather than being outsiders or aliens. It also fit in with the
discourse over the “civilized” West versus an “uncivilized” China that was the centerpiece of the
internal American (and Western) debate over the Uprising. The question appeared in the
greater debates over imperialism that had seized the imagination of the United States since the
acquisition of overseas territories in the Spanish-American War. By claiming that the system of
civilizing and assimilating worked and had created a new Chinese people in America, the

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320 The American animated program King of the Hill succinctly sums up the enduring problem of establishing Asian
identity in the United States. When meeting his new neighbor Khan for the first time, Hank Hill asks him if he is
Chinese or Japanese. “No, I'm Laotian,” Khan states testily. Hill pauses to digest Khan's comment and then replies,
“Are you Chinese or Japanese?”
322 Michael Hunt. The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914 (New York:
Chinese formed a shield to protect themselves. A new Chinese people held out the promise of a new China. It was be difficult for Americans to argue against this reasoning, for to do so would be to argue against the idea of civilization that the West was espousing. The core of the American response to the crisis was positioned as one of civilization against barbarity, reflecting the earlier arguments of the Spanish-American War. Otherwise the goal in China would be the very European, very *un-American* conquest of territory for the sake of conquest. The Chinese narrative supported and reinforced the American narrative.

The primary way Chinese in America sought to distance themselves from the events in China was to point to their own ethnic background and places of origin as distinct in distance, customs, mentality, and even language from the Boxers and the Qing rulers. The Qing Dynasty was controlled by the Manchu people, by 1900 regarded as an alien dynasty ruling over a country of predominately Han Chinese. 323 A string of disasters in the past century, both natural and manmade, had already weakened the legitimacy of the Qing. Chinese reformers like Kang Youwei and reform organizations were active in the United States, providing evidence that there was already dissent in China against the Qing.

Chinese community leaders insisted they were not responsible for the death and destruction of the Boxer Uprising as they were not the same people who were committing those acts. Ethnically, they argued, they were Cantonese, a people who lived far to the south of Beijing and the Manchu court, an area that was also far from the major hotspots of the Boxer Uprising. The Cantonese also made the point that they had been away from China for years, long enough

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323 William T Rowe argues the differences between the Manchu and Han were primarily manufactured to intentionally preserve a Manchu heritage. Regardless of their origin, the result was by 1900 the common perception was that the Manchu were an alien dynasty, their right to rule questionable after the Opium Wars and Taiping Rebellion.
to absorb and embrace American values and not have anything to do with the current troubles. This part of the argument was shared from the highest levels of Qing officials in America to local community associations to groups of businessmen and merchants.

**Wu Tingfang and the Qing Government**

The statements of Minister Wu Tingfang, the ranking Qing official in the United States, illustrates the difficulty encountered by government agents in reacting to the crisis and the similarity to the overall response of the Chinese in America. Wu's immediate reaction to questions on the Boxers was confusion, expressing that he not heard of the organization before, nor had he received intelligence from his government. As an appointed government official, Wu was likely loathe to speak out before he understood the position of the Qing Dynasty. As news of the Boxer crisis became more available and more lurid, he denounced the uprising, expressing that he did not want to see war between China and the United States. The rapid availability of news worked against him on several occasions, as reporters found it difficult to believe he was not in possession of timely and accurate reports from Beijing. At the height of the Boxer crisis in July 1900, the *New York Times* reported on a statement made by Minister Wu.

All the Chinese in the United States come from Southern China and are altogether out of sympathy for the Northern Chinese. In fact, they do not even speak the same language. He is sure there is not a single one of these Northern Chinamen in the United States and if they were here they would meet with the hostility of the Canton men. As for the latter, the Minister declares they are entirely satisfied with their condition in this country, and could not be persuaded to return to China to give any aid to any element opposed to Americans.

