

Playing with the Boxers in German Youth Media

Jeff Bowersox

In 1900 or 1901, the Otto Maier publishing house in Ravensburg (today, as Ravensburger AG, still globally known as a games-maker) hoped to take commercial advantage of the recent military conflict in North China. They worked with a designer named M. Mila to develop the *Neues China-Spiel* (*New China Game*, fig. 1 and 2), but the product never moved beyond the planning stage.¹ Because it never reached stores and because no written description or rules have survived, we do not know how one played or won the game, but the materials that remain provide a striking and complicated picture of the events and context as mediated back to Germany.

There are some intriguingly specific visual references to the campaigns against the Boxers, details that would only have been familiar to audiences keeping up regularly with reportage. The Dagu Forts at the mouth of the Beihe River, pictured in the fifth row flying the German naval standard, guarded the route to Tianjin and Beijing and were taken on 17 June 1900, although in fact German forces did not play a large role in that effort.² The *SMS Brandenburg* in the top-left square was Germany's first ocean-going battleship and thus symbolized the new *Weltpolitik* kicked off by the German seizure of Jiaozhou Bay³ in 1897.⁴ It also carried German Field Marshal Count Alfred von Waldersee, pictured in the fifth row, and his troops as they arrived in China in September 1900. This was too late for the fighting but just in time for the occupation, organized looting, and murderous retribution that followed.⁵ Next to Waldersee sits the respected Chinese diplomat Li Hongzhang (1823–

¹ Neues China-Spiel von M. Mila (1900), Ravensburger Archive. The only traces of the game today are prospects of the box cover and the “board.” My thanks to Roland Einholz at the archive for generously providing copies of these materials.

² See below for the commemoration of the gunboat *Itlis*.

³ Note on romanization: Chinese names are rendered using the standard *Hanyu pinyin* system. Where contemporary spelling is helpful to understanding the source, these will follow the *pinyin* version in brackets. In the case of Jiaozhou, I follow standard practice by transliterating the geographical name into *pinyin* while spelling the name of the German colony Kiaochow (the conventional English spelling, the German spelling is Kiautschou).

⁴ Konrad Canis, *Von Bismarck zur Weltpolitik: Deutsche Außenpolitik 1890-1902* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1997), 223–76.

⁵ For descriptions of German military actions and varying interpretations of the causes for their brutality, see James L. Hevia, “Krieg als Expedition: Die alliierten Truppen unter Alfred Graf von Waldersee,” in *Kolonialkrieg in China: Die Niederschlagung der Boxerbewegung 1900-1901*, ed. Mechthild Leutner and Klaus Mühlhahn (Berlin: Links, 2007), 123–34; Dietlind Wünsche, “Feldpostbriefe aus China: ‘Jeden [sic!] Zehnten mindestens den Kopf ab in den aufrührerischen Gegenden...’,” ebd, 153–61; Susanne Kuss, *German Colonial Wars and the Context of Military Violence*, trans. Andrew Smith (Cambridge, MA:

1901), known both for his 1896 tour of Europe and the United States and for his role as a westerniser (his name in Chinese characters is shown in the topmost row). He resisted the Boxers and their sympathisers from within the imperial administration and signed the peace deal that ended the war on terms very favourable to the allied powers. The image in the second row next to the junk may just be a generic Chinese arch, but it could also be a fanciful imagining of the planned memorial to Baron Clemens von Ketteler, the German ambassador, whose killing, on 20 June 1900, provided Germans with a rallying cause.⁶

Many of these images were probably not familiar to young Germans, so, as with many contemporary games, the rules accompanying the *Neues China-Spiel* likely provided brief lessons on the events and main characters. But more generic images provide a sense of how the designer framed the conflict. The angry Boxers armed with swords and rifles fill the role of aggressive, probably irrational, adversaries, but players need not fear. Orderly German men in the crisp and distinctive uniform of the East Asian Expeditionary Corps appear ready to meet the challenge. The result of the confrontation for the Chinese is clear: destroyed homes, grieving women, forlorn children, captured standards and soldiers, and a defeated army.

Beyond the level of specificity in some of the illustrations, there is little surprising in this product so far. It is clear that Otto Maier opportunistically hoped to take advantage of exciting, dramatic events taking place in an exotic land. After all, many looked with anticipation on the war in China as the recently unified Germany's first large-scale war, an opportunity to revive the mythical glory days of 1870–1871 that had been lost in the divisions of the Bismarckian era.⁷ Further, for many the war in China brought the Great Powers together to defend modern civilisation. Participation could represent the youthful Germany's

Harvard University Press, 2017), 13–36; Bernd Martin, “Soldatische Radikalisierung und Massaker. Das deutsche Erste und Zweite Seebataillon im Einsatz im ‘Boxerkrieg’ in China 1900,” *Militär-geschichtliche Zeitschrift* 69 (2010): 221–41.

⁶ On the building of the monument and its place in the development of Chinese nationalist narratives, see Klaus Mühlhahn, “Zwischen Sühne und nationaler Schande: Die Sühnebestimmungen des Boxerprotokolls 1901 und der Aufstieg des chinesischen Nationalismus,” in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Boxeraufstand*, ed. Susanne Kuß and Bernd Martin (Munich: Iudicium, 2002), 262–68. On the death of Ketteler, see Dominik Nowak, “Der Tod des deutschen Gesandten Clemens von Ketteler,” in *Kolonialkrieg in China: Die Niederschlagung der Boxerbewegung 1900-1901*, ed. Mechthild Leutner and Klaus Mühlhahn (Berlin: Links, 2007), 111–117.

⁷ Yixu Lü, “German Colonial Fiction on China: The Boxer Uprising of 1900,” *German Life and Letters* 59:1 (2006): 98–9. On the mixed successes of building notions of national unity around the events of 1870–71, see Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), especially 27–96.

first real grasp for a proper place in the sun.⁸ Along these same lines, one could reasonably make the case that the *Neues China-Spiel* was a form of propaganda designed to justify a controversial military endeavour as a patriotic or colonialist duty. It is certainly true that this game was unusual in its exclusive focus, even to the point of exaggeration, on the German military's role in defeating the enemy, apparently single-handedly. Or perhaps, one could argue that the *Neues China-Spiel* was an expression of a latent but long-gestating anti-Chinese sentiment awaiting an opportunity to be released.⁹

And yet, as most of the images in the *Neues China-Spiel* indicate, there are other processes at work beyond commercial opportunism, patriotic boosterism, and colonial denigration. Fewer than one-third of the colourful illustrations in the *Neues China-Spiel* relate directly to the Boxers; the rest present a China apparently at odds with the rebels. The less savoury aspects of Chinese society—embodied in the dead dogs, rats, and insects on plates—add a light-hearted note to an otherwise staid survey of distinctive cultural features. Busts in the bottom row offer 'types' in ethnographic style, while various typically Chinese things reflect both a fashionable *chinoiserie* and an undeniable tradition of Chinese civilisation.¹⁰ And, like the game's title, the pastoral pastiche decorating the box cover (fig. 2) provides no obvious indication of the disorder found on the game's board. A well-dressed mandarin, a well-bred lady, and a well-armed soldier interact genially while a junk passes quietly on the river.

What should we make of such a playful juxtaposition of current events, patriotic references, adventurous characters, and ethnographic details? Can such an apparently trivial product help us understand the formation of Germans' attitudes toward the Boxers and China more generally? In what follows, I will answer these questions by surveying the presentation of China and the Boxers in various media aimed at youth up to 1914. I examine toys and games and the marks they left in toymakers' and store catalogues, contemporary

⁸ In this regard, Germans' position was different than that of the British, who had an established and far more extensive sphere of influence in China and a much longer history of colonial 'rebellions' (especially in 1857) that reminded many of the fragility of imperial rule. This anxiety explains British youth authors' relative enthusiasm for thematizing the Boxer war, when compared to the apparent reluctance of German writers for young people. See Ross G. Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 98–129.

⁹ Changke Li, *Der China-Roman in der deutschen Literatur 1890-1930: Tendenzen und Aspekte* (Regensburg: Roderer, 1992), 7–24, 42–4, 52–5; Mechthild Leutner, "'Bezopfte Heiden': Zeitgenössische Bilder von Boxern und Chinesen," in *Kolonialkrieg in China: Die Niederschlagung der Boxerbewegung 1900–1901*, ed. Klaus Mühlhahn and Mechthild Leutner (Berlin: Links, 2007), 186–91.

