

THE MASON GUNRUNNING CASE AND THE 1891 YANGTZE VALLEY ANTIMISSIONARY DISTURBANCES: A DIPLOMATIC LINK

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In September 1891 Shanghai customs seized a shipment of contraband munitions consigned to Charles Mason, a Britisher and customs official himself, and destined for delivery to the Ko-lao hui 哥老會 (The Society of Brothers and Elders) at the upriver treaty port of Chinking 鎮江, Kiangsu. This secret society's abortive attempt to obtain modern foreign weapons attests to the frustration and psychological desperation affecting not a few of those living amidst the social, economic, and bureaucratic deterioration of central China.⁽¹⁾ Violence was but one outlet and was given direction by the presence of a conspicuous element, partially blamed — easily blamed — for China's malaise, the Western missionaries. So it was, under an already cloudy sky that in a lightning fashion more than a dozen churches along the Yangtze River were struck and destroyed. In Peking another storm was brewing as the thunder of angry and bellicose foreign ministers resounded in the subsequent diplomatic negotiations over these missionary incidents.⁽²⁾

(1) A short description of these various domestic problems may be seen in, Guy Puyraimond, "The Ko-lao Hui and the Anti-Foreign Incidents of 1891," *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China, 1840-1950*, ed. Jean Chesneaux (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 119-120.

(2) Throughout this paper "incidents" and sometimes "riots" are used in the narrow sense of describing the sites of destruction of foreign-owned property and/or the physical abuse of Westerners. "Disturbances" are defined more broadly as a rise in tension between the local common people and the missionaries which sometimes but not always resulted in an "incident" or "riot."

A number of Western and Chinese contemporary observers alleged that the Ko-lao hui was actively involved in the rash of antimissionary disturbances which appeared in central China just prior to Mason's apprehension. The validity of this allegation aside, the perceived role of the Ko-lao hui in the disturbances is undeniable and it is Mason's connection with a secret society deemed responsible which gives one a glimpse of the volatile nature of the times. Indeed, China was faced with enormous domestic problems and if the personal action of a foreigner such as Mason contributed to the weakening of the dynasty then ultimately it could only be to the detriment of the Western powers' Manchu-oriented treaty system.

The Ko-lao hui threat and attempt to obtain arms had been thwarted and it is no wonder that the Tsungli Yamen upon the revelation of Mason's role cabled its minister in London that this foreigner's collusion with a secret society made the overall situation even more difficult to handle.⁽³⁾ To understand why, the Mason case must be examined in primarily a diplomatic context so as to illustrate its impact on the respective positions of China and the treaty powers, especially Great Britain, during the negotiations spawned by the 1891 missionary disturbances. It is this that distinguishes the Mason smuggling episode from just another case of gunrunning.

(3) Tsung-li ya-men fa-tien-pu 總理衙門發電簿 (The Tsungli Yamen outgoing cablegrams file), to Minister Hsüeh Fu-ch'eng 薛福成, Kuang-hsü (Kh) 17/8/20, September 22, 1891. Hereafter cited as, *Outgoing cablegrams*: to receiver, Kh year/month/day. This source of discreet internal governmental communications is located at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Nankang, Taiwan. Unfortunately it is not complete but is relatively voluminous for the early 1890's for both the outgoing and incoming cablegram files.

THE MASON CONNECTION

In late 1887 Charles Mason arrived in China and was promptly assigned to a position in the indoor customs staff at Chinkiang. At this port Mason slowly became unspeakably bored with his work. Language study was one relief and he soon became proficient in the Nanking dialect. Intellectual pursuits were another diversion and led to a study of Chinese history and political institutions. Stanley Wright in a short analysis of Mason's activities suggests that it was an eagerness to learn about all sides of Chinese life that eventually brought Mason into contact with "the notorious secret and anti-dynastic society, the Ko-lao Hui."⁽⁴⁾ Such an opportunity was readily available, for Chinkiang's pivotal role in the transshipment of rice and salt transactions had been conducive to the growth of both smuggling and secret society networks there. Mason's memoirs confirm the impression that he was the catalyst in developing friendships with recalcitrant Chinese. A receptive attitude on the part of Mason therefore made all the difference between mere acquaintanceship and actual involvement with the Ko-lao hui. Once Mason's attitude and reliability were verified by his houseboys, who were society members, he was then formally introduced and became a member of the organization.⁽⁵⁾

China has always attracted an odd array of foreigners to her shores. Occasionally megalomania has been symptomatic of this group; Mason was an exception in that there was a Chinese nuance. In a manner

(4) Stanley F. Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs* (Belfast: Wm. Mullan & Sons, 1950), pp. 624-625.

(5) Charles Welsh Mason, *The Chinese Confessions of Charles Welsh Mason* (London: Grant Richards, 1924), pp. 79-82 and 169.

somewhat reminiscent of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, Mason mused that if he could rally men to his side by creating a personally-oriented ideological fanaticism which convinced others he was an "inspired Messenger sent to effect their deliverance" then it would be possible for him to become "King of China."⁽⁶⁾

Not long after, beginning in May and lasting until September 1891, a tempest of antimissionary disturbances whirled about the Yangtze Valley in the provinces of Kiangsu, Anhwei, Kiangsi, and Hupei. Actual riots occurred at Ju-kao 如皋, Chiang-yin 江陰, Tan-yang 丹陽, Wu-hsi 無錫, Wuhu 蕪湖, Chin-kuei 金匱, Yang-hu 陽湖, Anking 安慶, Kiukiang 九江, Wu-hsüeh 武穴, and Ichang 宜昌 where the prior circulation of anti-Christian rumors and literature led to increased tension, and in combination with an event involving children associated with a local church, to a clash.⁽⁷⁾ The fury of the crowd more often than not was concentrated on the orphanages and in some cases bodies were exhumed at the church cemeteries in a gruesome search for proof of the rumored missionary atrocities. Although disturbances occurred in locations where foreigners were numerous, such as at all the Yangtze treaty ports, nevertheless, the general atmosphere there and elsewhere was more anti-missionary than antiforeign.⁽⁸⁾

(6) *Ibid.*, pp. 40-45.

(7) *The Anti-Foreign Riots in China in 1891* (Shanghai: The North China Herald, 1892), pp. 10-55. Hereafter cited as, *Anti-Foreign Riots*. This book is for the most part a compilation, possibly by Archibald Little, of leading articles and letters to *The North China Herald* concerning, but not exclusively, the Yangtze Valley missionary disturbances; and Henri Cordier, *Histoire des Relations de la Chine avec les Puissances Occidentales, 1860-1902* (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer Bailliere et C', 1901-1902), III, 60-63.

(8) Edmund S. Wehrle, *Britain, China, and the Antimissionary Riots, 1891-1900* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), pp. 25-26.

There is particular evidence that the disturbances along the Grand Canal were precipitated by a group of men moving southward, and whose presence was chronologically and sequentially noted at Chinkiang, Tanyang, and Wu-hsi.⁽⁹⁾ They were coincidentally present at the same time that the spread of anti-Christian rumors and literature began and riots successfully started at the latter two places. Later Chinese authorities reported that a captured secret society member and others had "plotted to disrupt the churches" and that another member who was supposedly the mastermind had "ordered the starting of rumors and the posting of placards so as to beguile the masses into burning and looting [the churches]."⁽¹⁰⁾ Liu K'un-i 劉坤一, the Liang-kiang governor-general, considered this group of men to be involved in other disturbances and captured members admitted to a role in the Wuhu incident.⁽¹¹⁾ In fact, at Wuhu and Ichang eye witnesses observed that during the riot some men were using small flags and whistles to apparently direct portions of the mob.⁽¹²⁾ Chang Chih-tung 張之洞, the Liang-hu governor-general, thought the Ichang riot was probably started by a secret society and in this opinion, Charles Denby, the American minister, agreed, attributing both the troubles at Wuhu and Ichang specifically to the Ko-lao

(9) *Anti-Foreign Riots*, pp. 37-39.

(10) Tsung-li ya-men shou-tien-pu 總理衙門收電簿 (The Tsungli Yamen incoming cablegrams file), from the superintendent of trade for the southern ports [Liu K'un-i 劉坤一], Kuang-hsü (Kh) 17/9/17, October 19, 1891. Hereafter cited as, *Incoming cablegrams*: from sender, Kh year/month/day.