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While Wu stops short of making an association between the Boxers and the Manchu dynasty or criticizing the role of the government due to his position within the Qing bureaucracy, other groups without such limitations would not hesitate to draw a connection between the Boxers and the Qing. Wu was doing his utmost to safeguard Chinese lives and act as a mediator between the American government and the Chinese population in the United States. To have openly criticized the Manchu rulers of China would have imperiled his position. Mirroring the way business and missionary concerns followed the lead of the McKinley administration, Wu’s words were taken up by other groups due to his status and authority to develop a united front in denouncing Boxer activities.  

An August 1900 statement by Wu, shortly after the crisis ended with the rescue of the legations by the Allied forces and occupation of Beijing, made his position clearer by stating the Manchu and Chinese mixed civilly in social and official life and as much antagonism between the two groups as existed as between the “Scotch and English.” There was no enmity as reported in the press, the minister insisted. During the crisis and under fire however, Wu tactfully did not press the issue, which led in part to the proliferation of comments on anti-Manchu sentiment by other Chinese he found distressing.

In another July missive, Wu asked for understanding as the summer of 1900 found the news coming out of China growing ever more incendiary. His calls for calm appealed directly to
the American people for understanding. Part of his argument rested on the promise that a massive market awaited America in China. 329 Wu stressed the honesty of Chinese merchants and the need for the continuity of business links in other statements. 330 It is unclear if Wu was genuinely committed to trade relations or if he too had taken cues from the media and noticed the pro-commerce trend in the debates on the American side. Whatever his motivations, the comments on commerce reinforced one of the cornerstones of American interest in China. Wu also referred to Christianity frequently throughout 1900 as the crisis escalated, mostly asking for understanding or for a measured American approach to China. 331 While not espousing or supporting Christianity, Wu still brought religion into the Chinese side of the debate, something that would be stressed by other groups.

Wu's arguments were reflected by other Qing officials, such as in June 1900 comments by Ho Yow, the Qing Consul-General of San Francisco. In a lengthy statement entitled “The Attitude of the United States Towards China” the Consul-General invoked the value of the China trade as a reason for continued American engagement, noting the potential loss involved should European nations seize control of the Middle Kingdom. The statement continued to claim all Chinese workers in the States were Cantonese and argued for the benefits of Chinese labor to the American economy. Yow finishes by hoping “the broad enlightenment which distinguishes the American people among the nations of the world” will steer policy towards a better acceptance of Chinese inside the United States. 332

Wu received a mixed reaction to his statements and actions in the press. While some

330 Wu Ting Fang, “A Plea for Fair Treatment.”
331 Wu Ting Fang, “A Plea for Fair Treatment.”
lauded his sharp analysis, others were less than convinced of his ignorance of the early stages of the uprising and suspected he had been less than forthcoming with information. This suspicion was based on the availability of information, as Wu claimed he did not have any knowledge of the Boxers and later of the status of the legations. The onslaught of news coming out of Shanghai and other cities made it seem impossible the Chinese government could not send accurate news to Wu. Wu tried to defuse the issue by discussing the often incorrect nature of the news but the damage was done. This level of suspicion did not fall upon other groups—the direct connection to the troubles in China, official ties to the Qing government, and the taint of anti-Manchu sentiment did not color others as it did Wu.

**Chinese Communities**

The wording and sentiments expressed in official statements were echoed in the narrative produced by Chinese communities across the United States, often being more explicit in tone due to the lack of association with the Qing government. In these non-governmental responses, the benefits of association with the United States and the transformative power of American civilization was a major point, an argument Wu was unable to make full use of. In Boston, a group of Christian Chinese along with “a few of their best friends among the white Christians” formed a protective association to safeguard themselves against danger should open war break out between the United States and China. 333 This New England Chinese Protection Association adopted a resolution expressing their abhorrence of the Boxer violence and voicing their support

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333 “In and Around Boston,” *Congregationalist*, Sept 6, 1900, 320.
for reform measures. The specter of civilization was invoked yet again as the resolution was meant, “to express the hope that the new civilization knocking at the gates of our native land may bring to our peoples the blessings so richly enjoyed by America.”  