¹⁰ It is important to note that an apparent taste for Chinese fashions did not necessarily reflect a sincere engagement with China. The Chinese characters on the banner, for example, are gibberish articulated in a typography that seems to date from a century or more before. On contemporary perceptions of Chinese culinary habits, see Zhenhuan Zhang, *China als Wunsch und Vorstellung: Eine Untersuchung der China- und Chinesenbilder in der deutschen Unterhaltungsliteratur 1890-1945* (Regensburg: Roderer, 1993), 102–4.

commentary, or memoirs. I also draw from youth novels and a select range of popular and influential youth periodicals: the mainstream middle-class boys' and girls' magazines *Der gute Kamerad* (*The Faithful Comrade*) and *Das Kränzchen* (*The Friendship Circle*); the Catholic, middle-class *Efeuranken* (*Ivy Branches*) and the youth supplement to *Die katholischen Missionen* (*The Catholic Missions*); the Protestant *Der Jünglings-Bote* (*The Youth-Messenger*, aimed at working-class readers and after 1904 known as *Der Leuchtturm*), *Aufwärts!* (*Forwards!*, aimed at middle-class readers), and *Missionsblatt für unsere liebe Jugend* (*Mission Paper for Our Dear Youth*); and the socialist *Arbeiter-Jugend* (*Worker-Youth*).¹¹ These products, for the most part, reflected a particular sort of plurimediality that began around the turn of the twentieth century. That is to say, changes in technology and the commercial marketplace enabled new combinations of textual, visual, and material representations. Producers could fire the imagination and convey authenticity by mixing and matching colourful illustrations or realistic pictures with sensational narratives or scientific details. And, for the first time, they could offer their products at prices affordable to the masses, which encouraged new, popular genres that challenged the authority of cultural elites. As we will see, this new commercial environment offered producers unprecedented flexibility and pushed cultural arbiters to impose new limits on the market.

I proceed from two basic premises. The first is that commercial media were crucial for shaping Germans' perceptions of the world from their earliest days. These products did more than merely reflect prevailing scientific or political discourses; they channelled and reframed such 'authoritative' or 'official' knowledge to accomplish a wide range of purposes. Indeed, it was educators and propagandists who found they had to adapt to the obvious successes of mass culture. To sharpen the point, the dynamics of commercial culture encouraged a particular, colonial framing of Euro-American expansion in China and elsewhere around the globe, and educators' and propagandists' interventions in this culture made the colonial frame seem self-evident.¹²

My second premise, to use a musical metaphor, is that the China discourse of the era was polyphonic. Although dominated by a powerfully Sinophobic melody, it nevertheless also harboured a longstanding Sinophilic countermelody that was sometimes consonant and

¹¹ For more on these publications and their relationship to each other, see Jeff Bowersox, *Raising Germans in the Age of Empire: Youth and Colonial Culture in Germany, 1871–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 119–64.

¹² David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 13–4; John Phillip Short, *Magic Lantern Empire. Colonialism and Society in Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

sometimes dissonant.¹³ Various coexisting interpretations provided a grab-bag of sorts from which producers cobbled together different resonant combinations, as illustrated in the *Neues China-Spiel*, as they sought to reach and teach their audiences.¹⁴ Appreciating this variety allows us to see how producers transmitted and adapted stereotypes and how they reacted to the limits the marketplace imposed on their creativity. Products for young people were inevitably implicated in broader debates over the future of the German nation in a modern, global age: would Germany rise to a position of international prominence, or would the industrial modernity on which German power depended ultimately devour its children?

Proceeding from these two premises helps us unravel the puzzling uses of the Boxers in German youth media. The war was undoubtedly important for changing perceptions of China, as well as for encouraging attention to German colonialism more generally; during and after the conflict a more positive portrayal of the Chinese, especially those under German tutelage, came to predominate. At the same time, the war itself and the sorts of negative depictions that suffused German media more generally made only limited appearances in products aimed at young people.¹⁵ The campaign against the Boxers provided an opportunity for producers to update and re-package familiar Chinese stereotypes, but most did so without engaging with the war in detail. As I will suggest, the fantastical Boxer type, a brutal and backward creature bent on the destruction of Europeans and European modernity itself, was a sensationalised character who pushed the boundaries of what was respectable in youth media.

¹³ Very generally speaking, from the thirteenth century through the Enlightenment, a general admiration for China predominated in Europe. From the late eighteenth century, negative portrayals came to the fore, a shift that became ever more pronounced until the suppression of the Boxers convinced many that China's long decadence might be coming to an end. See Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11–79; Weigui Fang, *Das Chinabild in der deutschen Literatur, 1871-1933: Ein Beitrag zur komparatistischen Imagologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1992), 75–145; Ingrid Schuster, *Vorbilder und Zerrbilder. China und Japan im Spiegel der deutschen Literatur 1773-1890* (Bern: Lang, 1988); Zhang, *China als Wunsch und Vorstellung*, 254–62.

¹⁴ This is most thoroughly articulated in George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 361–507. See also Mechthild Leutner, "Deutsche Vorstellungen über China und die Chinesen," in *Von der Kolonialpolitik zur Kooperation. Studien zur Geschichte der deutsch-chinesischen Beziehungen*, ed. Kuo Heng-Yü (Munich: Minerva Publikation, 1986), 401–4; Colin Mackerras, ed., *Sinophiles and Sinophobes: Western Views of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially xxv–xxvi; Yixu Lü, "Germany's War in China: Media Coverage and Political Myth," *German Life and Letters* 61:2 (April 2008): 202–14; Fang, *Chinabild*, 19–35; Zhang, *China als Wunsch und Vorstellung*, 105. On the range of characteristics attributed to China and the Chinese, see Leutner, "Deutsche Vorstellungen," 411–9; Zhang, *China als Wunsch und Vorstellung*, 27–57; Fang, *Chinabild*, 17–9.

¹⁵ For derogatory portrayals of China around the time of the Boxers, see Kisôn Kim, *Theater und Ferner Osten* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1982), 171–85; Li, *China-Roman*, 7–42; Fang, *Chinabild*, 213–9. For some of the more limited contemporary efforts to complicate or even challenge stereotypes, see Ingrid Schuster, *China und Japan in der deutschen Literatur 1890-1925* (Bern: Francke, 1977), 147–86; Leutner, "Deutsche Vorstellungen," 427–30; Christiane C. Günther, *Aufbruch nach Asien: Kulturelle Fremde in der deutschen Literatur um 1900* (Munich: Iudicium, 1988); Fang, *Chinabild*, 145–212; Kim, *Theater und Ferner Osten*, 197–233.

If producers wished to avoid the wrath of the critics who played an important role in vetting youth media, they had to balance the appeal of the exotic and sensational with a measure of enriching or instructional content.¹⁶ Furthermore, the political controversy surrounding the war would have made many producers aiming at a broad audience wary of alienating potential consumers. If China had the store of adventurous possibilities that made the plains, deserts, and jungles of the Americas, Africa, and India so ubiquitous in youth media, it might have been worth risking the controversy, but China's ancient and evident civilization greatly limited its presumed appeal to young people. As a consequence, only those tendentiously promoting visions of patriotic or Christian solidarity found it useful to engage with the war and its adventurous potential.¹⁷

This was even more true once the excitement over the events in North China had been replaced by news from other conflicts overseas. The emergence of less controversial and richer settings for exotic, colonial adventure continued to channel the Boxer war into a narrow range of stories celebrating past German military accomplishments and tales of Christian sacrifice and solidarity in the face of intense hardship. Less controversial, more flattering to German audiences, and glossed with the sheen of educational 'authenticity', a 'new China' came to predominate in toys and publications. This new China was represented as a colonised character, a docile and productive subject of the German empire and of modernity more generally.¹⁸ Examining this shifting engagement with China can illustrate how a colonial worldview was produced and circulated at the dawn of mass culture. It allows us to do so without having to fall back reductively on the workings of propaganda or ideology for an explanatory framework but also without ignoring the broader implications of conditioning young people to see the wider world in colonial terms.

China as Colonial Education and Entertainment

¹⁶ Games makers like Otto Maier illustrate the point. Most sold a wide range of educational materials and incorporated instructional matter into most products, both to market them for potential use in the classroom and to ward off charges of crass sensationalism. Helmut Schwarz and Marion Faber, eds., *Die Spielmacher: J.W. Spear & Söhne – Geschichte einer Spielefabrik* (Nuremberg: Tümmels, 1997), 7, 12–13, 36; Otto Rundel et al., *Otto-Maier-Verlag Ravensburg 1883–1983: Hundert Jahre Verlagsarbeit* (Ravensburg: Otto Maier, 1983), 32–5, 62–133; Andreas Pollitz, *1883–1993: Hundert Jahre Otto Maier Verlag Ravensburg* (Ravensburg: Otto Maier, 1983), 59–70.

¹⁷ A notable and hardly trivial exception to this generalisation was the body of colportage dime novels (*Groschenhefte*) that relied upon the most sensational and grotesque of presentations. The lack of surviving texts makes it impossible to assess their uses of China and the Boxer war, but it is important to note that such novels operated to a great extent independently of the pressures I outline below. For some titles and contemporary critical commentary, see Li, *China-Roman*, 22–24; Kim, *Theater und Ferner Osten*, 177, 265.

¹⁸ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*, 211.

