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In memoriam Charles Ralph Boxer F.B.A. (8 March 1904-27 April 2000)


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Charles Ralph Boxer died at St. Albans (Hertfordshire) in his 97th year on 27 April 2000. On that date it was exactly 25 years since I first made the acquaintance of a unique figure in the history of the encounter between East and West when reading Boxer's exciting article of 1949 on the first European Japanologist, Isaac Titsingh (1745-1812). In October 1975 I met Boxer in person at a conference in the Netherlands. There was instant rapport between us, with Titsingh as intermediary. As a complement to my stimulating PhD supervisor, Marie Antoinette Petronella Meilink-Roelofsz (see Lequin 1990), Charles Boxer became my other sensei, a true friend and companion in arms, who generously offered me the use of his house Ringshall End at Little Gaddesden (Hertfordshire) as my home in England. He inspired me not only with lots of fresh air, but in many other ways, not the least of them the in-depth study of the life and works of Titsingh. Boxer supported me for better and for worse. It was a two-way traffic. In the course of our friendship I received 179 letters from him, some of them with Ferdinand Dejean, Samuel van de Putte, or Titsingh marked as sender, and all of them full of God betert's and other amusing archaic Dutch expressions. The age difference of 42 years did not matter. I will dedicate all of my work on Titsingh to him.

No scholar outside the Netherlands familiarized a wide readership with the history of Dutch expansion in the East and West in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries more than Charles Boxer. His very first book, The Journal of Maarten Harpertszoon Tromp Anno 1639, was devoted to Dutch naval history. His introduction and annotations to this publication testify to an amazing professionalism and authority for a man of only 26. Boxer retained a fondness for at least half a dozen Dutch admirals of the fleet throughout his life. Their portraits were hanging in the upstairs passage in Ringshall End, gazing down sternly on overnight guests staggering to their bedrooms.

I am greatly indebted for the kind assistance of Amanda Boxer, Carola Boxer-Vecchio, and James Cummins over the years.

Boxer 1930, dedicated 'To the memory of my mother / Horas non numero nisi serenas’ (I only count the bright hours).
Boxer's pioneering *Jan Compagnie in Japan* appeared in 1936. It contained essays on the cultural, artistic and scientific influence exercised by employees of the Dutch East India Company in Japan from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, including the seminal chapter on Titsingh. In 1957 *The Dutch in Brazil* appeared (dedicated to his oldest Dutch friend, the naval historian J.C.M. Warnsinck), and in 1965 *The Dutch Seaborne Empire*, which in the Penguin/Pelican edition became a best-seller, like his equally widely read *Portuguese Seaborne Empire of 1969*.

Between 1926 and 1984 Boxer at an unhurried pace published a total of 15,105 pages: 39 books, 275 articles (reprints, translations, and hundreds of reviews excluded). He devoted 2,356 pages in all to Dutch history: 9 books (almost a quarter of all his monographs) and 33 articles (see West 1984). Occasionally he would publish a page-long article on the state of affairs in Dutch colonial historiography in the *Times Literary Supplement*, focusing the spotlight on the younger generation of Dutch scholars in the field and encouraging their work (for example, Boxer 1981a).

The human element was always central in Boxer's writings. Theoretical considerations and statistical analyses hardly received his attention. 'Lire et relire l'histoire, c'est la seule philosophie', as he used to quote Napoleon. He did not adhere to the dangerously positivistic idea that a human being is the sum total of a series of rationally comprehensible actions. He fully approved of Meilink-Roelofsz' detailed critical appraisal of 1980 of Niels Steensgaard's *Carracks, Caravans and Companies*. Like Boxer, who ranked his colleague of more than 65 years as a first-rate scholar, Meilink-Roelofsz considered the human element in history of prime importance, and preferred the flexibility of data emerging from reliable sources to theoretical models. Likewise she insisted on starting with a patient and thorough examination of the available archival sources before trying to formulate more general conclusions. She objected to Steensgaard's *a priori* theoretical concepts, which offer little room for development and change and usually turn out not to conform to so-called historical facts. 'It is his very outspoken theoretical standpoint that invites discussion, and what I have written above is an acceptance of the challenge of a dialogue', she wrote (Lequin 1990:140). A dialogue between them never materialized.

Boxer was convinced that 'we are all liable to criticism' and did not mind criticism as long as it was properly founded and honestly meant. The gifted writer that he was, he could occasionally build a good story on only a few references in archives or rare books, a story which might include sweeping statements that were not always warranted by these incidental references.