The plea towards the perceived benefits of America no doubt struck a chord with many of the new immigrants to America, who had suffered through discrimination as well. For white Americans, it was a request that shot to the heart of the founding principles of the republic. While complete empathy was out of reach, certainly a level of understanding could be built. In Philadelphia local Chinese leaders issued a proclamation denouncing the Boxers. “We, who have had no part in it, see how it is making all Chinamen accursed.” The statement continued to employ a familiar refrain. “We can do nothing to prevent the riots and bloodshed in our own land, but we can, by expressing our regret and living in an orderly way in America, show the Americans that we have no sympathy for the Boxer brotherhood. The outrages are from the north of China while most of us come from the south, and many of our brothers have fallen in the effort to restore order.”  

New York's Chinese population was stated as being, “made up almost entirely of immigrants from southern China, fully three-fourths being Cantonese.”  

The New York Times explained the bewilderment of many Chinese over the Boxer Uprising.

Due to the fact that nine-tenths of all the Chinese residents of New York are from one province—that of Kwong-Tung, with Canton as its capital, which is located at the extreme southern end of China, whereas the operations of the Boxers are confined almost entirely to the province of Pe-Chi-Li, which is in the extreme northern portion of the empire. With no railroad connections between the

334 “In and Around Boston,” Congregationalist, Sept 6, 1900, 320.  
two provinces, and telegraph connection only for the use of the Government and the great business houses, and the inhabitants speaking two totally different dialects, the Southern Chinaman of New York knows little of his northern fellow countryman and cares less. 

The article went on to state that some Chinese in America had no idea that there was even a crisis occurring, so distant they were from their homeland and their northern countrymen. Mirroring modern day confusion over geography, another article helpfully pointed out that given the distances involved between Guangzhou and Beijing, the situation was analogous to New Yorkers being able to keep tabs on everything going on in Portland. Through these comments, the basic elements of a fairly consistent approach continue be seen. The first element is the claim that the Chinese communities in Philadelphia, New York and San Francisco had nothing to do with the Boxers and were unsympathetic to the movement. The second is a delineation of a line between northern Chinese and southern Chinese in New York. Lastly, the Philadelphia statement alludes to the fact that the southern Chinese have lost lives in the conflict vying for the same goal as all the Western nations and Japan—restoring order under the same banner of civilization for the advancement of themselves and their country.

San Francisco, home to one of the largest concentrations of Chinese in America saw general unity among Chinese, although when the rhetoric grew dangerously anti-Manchu the Qing Consul General Ho Yow spoke out. A series of resolutions were passed by a group of over two hundred Chinese merchants and businessmen in San Francisco. The resolutions were adopted at a meeting called by Ho Yow. He was quoted as stating that he called the meeting to

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prove to Chinese that they were in no danger and show that there was no sympathy among the Cantonese towards the non-Cantonese Boxers. Ho Yow went on to say, “We declare our utter detestation of Boxers and all their sympathizers, and assert that the greatest harm ever inflicted upon China has been produced by their acts.” 339 Yow concluded by stating, “We feel that, with the help of the West and the millions of progressive peoples who have come under Western influences, the subjects of China will be able to effect this.” 340

Chinese efforts were bolstered and given extra creditability by the support of American allies. These Americans were men and women with strong connections to China and the Chinese community, many of whom were involved in the missionary endeavor. 341 On more than one occasion the statements of a Chinese group were buttressed by an American organization who sponsored or supported the Chinese. A key element to these Americans was religion, perhaps the most visible marker of the new, civilized Chinese living in America. An example of the role of religion in changing perceived Chinese values is the subject of gender equality. “The masculine Chinese mind—I do not speak of the Christianized man but the heathen—seems unable to grasp the faintest idea of a possible equality of the sexes.” 342 Civilized and Christianized—the two were the sides of the same coin. The missionary organization the American Board was quick to publicize the contributions of Chinese Christian congregations to the relief effort in China. Later the suffering of Chinese Christians at the hands of the Boxers became further evidence of their separation from other Chinese. 343 To bolster this distinction, an unnamed Chinese official was