Portrayals of China in Germany cannot be considered in isolation but rather must be contextualised within a broader worldly education that took place within the realms of mass commercial culture and mass education. Around the turn of the twentieth century, young Germans had the world at their fingertips as never before. Whether in playthings, stories, and classroom lessons; in excursions to sites of leisure, like zoos, exhibitions, or film screenings; or in the advertisements that increasingly blanketed both cityscape and household pantry, young people were inundated with depictions of distant lands and peoples. Embedded in these depictions were the hierarchies of civilisation and race that underpinned the contemporary expansion of Euro-American influence around the globe. These hierarchies not only provided a handy and profitable frame of reference. They also allowed the new mass marketplace in youth leisure and education to become a forum for debating Germany's place within an unstable and competitive global order.¹⁹

The heterogeneous actors working within this marketplace found a colonial frame especially useful for entertaining and educating young Germans, not least because it proved highly adaptable to various purposes. Commercial producers were eager to exploit and shape young Germans' recognised interest in exotic settings populated with strange creatures. They simplified, sensationalised, and often creatively adapted physiognomic, ethnographic, or geographic differences. Doing so allowed them to catch the eye of a passer-by, to provide dramatic tension, and to flatter audiences expected to understand their relative superiority. The reform-minded commentators who attended the birth of mass culture looked on these efforts with a mixture of disgust and excitement. Critics decried the "trash and smut" (*Schmutz und Schund*) that irresponsibly appealed to the basest of human instincts, while others found in commercial entertainments tools for responsibly inspiring young people's imaginations. More accurate depictions that nevertheless drew on the wonder and excitement of an unruly colonial world could produce more effective, student-centred instruction and ultimately lead young people down the path to productive citizenship.²⁰ This call was taken up by educators, but also by producers who wanted to appear less profit-driven and by activists looking for new ways to reach their target audiences.²¹

¹⁹ See Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, especially 1–17, for a more in-depth survey.

²⁰ Kaspar Maase and Wolfgang Kaschuba, eds., *Schund und Schönheit: Populäre Kultur um 1900* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2001); Corey Ross, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 61–116.

²¹ Indeed, as activists of various sorts turned the consumer marketplace into an arena for fighting over the very future of the German nation, the boundaries among these categories (educator/entrepreneur/activist) blurred

All of these actors relied on a colonial shorthand that was easily recognisable, widely appealing, and readily available. For these very reasons, this shorthand was also flexible enough to be deployed in support of the widest possible projects, ranging from the most cynical profiteering to the noblest pedagogy and from patriotic mobilisation to international socialist solidarity. The result was a set of commonly articulated colonial assumptions about the relations between civilised and uncivilised peoples moulded into the widest variety of competing visions of the world and its relevance to Germany. Arguably more influential than the various campaigns of the state or its allies to shape public opinion, the dynamic interactions between consumers, producers, critics, and activists naturalised the imperialist expansion of the era by turning the non-European world into an object of both colonial instruction and fantasy.²²

The hype surrounding the Boxer war was an important catalyst for this broader development and dramatically expanded the attention paid to China more generally in German youth media. China had long played a role in young Germans' worldly education, albeit one that ebbed and flowed with current events. Certainly by the time of the Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860), middle-class family papers and youth journals, tin soldiers and other toys had made a Chinese man with queue into a stock exotic character populating the imaginary worlds of young Germans, at least of those who could afford such items.²³ While most Chinese representations evoked little more than exotic fancy, they could also convey more pointed lessons when public attention was drawn to China. Take for example a mid-century toy by the Sonneberg toymakers Louis Lindner and Sons, which appears to refer directly to Chinese superstitiousness and, perhaps more metaphorically, hostility toward foreigners; a Chinese man sits with a shocked expression on his face as a devil pops out of a can in front of him.²⁴

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, as producers began to target young audiences *en masse* and with a wide range of educational and commercial products, they increasingly cast China in the role of antagonist—sometimes admired and often despised—in

markedly. The efforts of such activists have always belied the utopian claims that consumer culture could fully transcend existing social divisions.

²² For a slightly different perspective that analyses the workings of colonialism in German culture with an eye toward the production of class, see Short, *Magic Lantern Empire*.

²³ On the queue as a marker of all that was wrong with China, see Zhang, *China als Wunsch und Vorstellung*, 27–34.

²⁴ Louis Lindner & Söhne, pattern book (ca. 1850), No. 4502, Deutsches Spielzeugmuseum Sonneberg (hereafter: DSS) SV2a. For a literary example, see the renowned youth writer Friedrich Gerstäcker's (1816–1872) 1847 treatise, which introduced young readers to the characteristic diligence of the Chinese as well as their closed-mindedness and willingness to subject themselves to tyrannical hierarchies; see Fang, *Chinabild*, 14–6.

a story about the expansion of modernity.²⁵ Geography textbooks, which served as a basic source of authoritative knowledge, framed world history in terms of the expansion of world trade. Europe led, while China, the ancient but declining civilisation, remained a closed-off hold-out whose stubbornness limited the entire globe's progress.²⁶ Commercial periodicals, which often drew directly from textbooks, added a variety of inflections to this message. Religious magazines like the Protestant *Der Jünglings-Bote* or the youth supplement to *Die katholischen Missionen* made the European missionary and his few Chinese converts into the agents of a moral modernisation, with emphasis on persecution by Confucian and Buddhist elites and the ignorant, often xenophobic peasants they held in thrall.²⁷ The popular middle-class girls' journal *Das Kränzchen* focused on women and girls—denied education and forced to bind their feet—as the victims of China's refusal to modernise.²⁸ Especially after the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), publications regularly used a contrast between a “closed” China and an “open” Japan to reinforce their broader narrative.

While China served as a suitable topic for instruction on Germany's and Europe's progressive roles in the modern world, it was less appealing as a fictional setting. The China novels by the popular writer Karl May (1842–1912) notwithstanding, authors of youth fiction turned more frequently to the plains, jungles, and deserts of the Americas, Africa, and South Asia than to the more “developed” and thus less inherently adventurous Middle Kingdom.²⁹

²⁵ On the development of the toy and youth literature industries, see David D. Hamlin, *Work and Play: The Production and Consumption of Toys in Germany, 1870–1914* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Bryan Ganaway, *Toys, Consumption, and Middle-class Childhood in Imperial Germany, 1871–1918* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2009); Heike Hoffmann, “Erziehung zur Moderne: Ein Branchenportrait der deutschen Spielwarenindustrie in der entstehenden Massenkongsumgesellschaft” (doctoral thesis, Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen, 1998); Reiner Wild, ed., *Geschichte der deutschen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990).

²⁶ Students in German schools first began to grapple with the wider world beyond Europe, including China, in the 1870s and 1880s. For more, see Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 54–80. For illustrative examples of portrayals of China in textbooks, see *Lehrbuch der Geographie für höhere Unterrichtsanstalten von Prof. Dr. H. A. Daniel*, ed. Alfred Kirchhoff, 36th edition (Halle an der Saale: Waisenhaus, 1873), 91; *E. v. Seydlitz'sche Geographie*, Ausgabe B: *Kleine Schul-Geographie*, ed. E. Oehlmann, 21st edition (Breslau: Hirt, 1892), 118; Alfred Kirchhoff, *Erdkunde für Schulen nach den für Preußen gültigen Lehrzielen*, II. Teil: Mittel- und Oberstufe (Halle an der Saale: Waisenhaus, 1893), 137.

²⁷ See the regular reports on mission stations and Chinese recruits or stories like “Gleichnis eines chinesischen Predigers,” *Der Jünglings-Bote* 41:8 (1887): 72; “Wie Li-Hoi-tsyä ein Jünger Jesu Christi wurde,” *Der Jünglings-Bote* 44:26 (1891): 204; “Aus Hai-Men,” *Die katholischen Missionen. Beilage für die Jugend* 5 (1877): 17–24; “Im Reiche der Mitte,” *Die katholischen Missionen. Beilage für die Jugend* 17 (1889): 3–4, 7–8, 11–12, 15–6, 19–20, 22–24; “Die Schiffbrüchigen,” *Die katholischen Missionen. Beilage für die Jugend* 26 (1897): 1–24.

²⁸ “Beim Thee,” *Das Kränzchen*, 2:32 (1889/1890): 435, 440; “Japanisches Mädchen,” *Das Kränzchen* 5:22 (1892/1893): 308; “Chinesische Damenfuß,” *Das Kränzchen* 8:32 (1895/1896): 446; “Über das japanische Kinderleben,” *Das Kränzchen* 11:34 (1898/1899): 477.

²⁹ On May's China novels, which formed only a small part of his larger oeuvre, see Zhang, *China als Wunsch und Vorstellung*, 106–25; Li, *China-Roman*, 56–62; Fang, *Chinabild*, 145–74; Schuster, *China und Japan*, 57–58.

The German seizure of Jiaozhou Bay in 1897—ostensibly a response to the murder of two German Catholic priests in Shandong province—brought China more forcefully into the German view. The rising tensions over foreign influence, with particular focus on the treatment of Christians and disorder in the countryside, provided new and encouraging storylines that authors and publishers could fit into established genres. In this way they could introduce China to young Germans.