(11) *Ibid.*

(12) U.S. Department of State, *Despatches from United States Consuls in Chinkiang*, A.C. Jones to the Undersecretary of State, June 24, 1891, vol. 5, despatch no. 182, pp. 5-6; and also Parliamentary Papers, *Further Correspondence Respecting Anti-Foreign Riots in China*, China No. 1 (1892), (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1892), Ichang Consul Herbert Soverby to Consul Everard, September 7, 1891, no. 89, enclosure 1, p. 60. Hereafter cited as, *Further Correspondence*.

hui.⁽¹³⁾

It may be adduced that there was a very strong secret society flavor to the missionary disturbances. Guy Puyraimond provides a virtual catalog of evidence implicating the Ko-lao hui which was the largest and strongest secret organization in the area of the disturbances.⁽¹⁴⁾

To this can be added the observations of a sworn member of the Society of Brothers and Elders, Mason. He was convinced that his secret society comrades were paving the way for a society led rebellion by attempting, through attacks on the foreign evangelists, to involve the Chinese government in a disastrous war with the treaty powers. In late June 1891 Mason arranged to meet in the Nanking area with Ko-lao hui leaders to protest their methods and to propose an alternate plan for rebellion — one which scrupulously avoided any assaults on foreigners and thus reduced the chances of outside intervention.⁽¹⁵⁾

Mason argued that about one hundred Ko-lao hui members should be armed with modern weapons. So equipped they would attack and defeat the Chinkiang garrison and capture the nearby Silver Island Fort whose strategic location allowed access control to the upper reaches of the Yangtze River.⁽¹⁶⁾ As soon as word of the initial victory spread, the

(13) *Incoming cablegrams*: from the governor-general of Hu-kuang [Chang Chih-tung 張之洞], Kh 17/8/2, September 4, 1891; and U.S. Department of State, *Despatches from United States Ministers to China*, Charles Denby to the Secretary of State, May 22, 1891, vol. 90, despatch no. 1390, enclosure 1, p. 3 (in unpaginated manuscript) and January 30, 1892, vol. 91, despatch no. 1463, p. 3 (in unpaginated manuscript). Hereafter cited as, *USMD*, date, vol./despatch no., all from Denby to the Secretary of State.

(14) Puyraimond, pp. 113-124.

(15) Mason, p. 34.

(16) *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42; and Law Reports: Regina vs. Mason, *The North China Herald*, October 16, 1891, p. 543, col. 1. Hereafter cited as, *NCH*.

charisma of Mason would allure more and more men to the cause. His armed forces would march on to rout the provincial army at Nanking and seize the arsenal. Mason envisioned that the total conquest of China would then be inevitable.

There is no way to know whether or not the Ko-lao hui leaders seriously considered this proposal. It is unlikely Mason ever revealed his own imperial ambitions. Nonetheless, this plan regarding arming society members undoubtedly had some attraction. There was minimal risk involved for the society if Mason was willing to procure the munitions himself and probably a high likelihood of success since he worked for customs.

However, in executing his cabal Charles Mason was not only egotistical but also inexperienced, naive, and indiscreet. The disclosure of his plan was unsurprisingly a result of an attempt to recruit other foreigners. Among the recruits was a customs colleague at Chinkiang, Henry Croskey. Unknown to Mason, Croskey informed the Chinkiang commissioner of customs of all that transpired. Even the inspector-general of customs seems to have been aware of Mason's activities at this early juncture but upper-echelon customs officials refused to believe he would ever go through with his plans, even though Mason never gave this impression to Croskey who continued to serve as an informant.⁽¹⁷⁾ Planning continued with Mason oblivious to discovery. He wrote anonymously to General William Mesny, a soldier of fortune living in Shanghai, unsuccessfully propositioning him to smuggle weapons into Kiangsu and to engage in the training of one thousand men.⁽¹⁸⁾

(17) Law Reports: Regina vs. Mason, *NCH*, October 9, 1891, p. 505, col. 1.

(18) *Ibid.*, p. 506, col. 3.

At the end of August Mason departed Chinkiang leaving detailed and crucial information with Croskey concerning the execution of the first stage of the rebellion.⁽¹⁹⁾ Upon arrival in Shanghai a cautious Mason surreptitiously caught a ship bound for Hong Kong, and after disembarking there, strangely enough, wrote his home port commissioner of customs a personal note thereby informing customs of his whereabouts.⁽²⁰⁾ Hong Kong authorities were then notified but Mason wearing a disguise proved difficult to tail.

Though Hong Kong was a wide-open entrepot one still needed an introduction to a cooperative gun merchant: this the Ko-lao hui had provided.⁽²¹⁾ Altogether Mason purchased 120 rifles, 127 revolvers, 221 bayonets, and 69,000 rounds of ammunition which were sent to a C. M. S. N. steamer for shipment as "shovels and steel."⁽²²⁾ He also hired an assistant, Peter Toussaint, who in turn hired nineteen other foreigners.⁽²³⁾

When the steamer set sail for Shanghai with both the contraband cargo and its consignee on board Toussaint and the other men were prepared to board the next ship but before they could leave Toussaint was arrested by the Hong Kong police. Later, after his release he went on to Shanghai but only five of the original nineteen men hired accompanied him.

On 12 September when the C. M. S. N. ship docked in Shanghai, customs authorities, who had received no less than three telegrams

(19) *Ibid.*, p. 504, cols. 2-3; and Mason, p. 208.

(20) Law Reports: Regina vs. Mason, *NCH*, October 9, 1891, p. 505, col 1.

(21) Mason, pp. 81-82 and 144-145.

(22) *Further Correspondence*, Shanghai Acting Consul-general R. A. Mowat to Sir J. Walsham, September 15, 1891, no. 90, enclosure 1, p. 63.

(23) Mason, pp. 149 and 154; and Law Reports: Regina vs. Mason, *NCH*, October 9, 1891, pp. 506, col. 3 and 507, cols. 2 and 3.

alerting them to the arms shipment, immediately began an inspection of the cargo.⁽²⁴⁾ In a cunning trick designed to get the contraband through to Chinkiang Mason concocted a story which he essayed in a letter to Shanghai Commissioner of Customs Robert Bredon. Mason wrote that he had uncovered a serious Ko-lao hui conspiracy and if the arms were allowed to proceed to their destination they could "track the contraband to its storing place," seize the ringleaders "and crush the revolt."⁽²⁵⁾ Bredon was not deceived and refused permission.

Afterwards, Bredon met with Mason, encouraging him to go on to Peking to take up his new job appointment with customs. Had he done so the whole affair might have ended at this point. Instead Mason went to Chinkiang without the munitions. He was met there by customs officials who in a search of his personal luggage discovered a small package of dynamite.

Almost immediately thereafter he was detained aboard a British gunboat handily at anchor in the harbor⁽²⁶⁾ but the reason for formal British involvement remains unclear. *The North China Herald* reported it as a measure to prevent rescue by the Ko-lao hui.⁽²⁷⁾ Regardless, delicate issues of legal jurisdiction were emerging. The foreign staff of the customs service while on duty was responsible only to the Chinese

(24) Miscellaneous Articles: "The Incipient Rebellion—I," *NCH*, September 18, 1891, p. 381, col. 1.

(25) Law Reports: Regina vs. Mason, *NCH*, October 9, 1891, p. 505, col. 2.

(26) *Further Correspondence*, Mowat to Walsham, September 15, 1891, no. 90, enclosure 1, p. 64.

(27) Miscellaneous Articles: "The Incipient Rebellion—II," *NCH*, September 18, 1891, p. 381, col. 2; and same issue, "Outports: Chinkiang," p. 385, col. 2.

government for their conduct.⁽²⁸⁾ But Mason at this time was formally on leave and thus technically under consular authority, yet he had done much of his planning and recruiting while stationed and on duty at Chinkiang. Mason was returned under custody to Shanghai and during the interim between the confiscation of the smuggled weapons and his eventual arrest he was, although suspect and under surveillance, to remain at liberty.