343 “Remembering Their Own in Need,” New York Observer and Chronicle, November 1, 1900.
reported to have stated, “as soon as a man becomes a Christian, he really ceases to be a Chinaman.” 344

This connection of religion to the transformation of an other into an American had precedent. The United States had recently attained control of Hawai‘i, whose non-white population were now Americans. A fairly glowing article in the New York Times sought to educate the average American on the process through which the inhabitants of the new acquisition became “fellow citizens.” 345 “When American missionaries came in 1820 they found a nation without religion. They reduced the language to writing, introducing the printing press and gradually fitted the natives for civilization. The evolution of rights and privileges followed steadily upon the adoption of Christianity by the Hawaiians.” 346

The transformation of certain others into Americans was an established and ongoing process. 347 If the principles that guided America and the West were not transferable, were not teachable, and were not universal, the only reason left for foreign adventures was conquest. This left the tragedies of westward expansion, the acquisition of the Philippines and the annexation of Hawai‘i as the results of European style greed and conquest, not part of a glorious destiny or the mission to bring light to darkness. It was not the history Americans wanted to see for themselves at the beginning of a new century.

As the crisis progressed, so did the delineation of a new identity for Chinese. Separation from the Boxers was one thing, but as the news reported on the actions of the Qing government

in assisting the Boxers, it was expedient to modify or sever those connections as well. 

Newspaper reports commented on the, “antagonism which Cantonese have for everything Manchu.” 348 It should be noted that this statement illustrates the general confusion in America over China which lay at the heart of this ad hoc strategy, as the Boxer rebels were predominantly Han Chinese while the Qing Government was Manchu. A further report from the *New York Times* elaborates in the form of an interview with a Chinatown doctor named Toms. “The whole uprising is led by the Manchus,” said Toms, “which are a mixed race of Tartars, freebooters and brigands and ought to be suppressed once for all, and every Chinaman in New York wants to see them punished. We want the present dynasty overthrown, and a strong ruler put on the throne under a powerful protectorate.” 349

His statements are echoed by Mr. Lung of the Wing Yu Long Trading Co., who affirmed that the Chinese of New York did not believe the Boxers were the true culprits of the uprising. Instead, the tyrannical Manchu were responsible. The reason he gave was that the Manchu feared that the spread of knowledge of Western progress among the masses would lead them to become dissatisfied. 350 The idea of an old regime fighting against the coming of progress was a simple and effective image that again echoed the image of Spain developed two years earlier. It is worth noting the professions of the Chinese who were quoted in the piece: a doctor, missionary workers, and businessmen, as is Lung’s portrayal of the tremendous power of Western progress as a thing the Manchu court feared.

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349 “Chinatown for America,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1900.
Towards a New China. The Reform Movement in America

Despite a remarkable consistency in the statements, overall organization between Chinese responses remained loose. Multiple statements were by issued by different associations and groups all building upon each other. However, Toms' comments linked the debates to the final group that was actively taking part in the Boxer debates—reformers. Not all those who spoke of change or a new China were reformers—the rhetoric on change was coincidental as it dovetailed well with the construction of a new separate identity for the Chinese in America, whether real or temporarily expedient. Surely a powerful new Chinese citizen, empowered by the strengths of Western civilization and religion, could shepherd an unheard of change in his homeland. 351

This portrayal of the Qing government as alien also worked in favor of the reformers and the manufacturing of a separate identity, not just for safety during the Boxer crisis but for the endgame and the possible regime change that might follow. The reformer message stressed that not only were the Chinese in America fundamentally different than the Boxers and the Manchu government, but that overseas Chinese had been actively attempting to reform the Qing Dynasty. Chinese Reform Associations, already extant by the time of the Boxer crisis, began to announce their activities in connection to the anti-Boxer statements. Statements by groups who had no official connection to the Reform Associations began to claim they wished for reform and change within China as well. Much of the funding for attempts at internal reform up to 1900 came from the United States, as America had a high concentration of overseas Chinese. 352 Relatively large

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numbers of wealthy Chinese resided in America who could act outside of possible sanctions from the Beijing court. Both during and in the aftermath of the Boxer Uprising, reformer Kang Youwei traveled to the United States to find support and financing for the reform movement. Years later, Sun Yixian would find himself in America raising money for the reform cause when the Xinhai Revolution of 1911 unexpectedly toppled the Qing Dynasty.