Although not the first, the most ambitious and politicised effort to make China into a scene of adventure was by Paul Lindenberg (1859–1942), prominent editor, journalist, and author of historical and war novels and travel literature. In his novel *Fritz Vogelsang: Abenteuer eines deutschen Schiffsjungen in Kiautschou* (*Fritz Vogelsang: Adventure of a German Cabin Boy in Kiaochow*), Lindenberg started with the template of a coming-of-age story (*Bildungsroman*) and filled it with Chinese exoticism, ethnographic detail, and a patriotic lesson about the value of civilising Germany's newly acquired colony.³⁰ Bandits, pirates, starving soldiers, superstitious priests, closed-minded officials, and the disorder they channel and abet provide the narrative tension as well as the trials that mature Fritz from an innocent cabin boy into a purposeful sailor-to-be. In the scant breathing space between adventures, Fritz learns about China from a benevolent German family, a noble Chinese Christian convert, and a seedy American missionary. They teach him that China's problem is not inherent backwardness but rather self-interested elites who keep commoners in the grip of poverty and superstition. In their short-sighted zeal to protect their own station, Chinese leaders fail to see that China has long before stopped progressing and unnecessarily leaves the needy and defenceless to terrible lives. They persecute anyone attracted to foreign ideas, and thus the Chinese could not appreciate the progress offered by the Germans. Once freed from this system by the German occupation of Jiaozhou Bay, local residents soon express their satisfaction with the improvements that follow: new infrastructure, peace and order, and a lively economy. Having participated in the conquest himself and witnessed this development, Fritz is imbued with a patriotic sense of mission that completes his journey to maturity.³¹

Inspired by current events, Lindenberg's story tested the suitability of China as an adventurous setting and as a tool for instilling patriotic and Christian convictions in his readers. His attempt to fuse education, entertainment, and politics was not a straightforward

³⁰ Paul Lindenberg, *Fritz Vogelsang: Abenteuer eines deutschen Schiffsjungen in Kiautschou* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1899). For useful analysis, see Li, *China-Roman*, 64-67.

³¹ The story's denouement takes place when Fritz, having been taken prisoner by pirates who intend to attack a German unit by surprise, escapes and foils the attempt.

success, though. While *Fritz Vogelsang* reached a respectable 10,000 copies in two printings, reviews were mixed. In his critical literary guide, the colonialist Emil Sembritzki (*1869) lauded Lindenberg's realistic adventure, which incorporated textbook-style lessons in the form of character monologues. But this instructional content did not prevent the respected reformer Georg Ellendt (1840–1908) from dismissing it as an unsuitably sensationalist adventure tale and recommending that schools purge it from their libraries.³²

The conflicting reviews help us understand the contexts entrepreneurs worked within when, only a short while later, they rushed to take advantage of the Boxer uprising but were wary of portraying the Boxers themselves. Why did China become *au courant* while the cause of all the fuss—the Boxers themselves—remained relatively invisible in most youth media? The answer lies in the dynamics of a consumer marketplace that favoured broad appeals and punished controversy. Those who aimed at a broad audience had to take care not to alienate critics or potential consumers, and this meant they trafficked in the most generic stereotypes and uncontested facts. Those, like Lindenberg, with a narrower target audience could afford to toy with more explicit lessons and sensationalised portrayals and thereby risk the ire of political opponents and critics of commercial culture more generally. But all grappled with the central dilemma of how to make China accessible and interesting for young people, and in this quest the sort of adventure the Boxers offered was only of limited value.

Deploying the Boxers

As did all military engagements that involved Germans (and many that did not), the Boxer War appeared almost immediately in a wide range of youth media. Producers exploited audiences' vague familiarity with China by quickly plugging familiar details into existing media and formats, and most framed their products with appeals to an uncontroversially instructional mission that complemented predominant colonial modernisation narratives.

Sets of tin soldiers, nicknamed “newspapers in tin” because they appeared on store shelves within weeks of the event portrayed, were perhaps the first form through which young

³² Emil Sembritzki, ed., *Der Kolonialfreund: Kritischer Führer durch die volkstümliche deutsche Kolonial-Literatur* (Berlin: “Kolonie und Heimat” Verlagsgesellschaft, 1912), 130; Georg Ellendt, *Katalog für die Schülerbibliotheken höherer Lehranstalten nach Stufen und nach Wissenschaften geordnet*, 4th ed. (Halle: Waisenhaus, 1905), xxxiv. Ellendt did not feel any differently about Lindenberg's other novels.

Germans encountered a version of the Boxers.³³ For toymakers, working on razor-thin margins and reliant on beating competitors to the punch, speed was far more important than accuracy in detail. Thus they stored and recycled their moulds to take full advantage of any new event: Chinese figures who had fought the Opium Wars earlier in the century were pressed into service to fight again for the Boxers, and European figures from previous engagements (the Crimean and Franco-Prussian wars, various colonial engagements, etc.) marched to meet them. In this way, manufacturers like Wilhelm Heinrichsen could quickly produce very affordable sets (fig. 3) that made their way into children's—boys' above all—playrooms and classrooms, where they were highly valued as an instructional supplement.³⁴ Toymakers could also enhance the value of their sets through heightened, up-to-date detail and charge an appropriate premium. For the relatively expensive price of 4.50 marks, the Nuremberg toymaker M. Reiss offered 'The War in China,' a fifty-piece set of 40-mm figures that included grouped soldiers, a "Chinese house," a "large, modern tin warship, walls etc." What made the conflict particularly "interesting," according to the firm's catalogue, was the participation of "7 nations" (*sic*), each indicated with its respective flag; some of those army figurines were even outfitted in "their new tropical uniforms."³⁵

Whether recycled or made anew, such sets did little to explain the events but rather situated them within a longer history of "national" conflicts decorated with vaguely ethnographic details. Even though kids could play with them in ways unintended by producers, the point of such items was ultimately to educate on the course of the military campaign, with subtle biases in favour of the eventual victors. Reflecting general misperceptions about the degree of reforms undertaken by the Chinese military, sets of soldiers like those illustrated here gave the Chinese side antiquated weapons as well as far more wounded, fleeing, or surrendering figures.³⁶

³³ Erhard Schraudolph, "Tagesthemen aus der Spanschachtel – Zinnfiguren und Zeitgeschichte," in *Paradestücke: Zinnfiguren aus Nürnberg und Fürth*, ed. Helmut Schwarz (Nuremberg: Tümmels, 2000), 54.

³⁴ On the gendering and pedagogy of play, see Ganaway, *Toys*, 15–16, 40–64; Hamlin, *Work and Play*, 23–8, 38–55.

³⁵ One of the eight participating countries is missing, but which one is not clear from the prospect by Nürnberger Spielwaren-Manufactur M. Reiss, ca. 1902, 11, DSS SV83. For other manufacturers producing similar sets, see Klaus Gerteis, ed., *Abenteuerlust, Fernweh und koloniale Träume in deutschen Kinderzimmern: Zinnfiguren aus zwei Jahrhunderten (ergänzt durch populäre Abenteuerliteratur)* (Trier: GM-Press, 1989), 35; Helmut Schwarz (ed.), *Paradestücke: Zinnfiguren aus Nürnberg und Fürth* (Nuremberg: Tümmels, 2000), 61, 105; *Kolonialgeschichte im Kinderzimmer. Ein Gang durch die Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts im Rahmen der Wechselausstellung des Zinnfiguren Museums Zürich von September 1994 bis August 1995* (Zürich: Zinnfiguren Museum, 1994), 11.

³⁶ On Chinese military reforms and foreign perceptions thereof, see Heike Frick, "Die Boxer und die kaiserlichen Armeen der Qing-Regierung," in *Kolonialkrieg in China: Die Niederschlagung der Boxerbewegung 1900-1901*, ed. Mechthild Leutner and Klaus Mühlhahn (Berlin: Links, 2007), 96. More

Because of their textual components, board games offered more opportunity to flesh out the events and their context. Nevertheless, most remained resolutely focused on instructing the players merely on the course of events, with pastiches of familiar Chinese stereotypes for decoration. Like tin soldiers, games naturalised the conflict and China's defeat and provided a global frame for understanding Germany's participation.³⁷ The international interest in the uprising offered a golden opportunity for German toymakers to appeal to foreign markets already familiar with playthings "made in Germany," but emphasising the international cooperation was also an opportunity to subtly play up Germany's prominent place on the world stage.³⁸

The Leipzig publishers Hartmann & Wolf, for example, tried to cash in on both the novelty and international appeal of the Boxers with *Die Eroberung von Peking und die Befreiung der Gesandten* (The Conquest of Peking and the Liberation of the Ambassadors) (fig. 4 and 5).³⁹ An advertisement from November 1900 praised the game as "Current! Educational! New!" and pointed out that it incorporates the "newest events from the Chinese war."⁴⁰ The game also included instructions printed in five different languages. *Die Eroberung* followed the standard pattern for such educational "war" or "travel" games. Players choose to be one of the eight countries involved in the "liberation," each represented by a tin battleship and coloured flag, and roll the dice to see which would be the first to reach "Peking" and thereby free the trapped ambassadors. The race is complicated by stopping points meant to emphasize the actual course of the war. Each nation starts off from an appropriately different point on the board (Russia and France from Port Arthur; Germany, Austria, and Italy from Kiaochow (in the game, Kiau-tschou); England from Wei-hai-wei; America from Zhifu (Tschifu, present-day Yantai); Japan from Nagasaki) and follows individual sea routes that end at the Dagu (Taku) Forts, which each country must "bombard" with particular dice rolls before moving on land along railroad lines. Those unfortunate

generally, see Jane E. Elliot, *Some Did It for Civilisation, Some Did It for Their Country: A Revised View of the Boxer War* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2002).