In order to understand how this question of jurisdiction was resolved and the diplomatic implications of Mason's actions it is necessary to first categorize the various official opinions regarding the causes of the missionary disturbances. As the tone of the negotiations is clarified and the lyrics of the arguments over the missionary troubles noted, it will be possible to discern any change in diplomatic orchestration after the confiscation of the arms shipment.

THE DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS RESULTING FROM THE YANGTZE UPHEAVAL

In response to the overtly antimissionary disturbances the representatives of the foreign powers in Peking moved quickly and forcefully to impress upon the Chinese government the gravity of the situation and the necessity for precautionary and preventive action. American Minister to China, Charles Denby, wasted little time in ordering every available

(28) Britten Dean, "Sino-British Relations, 1860-1864: The Implementation of the Commercial Provisions of the Treaty of Tientsin During the Ministership of Frederick Bruce" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1969), p. 336. This work is now published under the title, *China and Great Britain: The Diplomacy of Commercial Relations, 1860-1864*, Harvard East Asian Monographs, 50 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

gunboat to the vicinity of the incidents and urgently requested Washington to increase the Asiatic squadron. Denby noted that although indemnity was usually forthcoming still Westerners had to act to protect themselves. He added that the Chinese government normally did not punish the participants in such riots and asserted that if the Chinese continued to neglect its responsibilities of providing protection for Westerners then a policy of force would have to be resumed "with great vigor."⁽²⁹⁾

Much more active and aggressive than America was Great Britain, the treaty power with the greatest economic stake in the Yangtze area. The British consul at Wuhu quickly appealed for the use of gunboats, as he put it "to strengthen the hands of the Chinese authorities ..." More "vigorous" action this consul reasoned was necessary to prevent further trouble.⁽³⁰⁾ Accordingly, gunboats were dispatched to patrol the Yangtze River while Sir John Walsham, Britain's minister in Peking, dealt with matters just as forcefully on a diplomatic level. In these contacts the Chinese government found Walsham "more urgent and severe in his representations" than any other foreign minister, including the French "whose nationals were the principal sufferers."⁽³¹⁾ Not long after the Wuhu riot in early May a committee of foreign ministers (from Britain, France, and Germany) was formed to represent nine of the treaty powers. Walsham played a leading role in that committee's

(29) *USMD*, May 20, 1891, 89/1304, pp. 6-7 and 9-10 (in unpaginated manuscript).

(30) Parliamentary Papers, *Correspondence Respecting Anti-Foreign Riots in China*, China No. 3 (1891), (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1891), Wuhu Consul Ford to Commander V. A. Tisdall, May 18, 1891, no. 14, enclosure 10, p. 8. Hereafter cited as, *Correspondence*.

(31) *Ibid.*, The Marquis of Salisbury to Sir J. Walsham, July 22, 1891, no. 21, p. 27.

efforts to elicit a satisfactory response from the Tsungli Yamen on the subject of the disturbances.

Generally speaking, the diplomatic community stressed two principal factors in the spawning of the missionary troubles. Charles Denby summarized one of the causes on 20 May—it was feared by many Westerners, he wrote, that a plot had been formed for a general uprising against foreigners.⁽³²⁾ By the end of the tumultuous summer his opinion had crystallized. There was a deeply laid plot involving the Ko-lao hui, with support from elements with influential status, aimed at the expulsion of all foreigners first from the Yangtze area then all of China.⁽³³⁾

The British acting consul-general in Shanghai considered it probable that secret societies were behind the missionary disturbances.⁽³⁴⁾ Two British naval officers also posited that one possible cause of the riots was the involvement of a secret society which hoped to create a confrontation between the West and China.⁽³⁵⁾ This so-called rebellion theory was widely held. In the Shanghai treaty settlement press Attorney W. V. Drummond argued the merits of this hypothesis not unconvincingly in a series of letters to the editor.⁽³⁶⁾

In support of this interpretation it was contended that the appointment of Liu K'un-i as Liang-kiang governor-general and his subsequent

(32) *USMD*, May 20, 1891, 89/1304, pp. 4-5 (in unpaginated manuscript).

(33) *Ibid.*, September 21, 1891, 90/1390, enclosure no. 1, p. 3 (in unpaginated manuscript); and October 12, 1891, 91/1402, pp. 7-8 (in unpaginated manuscript).

(34) *Correspondence*, Mowat to Walsham, June 21, 1891, no. 20, enclosure 2, p. 26.

(35) *Ibid.*, Vice-Admiral F. W. Richards to the Admiralty, May 23, 1891, no. 14, enclosure 1, p. 5; and *Further Correspondence*, Commander J. Leslie Burr to Commander V. A. Tisdall, May 30, 1891, no. 12, enclosure 4, p. 9.

(36) *Anti-Foreign Riots*, pp. 81-94.

termination of the Hsiang 湘 army veterans pensions, which had been maintained by a string of Hunanese officials at Nanking, was actually the spark which ignited the antimissionary conflagration. Many of these veterans reputedly had Ko-lao hui connections and had decided to avenge themselves against Liu through a quick and sure technique, harassment of the missionaries. In return Liu retaliated by ordering the eradication of the Brothers and Elders organization.⁽³⁷⁾ Thus, from this limited beginning the Ko-lao hui became motivated to discredit and weaken the Ch'ing dynasty by creation of a confrontation with the Western powers who would of course seek protection and redress for the missionaries.

The other predominate theory on the causes of the disturbances, and one that tended to be more substantiated by information readily available, was espoused by some Chinese officials, many missionaries, and not a few diplomats. The ubiquitous presence of scurrilous antimissionary literature at almost all of the incidents led the British consul at Hankow to conclude that the nature of the literature itself was primarily to blame. This material, it was thought, could only be published and disseminated by people with either the indifference, tacit approval or collusion of the scholar-official class.⁽³⁸⁾ This opinion was reinforced by a plethora of evidence and especially by the discovery of a self-avowed author of a

(37) Puyraimond, p. 120; and "The Proclamation of [the] Viceroy of Nanking [Liu K'un-i]," of June 6, 1891, denouncing the Ko-lao hui in *Anti-Foreign Riots*, pp. 229-230.

(38) *Anti-Foreign Riots*, pp. 153-192; and a series of reports by the British consul assigned to Hankow in *Further Correspondence*, Christopher Gardner to the Marquis of Salisbury, September 28, 1891, no. 97, pp. 73-74; October 19, 1891, no. 125, pp. 123-126; October 20, 1891, no. 126, pp. 126-129; October 31, 1891, no. 142, pp. 146-150; November 7, 1891, no. 145, pp. 151-153; November 17, 1891, no. 155, pp. 162-164; and November 20, 1891, no. 156, pp. 165-168.

number of anti-Christian tracts.⁽³⁹⁾ It is also very significant to note that the energetic and vocal committee member, Minister Walsham, attributed the disturbances to the "scandalous accusations" regarding the missionaries.⁽⁴⁰⁾

The significance of the latter argument is evident in that the Tsungli Yamen's efforts to cope with the spreading disturbances were judged in terms of what they were doing to prevent the ubiquitous antimissionary rumors and literature. The action taken by the Chinese, despite the complex factors involved in the outbreaks and though by no means small, was deemed unsatisfactory because the antimissionary atmosphere prevailed. Gradually, the Tsungli Yamen's response, or according to the foreign ministers lack of response, became an irritant as well.

Various diplomats thus concluded that the Chinese government was administratively "unable" to forestall and cope with antimissionary outbreaks or was simply procrastinating. Denby for one reproached the Tsungli Yamen for excusing its lack of energetic action because of popular opinion against the missionaries and the independence of provincial authorities from Peking.⁽⁴¹⁾ By August the foreign envoys were so incensed by the supposed impotence of the Tsungli Yamen that they began to speak of "the necessity for a reorganization."⁽⁴²⁾ Oddly unnoticed was the fact that a number of near-riot situations had been

(39) The efforts of Griffith John, a Hankow based missionary were primary in the disclosure of this author, Chou Han 周漢. See *Anti-Foreign Riots*, pp. 131-143, 153-155, 156-157 and specifically 183-222; and especially the article by Lü Shih-chiang 呂實強, "Chou Han fan-chiao an" 周漢反教案 (The anti-Christian case of Chou Han), Academia Sinica's Chin-tai-shih yan-chiu-so chi-k'an 近代史研究所集刊 (Institute of Modern History Bulletin) Ti-erh-chi 第二期 (II), (June, 1971), 417-461.