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2 Boxer 1950. This second, revised edition is preferable to the first; notably the last chapter, on Titsingh, is more detailed than in the first edition.
and he would leave things at that, without looking for a broader basis for his
generalizations. In this respect he was open to criticism. Meilink-Roelofsz
could be more systematic than Boxer, but published much less than him,
although he was the last person to find that of any importance at all.

Boxer had an open eye for new developments in the fields on which he
had written, and he did not regard his own writings as the last word. For
example, he considered it 'very silly' of the Dutch publisher Sijthoff to have a
Dutch translation (by a 'cretin' into the bargain) of his Dutch in Brazil pub-
lished (in 1977), instead of asking a younger historian to write a new and 'bet-

Boxer was 'a historian of colonial empires who always marched to his
own drummer' (Martin 2000). His writings were free of political correctness.
'Concern for the underdog and contempt for delusions of racial superiority
informed all his writing and teaching' (Cummins 2000). His Race Relations in
the Portuguese Colonial Empire 1415-1825 of 1963 led the Portuguese dictator
and colonial empire jingoist Salazar to declare him persona non grata. How-
ever, times changed and Portugal later conferred its highest honour (the
Grand Cross of the Order of the Infante Dom Henrique) on him. The Portu-
guese ambassador in London further honoured him with his presence and
his speeches at Boxer's funeral on 8 May, as well as at the moving Boxer
Commemoration at King's College, the University of London, on 11 July
2000, which was co-organized with the Portuguese Embassy.

Charles Boxer was a legend as an unconventional teacher to both senior
and junior students, regularly showing authentic artefacts, books and manu-
scripts as illustrations to his lectures. His concise style, his sharp, unconven-
tional wit, and the originality of his work invited further research. His work
was a labour of love and of erudition. He understood the art of making the
difficult look easy. His oeuvre will continue to be an inspiration to all intelli-
gent scholars in the field of European expansion in Asia, South America and
Africa in the period 1500-1800.

Charles Ralph Boxer was born on 8 March 1904 in Sandown, on the Isle of
Wight. Since the Crimean War, the Boxer family had a strong army and navy
tradition. In June 1915 his father, Major Hugh Edward Richard Boxer (1871-
1915), was killed in action at Hooge near Ypres in Belgium. After attending
Wellington College public school in Lincoln and Sandhurst Military Acad-
emy (where Winston Churchill had also been a student), Charles, whose eye-
sight prevented him from entering the navy, joined the same Lincolnshire
Regiment as his father and his eldest brother, Hugh Myles Boxer (1898-1982).
The Lincolns were almost an extension of the family (Clark 1991:22).

Boxer's mother, Jane Patterson (1876-1929), had been born into a wealthy
family in Tasmania which originally came from Edinburgh and had left

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Scotland in the 1820's. His only sister, Beryl Alice Boxer (1905-1979), travelled around like the rest of her close kin. She and her husband, Miles Smeeton (1906-1988), had travelled across every page of the *Times Atlas of the World* and were great conservationists. Both continue to be regarded with universal affection by yachtsmen all over the world (Obituary Smeeton 1988).

After a few years of service in Northern Ireland, Boxer was trained in the early 1930's as a language officer at Nara in Japan and was subsequently appointed as a Japanese interpreter. From 1936 he was a British military intelligence officer in Hong Kong. He was nearly killed in action at the surrender of this city on Christmas Day 1941. From this time until 1945 he was a Japanese prisoner of war, which left him with a crippled left arm for the rest of his life. The already famous Bibliotheca Boxeriana was seized by the Japanese for the Imperial Library in Tokyo, but after the war Boxer was able to recover almost every book. On a visit to Japan in the 1960's he discovered one of the few missing copies from his library in a bookshop. When he explained to the Japanese bookseller how he had lost the book and wanted to buy it back, the latter felt only too honoured to be enabled by this 'programmed' coincidence to return the book to its former owner as a present. Boxer resigned from the army with the rank of Major in 1947, in which same year he was appointed Camões Professor of Portuguese at King's College in London. It was the first time the University of London recruited one of its academics from among the military.

Boxer embarked upon this second formal career without any academic degrees, but with 7 books and 84 articles to his name, at an age when most professors are at the end of their creative life (if they ever had one), having sometimes had only a doctoral thesis and the odd article published. From 1951 to 1953 he also held a chair in Far Eastern History at the London School of Oriental and African Studies. After his retirement from King's in 1967, he held personal chairs at Yale, Michigan, and Indiana University (Bloomington) in the USA. He was moreover a highly valued permanent consultant of the Lilly Rare Book Library at the University of Indiana.