³⁷ The *Neues China-Spiel* was actually exceptional in the extent to which it ignored the participation of other powers. All such games and wider accounts for young people ignored the tensions among the allies. See Bin Hu, "Contradictions and Conflicts among the Imperialist Powers at the Time of the Boxer Movement," *Chinese Studies in History* 20:3/4 (1987): 156–74; Hevia, "Krieg als Expedition," 132.

³⁸ Claims to German global leadership were most often made with reference to General Alfred von Waldersee (1832–1904), whose formal role as the supreme commander of allied forces was a matter of particular pride for patriotic commentators. On the strategies pursued by German tin toy makers as they tailored their presentation of international events for non-domestic audiences, see Schraudolph, "Tagesthemen aus der Spanschachtel," 56–61.

³⁹ *Die Eroberung von Peking und die Befreiung der Gesandten* (Leipzig: Hartmann & Wolf, 1900). My thanks to Dieter Mensenkamp for providing me with a copy of the game from his private collection.

⁴⁰ Advertisement in *Die Woche*, 24 November 1900.

enough to land directly on the “obstructions” of Tianjin (Tien-tsin), Beicang (Pei-tsang), and Yangcun (Yang-tsun) must retreat a number of spaces and try again. The game ends with an exact dice roll landing on the Chinese capital. The narrow focus on the relentless progress toward the liberation of the ambassadors (who are presented on the box cover as martyrs protecting Chinese traditions—pagodas etc.—from the Chinese dragons) distilled the intervention down to a simple story: a single dastardly act had justified an international invasion that was bound, in the end, to achieve its target.⁴¹ In an effort to appeal to educators, promoters also claimed the game would enrich “geographic awareness.”⁴² As with travel and war games more generally, the massive, realistic, and often very detailed maps that dominated the board provided not only the setting for the action but also a sheen of academic authority.

In *Die Eroberung von Peking*, as in games and toys more generally, the big picture remained implicit or incomplete. Various print media could offer more explicit explanations of the conflict and its consequences, but, remarkably, the Boxers were often absent, little more than an implied presence. Many youth periodicals did not even take the opportunity to recount the events but instead focused on framing the conflict. This is not at all surprising in a journal like the Catholic *Efeuranken*, which did not generally mention current events but in 1900 and 1901 nevertheless included a pair of reports on education and the unfortunate lives of children in China when compared with Japan.⁴³ It is more surprising in a publication like the mainstream, middle-class boys’ paper *Der gute Kamerad*, which constantly reported on current events and relied heavily on the colonial world for adventurous and educational material. *Der gute Kamerad* provided the most comprehensive survey of China-related material during the Boxer war: photos of and informational articles about well-known landmarks, everyday life in China, the preparations undertaken by German soldiers and marines to prepare themselves for this exotic environment, and the improvements that German colonisers had already made in their slice of China. There was some photographic reportage of the conflict itself in the form of regular photographs of battle sites and a few pictures of captured Boxers. Certainly these suggested the Boxers’ degradation and the

⁴¹ The representation of the ambassadors as “slain” martyrs and “besieged” victims awaiting their “liberation” was common within media reports, as in the article from which most of the ambassadors’ portraits here were taken. “Das diplomatische Corps in China,” *Illustrirte Zeitung*, 26 July 1900, 123-4.

⁴² Advertisement in *Die Woche*, 24 November 1900.

⁴³ K. R., “Gelehrsamkeit in China,” *Efeuranken* 10:17 (1899/1900): 267; Auguste von Pechmann, “Kinderleben in China und Japan,” *Efeuranken* 11:15 (1900/1901): 232–5.

certain victory that awaited the advanced and disciplined allied forces.⁴⁴ But the images as a whole, which were generally published without detailed comment, provided a picture of an orderly and stable China at odds with the contemporary unrest that presumably had sparked readers' interest.⁴⁵ Similarly, when the paper's editors took the opportunity to print the only fictional story set in China, they chose not to take up the Boxer War itself. Instead their story describes the exploitation of Chinese commoners in the 1860s. The ambivalence toward depictions of the Boxers is curious for editors who introduced the popular but controversial Karl May to the public in the 1880s and 1890s and had no qualms about fictionalising wars in South and Southwest Africa.⁴⁶

There were nevertheless a few exceptional examples that illustrate how the Boxer war could be used to entertain young Germans and to convey more pointed lessons. Take, for example, the Protestant youth journal *Der Jünglings-Bote*. Among only occasional references to the course of events, the paper printed a letter from the missionary Rudolf Röhm, in which he recounted his own assessment of the unrest. Despite abuses taking place across China, Röhm reported that his own experiences had long been uneventful because of the support of local mandarins. Eventually even they could not shield him from the spreading violence, and he fled. Once on the move, he came to understand the “untold travails and dangers” that so many missionaries had endured as they tried to reach the coast and escape. Chinese Christians too endured “indescribable... torment and suffering,” and, he was proud to report, only a few renounced their faith. Even as they were hounded and abused, the devoted stayed strong, did not hide, and helped those fleeing atrocities. “Thousands” of them paid a higher price, sealing their love for their savior with their blood. But out of this misery the Lord will raise up a “cleansed and purified” church, showing that “even in the ‘Middle Kingdom’ the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Here was Röhm's purpose in writing the letter: recounting the troubles in China could encourage Christian devotion and solidarity back in Germany. If missionaries and *Chinese* Christians could endure such ordeals and come

⁴⁴ See, for example, the contrast between the German troops and the “Chinese Boxer types” as represented in *Der gute Kamerad* 14 (1899/1900): 621 and 15 (1900/1901): 240.

⁴⁵ See, for example, the street scenes accompanying the article “Aus China,” *Der gute Kamerad* 14 (1899/1900): 608-610. Unusually, these images were accompanied by some details on urban life drawn from Paul Goldmann, *Ein Sommer in China: Reisebilder* (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1899).

⁴⁶ Franz Teller, *Hung-Li*, serialised in *Der gute Kamerad* 15 (1900/1901); Andries van Straaden, *Der Depeschenreiter*, serialised in *Der gute Kamerad* 14 (1899/1900); Richard Schott, *Der Buschläufer*, serialised in *Der gute Kamerad* 18 (1903/1904).

out stronger, so too could readers at home also take courage in their own (presumably lesser) trials.⁴⁷

If a story about Christian devotion was one appropriate vehicle for making sense of the Boxer unrest, a story about patriotic devotion was another. A few authors for young people took the opportunity to dramatise the events. Paul Lindenberg, perhaps not surprisingly, sent Fritz Vogelsang back to the front with a sequel, but he also had imitators like Otto Felsing (1854–ca. 1920).⁴⁸ Felsing's 1901 book *Gert Janssens China-Fahrten* (*Gert Janssen's China Journeys*) closely followed Lindenberg's model by packing Chinese exotica, supposedly true-to-life adventures, and tendentious instructional material into the format of a coming-of-age story.⁴⁹ The plot is similar: a German cabin boy in China runs into troubles with pirates, spies, mandarins, and rebels before finally making his own contribution to the war effort—earning a commendation from the Kaiser—and ultimately deciding to join the Navy. The educational intention is similar as well: Gert's harrowing experiences would educate boys and girls about the state of affairs in China in order to help them understand Germany's struggle for world prominence.⁵⁰

The story does not simply denigrate the Chinese *in toto* but rather pursues a subtler strategy for constructing them as subordinate subjects.⁵¹ The hero's encounters with untrustworthy Chinese men illustrate their characteristic xenophobia, but Gert's adult companions blame this fault on longstanding subjugation to the foreign Manchu dynasty and high-handed treatment by the British and French over the past century. Paul, a Chinese convert to Christianity whom Gert saves from the Boxers and who becomes Gert's boon companion as a result, illustrates the possibility of redemption, as do various other Chinese characters who are able to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' foreigners. In other words, Felsing seeks a core that can be rehabilitated once the conflict is over. His ultimate lesson is that the irrational violence produced by the decay of China's once great civilization has to be met by forcibly restoring order (under German leadership naturally) and undoing the

⁴⁷ Rudolf Röhm, "Brief aus China," *Der Jünglings-Bote* 54:5 (1901): 38-9. See also *Die Brüder Yang und die Boxer*, serialised in *Die katholischen Missionen. Beilage für die Jugend* 30 (1901/1902).

⁴⁸ Agnes Harder, *Wider den Gelben Drachen* (Bielefeld: Velhagen & Klasing, 1900); Paul Lindenberg, *Fritz Vogelsangs Kriegsabenteuer in China 1900* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1901); Eugen von Entzberg, *Drachenbrut* (Berlin: Dünnhaupt, 1901); Karl Tanera, *Aus der Prima nach Tientsin* (Leipzig: Hirt, 1902).

⁴⁹ Otto Felsing, *Gert Janssens China-Fahrten: Reise und Kriegserlebnisse eines jungen Deutschen* (Munich: Lehmann, 1901).

⁵⁰ Felsing wrote this book as part of the series *Julius Lohmeyers Vaterländische Jugendbücherei für Knaben und Mädchen*. Rather unusually for the time, the series aimed adventurous tales explicitly at both boys and girls.