(40) *Correspondence*, Walsham to Salisbury, May 16, 1891, no. 2, p. 1.

(41) *USMD*, May 20, 1891, 89/1304, enclosure 1, pp. 2-3 (in unpaginated manuscript).

(42) *Further Correspondence*, August 25, 1891, no. 110, enclosure 2, p. 87.

averted by local officials acting with circumspectness but such action although reported by several consuls apparently went ignored at the ministerial level in Peking. The British Foreign Office for one was satisfied with the diplomatic tactics and gave Walsham "full discretion as to the mode of urging the matter on the Yamen."⁽⁴³⁾

Joint diplomatic action therefore continued to be taken by the foreign powers and in a very argumentative meeting the committee of ministers finally cajoled the Tsungli Yamen into taking what they considered more stringent action. The Chinese agreed that the leaders of the riots should be punished and that officials in the areas where the incidents happened should also be held accountable. Further, in a move the foreign ministers considered to be of high importance, the Tsungli Yamen assented to memorialize the throne for an edict prohibiting further attacks on foreigners.⁽⁴⁴⁾

As agreed upon but not without reservation and resistance the Tsungli Yamen forwarded a memorial in which it was pointed out that the appearance of anonymous placards and rumors about missionaries kidnapping children were for the purpose of misleading the people and instigating a rift. Success was made possible because the Yangtze basin was honeycombed with secret societies and rowdy veterans who never missed an opportunity for mischief.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Still the stress remained, as in

(43) *Correspondence*, Marquis of Salisbury to the Duke of Norfolk, June 17, 1891, no. 10, pp. 2-3; and Salisbury to Walsham, July 2, 1891, no. 13, p. 5. For reports on Chinese action cf., Mowat to Walsham, May 15, 1891, no. 11, enclosure 2, p. 4; Gardner to Salisbury, June 9, 1891, no. 19, p. 25; and Mowat to Walsham, June 19, 1891, no. 23, enclosure 1, p. 34. One may also refer to the outgoing cablegrams from the Tsungli Yamen for substantiation.

(44) *USMD*, May 20, 1891, 89/1304, enclosure 1, pp. 2-3 (in unpaginated manuscript).

(45) *Anti-Foreign Riots*, "The Memorial of the Tsungli Yamen," pp. 232-234 or *Further Correspondence*, no. 110, enclosure 6, pp. 93-94.

the early series of outgoing Tsungli Yamen cablegrams, on the rumors and anonymous literature.

It was also implicit in the memorial that missionaries were to blame because of their orphanage activities and interference in matters of Chinese jurisdiction, such as law suits.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The Yamen had implied as much in earlier diplomatic notes to the committee of ministers and in addition Chang Chih-tung enjoined that the missionary practice of rearing children be temporarily halted in order to prevent the suspicions and rumors which had led to the current difficulties by "inciting public anger."⁽⁴⁷⁾ Not only did the diplomats of the West ignore Chang's appeal they also refuted any contention that foreigners might share responsibility for the missionary incidents and seemed highly resentful and defensive of this accusation.⁽⁴⁸⁾

On 13 June 1891 an imperial edict was promulgated in which the emperor reiterated the Tsungli Yamen's explanation for the incidents but deleted any reference to soldiers or secret societies and instead said "desperate characters" were scheming to create an opportunity for looting.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Officials were curtly ordered to prevent rumors and prohibit the circulation of anonymous placards and "devise measures for the protection of ... merchants and missionaries"⁽⁵⁰⁾

"A great deal," Walsham fumed, "now depends on the manner in which the Imperial orders are executed by the high officials. The

(46) *Ibid.*

(47) *Incoming cablegrams*: from the governor-general of Hu-kuang, Kh 17/8/13, September 15, 1891.

(48) *USMD*, June 23, 1891, 90/1328, p. 1 (in unpaginated manuscript).

(49) *Anti-Foreign Riots*, "Imperial Edict," pp. 234-235 or *Further Correspondence*, no. 110, enclosure 5, pp. 92-93.

(50) *Ibid.*

Government at present seems powerless to deal with the situation ...”⁽⁵¹⁾ The treaty power envoys were continuously dissatisfied with what they felt were the half-hearted efforts of the Chinese government. In the face of this vituperation the Chinese persistently maintained that measures were being implemented despite the varying circumstances of the disturbances.⁽⁵²⁾

This situation and the various “excuses” of Chinese government spokesmen pointed to a serious dilemma. High Peking officials were of course aware of the effective limitations of their administrative power and cognizant that a hard-line, pro-foreign order to stop all missionary disturbances could do nothing but damage their governing credibility and position vis-à-vis the provincial-level bureaucracy. It was not in the central government’s long-run interest to alienate the provincial bureaucrats, who to a certain extent held the missionaries responsible for the incidents, solely to please the treaty power ministers.⁽⁵³⁾ Furthermore, the Tsungli Yamen was sympathetic to the common people’s animosity toward missionaries and remarked in regards to an earlier case in Shantung that the people should not be pressed too hard, for after all it was not stipulated in the treaties exactly where churches could be located.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The Tsungli Yamen feared that more arrests and executions of those involved “would tend to increase rather than allay popular excitement.”⁽⁵⁵⁾

(51) *Correspondence*, Walsham to Salisbury, June 21, 1891, no. 12, p. 4.

(52) *Ibid.*, Salisbury to Walsham, July 22, 1891, no. 21, p. 27; and *USMD*, June 4, 1891, 90/1316, enclosure 1, pp. 3-4 (in unpaginated manuscript).

(53) Hosea Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, Vol. II, *The Period of Submission, 1861-1893* (London: Longmans Green, 1910-1918), p. 410.

(54) *Outgoing cablegrams*: to Minister Hsü Ching-ch'eng 許景澄, Kh 17/5/26, July 2, 1891.

(55) *Correspondence*, Salisbury to Walsham, July 17, 1891, no. 16, p. 16; and July 22, 1891, no. 21, p. 27.

Unsympathetic and perhaps ignorant of the extent of China's domestic crisis the foreign ministers serving in Peking forced the government into a corner by pressing for the arrest and punishment of more participants in the incidents.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Chagrined and in hope of relief from this constant pressure the Tsungli Yamen cabled the Chinese minister in London to clarify the situation for the British Foreign Office. Minister Hsüeh Fu-ch'eng 薛福成 personally interpreted the recent troubles as the result of secret societies plotting to embroil the government in difficulties but inasmuch as the Tsungli Yamen was doing its utmost, he desired the British to instruct Walsham "to show no undue impatience."⁽⁵⁷⁾

Throughout July and August the dispute between the foreign ministers and the Tsungli Yamen raged. Walsham for his part continued to totally deny Chinese claims and accused the officials of negligence.⁽⁵⁸⁾ He proposed further pressure by the committee of ministers and received, after Salisbury checked with the two other committee powers, British approval.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The French considered a united-front posture to be quite important in dealing with Chinese.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Walsham was in full agreement and contributed the committee's meager results to the efficacious use of cooperative action.⁽⁶¹⁾

Broadly speaking, the foreign ministers cared not about causes of the incidents, except to deny that the missionaries were at all to blame.

(56) *USMD*, July 6, 1891, 90/1340, pp. 1-2 (in unpaginated manuscript).

(57) *Correspondence*, Salisbury to Walsham, July 10, 1891, no. 15, p. 15.

(58) *Further Correspondence*, Walsham to Salisbury, July 27, 1891, no. 1, p. 1.

(59) *Ibid.*, Salisbury to the Earl of Lytton and Sir E. Malet, July 28, 1891, no. 2, p. 2; and Salisbury to Walsham, August 1, 1891, no. 6, p. 3.

(60) *Ibid.*, Egerton to Salisbury, September 2, 1891, no. 22, p. 21.

(61) *Ibid.*, Walsham to Salisbury, September 12, 1891, no. 29, p. 26.