Part of what made the reformers' message appealing and easy to integrate into the Boxer narrative was that the basic principles at play throughout 1900 were already part of the reform manifesto. The charter of the Chinese Empire Reform Association, founded in 1899 states:

The purpose for which it is formed are, the elevating of the Chinese people to a standard of excellence equal to that of any other civilized race. And to enable the people of the Chinese Empire to foster and cultivate their spiritual welfare, by endowing their offspring with all the advantages and privileges enjoyed by their fellow beings in other parts of the world. To promulgate in every direction the intercourse of legitimate commercial enterprise, and pay due regard to its social and moral education, by the strict observance of the laws of the country in which they reside.

The 1899 charter incorporated elements of the major arguments for Chinese differentiation and stability during the uprising, providing continuity as well as a precedent to point to. A second salient passage from the association's charter reads, “To impress upon the Chinese people, the urgent need of a revival of the reform of the governmental affairs of China, which will at once eradicate the distressing state of inaction as at the present existing, and place them on a footing of equality, such as it is at this period enjoyed by citizens of the United States.”

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The benefits of civilization, commentary on spiritual welfare (what kind and from where was left nebulously open to interpretation), the importance of commerce, and need to reform the government were the major points of the manifesto. While the document stressed the unity of the Chinese people, the desire for reform lent itself to making more overt comments on why the Qing needed to be changed based on ethnic distinctions. While these efforts were generally well known within the Chinese reform community, it was not common knowledge to most Americans. These associations began to work their way into the public debates and statements and resolutions declared by other Chinese groups.

Who were these reformers? There were several organizations, ranging from small local groups in America to larger associations that had members in both China and the United States. Perhaps the largest and most well-known was the Baohuanghui, translated as the Chinese Empire Reform Association and also known as the Save the Emperor Society led by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. A vocal member during the Boxer Uprising was Xu Qin, president of the San Francisco branch of the Chinese Reform Association. Membership in the reform associations was put at 10,000. The organization of the association was nationwide in America, with six regional headquarters in San Francisco, Portland, New York, Chicago, New Orleans and Helena overseeing fifty smaller chapters. Internationally the Baohuanghui had a main office in Vancouver, Canada overseeing twelve chapters and in Torreon, Mexico with seven chapters. Membership was not restricted to Chinese, as the Hawai‘i branch boasted Japanese, Filipino and

American members. 359

The Baohuanghui sought to support Emperor Guangxu’s claim to the throne, adding that the Emperor had, “read the books of the Western sages, and realized there was but one way to save his country, and that was by adopting Western forms of civilization.” 360 In the reformer’s narrative, Guangxu's liberalism enraged the old Manchu court and was met with jealousy by the corrupt government officials. 361 The West needed to support a regime change that would result in the shining goal of a new civilized China. “Shall we stand idly blinking in this new light of civilization that has suddenly broken upon the Chinese people, or shall we be up and doing?” 362 The reformers claimed 9/10ths of the Chinese population supported their views. While certainly exaggerated, the goal was not to convert Chinese to their cause but to convince Americans of their strength. The general air of confusion when dealing with China in matters regarding population helped such exaggerations pass initial scrutiny. 363

With the Boxer troubles leading up to military intervention, the reformers also had a new mission: to prevent the dismembering of China by victorious allied powers, a very real possibility. 364 Xu Qin proclaimed, “China must be governed by the Chinese.” 365 By presenting an alternative power structure than the Manchu court with sympathetic links to the West and a theoretical basis in the principles of American civilization, the reformers were forming an

