From "A Record of Facts to Ward Off Heterodoxy" (1861) to "Death Blow to Corrupt Doctrines" (trans. 1870):

Understanding the Development of Anti-Christian Literature in China from 1861-1870

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History 328

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5 December 2012

I. Introduction:

Following the Second Opium War in 1858 and the Treaty of Tientsin (ratified in 1860), Christian missionaries gained full toleration and the right to propagate their religion in the interior of China. At the same time China was plagued by deep domestic upheaval, marked in particular by the Christian-inspired Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864). These events sparked a sharp increase in anti-Christian literature, especially in Hunan, which had both a tradition of this literature and collective action, as evidenced by their important role in suppressing the Taiping. In this paper, I examine two editions of the "A Record of Facts to Ward Off Heterodoxy" (*Pi-hsieh chi-shih*) one of the most virulently and widely circulated anti-Christian texts. For the most part, I focus on the 1861 original published by a member of the Hunanese gentry in the wake of the Taiping Rebellion. Later, I consider the significance of an 1870 English translation by foreign missionaries of "Death Blow to Corrupt Doctrines" (*Pi-shsieh shih-lu*) a mid-1860s derivative of the 1861 parent work, authored by "the gentry and the people" and likely intended for wider audience beyond Hunan. I argue that the evolution of these two editions sheds important insight into the development of anti-Christian attitudes. Anchored in Hunan, anti-Christian literature was then disseminated more broadly and informed popular opinion to the point of inciting violence against Christians, notably the 1870 Tientsin Massacre, which convinced missionaries that translating the work was necessary precisely to alert each other and the West of the extent of anti-Christian attitudes.

II. The Author of the 1861 "A Record of Facts to Ward Off Heterodoxy":

Crucial to understanding the 1861 work and its chief motivation is the background and identity of its author. The author does not identify himself explicitly by name, but rather calls himself "the most heartbroken man." While the identity of the author cannot be determined with absolute certainty, the content of the book and secondary scholarship strongly supports the notion that the author was a Hunanese member of the gentry from Changsha likely with a military

background.[1] In the "An-cheng" section of the book, Paul Cohen explains that the author relays eyewitness accounts that locals had with Christian missionaries and converts, and eleven out of nineteen items either occurred in Hunan, mostly in the Changsha area, or were recorded by a person from Hunan.[2] Furthermore, other secondary sources, namely the missionaries in the 1870 edition, point to the author's "first-class literary abilities" as evidence of his status as a member of the gentry. They assert that the sources the author consults, the fact that he had knowledge and access to official documents, and the skill in which he analyzes this full-range of sources, strongly suggests that he was a well-educated member of the gentry. The connection between the author's gentry status and his anti-Christian sentiment also accords with the fact the gentry were overwhelmingly opposed to Christianity, and in Hunan, played an important role in suppressing the Taiping. Protectors of Confucianism, the orthodox order, and security, the gentry opposed Christianity and the Taipings, regarding both as grave threats to as established religious and social doctrines. Describing the role of gentry, Cohen explains:

> "At all times…they acted as the principal repository of traditional Confucian moral and intellectual values, in which capacity they served as teachers; contributed to the establishment of local private schools…constructed and repaired the examination halls; contributed to the upkeep of Confucian temples….and assisted the authorities in indoctrinating the common people of the area with the official ideology."[3]

Thus, in a sense as well, Cohen suggests that the gentry regarded the missionaries as threatening because they usurped some of their traditional duties, in particular, their role as teachers and intermediaries, helping the state in spreading official ideology to the common people.

In addition, there is considerable textual evidence that the author had a military background and, sought to use the text as a means of motivating opposition to the ongoing Christian-inspired Taiping.[4] The author clearly had intimate military knowledge and proposes a plan in the appendix of the book, entitled "Measures for Militia Defense" designed to combat the

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[1] Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 281.
[2] Ibid., 280.
[3] Ibid., 83.
[4] Ibid., 47.

Taiping rebels and root out Christianity. This section includes some twenty detailed proposals regarding administration and finance of militia units, establishment of ancestral shrines, regular inspections of homes, capital punishment for Christians and those who protect them, and finally, drills for militiamen and lectures on the evils of Christianity and virtues of the sacred edict prohibiting Christianity.[5] The clearest indication that the author was addressing the Taiping is the actual fact that he refers to them by name. He claims that the militia system should not only defend the region against encroachment by foreigners but also should guard against these domestic agents of subversion. Here, he extorts the militia units to "eliminate all traces of local robbers and assist the government troops in rounding up escaped remnants of the Hung-chin tsei (the Taipings)."[6]