Boxer had many honours conferred upon him, including honorary doctorates from the universities of Utrecht (1950), Lisbon (1952), Bahia (1959), Liverpool (1966), Hong Kong (1971), and Peradenya in Sri Lanka (1980). In 1969 the Vatican offered him the papal knighthood of the Order of St Gregory the Great, which he accepted out of respect for the scholarly members of the Jesuit Order, notably St Francis Xavier (1506-1552). He also received memberships of scholarly institutions such as the British Academy (1957), the China Academy Taiwan (1966), the Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (1976), and the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde. Of the latter he was granted an honorary membership together with M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofsz on the occasion of the institute's 125th anni-
versary. Boxer accepted the latter with a brilliant, witty speech at a general meeting of this institute in Leiden on 10 September 1976.3

Except for the Liverpool doctorate, England was remarkably behindhand in the heaping of honours on one of its most honourable sons. In 1946 Boxer refused an M.B.E. for selfless moral courage while in Japanese prison camp because a Eurasian fellow prisoner of equal moral courage was not listed for the same honour. In 1975, when offered a C.B.E., he again refused, this time on the grounds that there was no longer a British Empire to be a Commander of. In 1997 King's College London created a Charles Boxer Chair in History at the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies.

In 1945 Boxer married Emily Hahn (1905-1997), an intelligent, unconventional and emancipated woman, and the first American woman to obtain a degree in mining engineering. They had two daughters, Carola (1941) and Amanda (1948). Emily Hahn wrote 52 books and for 68 years was one of the New Yorker's most prolific contributors. Both lived according to the principle of 'a shared preference for intimacy built around absence' (Angell 1997:52). On marrying, they promised each other never to criticize each other's work in public. Emily Hahn's Raffles of Singapore (1948) contains an annotated bibliography, including three pages of exclusively Dutch sources. Although she does not mention her husband in her preface, nor anywhere else in the book, she must have relied heavily on his library. Boxer, like his wife, worked as much as possible on two different projects at the same time. While writing, he always had a manuscript or some artefact lying on his desk as a source of inspiration.

Boxer's last years were marked by a variety of physical ailments, but his mind remained clear and his spirit unbroken almost till the end. He was intellectually active till his 90th and good-looking to the end. He was plagued by increasing deafness and was able to read less and less, but he did not complain. Although there were fewer visitors to Ringshall, he was paid official homage once again by Macao and Portugal. For the last three years of his life he was extremely well looked after in his own home by Colin Thoroughgood, who took care of him round the clock. He did not die in his own home, as he had wished ('I'd rather be banged on the head and left lying in a pool of blood, instead of going to a bloody nursing home'), but in a nursing home after a three-week stay. There the man who had survived one and a half years of confinement in an isolation cell, lighted 24 hours a day, in a Japanese prison camp died in another kind of cell.

At his funeral at West Herts. Crematorium near St. Albans on 8 May 2000 the name of God, in accordance with his wishes, was not mentioned (he had

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always said 'God created Man according to his image, and Man returned the compliment'). As the presence of formal representatives of their respective countries testified, Boxer had continued to enjoy the official respect of Portugal, Brazil, Japan, and Macao. It was the most remarkable funeral I have ever attended. It was a lively and moving 'conference on C.R.B.'. Family and friends from all walks of life, young and old, paid tribute. It was a mixture of expressions of jolly, sad, and grateful feelings, devoid of the clichés and routine tributes that are customary at such gatherings. The beginning and end of this conference were without words, but filled with the sounds of birds and rustling trees of his beloved countryside and the strains of the second movement of his favourite Mozart piano concerto, K. 466.

Boxer was a great traveller. With his curiosity about the unfamiliar and fascination for the unexpected, he moved around in the world completely at his ease. He travelled every continent, notably visiting pre-World War II southern Siberia, Manchuria, Korea, China, and Japan, as well as the Dutch East Indies. One of his treasured recollections was about his first-class voyage to the Dutch East Indies in the 1920's aboard the Dutch ship Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (Stoomvaart Maatschappij Nederland) in the company of his close friend, General Jean Charles Pabst (1873-1942; see Stolk 2000). The latter was himself greatly interested in the history of Dutch-Japanese relations and a collector of Japanese Things, leaving his collection to Boxer, who after the war was able to recover it from the Japanese completely intact, despite the fact that both were 'enemies' of Japan.