⁵¹ For a contrary interpretation, see Yixu Lü, "German Colonial Fiction," 95, 97–9.

stubborn insularity that keeps the Chinese from appreciating the benefits of Western civilization. Once liberated from superstition and tyranny and guided toward civilisation, however, the Chinese would rise to join the concert of nations. This was an outcome to be welcomed but not without reservation. Felsing argued his book would give young Germans a thorough knowledge of the Middle Kingdom, which they would need to contain this economic ‘yellow peril’.⁵²

Felsing’s patriotic paean, like Lindenberg’s earlier novel, received mixed reviews. Critics complained about Felsing’s clumsy insertion of educational content as well as his reliance on “unbelievable and improbable” events to carry a plot as sensational as any “Indian story.”⁵³ The medium and genre obviously mattered. Critics of such irresponsible adventures—whether set in the Wild West, in African jungles, on the high seas, or in the urban underworld—worried that young readers would become emotionally over-stimulated and reject civilised standards of behaviour as they sought a reality that could never exist. They would be lost to the nation, victims of an alluring mirage of false freedom and selfish satisfaction. But writers about China were at a particular disadvantage. Stories and reportage about the Wild West or exotic jungles drew on an adventurous potential that adhered to their landscapes and residents and could draw readers despite critical accusations. Writers on China had difficulty establishing their own variant because China’s ancient civilisation and the colonial modernisation narrative made the assumption of inherent or eternal disarray an unbelievable proposition.

The setting also mattered in another, more immediate sense. The Boxer war was a divisive issue at home. Although all parties but the Social Democrats supported the military engagement in principle, politicians nevertheless engaged in vigorous debate that built on arguments raging in the international press. They argued over the lack of parliamentary consultation, the responsibility of missionaries for the Chinese sense of grievance, the outrageous behaviour of German forces in China, the role of the Kaiser’s infamous ‘Huns speech’ in authorising German atrocities, and the overall direction of German colonial and

⁵² Felsing, *Gert Janssen*, vi. On the development of the idea of the “yellow peril” more generally, see Heinz Gollwitzer, *Die gelbe Gefahr. Geschichte eines Schlagworts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).

⁵³ “Beurteilung: Felsing, *Gert Janssens Chinafahrten*,” *Jugendschriftenwarte* 11:7 (July 1903): 28. For other conflicting reviews of Felsing’s work, see Sembritzki, *Kolonialfreund*, 39, 43, 53, 72, 75, 123; Bernhard Heidhues, *Nachtrag zu dem Verzeichnisse der Schülerbibliothek des Königl. Friedrich-Wilhelms-Gymnasiums in Cöln. Beilage zum Osterprogramm 1911* (Cologne: Gebr. Brocker, 1911), ii, 7; Ellendt, *Katalog für die Schülerbibliotheken*, xxvi; Hermann L. Köster, *Geschichte der deutschen Jugendliteratur*, 2nd ed. (Hamburg: Janssen, 1915), 311.

foreign policy.⁵⁴ That the China war was controversial enough to raise questions about its suitability for children is clear from a 1900 cover image from the left-wing satirical magazine *Simplicissimus* (fig. 6). The gruesome image, which shows a group of five boys pitilessly torturing and killing roosters, a dog, a teenage girl, and a baby (the latter being impaled on a flagpole bearing the German national standard), purported to depict an officer's children playfully spreading "Prussian *Kultur*" in China.⁵⁵ The image obviously plays on the ongoing scandals and a broader critique of German militarism, but it also parallels and reinforces contemporary criticism of 'trashy literature.' Its satirical message is that allowing young people to play at fighting the Boxers would ultimately turn them into modern savages—whether the impetus is their inner nature, their Kaiser's words, or the media coverage is left vague.

These sorts of controversies made the Boxer rebellion a difficult subject to produce for the mass market. After all, producers generally tried to avoid alienating their potential consumers, and those aiming at young audiences had to be especially careful not to run afoul of the decrees against politicising youth as well as the less formalised but very vocal criticism of reformers and cultural conservatives. Even the most politicised authors aiming at a targeted audience, like Otto Felsing, took care to avoid unintended controversy. In explaining his approach to writing *Gert Janssens China-Fahrten*, whose portrayals of the "real China" he intended as an improvement on the standard "Indian stories," he noted that he "presented the actual ways of life and thought of the Chinese, insofar as it is known to us *and its presentation is suitable for adolescents.*"⁵⁶ In other words, there were aspects even of the "real China" that he deemed unsuitable. In this regard Felsing was guided chiefly by criticisms over sensational culture, but to most producers the politics mattered as well. At the most, they addressed political controversies only obliquely. For example, *Der Jünglings-Bote* never mentioned the scandalous soldiers' letters describing German atrocities nor the accusations that German missionaries were responsible for the violence. But printing Rudolf Röhm's letter along with a number of inoffensive soldiers' letters was likely intended as a subtle rejoinder. Perhaps the Socialists, by far the most critical commentators on the military

⁵⁴ For a helpful overview, see Bernd Sösemann, "'Pardon wird nicht gegeben!' Staatliche Zensur und Presseöffentlichkeit zur 'Hunnenrede,'" in "Propaganda und Kritik: Die Rolle der Medien," in *Kolonialkrieg in China: Die Niederschlagung der Boxerbewegung 1900–1901*, ed. Mechthild Leutner and Klaus Mühlhahn (Berlin: Links 2007), 118–23; Ute Wielandt, "Die Reichstagsdebatten über den Boxerkrieg," *ibid.*, 164–72; Thoralf Klein, "Propaganda und Kritik: Die Rolle der Medien," *ibid.*, 173–80.

⁵⁵ "Wie die Alten sunen," *Simplicissimus* 5:22 (21 August 1900): 173.

⁵⁶ Felsing, *Gert Janssen*, vi (emphasis added).

campaign, would have been willing to engage young people in controversy, but an organised focus on youth was still years away for them.⁵⁷

Most producers aimed for a broader audience and thus chose to avoid controversy of any sort, even in spite of their political sensibilities.⁵⁸ Take the internationally successful Brandenburg toymaker Ernst Paul Lehmann (1856–1934). An enthusiastic member of virtually all patriotic associations, he also understood that the key to broad commercial appeals lay in clever manipulations of familiar references.⁵⁹ He responded to the China war with a funny toy devoid of overt political content (fig. 7). *Der bestrafte Boxer* (*The Punished Boxer*) consists of four Chinese figures who collectively toss up a fifth Chinese figure (presumably the Boxer) on a blanket. The toy marginalises the Boxers as a sort of ‘bad Chinese’ while using the braid—the symbol *par excellence* of what was wrong with China—to literally hold the figure down. Lehmann aimed at a broad, international market. He titled it for sale in five different languages, but also, by choosing Chinese figures to punish the Boxer, he removed the toy one step from the pointed arguments over the behaviour of allied soldiers and their internal rivalries.⁶⁰ At the same time, by painting the hats of the ‘good Chinese’ figures in the colours of the British, French, German, and Russian flags, he clearly subordinated the Chinese to European oversight. This toy helps us see politicised interventions in the marketplace as efforts to reach a niche audience but also as potential risks for those with broader ambitions. As such it reminds us that we cannot reduce commercial actors to their political persuasions but rather must seek out other, often subtler dynamics governing the circulation of colonial prejudices in youth media.

The dual controversy and the challenge of making China an adventurous setting for young people help explain why, within a few years of the suppression of the Boxers, the war had largely disappeared from the marketplace for youth media. Lehmann made his *Punished Boxer* in just one batch of 20,000 in 1900, which has made it one of the most sought-after

⁵⁷ Various Socialist youth organisations began forming in 1904 and accompanying them were two publications representing competing wings of the Socialist youth movement. A unifying authority was established in 1908, and the following year it replaced the two competing journals with a new publication entitled *Arbeiter-Jugend*, which went in a less polemical and more openly commercial direction. See Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 153-6.

⁵⁸ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*, 167–8, makes a similar point with regard to the resonance of China and the Boxers specifically in advertising.

⁵⁹ Jürgen Cieslik and Marianne Cieslik, *Ein Jahrhundert Blechspielzeug: Ein Jahrhundert E. P. Lehmann* (Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1981), 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

toys among collectors today.⁶¹ In tin soldiers, the Boxers only briefly displaced their popular competitor, the Boer War, and were forced out of catalogues entirely by their successors in Southwest Africa.⁶² After 1902, only a few publishers saw the fight against the Boxers as a suitable topic for their board games, stories, and youth publications. Fascination with China did not disappear—quite the contrary, actually—but the Boxers specifically seem to have failed to resonate with young Germans in a way that would have driven producers to keep reproducing them. If a picture sent in by readers to *Der gute Kamerad* is any indication, at least in 1900 and 1901 some young people were inspired to imaginatively line up as one of “our colonial defense forces” (*Schutztruppe*) fighting against disorder in China (fig. 8).⁶³ But already by 1904 the Boxers had dropped off the list of heroes and villains young Germans adopted in their wargames: cowboys and Indians, English and Boers, *Schutztruppe* and Herero were all the rage.⁶⁴

Remembering the Boxers

In the aftermath of the Boxer war, representations of the Middle Kingdom in German youth media were dominated by the “new China” prefigured in Otto Maier’s shelved game. Many of the generic stereotypes persisted—not the least of which was the slyly grinning Chinese man with braid—but now there was less disarray or danger attached.⁶⁵ Instead, in visual and textual terms, the Chinese were turned into docile and productive subjects of the German empire and of modernity.⁶⁶ Youth periodicals occasionally reported on colonial progress in Kiaochow, economic development in China more generally, exotic cultural

⁶¹ Ibid. In 2000, a collector paid \$33,000 in auction for the toy (including the original box) “Would You Pay \$33,000 for This Tin Toy? Well... Someone Did!,” *Old Toy World*, accessed 7 January 2015, <http://oldtoyworld.com/lehmann/530/530.html>.