Certainly the author's military links are credible given that Hunanese armies, led by the gentry, played a key role in collective action to suppress the Taiping, both military and ideologically. During the Taiping, Hunanese gentry organized small militia units to combat there are.[7] While scholars are in debate over the precise identity of the author, both the Chinese Catholic scholar Fang Hao and the missionary Griffith John claim that he was likely an important member of the "Hunan Braves," a well-known regional army that helped defeat the Taiping. Alvyn Austin expounds on the role that the Hunan armies, especially the "Hunan Braves" played in the military *and* ideological fight against the Taiping:

> "Changsha, the capital of Hunan, had resisted the Taiping siege for several years, in large part because Zeng Guofan, the provincial viceroy, organized regional armies of "braves" (so called because they wore chest badges with the character "brave"). The military campaign against the Taipings was accompanied by a propaganda campaign against the "god-worshippers" in general, i.e. the Protestants who worshiped Shangdi, the One True God."[8]

Several elements of Austin's description are significant in relation to the 1861 work. First is the fact that Changsha, where the author likely came from, was under siege during the Taiping

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[5] Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 56-57.
[6] Ibid., 56.
[7] Ibid., 83.
[8] Austin, *China's Million: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905,* 116.

Rebellion and played a central military role in suppressing the rebels. This lends credence to the idea that the author came from military background, was exposed to the Taiping, and wrote his tract largely in the midst and in response to the Rebellion. Further buttressing the notion that the author wrote this text in response to the Rebellion is Austin's assertion that the "Hunan Braves" were engaged in both military action against the Taiping and pursued a more general "propaganda campaign" to root out Christianity. Similarly the Chinese scholar Fang Hao's contends that the book was likely constructed as part of an "ideological program for combatting the rebels," and was undertaken by a member of the "Braves."[9] In Hunan, following the Taiping there was a "torrent of violently anti-Christian pamphlets and tracts."[10]

III. Content of the 1861 Edition:

The author of the book seeks to foment anti-Christian sentiment through a number of strategies. First, the very title and style of the work, emphasizing the heterodox nature of Christianity, draws on a deeply entrenched and powerful tradition of heterodox-orthodox literature, which had an especially strong tradition in Hunan. "Hsieh," translated by Western writers into "heterodox," sometimes carries in Chinese additional overtones of "supernatural" and an "uncanny power" which leads the individual "astray," and "other contexts it plainly refers to the gamut of excesses and irregularities in the sexual sphere."[11] These labels of "heterodox" had a long tradition in China, and were typically used to "stigmatize the beliefs and practices of those who professed allegiance to other and divergent norms."[12] This category had a powerful tradition in China, and had existed before Christianity. Historically in literature, the label had applied to Buddhism and other non-Confucian religions. As Guy Puyramond explains, "The Confucian authorities had always considered heterodox sects as threats against the established social order.

[9] Cohen, 279.
[10] Austin, *China's Millions*, 116.
[11] Cohen, 5.
[12] Ibid.

This had been the case with Buddhism and Taoism before they became recognized as part of the orthodoxy."[13]

Moreover, this heterodox-orthodox literature, as it related to Christianity, had a particularly strong foundation in Hunan. The Hunanese historian-geographer Wei Yuan's (1794-1856) *Hai-kuo t'u-chih*, first issued in 1844, contained a section of Christianity. This work represented one of the "most comprehensive compendia of anti-Christian lore to date" and it became a seminal "source book for future anti-Christian thought."[14] In the 1852 edition, Yuan details the heterodox practices of Christians, which include missionaries' use of medicine and spells, a common theme in "A True Record of Facts to Ward Off Heterodoxy." He suggests that missionaries bribe converts, that "fellow religionists of both sexes lodge together in the same buildings"; and that "pastors are notified when death approaches so that they can come and gouge out the eyes of the dying."[15] These charges and tales of Christian impropriety are ones repeated in the 1861 "A Record of Facts to Ward Off Heterodoxy." Thus in using them, the author was drawing on pre-existing and popularly held beliefs regarding Christianity.

The author draws on tradition in other ways as well. He seeks to profess his allegiance to the 18th century Chinese Yongzheng Emperor, who took a strong anti-Christian stance. He begins the book on "a note of official sanctity with the Yung-Cheng Emperor's *Sacred Edict* on heterodoxy."[16] Here the author is appealing to traditional sources of Chinese authority, identifying himself with the respected and stridently anti-Christian Yongzheng Emperor. Implicitly he is suggesting that even though currently the Chinese state has wavered in its strongly anti-Christian position, he exhorts readers to not forget the *Sacred Edict* and act to protect their country against the influence of Christianity.

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[13] Puyraimond, "The Ko-lao Hui and the Anti-Foreign Incidents of 1891," in *Popular Movements and Secret* Societies in China, 1840-1950, edited by Jean Chesneaux, 122.
[14] Cohen, 36.
[15] Ibid., 40.
[16] Ibid., 49.