Boxer's letters contained as a regular feature a number of details of his current travel schedule, for example: 'Many thanks for yours of the 12th, arrived today. I got back from India a week ago after a very strenuous but successful trip (Goa-Bombay-Cochin-Delhi), and leave for Indiana on the 3 January [1979].' (Boxer to Lequin, Little Gaddesden, 17 December 1978.) In July and August 1979 he visited the country of his mother's birth, Australia, for the first and last time, even thinking of moving there. His schedule for 1980 was particularly taxing, with visits to Japan and Sri Lanka in February and March ('It was very strenuous – I was never more than 2 or 3 days in the same place – but very enjoyable', Boxer to Lequin, Little Gaddesden, 22 April 1980), America in May, Amsterdam, Leiden, Groningen, and The Hague in June, Kuala Lumpur in July, and Lisbon and Oman in October and November.

In January 1987 Boxer and his wife visited Harold Acton (1904-1994), an old China friend, in Florence. Acton had been an intelligence officer with the R.A.F. in World War II (and was also a translator of Chinese poems and classical plays) and had lived seven years in Peking. In 1991 Boxer, at the age of 87, paid a memorable last visit to Japan, in the company of his wife and their
close friend James Cummins, as guest of honour of Tenri University.

Boxer attended my promotie in Leiden on 14 June 1982 and reviewed my PhD thesis in the Times Literary Supplement (Boxer 1983). In May 1987, when he was lecturing at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, I joined him to visit Titsingh's tomb at Père-Lachaise, that wonderful city of living death. It was always exciting to join him on his book-hunting expeditions, visiting rare booksellers in Amsterdam or London, or to work with him in the old building of the Algemeen Rijksarchief at Bleijenburg, in The Hague. Incidentally, it was Boxer again who put me on the adventurous tracks of two other remarkable eighteenth-century VOC employees, namely the stadschirurgijn (municipal surgeon) of Batavia and patron of Mozart, Ferdinand Dejean (1731-1797; Lequin 1981; Boxer 1981b), and the 'Mandarin of Vlissingen', Samuel van de Putte (1690-1745; Lequin and Meijer 1989; Boxer 1991).

Boxer hardly ever took an ordinary holiday. He occasionally went to Portugal to recharge his batteries. He rarely went on holidays with his family, and even then there was always work, and visits to archives (he did not mind getting his hands dirty with spadework) and libraries.

Quite late in life, Boxer took a fancy to marine archaeology, giving advice and help to the archaeologists Rex Cowan, Peter Marsden, and Robert Sténuit. He acquired a collection of Chinese export porcelain, by which he was fascinated as objects with the power to inspire. He used cups from the VOC ship Geldermalsen for his daily afternoon tea, which were washed up in the kitchen in the same way as any other piece of crockery.

Boxer had even more interests and hobbies. For instance, he liked to read aloud like an actor, first to his two daughters and then to his grandchildren. He could draw well, often illustrating his letters to his young friend Wim Warnsinck, which he wrote in Dutch. He had a penchant for 'barrack-room ballads and bawdy limericks' and a taste for poetry (Shakespeare, Pope, Kipling, and Hardy; see Cummins 2000). His favourite bedside reading was, besides Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (AD 121-180), the collection of Dutch bawdy poems and songs, De Oost-Indische Thee-Boom (East Indies Tea Tree), for example. He also read, of course in the original Dutch, Eduard Du Perron's 500-page novel on the Dutch East Indies, Het land van herkomst.

Boxer held his drink well. Abundant alcohol consumption did not keep him from his scholarly work. He never smoked, but did not mind other people smoking. He hardly ever went to the cinema, nor did he watch television regularly. He did not drive a car, but loved to walk in the countryside as well as in crowded cities. When at home, he had his regular one-hour walk in the unspoiled countryside of the National Trust's Ashridge Estate every morning and every afternoon, rain or shine, with nothing but the sound of the birds and the trees; the dog, and an occasional friend to keep him-com-
pany. As he said, these were the only times when he was able to think properly. The local farmer and Boxer's closest neighbour for miles around, Paul Gent, confirmed this at Boxer's funeral, where he said that he could feel Boxer's brain ticking when he was walking in the fields. Boxer lived in the country and loved the country, but was anything but a British country squire.