361 Chuy C. Kain, “What the Chinese Reformers Wish.”
362 Chuy C. Kain, “What the Chinese Reformers Wish.”
364 Again using exaggeration to hopefully sway public opinion, Qin remarked that foreign control of China would be nearly impossible due to the ferocity of the inhabitants of the interior, who were more like tigers than men. Whether Qin's remarks helped or hindered the construction of the Chinese man as a civilized citizen is unclear.
365 Chuy C. Kain, “What the Chinese Reformers Wish.”
argument for Chinese control over China in a worst-case scenario while improving the image of the Chinese in America as progressive and reform minded. The stress of the Boxer troubles led to a tonal shift in the original message of unity, with Xu Qin commenting, “We must suffer for years to come because of the outrages committed by these barbarians claiming kinship with the real Chinese people, who reside in the south. The real Chinese people have no more to do with this ignorant horde than have the peaceful citizens of California.”

As to why the reform associations had waited until the chaos of the Boxer Uprising to begin making claims as to their power and goals, Qin answered, “Action had not come sooner because we have waited for favorable opportunity. We believe that opportunity is now close at hand…” The Boxer Uprising was disastrous for China but could well be the opening that reformers had been waiting for—if they could convince foreign powers to go along with the plan. It also laid the groundwork for a future vision of China after the crisis had subsided, in much the same manner as the American interests were attempting to establish. It would indeed prove transformative, but not in the manner the reformers had hoped. A military adventure in China in 1900 amidst the Boxer chaos to incite a revolution funded by Baohuanghui was suppressed by the Qing, with substantial loss of life among major figures in the movement.

However, despite general agreements in tone and wording between Qing officials in the United States and local non-governmental groups, some Chinese officials stood in opposition to the reformers and maintained the Qing dynasty line. The Chinese Consul-General of San Francisco Ho Yow—even though he called a meeting of business leaders to issue a statement

366 Chuy C. Kain, “What the Chinese Reformers Wish.”
against the Boxer violence—accused Xu Qin of sponsoring rebellion against the Qing Dynasty in a very public dispute. Ho Yow also condemned reform party publications such as the Chinese World newspaper. Fortunately for the reformers, the idea of friction between the Manchu and Han populations remained ingrained in the dialogue. A post-crisis report in the New York Times on the Qing government's efforts to repair the damage done by the Boxer Uprising (at the stern insistence of foreign powers) commented on the, “...the southern viceroy, who so loyally lived up to their pledges to preserve order, life and property, and who for years have longed for the overthrow at Peking of the reactionary Manchu party, of which Prince Tuan is the leader.”

After the crisis, on both a public and governmental level, the southerners were seen as anti-dynastic and different from the Boxers.

Reimagined Identity

The stress of the Boxer crisis brought on a reordering of Chinese identity in the United States. Different from the majority of their countrymen, different from the government that ruled their nation, the Chinese in America were men apart from their homelands in more ways than one. It was indeed a land of men, as census data indicates. The element that was claimed to have made them different was the exposure to American civilization, an experience that in the narrative of the parties invested in the Boxer crisis profoundly altered the Chinese in America into new men. Like ideas encapsulated in the Turner thesis, life in America was a crucible that

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changed people: from immigrants to Americans, from Chinese barbarians to civilized men. While the common assumption of the Chinese in America in 1900 was that of journeymen, workers who traveled to the United States without the intent to stay, the Boxer crisis began a movement towards an public identity that relied more on American ideals than Chinese heritage and that fit within the parameters of American self-identification. Whether this identity was heartfelt and as endemic as public statements indicated was not as important as the impact of the message to the American people during the Boxer troubles.
CONCLUSION

The discourse on the Boxer Uprising that played out in American print media proved successful in advancing the agendas of Americans and Chinese with a vested interest in China. While the need to manage the Boxer crisis sparked the discourse that followed, the overall narrative produced spoke to a longer history of racism in the United States and confusion over the role of America in the world. For a United States that was a newly minted imperialist power, the Boxer crisis was an uncomfortable reminder of how far the self-image of a progressive, benevolent America was from the imperialistic and often racist reality. For Chinese in America, the Boxer discourse was an unhappy example of the expectation of unity, progress, and comradeship the United States espoused but did not practice.