In the following sections of the book, the author seeks to discredit and impugn Christianity. He portrays Christians and their practices as strange and "stringently tabooed" and refutes the possible legitimacy and truth of Christian doctrine. The subject matter is quite wide-ranging, from "Christian history and practices (real and unreal) to a whole galaxy of evils," purportedly introduced into China by the West.[17] Taken altogether, Cohen describes the contents of the work as tremendously heterogeneous:

> "The author gives an account, which through professing to be a compilation of the teachings of the heterodox Christian religion, is actually a curious patchwork of Christian history and practices, tales of lascivious behavior of priests and converts, weird and obscene barbarian customs, and esoteric terminology."[18]

Many of these practices involve improper sexual norms that the author claims Christians regularly take part in. As Cohen explains, such charges of "sexual license and perversion have always…been the favorite devices by which indignant upholders of the Orthodox Order have sought to incriminate their real or imagined foes."[19] Drawing on this scatological material and "attributing to the foreigner" such taboo practices signals the author's attempt to "outrage his readers' sensibilities"[20] and perhaps incite mass action against Christians.[21]

Distinctive in the author's approach is a certain mixing of facts regarding Christianity and falsehoods. For example, interspersed his discussion of Sunday prayer services is the claim that priests are castrated in their youth and that converts, following prayer services, commit sodomy with the priests.[22] He also claims that in Western culture, women are revered but he charges this stems from Christian society's obsession with women's menstrual flow – and that the "barbarians" [Christians] drink it.[23] Again, these descriptions of Christian practices are designed to outrage the reader. This strategy of mixing fact and fiction is effective in large part because the

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[17] Cohen, 50.
[18] Ibid., 48.
[19] Cohen, 58.
[20] Ibid., 50.
[21] Ibid., 58.
[22] Ibid., 49.
[23] Ibid., 50.

Chinese audience did not necessarily have familiarity with standard Christian practices, and accordingly, would have trouble deciphering between facts and falsehoods.[24]

In addition, in a latter section of the book, the author criticizes and refutes the legitimacy of Christian Doctrine. He challenges traditional Christian doctrine, for example John's exposition of such doctrines as the Trinity, redemption, and the final judgment. He questions that if God is truly so merciful, "why is it that from ancient time on there have been no lack of tyrannical rulers?"[25] Refuting Christian doctrine in a straight-forward manner, the tone of this section is markedly different from the previous ones and makes no reference to "licentious behavior" and "sexual perversion."[26]

However, the final, "An-cheng" section of the book, resumes the lurid tone of much of the foregoing part of the book. This section includes a collection of over four-dozen items from a combination of written and oral sources, which detail a variety of salacious practices the "barbarian rebels"/Christian missionaries took part in, including bribery, sorcery, and improper sexual acts with converts.[27] Furthermore, many of these stories are said to have occurred in Hunan, reaffirming how the work was produced there. An appendix to the book opens with a "ballad to ward off heterodoxy" which summarizes the inflammatory material in the book, and signaling the author's express desire, as discussed in his preface, that the ballad be intended for popular consumption, the song is "cast in rhymed form and written in semi-colloquial style."[28] The second appendix is the "Measures for Militia Defense," mentioned in the foregoing of the paper.

IV. Circulation of the 1861 Edition

Precise information regarding the 1861 edition's circulation is difficult to confirm. Cohen does cite an 1870 British Consul Report, claiming that copies of the 1861 edition were sent to

[24] Cohen, 49.
[25] Ibid., 52.
[26] Ibid., 54.
[27] Cohen, 55.
[28] Ibid., 56.

"various district magistrates in Hoopeh" (Hubei) "for gratuitous circulation."[29] Also in 1868, inhabitants of Nanyang, Hunan claimed that they had seen copies of the 1861 edition while a French minister to Peking claimed in 1873 that anti-missionary activity in Hunan was the direct result of the work's distribution there.[30] From all of these reports, it is clear that throughout the 1860s, the book and the derivatives it spawned achieved increasingly widespread circulation throughout Hunan and neighboring provinces. As it was increasingly disseminated to a broad segment of the population, ranging from officials to common people alike, its influence seems to have grown too, helping spur episodes of violence against Christians. The book was so notorious and widely circulated that missionaries became familiar with it and believed there was a real link between its vitriolic content and anti-Christian attitudes and violence.