⁶² *Mode-Katalog 1903/1904 Warenhaus A. Wertheim, Berlin*, reprint ed. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1988), 180; *Spielwarenkatalog E. L. Meyer: Auswahl*, reprint ed. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1991), 80.

⁶³ “Unsere Schutztruppe,” *Der gute Kamerad* 15:43 (1900/1901): 688.

⁶⁴ Paul Hildebrandt, *Das Spielzeug im Leben des Kindes* (Berlin: Soehlke, 1904), 279.

⁶⁵ The persistence of this stereotype is apparent in carnival masks and toys, such as those advertised in Georg Spindler, “Preisliste über Masken, Mützen, Carnevals- und Scherzartikel,” 1901, DSS SV26b; Jul. Bähring, “Illustrierte Preis-Liste über Masken- u. Karnevalsartikel,” ca. 1904–1910, DSS SV23a; Carl Joseph Nick, “Ill. Musterkatalog f. Masken u. Karnevalsartikel,” ca. 1910, DSS SV7f/2; Julius Dorst, pattern books, ca. 1910), 13, DSS SV447/1. See also cartoons that use the queue as a comic device, as in *Der gute Kamerad* 25 (1910/1911): 140–2 and 26 (1911/1912): 826–7 or a sketch mocking Chinese religious practice in *Missionsblatt für unsere liebe Jugend* 5 (1902): 15. On the Chinese smile as symbol both of courtesy and unsettling inscrutability, see Zhang, *China als Wunsch und Vorstellung*, 35–8.

⁶⁶ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*, 211. For a useful summary of the arguments for the German civilising mission in China, see Leutner, “Deutsche Vorstellungen,” 420–6.

practices, advances in education, and the prospects for missionary work, and such articles were remarkable not least for the benign portrait of a developing but still exotic China that they produced.⁶⁷ Toymakers played with the image of an outmoded China ripe for change. E. P. Lehmann's comical "Mandarin" toy depicted a haughty official directing his porter by yanking on his queue, and when the Nuremberg toymaker M. Reiss advertised his mechanical toy rickshaw, he entitled it *Chinesenwagen* (Chinese Car) and juxtaposed it with the most modern European racing cars.⁶⁸ It also became more common to see playthings depicting Chinese labourers, suggesting one means of effectively integrating China into the global economic system.⁶⁹

But in the vast majority of depictions of China, the Boxers and the Boxer War were conspicuous by their absence, even though they conceivably could have supported the narrative of European-assisted Chinese recovery from decadence. Many authoritative sources, for example the geography textbooks that formed the foundation for classroom lessons on the non-European world, failed to mention the war at all.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the Boxers did not disappear entirely. As during the campaign itself, the Boxers found a home in print media targeted at reinforcing patriotic or Christian convictions. In the pursuit of their narrowly tendentious aims, editors and authors were willing to employ even controversial characters shunned in other media, but the way they framed the events also limited the adventurous potential that was central to inspiring young Germans' imaginations.

Despite the extensive number of German works on China published in the aftermath of the seizure of Kiaotschou and the Boxer War (over 1,000 by one count), after 1902 there were

⁶⁷ Perhaps the most sympathetic was Karl Gerken's survey of the reforms that followed the 1911 revolution, which even eschewed the old standby of superstitious and backward masses in favour of an emphasis on the growing national consciousness of the illiterate "labouring hordes." Karl Gerken, "China," *Der Mai* 24:20 (1913/1914): 360–1.

⁶⁸ Cieslik and Cieslik, *Ein Jahrhundert Blechspielzeug*, 67; Helmut Schwarz and Marion Faber, eds., *Bewegte Zeiten: Ernst Paul Lehmann Patentwerk: Geschichte einer Spielwarenfabrik/Moving Times: Ernst Paul Lehmann Patentwerk. History of a Toy Factory* (Nuremberg: Tümmel, 2003), 87; Nürnberger Spielwaren-Manufactur M. Reiss, 11.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Ernst Paul Lehmann's coolie toy depicted in *Spielwarenkatalog E. L. Meyer*, 80. In the 1908 board game *In die deutschen Kolonien* (*Into the German Colonies*), produced by Otto Maier, a coolie figure was one of the pieces that players could choose as their token as they moved through the German colonies, with Kiaochow as their final destination. My thanks to Rudolf Rühle for generously providing me with a copy of this game from his private collection.

⁷⁰ See, for example, *Erdkunde für Schulen von Alfred Kirchhoff*, ed. Felix Lampe, part II: *Mittel- und Oberstufe*, 14th edition (Halle an der Saale: Waisenhaus, 1908); *H. A. Daniels Lehrbuch der Geographie für höhere Unterrichtsanstalten*, ed. W. Wolkenhauer, 83rd edition (Halle an der Saale: Waisenhaus, 1906); *E. v. Seydlitz: Geographie, Ausgabe B: Kleines Lehrbuch*, ed. A. Rohrmann, 24th edition (Breslau: Hirt, 1912). It is worth noting that such textbooks sometimes omitted other important conflicts, including the war in Southwest Africa, but the utter absence of the China war remains striking.

only a few efforts to fictionalise the events for young people.⁷¹ Instead, factual accounts—history textbooks and memoirs or popular histories adapted for young people—were the chief repositories for the memory of the Boxer War as a patriotic event. The editors of some history textbooks updated their series to account for recent events, including the acquisition of colonies and the Boxer war. As they did when describing the various political and military successes that teleologically led to the founding of the German nation-state and its emergence on the world stage, these textbooks avoided a militant tone. They creatively narrated the course of events to convey a sense of German greatness but also talked about the war in terms of the collective accomplishments and sacrifices of the soldiers and sailors who stood in for the entire national community on the world stage.

Max Francke and Otto Schmeil's textbook included "the struggles in China" under the important deeds of Wilhelm II, although in their telling this was a war fought between German-led European forces and a Chinese government responsible for murdering the German minister and besieging the legations. Besides a general comment that placed Germany's colonies within a broad expansion of maritime trade and transportation, the authors chose not to talk about closed-mindedness, anti-Christian sentiment, or modernisation. They preferred instead to focus on the "proficiency" of the German sailors and their leader, who saved the initial, failed expedition to rescue the ambassadors. They praise the leadership of General Waldersee, who led the international effort to restore "peace and order," as well as the little gunboat *Illtis*, which bore heavy losses in the battle against the seemingly impregnable Dagu Forts.⁷²

The *Illtis*'s baptism by fire at the Dagu Forts was the only event from the Boxer war with lasting patriotic resonance. It was certainly the only event that regularly appeared in classroom readers. These collections generally included narrative and patriotic passages meant to illustrate factual lessons and inspire imaginations, and accounts of the *Illtis* by veterans and popular authors provided ready models of patriotic sacrifice and fortitude. Schmidt and Schillmann's reader for Berlin schools, for example, adapted an account told by Commander (*Korvettenkapitän*) Wilhelm Lans (1861–1947), who was badly wounded in the fight. Lans outlines the basic course of the five-hour battle in a text that mingled sometimes

⁷¹ The most notable exception was Maximilian Kern, *Das Auge des Fo* (Stuttgart: Union, 1905), which was a best-seller into the 1950s. Wilhelm von Beck, *Abenteuer und Erlebnisse im Chinakriege* (Berlin: Weichert, 1901) does not seem to have been particularly successful in its time, but it has nevertheless recently been reprinted by Salzwasser Verlag, a Paderborn-based publisher specializing in maritime themes. On the flood of reports on China aimed at adults, see Kim, *Theater und Ferner Osten*, 26–7.