Boxer's early training in military discipline and his strict daily timetable provided the basis for his vast scholarly output. This must also have saved him from becoming a prey to permanent depression as a result of his traumatic wartime experiences. He loved cats, dogs, flowers, good food (without being a conventional gourmet), and drink, particularly a *borreltje* and champagne ('it goes with everything'). He was obsessed with the weather, no letter of his being without details of the current meteorological conditions.

Boxer was a member of the fairly stuffy, though highly respectable, London Athenaeum Club and agreed with the dictum that 'the eventual and lasting verdict of most members was that all the arts and sciences are understood there, except gastronomy' (Lejeune and Lewis 1984:44). When in New York, he usually stayed at the Yale Club.

Despite his world fame, Boxer remained rather a private person, who preferred a solitary life without being anti-social. He enjoyed company, and at set times used to give a party at one of his clubs. His hospitality at home was generous. A United Nations of different individuals with different occupations would often sit around in the Ringshall kitchen with the old AGA stove presiding. There was always plenty of conversation, as well as victuals and drink. Boxer had a flair for bringing people together. He would be just as ready to help a hippie backpacker as an established academic or a prominent lawyer with an interest in Diderot. Visitors to Ringshall used to be welcomed by one of the original seventeenth-century cannon from Batavia Castle – which was stolen in 1979 and never turned up again. Overnight guests at Ringshall were treated more or less as congenial dogs, being expected to do things together at some times and to work alone in their own room, though with the door open, at others. Boxer could be rude to or impatient with anyone. This may have been due to an excess of talents and emotions, which do not as a rule provide the most suitable weapons for coping with 'the World'. He disliked pomposity, which he was apt to deflate with some caustic remark or other in his loud voice at any time. He hated all British jingoism and used to say: 'Every line of the national anthem contains a lie'.

All his life, Boxer was accustomed to having servants around the house. He never used to do any typing himself. He hated machines and once threw a typewriter overboard after having tried it for only six minutes! However, he always did all his research himself, without any assistance. He conducted a voluminous, worldwide correspondence and as a rule replied to letters he...
received by return of post, that being the only way of coping with the daily mail deliveries.

In the long run, however, Boxer liked to be left alone. He was a happy pessimist, believing in hoping as well as coping. 'Hoop doet leven' and 'De geest moet altijt boven alle moeilijkheden sweven ende geensints daaronder buigen' were some of his favourite Dutch sayings that recurred regularly in his letters. He remained a devout agnostic who was at once fascinated and amused by missionary Catholicism, especially as represented by the activities of the Jesuit Order, which he greatly admired (Cummins 2000). 'Nothing matters much; most things do not matter at all' was one of his cherished quotes; in his case, this did not lead to intellectual and emotional inertia and impotence. 'I like action – moral courage is much less common than intelligence' (de Figueiredo 2000).

Boxer was a fiercely independent man. He was full of sentiment, without being sentimental. He was a stoic philosopher, capable of objective, penetrating self-analysis, and at the same time possessed a warm heart. He would have agreed with Marcus Aurelius that 'Simple and modest is the work of Philosophy: lead me not astray into pomposity and pride' (Marcus Aurelius, Book IX, § 29). Having lost his father when he was 11 and his mother at the age of 25, and after his POW experiences in his late thirties, he was well aware of his own mortality and knew that 'we may be dead next week'. Finally, he was an undogmatic philosopher who realized that, lacking other possibilities, some kind of practical philosophy of life is capable of arming a human being against most of the banal stupidities of 'the World'.

Charles Ralph Boxer was a sensitive and perspicacious citizen of the world, who 'could spot a fake at a mile's distance', as his fellow-POW, Mr. Alf Bennett, put it at Boxer's funeral on 8 May 2000. He was a one-man historical army equipped with an exceptional speurzin (curiosity and doggedness in tracking down facts) and an astonishing memory. From an early age he was a historian and a soldier. Learning Dutch and Portuguese as a boy as a means of finding out about Japanese history, he was to become a polyglot later in life. He was not an orthodox linguist or interested in languages for their own sake, but used his passive and active knowledge of nine languages (English, Portuguese, Dutch, Japanese, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Latin) for written and spoken communication with his fellow humans – provided he found them interesting – old or young, dead or alive.