Their overwhelming concern was to force the Chinese government to protect *all* Westerners in China. The Chinese government was nonplussed by the inflexibility of the treaty powers, especially the British.⁽⁶²⁾ The British government took the position that "in cases of popular disturbances, it was not so much the number of punishments inflicted that was material. What was important was that they should be prompt, and that it should be certain that they were inflicted on the real and leading offenders."⁽⁶³⁾

In early September it appeared that domestic order was slowly being restored. On the diplomatic front the Tsungli Yamen was markedly confident that they had exhibited "the utmost earnestness, energy, sincerity, and justice in dealing with these missionary troubles."⁽⁶⁴⁾ After four months of "united front" diplomatic pressure and reflective of an emerging Chinese sanguine attitude the Tsungli Yamen pointed out that the use of "joint notes" by the powers was not warranted by current international law. There was no further reason to continue with this form of communication.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Unfortunately for the Chinese yet another and destined to be the last of the 1891 Yangtze series of incidents erupted virtually at the same time. Chinese credibility was shattered and the diplomatic fireworks over Peking became even more spectacular. It was now proved, a joint communication stated, that Chinese assertions were worthless. And the

(62) *Correspondence*, Salisbury to Walsham, July 22, 1891, no. 21, p. 27.

(63) *Further Correspondence*, Salisbury to Walsham, September 18, 1891, no. 44, p. 33.

(64) *Ibid.*, "The Tsungli Yamen to the Foreign Representatives at Peking," September 3, 1891, no. 110, enclosure 1, p. 86.

(65) *Ibid.*, or *USMD*, September 13, 1891, 90/1387, enclosure 1, p. 10 (in unpaginated manuscript).

use of joint notes was justified in such grave situations when a number of governments were pursuing "the same policy." It was most forcefully threatened that the various home governments were about to be informed of the unsatisfactory response of the Chinese.⁽⁶⁶⁾

Walsham was angered. He felt there was "something almost bordering on flippancy in the tone of the Chinese communication"⁽⁶⁷⁾ He and his colleagues decided unanimously to break off negotiations with the Chinese. Thereupon, a protocol was drafted combining the collective views of the foreign ministers on these unresolved problems. They concluded the recent outbreaks were instigated by anti-Christian literati, chiefly Hunanese, whose bias was transmitted to the common people by antimissionary literature which the Chinese government did nothing to curtail. The Tsungli Yamen itself has acted, they wrote, "only under strong pressure." Even Chinese promptitude on the question of indemnity was discounted simply as a move to forestall foreign pretext for interference. The foreign ministers supposed the Tsungli Yamen was anxious to use the excuse of popular hostility against Christianity in order to limit the missionaries treaty rights. Instead the ministers insisted the status of missionaries be reviewed for clarification and extension of their treaty rights before the talks would be renewed.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Ominously and of potentially far-reaching impact, especially for Britain's "informal empire" policy, it was threatened that since it appeared that peace could only be maintained in the Yangtze Valley by the presence

(66) *Ibid.*, "The Foreign Ministers to the Tsung-li Yamen," September 10, 1891, no. 110, enclosure 3, pp. 88-89; or *USMD*, September 13, 1891, 90/1387, enclosure 2, pp. 1-2 (in unpaginated manuscript).

(67) *Further Correspondence*, Walsham to Salisbury, September 30, 1891, no. 110, p. 84.

(68) *Ibid.*, "Extract from Protocol signed at Peking, September 9, 1891," no. 110, enclosure 4, pp. 89-92.

of military force then perhaps gunboats should be permanently stationed at all of the Yangtze treaty ports and the sites of riots at the expense of the Chinese government!⁽⁶⁹⁾

At a lower level the British consul in Hankow on 10 September notified Chang Chih-tung that the Admiralty had granted authority to gunboat commanders, in cases where the lives of foreigners were endangered, to use weapons to disperse threatening Chinese.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Chang Chih-tung was appalled at this crass intrusion into the realm of Chinese jurisdiction and declared that the responsibility for protection belonged to local officials. Further, if force was used by a gunboat and innocent bystanders were injured then public indignation and national action would be aroused. And because there were churches everywhere the local officials would simply be unable to protect them all from the wrath of the aroused people!⁽⁷¹⁾ By this time the plight of the Chinese government was becoming desperate.

The Interim Between Discovery and Arrest: A Growing Significance

At approximately this point in the diplomatic negotiations the Mason consignment of contraband was seized in Shanghai. As knowledge seeped out regarding the scope of Mason's activities and his contact with an anti-dynastic secret society the Chinese government realized this indeed was a matter that had to be thoroughly checked. Liu K'un-i, as the ranking official in the area, immediately ordered the Shanghai taotai to

(69) *USMD*, September 17, 1891, 90/1389, enclosure 1 [the protocol], pp. 17-19. Note that this crucial statement is not in the "extract" version of the protocol and must be referred to in the American despatches.

(70) *Further Correspondence*, Salisbury to Walsham, September 14, 1891, no 34, p. 28; and October 17, 1891, no. 84, p. 55.

(71) *Incoming cablegrams*: from the governor-general of Hu-kuang, Kh 17/8/8. September 10, 1891.

cojointly investigate with the British consul. The consul acknowledged that Mason was involved in suspicious goings-on but because there were no charges against him declined to play a cooperative role.⁽⁷²⁾

Consequently, without British consular assistance the Shanghai tao-tai took another approach and met with Bredon of Shanghai customs for a series of discussions. Mason's cooperation at this stage was deemed essential for rapid and effective but belated action against the planned rebellion and he voluntarily participated in these sessions in which it was stressed that he should supply the names and addresses of secret society members in order to facilitate the government investigation and capture of those involved.⁽⁷³⁾ When he proved evasive, providing only generalities in line with the story he had told Shanghai customs, the Tsungli Yamen tried to entice him to no avail with the promise of a light sentence in exchange for the wanted names.⁽⁷⁴⁾

In the columns of *The North China Herald* an astute editor predicted that the Chinese government would probably try to use the Mason case as a fulcrum to alleviate the diplomatic pressure of the foreign ministers. Most likely, the article continued, Chinese officials would implore the treaty powers to allow them the opportunity to restore order in the Yangtze basin without the interference or pressure of the past because such a policy was detrimental to Chinese efforts to subdue the domestic troubles.⁽⁷⁵⁾ It soon became known, due to the efforts of an enterprising

(72) *Further Correspondence*, Mowat to Walsham, September 15, 1891, no. 90, enclosure 1, pp. 63-64; and *Incoming cablegrams*: from the superintendent of trade for the southern ports, Kh 17/8/24, September 26, 1891.

(73) *Outgoing cablegrams*: to the superintendent of trade for the southern ports, Kh 17/8/16, September 18, 1891.

(74) *Ibid.*, Kh 17/8/17, September 19, 1891.

(75) *Miscellaneous Articles*: "The Incipient Rebellion—II," *NCH*, September 18, 1891, p. 381, col. 3.

Shanghai reporter, that six men hired by Mason in Hong Kong were now in the treaty settlement.⁽⁷⁶⁾ To the Chinese authorities involved in this investigation the evidence was irrefutable and the above prognostication was a logical argument soon forthcoming.

Mason provided his side in an interview with a reporter from the treaty-port press stressing that he was not a Kao-lao hui member and had only minimal knowledge regarding this secret society. He claimed he had heard rumors of rebellion and therefore took a month's leave to play detective. While in Hong Kong he met several Westerners aiding the rebels and from them he was consigned the contraband weapons. When asked specifically about the dynamite Mason replied he could not reveal his real intentions despite the suspicious circumstances! He did express concern that the Chinese government might demand prosecution if he did not confess but he did not fear reprisal by the Ko-lao hui, for as he implied, he was not going to reveal the names of any coconspirators.⁽⁷⁷⁾ In a follow-up letter to the editor of that newspaper Mason pointed out a real rebel would have taken more precautions. Yet in a revealing statement he boasted "... I could have done it, and a rebellion could at this moment be in full swing."⁽⁷⁸⁾

Incriminating evidence pointed to Mason's guilt but still the British had made no move to prosecute. Minister Sir John Walsham felt as late as 23 September that there was still no need for prosecution.⁽⁷⁹⁾ The Shanghai British consul stated that charges had to be brought

(76) Miscellaneous: "The Incipient Rebellion," *NCH*, September 18, 1891, p. 395, col. 1; also see Mason, p. 160.