This seemingly muted and tranquil situation within the United States came about as the result of a campaign of crisis management and public manipulation. Very different American and Chinese interest groups responded to the crisis with a narrative that used a malleable concept of American civilization to generate public support for overseas intervention, ensure domestic tranquility, safeguard Chinese immigrants, and manage a reasonably rapid return to the status quo. While the different groups involved had markedly divergent ambitions, the use of civilization as a fundamental element of their approaches to the crisis allowed their narratives to merge together and reinforce one another. The means to deliver this message and manage the crisis for an uncertain American public was the emerging national print media. Awareness of this message by Chinese and the American public is a testament to the pervasiveness of what was generally a smokescreen for the United States to be able to pursue actions that favored national interests.
For the Chinese in America, the message of civilization through the print media was the means to distance themselves from the Boxer violence by creating an identity distinct from their countrymen in China. Americans special interest groups used the ideas of civilization to channel anger away from themselves and from the Chinese in America and towards the distant shores of the Middle Kingdom, again creating a distinction within the Chinese people. The end result was the production of a narrative that justified intervention, protected Chinese citizens, and explained the crisis to the public through distinctly and comfortably American concepts.

Through the use of civilization their message, interest groups in the United States created a binary means to respond to the crisis and established a framework of acceptable behavior based on established principles. The media functioned as a medium where the different factions involved could communicate to the public and with each other while also advancing its own agenda, often but not always in sync with other efforts. The various groups, although rarely working in concert, developed strategies and arguments which complemented each other in the media, eventually assuring a measured and level response in the United States which avoided internal violence or panic.

Ultimately, the Boxer discourse was primarily a fiction developed from the lofty ideals the United States claimed to stand for, but often fell short of. Filipinos, Native Americas, Cuban, Chinese—all these groups had been seen the promised benefits of American exceptionalism and civilization but had not been allowed to truly partake. For the American people, invoking civilization at the critical junctures of the Boxer crisis acted more as a brake on behavior out of confusion than a legitimate moral awakening. Potential ramifications awaited behavior that was outside the moral parameters set down by the civilization discourse. The specter of ostracism,
punishment, and comparison to the Asian other likely stayed the hands of Americans inclined towards violence and protest. It did not matter what direction the resolution of the discourse in America took. It only needed to maintain order long enough to see the Boxer Uprising in China to its conclusion. Afterwards, it was the United States that truly returned to the status quo.

The conclusion of this thesis suggests other lines of inquiry that connect to the major points raised within. After the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and the destruction of government records, many Chinese were able to claim American citizenship. In part, the acceptance of these new Chinese-American citizens potentially stems from the reconceptualization of Chinese identity that was introduced in the media during the Boxer crisis. As matters in China stabilized, the ideas of “good” Chinese, the success of Americanization, and the distinctions between elements of Chinese society had been introduced into the national consciousness. This reordering of Chinese identity along binary lines created an understandable, unthreatening, and sanctioned group of Chinese within America. Propelled by ideas of assimilation and the strength of American values, the Boxer narrative on Chinese identity may prove to have soothed anxiety over the sudden rise in Chinese-American citizens.

Examination of the news reporting of the 1911 Xinhai Revolution and the establishment of the Republic of China under the framework introduced in this thesis can yield new insights as to the evolving American idea of China. While Sun Yixian’s Christianity and the role of overseas Chinese has been explored in the literature, the impact of a civilization discourse on the reception of the revolution in American print media can shed light on the development of China within the American popular consciousness.

In the European theater, the McKinley administrations’ efforts to separate American
action from European activities during the Boxer crisis created an early version of the
“concurrent but not in concert” concept that guided the entry of the United States into World War
I as an associated power. The relationship between the Boxer era arguments that explained the
causes and need for a distinct form of American intervention and the discourse that appeared
before 1917 and the involvement of the United States in the Great War bears examination.
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