⁷² *Franke-Schmeil Realienbuch, Ausgabe A für evangelische Schulen*, ed. Max Francke and Otto Schmeil, 3rd edition (Leipzig: Teubner, 1907), 132–3.

gruesome details of destruction with a tendentious insistence on the pluck of the crew. Lans was proud that the small boat had been “honoured” with shelling worthy of a battleship, and he emphasized that the crew handled themselves well even as so many brave comrades were lost. Lans does not dwell on that loss but rather emphasizes that it had been a pleasure to serve alongside them. He also describes his experience as an interesting time he would not soon forget, not least because he was injured by a shell that took out his legs, burned his face, and peppered him with twenty-five shrapnel fragments. With grim humour—“the lad sure looked pretty!”—he fought on until the deck collapsed and left him, like the boat itself, a mere observer to the fall of the fortress. His mind always on his duty, he reported feeling unworthy when the Kaiser presented him with the order *Pour le mérite*.⁷³

The story of the *Illis* was an underdog story about bravery, discipline, fortitude, and faith in comrades and God, and for this reason it had obvious value in history lessons aimed at inculcating a sense of patriotic duty.⁷⁴ But this patriotic frame also produced problems. As the Socialist critic August Friedenthal suggested in his imagining of a battle for a nameless fortified coastal city, focusing on the plight of the troops could not erase an obvious disjuncture in the prevailing narratives. Painting the Chinese as an implacable foe was necessary for producing adventurous tension, but for instructional and patriotic purposes there could be no doubt over which side was destined to win.⁷⁵ Put another way, could the Germans play the roles of both underdog and leader of the obviously superior allied forces? Friedenthal’s tale, published in the socialist *Arbeiter-Jugend*, lampoons the inventions and overwrought sentiment used to buttress a patriotic perspective. Instead of a feverish battle to take an impregnable fortress, it shows the Chinese defenders evacuating quickly and without a fight. Rather than rampant enthusiasm, the soldiers have “mixed feelings” as they look at the shore they were to occupy. And instead of exhibiting firm purpose, the main character, a baker sitting a night-time watch, has been forced into the war for reasons he could not fathom.

As the soldiers fearfully await a night-time attack by Boxers and Chinese regulars, the watchman dozes and dreams that Boxers have shot at him. Awakened by the sound of hooves and terrified that he might die far from home, he fires at the sound, only to discover that he

⁷³ Otto F. Schmidt and Hermann Schillman, *Neues Berliner Lesebuch für mehrklassige Schulen. V. Teil. 7. und 8. Schuljahr*, 16th edition (Berlin: Klinkhardt, 1909), 461-62.

⁷⁴ For a more recent commemoration, see Wolfgang Noecker, “Kampf um die Taku-Forts vor 70 Jahren. Eine marine-historisch-politische Betrachtung,” *Marine-Rundschau* 67 (1970): 349–61.

⁷⁵ On the contradictions in nationalistic portrayals of the Boxer war, see Yixu Lü, “German Colonial Fiction,” 95–9.

has shot a mule. This is the only shot the entire company fires during the campaign, but Friedenthal expects this will not prevent them from building heroic narratives around their service: “Who knows whether or not the brave defender is now at home in the veterans’ association or somewhere like that, making one shot into one hundred and bragging about how many braid-wearers he courageously sent into the afterlife.” By describing the war as a farce that allowed the world’s capitalist powers to exploit a China too weak to defend itself, Friedenthal lays bare the hollowness of patriotic bombast. He also points to a degree of controversy that limited the utility of the war as a tool of entertainment or instruction.⁷⁶

Such controversy did not seem to concern writers interested in building a sense of Christian solidarity among readers. Indeed, the pastor Sybrecht reported a year after the hostilities that the war had changed Chinese opinions of missionaries for the better.⁷⁷ Just as importantly, though, it had also built tremendous sympathy in Germany for missionaries’ efforts. As such, the war could be a useful setting for stories depicting suffering Christians.⁷⁸ In 1904, the Protestant *Missionsblatt für unsere liebe Jugend* told the tale of a Chinese convert named Yang in order to highlight his devotion in the face of immense cruelty. Neither persistent ridicule nor the “raging hordes” of murderous Boxers, who burned down his church and broke down his front door can convince Yang to renounce his faith. As a result, the Lord keeps him and his family safe.⁷⁹ For editors and writers seeking to gird their readers to maintain their faith in the face of modern materialism, commercialism, and socialism, such stories offered a touchstone for measuring Christian devotion, not to mention encouraging moral and financial support for mission work. The Boxers’ unquestioned utility in this regard also helped to maintain the memory of the conflict as a war fought against mindless anti-Christian prejudice.

Conclusion: Losing Interest in the Boxers

⁷⁶ August Friedenthal, “Der Schuß,” *Arbeiter-Jugend* 1:16 (1909): 191–2.

⁷⁷ Not all agreed. Nowack’s textbook is a rare exception to geographers’ general reluctance to bring up the Boxer war, and it is notable that he supplemented his derisive review of the Chinese character with an unusually militant screed against the Chinese hatred of foreigners and desire to murder all Christians. Hugo Nowack, *Geographie: Stoffe für den Unterricht in den Realien in schulgemäßer Form, größere Ausgabe* (B), für katholische Schulen (Breslau: Hirt, 1904), 76.

⁷⁸ Sybrecht, “Aus Kirche und Mission: Die Aussichten in China,” *Der Jünglings-Bote* 55:20 (1902): 171. To judge from a report in the Protestant youth paper *Aufwärts!*, which recounted the experiences of a *Times* reporter (most likely George Morrison) trapped in Beijing during the siege of the Legations Quarter, even those who hated missionaries could not help but praise their grace and courage when confronted with Boxer brutality. “Ein Urteil über Missionare,” *Aufwärts!* 14:2 (1911): 3.

⁷⁹ W. M., “Kurze Lebens- und Bekehrungsgeschichte eines Chinesen,” *Missionsblatt für unsere liebe Jugend* 7:7 (1904): 28.

The marketplace for youth media in turn-of-the-century Germany was no place for subtlety. Producers aimed catchy presentations and simple, often explicit messages at young people. They readily exploited a general interest in novelty, but made exotic subjects or current events meaningful by drawing from an available shorthand of recognisable and uncontroversial markers and conventions. This both amplified the resonance of events around the globe and effectively ran prevailing stereotypes through a colonial filter. For China, as represented in German youth media, the Boxer War provided an opportunity to deploy perceptions of an ancient cultural inheritance and contemporary decadence to talk more explicitly about European and German superiority. Although the taint of controversy and an apparent lack of faith in China's adventurous appeal limited the uses of the Boxer war specifically, youth media nevertheless converted China from a generic cautionary example of the perils of resisting European modernity into a confirmation of the progress Germans offered to the entire colonial world.

Such representations undoubtedly shaped Germans' worldviews from a young age, but we must be cautious not to assume that young people simply internalised any and all messages embedded in playthings and publications. Young people could mix and match basic stereotypes to suit their own purposes; they took apart their toys and recombined them, and they skipped the parts of books that bored them.⁸⁰ To judge from memoirs and contemporary accounts, in their play children and adolescents sought out opportunities for autonomous self-fashioning, for transgressive behaviour, and for simple wonder and fantasy. An "uncivilised" colonial world populated with strange characters who operated according to different rules than those governing the staid metropole provided one imaginative realm for creating these opportunities.⁸¹

As I have argued elsewhere, this produced a predisposition to look for the romantic, the unruly, and the adventurous when looking at exotic frontiers.⁸² Clearly, the boys (and girls?) who played at Boxer War played out fantasies of heroic action in an exotic landscape against brutal and uncivilised foes. But as the novelty faded and other wars commanded public attention, could the Boxers, or the Chinese more generally, compete with more popular

⁸⁰ We can find an appropriate metaphor in Otto Maier's *Lustiges Gesichterspiel*, a "physiognomic-comic-ethnographic game" in which the fun came from mixing up facial features of different nations and races; see *Katalog* (Ravensburg: Otto Maier, 1914), 25.

⁸¹ Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 45–53.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 11.

“savages”?⁸³ Germans had no trouble imagining Native Americans and Africans as peoples without history inhabiting undeveloped frontiers. By contrast, China had an undeniable civilisation that provoked criticisms focused on mismanagement rather than inherent inferiority. This complicated the search for a blank slate on which to project disorder and conquest, resistance and subservience. For authors and producers consciously seeking to educate young people in a way that might resolve the tensions produced by industrial modernity in the metropole, China also failed to provide a revitalising anti-modernity.⁸⁴

As an educational tool, the colonising efforts of Germans in Kiaotschou and others elsewhere in China effectively articulated a vision of Euro-American modernity expanding through colonial rule. In this context, the Boxer war continued to resonate for adults, especially those committed to inculcating patriotic or Christian virtues in young people. As a fantastical setting for adventure, though, the conflict could only briefly exercise young Germans’ imaginations. When ‘cowboys and Indians’ or ‘*Schutztruppe* and Herero’ were available, who would have chosen to board the plucky but wrecked *Illis* or take on the role of a passive and persecuted missionary in China? It is not hard to imagine that, without an international event to concentrate contemporary commentary, images of the Boxers and China slipped back into the jumbled melange of exotic colonial references, drawn on occasionally, as when a child pulls a forgotten item out of a toybox and uses it in a new game.

⁸³ For an excellent illustration of the visual hierarchy that privileged black bodies and tropical landscapes as objects of Europeans’ imaginative interventions, see the masthead for the *Missionsblatt für unsere liebe Jugend*.

⁸⁴ To provide just one example, the Scouting movement (*Pfadfinder* in Germany), was predicated on the idea that Africans and Native Americans could revitalise a Euro-American civilisation that had become too alienated from the natural world. For its workings in Germany, see Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 165–211. Despite the efforts of explorers and travel writers like Sven Hedin, Germans were simply not familiar enough with China’s Central Asian frontiers to make them the setting of youthful fantasies.