(77) Miscellaneous: "Mr. Mason Explains," *NCH*, September 18, 1891, p. 395, cols. 2-3.

(78) Correspondence: C. W. Mason to the editor, *NCH*, September 25, 1891, p. 430, cols. 1-2.

(79) *Further Correspondence*, Mowat to Salisbury, September 30, 1891, no. 98, p. 74.

against Mason before he could be tried and questioned. Even Mason flaunted this as an excuse for firmly refusing to answer the pointed questions of the Shanghai taotai. As the days passed it became very obvious that the British did not intend to act. The Chinese authorities concluded that the only alternative was to formally request the dilatory British to order Mason's arrest for trial, hoping the details of the rebellion and names of other participants would emerge in courtroom testimony.

Even more important a reason for bringing Mason to trial was expressed by Li Hung-chang, superintendent of trade for the northern ports, who had also uncovered a recent smuggling case in his jurisdiction. Li stated that prosecution was needed to maintain civil order and curtail such "brazen" acts as gunrunning. "Just allow such collusion [with the secret societies]," he cabled to the Tsungli Yamen, "and foreigners will appear. Although one was apprehended we still have to stop [them] or the hidden calamities will be endless."⁽⁸⁰⁾

Liu K'un-i ordered the Shanghai taotai to make the appropriate requests for Mason's prosecution. This "intervention" by Chinese officials changed matters drastically for the British. Obligated now by China, Minister Walsham ordered the British consul-general in Shanghai to issue a warrant for Mason's arrest. Finally on 26 September, two weeks after contraband consigned to Mason was seized, he was arrested by Shanghai foreign settlement police.⁽⁸¹⁾

(80) *Incoming cablegrams*: from the superintendent of trade for the northern ports, Kh 17/8/25, September 27, 1891.

(81) The actual date of Mason's formal arrest, 26 September, is not of overwhelming importance except in the diplomatic context under discussion. Yet for the record it should be noted that Puyraimond erroneously tagged the date as 14 September and in a companion article Charlton Lewis (see note 86) writes that Mason was "seized" on 13 September.

As predicted earlier by *The North China Herald* the Chinese minister in London met with high British Foreign Office officials and declared that the recent discovery of Mason and other 'foreigners' attempt at smuggling arms to a secret society made it clear that the Yangtze Valley antimissionary outbreaks were not purely of Chinese origin and the settlement of the riots was correspondingly complicated now.⁽⁸²⁾ Neither the British or French intended to formally admit any such new factor into the negotiations and indignantly remarked that Chinese responsibility had not been diminished by the entanglement of a foreigner.⁽⁸³⁾

Why were these two powers adamant in disavowing the validity of the Chinese argument? To be sure, Mason's culpability had not yet been conclusively proven but would the trials, as the Chinese hoped, reveal further facts and strengthen their diplomatic case?

Treaty-Port Justice: The Trial

With the British consul sitting as judge, Charles Mason was arraigned before Britain's Shanghai Supreme Court. The charge was violation of Great Britain's Explosive Substances Act of 1883 which specifically forbade the possession of any type of explosive in circumstances which aroused suspicions that it was not intended for lawful use.⁽⁸⁴⁾ It was the defendant's responsibility, the judge remarked, to clarify the circumstances. However, Mason made no effort to do so and was not represented by defense counsel. This move was clearly an attempt to avoid the witness stand for fear his alibi would not stand up in the face of testimony to the contrary and a stringent cross examination.

(82) *Further Correspondence*, Salisbury to Walsham, September 24, 1891, no. 57, p. 39.

(83) *Ibid.*, Salisbury to Egerton, October 1, 1891, no. 69, p. 47.

(84) Law Reports: Regina vs. Mason, *NCH*, October 2, 1891, p. 471, col. 1.

Mason's defense strategy was little more than an ill-conceived tactic to avoid punishment. High Chinese officials, however, were anxious that Mason might create a "devious and artful argument in self defense" and thus considered it necessary for the court prosecutor to thoroughly question the accused so as to get to the bottom of the affair.⁽⁸⁵⁾

Although the charge against the defendant was illegal possession of dynamite still the depositions of several key witnesses at the trial clearly pointed to a much larger case and touched upon the details of the smuggling caper and the planned insurrection. Over Mason's personal objections the information was ruled admissible since it was necessary in determining the nature of the circumstances involved.

Henry Croskey, Mason's confidant at Chinkiang, provided very damaging testimony. He described how the defendant attempted to recruit him for the secret society rebellion and supplied the court with evidence in the form of written instructions from Mason on the role he was suppose to play in capturing Chinkiang and the nearby fort. Peter Toussaint, Mason's righthand man in Hong Kong, stated he was given a sum of money by the defendant for the purpose of hiring other Westerners to participate in the rebellion. Particularly revealing was Toussaint's deposition about Mason's purchase of weapons which was the indisputable tie between the proposed rebellion and the smuggling. Such evidence continued to mount as other foreign and Chinese witnesses testified that Mason had broached the subject of a secret society rebellion to them.

Albeit information of far-reaching implication was coming in focus,

(85) *Incoming cable grams*: from the superintendent of trade for the northern ports, Kh 17/9/11, October 13, 1891; and from the superintendent of trade for the southern ports, Kh 17/9/13, October 15, 1891.

still the court did not intend, because of a strict legal interpretation, to pursue the point further. For example, a crucial and pivotal question that was not dealt with in the courtroom was the financing of the munitions purchase. Charlton Lewis writes that Li Hung 李洪 (Li Hsien-mou 李顯謀), a Ko-lao hui leader, supposedly provided Mason with 60,000 taels of silver for use in obtaining weapons.⁽⁸⁶⁾ This contention is brought into question by further research.

First, the amount itself is suspect. One of Mason's houseboys and a society member stated that Li Hung was indeed the financier but the amount furnished Mason was only about 20,000 taels.⁽⁸⁷⁾ As the Chinese government wrapped up its own investigation of Ko-lao hui activities in 1893, one participant and reputedly one of the society leaders, also pointed to Li Hung as the overall director and said he provided 60,000 taels, half of which went to Mason and half for use by the society for "the cause."⁽⁸⁸⁾

Second, if Mason had such a large sum of money available (between \$28,000 and \$84,000) why did he spend only a measly \$5,000 for munitions? The answer to this anomaly lies in a timely inheritance received from the estate of his deceased mother which provided not only the working capital but also the final impetus for his subsequent activities.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Mason admitted at that time to the use of his own money

(86) Charlton M. Lewis, "Some Notes on the Ko-lao Hui in Late Ch'ing China," *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China, 1840-1950*, ed. Jean Chesneaux (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 109.

(87) Ou-yang Fu 歐陽輔 (comp.), *Liu Chung-ch'eng kung (K'un-i) I-chi* 劉忠誠公 (坤一) 遺集 (the collected works of Liu K'un-i), Tien-tsou tien-hsin 電奏電信 (cabled memorials and grams), (Taipei: Wen-hai ch'u-pan she, 1966), Cablegrams: to Yü Tse-shuai 裕澤帥, Kh 17/12/5, January 4, 1892, pp. 8220-8221.

(88) Miscellaneous: "The Ko-lao Hui Trials," *NCH*, June 16, 1893, p. 881; col. 1.

(89) Mason, pp. 60-61.

which was confirmed by an investigation of Mason's Shanghai bank account transactions.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Presumably the deposit of any large amount of specie or cash would have been quite obvious and suspicious to even the most trusting of British auditors and would have been reported.

It seems highly possible then that the Ko-lao hui was shrewdly utilizing and exploiting both foreign and Chinese "assets" for Li Hung was not a Ko-lao hui leader and like Mason was motivated by personal reasons.⁽⁹¹⁾ And while there is no evidence of a Li-Mason connection still the possibility of an uprising was plausible but discounted by the uncooperative and uninquisitive British judges.

As the trial proceedings drew to a close Mason made one statement in which he attempted to explain the extenuating circumstances — a plea for leniency. What ensued was just a rehashing of his oft-told cover story in which he contributed his courtroom reticence to a desire to protect his Chinese counterparts. "... If I pleaded not guilty I should have to introduce names of Chinamen. My so doing might possibly result in their execution."⁽⁹²⁾ Unfortunately Mason did not know his diary had already fallen into the hands of Chinese provincial authorities and that the names and clues needed for more arrests would be sifted out anyway.