V. 1870 Translated Version

Indeed, on August 18, 1870, Catholic missionaries translated a derivative (*Pi-hesieh shih-lu*) of the 1861 work, authored by the "gentry and the people" and likely written in the mid-1860s, sometime after the end of the Taiping Rebellion (1864). Like the 1861 version, the author maintains that his motivation is to protect Confucianism against the heterodoxy of Christianity. However, from the title of this derivate, "the gentry and the people," it is indicative that the work seeks a more popular audience than the parent version. Addressed to this broad audience, it seems to advocate violent action against the Christians. The author's tone carries a certain urgency, exhorting its readers to retaliate against the Christians. The author states: "Their crimes are great, their wickedness extreme. Simply to burn their houses is not enough to cover their sins."[31]

Further internal textual evidence from the derivative edition provides information on the nature and place of its publication. Most obviously, it is a derivative because the author in the post-face, praises and author of the parent work.[32] Likely it was published between 1864-1868,

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[29] Cohen, China and Christianity, 47.
[30] Idem
[31] The Gentry and the People, *Death Blow to Corrupt Doctrines*, trans., 60.
[32] Cohen, 281.

undoubtedly after the defeat of the Taiping Rebellion, because in the post-face, the author refers to their successful suppression.[33] "Now on the extermination of the Canton rebels, and while the Nien Fei," another group of rebels, he states, were "yet unsuppressed."[34] In addition, this mid-1860s derivative was likely written by a non-Hunanese scholar, and printed and distributed outside of Hunan. In the comparable "An-cheng" section of this version, the author omits most of the items relating directly to Hunan. In the parent work, this section includes approximately nineteen eyewitness accounts, of which eleven take place in Hunan or were told to the author by someone from Hunan. By contrast, in the comparable section of the *Pi-shsieh shih-llu* contains only five oral reports, and only one of these accounts is identified with a particular place (Siangtan, Hunan).[35] The fact that the author includes far fewer references to Hunan does suggest that he was not from there and intended the book for a broader audience outside of Hunan. As Cohen speculates, references to Hunan, naturally, would be most effective in "stirring up the emotions of the Hunanese."[36] However, if the work were indeed intended for a broader audience outside of Hunan, such references would be less utile.

VI. Missionaries' Decision to Translate the Work

The missionaries' 1870 decision to translate the work seems somewhat curious. After all, why would they want to distribute such inflammatory material impugning them and their religion? In their preface to the translated version, the missionaries explain the rational for their translation. They believe the work is an accurate representation of anti-Christian attitudes and, coming on the heels of the Tientsin Massacre (June 1870), they assert it was a precipitating factor fueling this episode of anti-Christian violence:

> "In the present juncture of affairs in China we regard it as too much importance to be withheld from the foreign public, believing as we do that it is a remarkably truthful representation of the animus of the ruling and literary classes of China toward foreigners…We believe also that it has been largely instrumental in giving rise to the vile

[33] Idem.
[34] The Gentry and the People, 64.
[35] Ibid., 280.
[36] Ibid., 281.

> and slanderous stories concerning foreign residents and native Christians which have recently spread throughout China ; and that it sheds important light on the means by which the recent massacre at Tien-tsin was brought about."[37]

Accordingly, it was the extent of anti-Christian violence in 1870 that really persuaded the missionaries of the need to translate the work. The Tientsin Massacre (June 1870) represented the decade-long culmination of Chinese-foreign friction over the missionary presence.[38] Tientsin was, of course, the site of 1858 treaties ending the Opium War and granting the foreign powers and missionaries significant privileges, and it continued to be important in treaty negotiations between the Chinese and French. In June 1870, the inhabitants of Tientsin attacked French priests and nuns, as they believed the Church, which administered the orphanage of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul in Tientsin, was engaging in such practices as the abuse of children and patients. One critical source of these popularly held beliefs regarding the Christians mistreatment of children had been circulating in the 1860s anti-Christian writings and prior to then in anti-Christian writings.[39] In the minds of these missionaries, the link between "Death Blow to Corrupt Doctrines" and similar works and anti-Christian violence was not imagined and tenuous but quite real.

VII. Conclusion:

As demonstrated, Hunan was a very important source of anti-Christian literature and the 1861 work "A Record" was disseminated widely and grew in influence from 1861 to 1870. The attitudes contained in the work drew on a long tradition of anti-Christian sentiment. As well, they increased in intensity in response to the Taiping Rebellion. Subsequently, from 1861 to 1870, in the midst of the ardently anti-Christian sentiment of this period, they were adapted for a broader audience beyond Hunan and widely circulated, whether through direct reading or rumor. Indeed, "A Record" spawned many derivatives, which became increasingly influential in informing

[37] Missionaries, Preface to "Death Blow to Corrupt Doctrines," by the Gentry and the People (August 18, 1870), iii.
[38] Cohen, *China and Christianity,* 233.
[39] Cohen, 229.

popular opinion and helping foment violence, culminating in the 1870 Tientsin Massacre and the missionaries' 1870 translation of "A Death Blow to Corrupt Doctrines."

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