In response to Mason's statement and in summation the prosecutor said that in regards to the charge there was no question as to the defendant's guilt. However, he continued, questions concerning the circum-

(90) *Further Correspondence*, Shanghai Acting Consul-general G. Jamieson to Walsham, October 30, 1891, no. 115, enclosure 1, p. 96; and Hannen to Walsham, October 30, 1891, no. 135, enclosure, p. 135.

(91) For a very revealing document on Li Hung's role see Tsou-shu 奏疏 (memorials) vol 4, pp. 2877-2885 in *The Collected Works of Liu K'un-i* (cf. note 87).

(92) Law Reports: Regina vs. Mason, *NCH*, October 30, 1891, pp. 609, col. 3-610, col. 1.

stances of the dynamite possession remained. If the defendant was acting as a detective in becoming involved with the secret society then the seriousness of his crime would understandably be reduced. But since there had already been outbreaks in the Yangtze Valley, any connection with an organization reputedly a part of the violence was quite serious in itself. Additionally, nothing had been said during the trial to prove he was not actively assisting the rebels. The accused, maintained the prosecutor, was procuring munitions for a rebellion and had intended to deliver them. If it was true he had been threatened by his secret society cohorts then it was further proof that Mason was indeed conspiring to rebel.⁽⁹³⁾

On 29 October 1891 Charles Mason pleaded guilty to the charge against him. He was sentenced to serve nine months in the British consular prison in Shanghai and upon release to pay a \$5000 bond as a guarantee of good behavior or be deported from China. In reaching this verdict the chief judge said. "No doubt this is not as serious a matter as it might have been. ... but at the same time it is so grave in all its circumstances that it would be impossible for me to pass nominal sentence."⁽⁹⁴⁾

High officials of the Chinese government were as indignant at the lackadaisical manner in which Mason was prosecuted as they were shocked by the light sentence. Testimony, they knew, indicated a much more complex and damaging affair than British diplomats found convenient to admit. But "justice" for foreigners in China and even China herself was of course what the treaty powers wanted it to be. It could be part of the diplomacy or separate from it, as the situation

(93) *Ibid.*, p. 610, col. 2.

(94) *Ibid.*, p. 611, col. 1.

demanded. Similarly, the prevailing treaty-port mentality did not make it obviously hypocritical of the British to have on the one hand cajoled the Chinese to act sternly and energetically in preventing missionary disturbances when Britain on the other hand was unwilling to act likewise after a British subject was found to be involved in a related situation potentially as explosive.

And though there was Anglo-American concurrence on how to deal with the Chinese government regarding the missionary disturbances still the differing analysis of the cause of the incidents is particularly evident at the consular level in weighing the import of the Mason case. The American consul in Shanghai wrote to Washington that evidence suggested Mason was acting for others, probably Ko-lao hui rebels, whose object was to raise the standard of rebellion.⁽⁹⁵⁾ Basing his despatch to London on the same information and certainly being more familiar with the case the British consul and assistant judge at Mason's trial concluded there was a dearth of evidence indicating Mason had any confederates.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Although the testimony of all witnesses had not been gathered at the time of this consul's report still the depositions given by Croskey, Toussaint, and others mentioned above upheld the American consul's conclusion and not that of the British consul.

Because the American diplomats had early recognized the secret society involvement in the missionary troubles, their position remained unchanged and undamaged by the Mason affair. The British, however, who had taken the Chinese government itself to task for not stopping

(95) U.S. Department of State, *Despatches from United States Consuls in Shanghai*, Joseph A. Leonard to the Assistant Secretary of State, September 25, 1891, vol. 41, no. 153, p. 3; and October 9, 1891, vol. 41, no. 157, p. 2.

(96) *Further Correspondence*, Jamieson to Salisbury, October 12, 1891. no. 81, p. 52.

the antimissionary literature and for procrastinating in general, had waited a full two weeks before arresting Mason, and then only after formal Chinese request. There is no evidence of a British coverup but it seems clear that the British were deliberately playing down Mason's activities because this case had weakened their "moral" if not diplomatic position.

Further illustrative of the hypocritical and contradictory stance of the British regarding Mason was their speedy action in slowing the flow of munitions out of Hong Kong. Tsungli Yamen officials cabled Minister Hsüeh on 22 September to request such action. The home government then quickly notified the Hong Kong crown authorities that there was "reason to believe that clandestine shipment of cargoes of arms has been made to China to be used possibly by leaders of disturbances and insurgent bands."⁽⁹⁷⁾ The Hong Kong governor who was empowered under 1862 (anti-Taiping) ordinances to "evince to the Chinese Government the sincerity of our desire to deter British subjects from affording aid to rebels" quickly issued a proclamation on 1 October halting the export of weapons for six months.⁽⁹⁸⁾

As noted earlier in this paper the diplomatic negotiations had reached a boiling point just prior to the discovery of the Mason shipment of arms. Edmund Wehrle has punctiliously studied the British Foreign Office archives related to the Yangtze missionary incidents and remarked that the superheated British grew "lukewarm" not long after the "protocol" of 9 September. Wehrle's analysis attempts to explain whether

(97) *Ibid.*, Lord Knutsford to Administrator Barker, September 29, 1891, no. 68, enclosure 1, p. 44.

(98) *Ibid.*, The Duke of Newcastle to Administrator Mercer, December 21, 1862, no. 68, enclosure 2, p. 45; and October 1, 1891, "Proclamation," no. 102, enclosure 2, p. 79.

or not London was actually aware of the far-reaching provisions of the "protocol" before mid-November when its receipt is officially marked. He reaches an uncertain conclusion but is convincing in that the "protocol" was an overstatement of British policy and infringed on that thin line delimiting Britain's "informal empire" in China. The use of threats, diplomatic pressure, and more threats might have endangered the very existence of the Manchu dynasty, he states, and therefore been counter-productive to long-term British goals.⁽⁹⁹⁾

Wehrle has completely overlooked the Mason affair though it could have added indirect support to his contention. It would be unreasonable to consider the precipitous change in Britain's diplomatic tactics in mid-September as merely coincidental to the discovery of a British smuggler. If the provisions of the "protocol" were not immediately known to London the Mason affair was. The speed in which the proclamation prohibiting arms exportation from Hong Kong was issued clearly shows tacit admission of responsibility in the Mason affair and realization that some self restraint was in order.

Spokesmen for the Tsungli Yamen argued for precisely this, claiming that since the Mason case proved that the machinations which resulted in the Yangtze basin missionary disturbances were really planned and directed against the dynasty then the treaty powers should not pressure and intimidate China but should instead provide sympathetic support.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

The diplomatic heat was off China by November. Walsham even admitted the situation had improved but he was still apprehensive that the removal of any of the twenty odd men-of-war stationed on the

(99) Wehrle, pp. 28-42.

(100) *USMD*, October 12, 1891, 91/1402, p. 7 (in unpaginated manuscript).

Yangtze might result in the recurrence of difficulties. The Chinese gained confidence and began to take a less defensive-oriented posture in the ongoing diplomatic contact.

It is noteworthy that the Mason case was kept alive by Chinese diplomats who indignantly stated that Mason's nominal punishment was a travesty of justice and would have been much harsher if he had been tried for a more serious offense. In fact, as the Chinese pointed out, a thorough investigation would have revealed the involvement of other Westerners. And for this reason the Chinese called for a new trial of Mason in Hong Kong after his sentence was up.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Instead when Mason's prison term ended in July 1892 he was brought before the court with the smallest of fanfare so as to avoid public attention.⁽¹⁰²⁾ Since Mason was unable to pay the court-required good behavior bonds he was ordered as per his sentence to be deported from China. This was the last act of the British in ridding themselves of the embarrassing Mason affair.

CONCLUSIONS

Domestically, the Mason episode is a whiff of the recurring nineteenth century crisis of control for the Manchu government, easily discerned in the Ko-lao hui scented antimissionary disturbances of 1891. Although gunrunner Mason was not connected with the instigation of these troubles still it was this that provided the impetus for his subsequent activities. Unknowingly, Mason was guilty of more than posses-

(101) Miscellaneous Articles: "The Tsungli Yamen and Mason," *NCH*, April 18, 1892, p. 338, cols. 1-3; and "The Shanghai Dynamite Case," *The Times* [London], April 27, 1892, p. 6, col. 2.

(102) Law Reports: Regina vs. Mason, *NCH*, July 29, 1892, p. 172, col. 3.

sion of explosives — he and other smugglers were playing with societal dynamite. In north China more and more “bandits” using foreign weapons were being encountered.⁽¹⁰³⁾ With the ascendancy of the powerful and widespread Society of Brothers and Elders in central China the volatility factor was even higher. Charlton Lewis contends that the Ko-lao hui was organizationally and ideologically incapable of mounting a successful attack against the moribund dynastic system.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ While this is true it must be kept in mind that the *hui*'s failure was not a foregone conclusion as the innovating technique of attacking the missionaries in order to compromise, hopefully destroy, the dynasty vis-à-vis the vengeful treaty powers was brought to play.

This technique had agitated the treaty powers to the point of retaliatory aggression and a proposed change in military policy (permanently stationing gunboats on Yangtze duty) which could have led to greater and greater military and then administrative involvement in Chinese affairs. But the eleventh hour discovery of Mason and his publicized escapades apparently opened British Foreign Office eyes and culminated in a less bellicose diplomatic stance made easier by the restoration of “peace” in the Yangtze Valley.

In many ways 1891 was a signal, a portent of what would transpire a scant decade later with the Boxers. Correlations are numerous: the anti-Manchu orientation of the Ko-lao hui who later joined forces with

(103) *Incoming cablegrams*: from the superintendent of trade for the northern ports, Kh 17/9/14, October 16, 1891; and Wang Yen-wei 王彥威 and Wang Liang 王亮 (comp.), *Ch'ing-chi wai-chiao shih-liao* 清季外交史料 (Historical materials concerning foreign relations in the late Ch'ing period, 1875-1911), 218 chüan (plus 1 chüan) for the Kuang-hsi period; 24 chüan for the Hsüan-t'ung period (Peiping, 1932-1935; reprinted Taipei: Wen-hai ch'u-pan she, 1969), 85:9b.

(104) Lewis, p. 107.

the initially anti-dynastic Boxers; the attacks on the missionaries; the cooperative inclination of the treaty powers in the face of these popular outbursts; and the use of the joint protocol of 1891 and also 1901. The importance of the 1890's can not be overstressed nor can the need for a monographic study to explore the role of the Ko-lao hui in the transition to the violent desperation of the 1900's.

Governmentally, the Ch'ing dynasty mustered its administrative resources. From 1891 to 1893 Chinese authorities attempted to stamp out the Ko-lao hui organization. The Mason affair added a degree of urgency and momentum to this drive. The search for those even remotely implicated by clues plucked from Mason's diary stretch along the course of the Yangtze River. Many society members were apprehended but the power of the *hui* which honeycombed central China could only be temporarily abated for the dynasty was treating the symptoms not the disease. Such measures while necessary were ultimately futile.

In addition, concomitant action was taken by Chinese authorities to prevent future incidents of arms smuggling by dusting off ordinances designed thirty years earlier to deny weapons to the Taiping rebels.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ "Cargo certificate regulations" which entailed the comparison of cargo manifests, one at the port of origin and another under seal and to be opened and compared with the original at the port of destination, were

(105) See for example the communication from the Tsungli Yamen to Denby in, *USMD*, August 10, 1892, 92/1565, enclosure 1, pp. 1-9 (in unpaginated manuscript); and refer to Articles X, XIV, and XLVII of the Sino-British Treaty of Tientsin in *Treaties, Conventions, Etc., between China and Foreign States*, China, The Maritime Customs, Miscellaneous Series, No. 30, vol. 1, 3d ed. (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1917), pp. 408, 409, and 418. In the same source also see Rule 10 of the 1858 Rules of Trade on p. 428 which stated: "The Chinese Government will adopt what measures it shall find requisite to prevent smuggling up the Yangtze, when that river shall be opened to trade."

revived in order to better regulate the coastal and riverine trade done by foreigners under Chinese flag. The possibility of illicit intransit transactions was reduced and the chance of discovering foreign smugglers increased. However, by 1892 American Minister Denby was already complaining frequently about the need to abolish these commercially obstructive regulations.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

Great Britain was finally awakened to the unequivocal and inherent dangers to British mercantile interests if foreign-armed rebels staged an uprising in the Yangtze basin. Concurrently, although Hong Kong trade might be adversely affected, the tenseness of the secret society situation warranted an extension (into late 1892) of the Hong Kong prohibition on exportation of munitions.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ This cooperative attitude (from London) and failure to permanently station gunboats in the Yangtze with all that this implied for Britain's "informal empire" is antithetic to the non-sympathetic-aggressive stance of Walsham and a direct result of Mason's apprehension!

Commercially, Mason's activities created for the customs service "the greatest peril it had yet faced."⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ The governor-general of Szechwan termed the Mason case as simply the latest occurrence in a series of problems resulting from the use of foreign customs inspectors.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ The probity of the entire foreign customs staff was questioned. Li Hung-chang complained that he thought high-level customs officials, including Robert Hart, were trying "to conceal their faults" regarding

(106) *USMD*, December 1, 1892, 92/1609, enclosure 1, p. 3 (in unpaginated manuscript).

(107) *Ch'ing-chi wai-chiao shih-liao*, 85:9b and 10b.

(108) Wright, p. 625.

(109) *Incoming cablegrams*: from the governor-general of Szechwan, Kh 17/8/21, September 23, 1891.

Mason. "Their power," Li telegraphed the Tsungli Yamen, "is excessive."⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Though Hart thought that the Mason episode would be used as leverage to pry away his responsibility for making customs appointments this fear never materialized. Still Hart could never offer a justifiable explanation for Mason's activities but since the "ill-effects" were "everywhere in evidence" Hart decided it best to simply ignore the matter, knowing that sooner or later the controversy would blow away.⁽¹¹¹⁾

Diplomatically, this basically summed up British attitudes as well for they never specifically admitted the import of Mason. China was not as nonchalant. A definite change in the tone of the Chinese diplomatic arguments precipitously resulted after Mason's discovery and arrest. Initially the Chinese had blamed the secret societies and rowdy elements for the missionary troubles. However, with foreign, particularly British emphasis on the dissemination of the antimissionary literature as a common principal factor in the disturbances and castigation of Peking for not halting the flow, the Chinese had become enmeshed in providing a satisfactory answer to this allegation. In the wake of Mason's shipment of contraband the Tsungli Yamen reverted to their earlier position and cabled the Chinese minister in London that

presently the missionary cases are not yet concluded and there is also a foreigner colluding with a secret society to rebel ... It is hoped that you will detailedly inform the British government and notify them that the actual cause of the missionary disturbances are the secret societies. Furthermore, there is an

(110) *Incoming cablegrams*: from the superintendent of trade for the northern ports, Kh 17/8/25, September 27, 1891.

(111) Wright, p. 629.

Englishman [involved] with a secret society and the foreign rifles were shipped from a British possession. Request them [London] to telegraphically order the British minister to take an equitable attitude in the negotiations.⁽¹¹²⁾

With the arrest of Mason the Chinese purported to have belated real proof for their argument. To the British the adroit triangular linking of the already connected missionary disturbances and the Ko-lao hui with this smuggling case was geometric manipulation. Most foreign diplomats treated it as opportunism, as did the British mouthpiece, *The North China Herald*.

Nonetheless, Chinese sincerity was evident in the speedy efforts made to emasculate the Ko-lao hui. British hypocrisy and the damage done to her "moral" position by the revelations of the Mason case are evident and tacitly recognized in statements by Mason's procecutor and judge and in the promulgation of the Hong Kong munitions prohibitions. Despite the unconvincing denial of the British this smuggling caper had become a complicating factor which worked in favor of the Chinese in the tumultuous period of diplomatic negotiations following the 1891 Yangtze Valley disturbances. It could be no less.

(112) *Outgoing cablegrams*: to Minister Hsüeh Fu-ch'eng, Kh 17/8/20, September 22, 1891.