Also from an early age he was an antiquarian, a book collector, and a lover

4 'Where there's hope there's life.'
5 'The mind should always remain elevated above every difficulty and refuse to bend' (quotation from Jan Pieterszoon Coen).
of prints, coins, maps, and manuscripts, though again not in the orthodox sense. His collection – one of the most important ever put together in the field by one man – not only formed the solid basis for his scholarly work, but he shared it (for the greater part) with others. He once pointed out to me that all collectors have three categories of objects in their collection: 1. things they show to everybody; 2. things they show to intimate friends; and 3. things they never show to anybody. The objects in his collection were meant to be handled, and he did not bother over-much about their plain cash value, agreeing with Titsingh’s saying 'Ik veragt het geld, wyl het myn weetlust niet kan voldoen'.

Boxer was not a conventional professional historian, either. His work relied heavily on forgotten books and undiscovered archives. His writings, based on worldwide research in every archive and library imaginable, were of flesh and blood and treated the conventional as well as the unconventional. He was often a pioneer breaking new ground and offering stimulating new perspectives.

Boxer was also an unorthodox academic, who possessed no traditional academic degrees. He conformed to the rules of academia only partially. For instance, he used to wear formal navy-blue pinstripe suits, which would contrast with a pair of red socks, the buckles of a pair of monk strap shoes and an unconventional, colourful tie, preferably with animals on it. On formal, full-dress academic occasions he would ironically suggest that he might be taken for 'the man who’d called about the gas'. 'And was there not the enfant terrible in the less than reverent comments on venerable institutions and personages, a choice of language not normally associated with academic common rooms, and intolerance for the pretentious?' (Russell-Wood 2000).

The upright, honourable soldier of the Lincolnshire Regiment, the Hong Kong intelligence officer, the Japanese interpreter, and the historian-detective were one and the same gentleman.

Boxer used to say he had a love for Japan even before he was born. As a boy he felt attracted to Japanese Things. He survived Japanese prison camps thanks to his courage, his great physical and mental stamina, and Marcus Aurelius, the stoic Roman emperor-philosopher to whom he remained loyal all his life. Japanese officers respected him as a learned foreign samurai who spoke Japanese and knew kendo. He did not regard Emperor Hirohito as a war criminal. His love for Japan remained intact.

Perhaps his greatest talent, overriding the many others, was his acceptance of the innate cruelty of man, his ability to transform negative into pos-

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6 'I despise money, as it is unable to satisfy my curiosity' (Lequin 1992: letter 227, Titsingh to Kutsuki Masatsuna, Chinsura, 10 March 1786).
itive energy without complaint and without nursing resentment or spite. Only once does he offer the readers of his works an insight into this talent, namely in *The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650* of 1951, his first book on Japan after World War II. He wrote it from anything but a Eurocentric point of view. In his own words: 'A residence of three years in Japan (1930-1933) and a somewhat longer captivity in Japanese hands a decade later, has enabled me to see something of "the other side of the hill"' (Boxer 1951:ix).

Further down, he draws a parallel between the Jesuit 'Soldier of the Cross' St Francis Xavier and Japanese samurai by reference to a quotation from the *Legacy* of the first Tokugawa Shōgun, Ieyasu (1542-1616), which might well have been drawn from Marcus Aurelius' stoic *Meditations*: 'We must make ourselves indifferent in regard to all created things, so that we shall not wish for health rather than sickness, for riches rather than poverty, for honor rather than reproach, for a long life rather than a short one'. He went on to point out, however, that

The parallel must not be pushed too far, for this detachment from and indifference to worldly things, did not signify with Loyola an end in itself, as did the *ataraxia* [equanimity] of the ancient Stoics. With the Jesuit, it was an essential condition for the mind to free itself from all earthly attachments in order that it could act solely in accordance with the Divine will. The samurai was satisfied with sacrificing everything for the sake of his feudal superior. (Boxer 1951:48-9.)

In the concluding paragraphs of this work Boxer once more turns to Marcus Aurelius, 'that somewhat sententious but otherwise admirable Stoic', who wrote:

> What is wickedness? It is that which many times and often thou hast already seen and known in the world. And so, as anything doth happen that might otherwise trouble thee, let this memento presently come to thy mind, that it is that which thou hast already often seen and known. Generally, above and below, thou shalt find but the same things. The very same things whereof ancient stories, middle age stories, and fresh stories are full. There is nothing that is new. All things that are, are both usual and of little continuance. (Marcus Aurelius, Book VII, § 1.)

Boxer then concludes:

> So it is with the story of the suppression of Christianity in Tokugawa Japan; for the sickening cruelties and incredible heroism which marked its course have been re-enacted on a far vaster scale in our own day and generation. If only for this reason, the history of the Christian Century may perhaps be regarded as a 'tract for the times', and one from which the reader can draw his own moral. (Boxer 1951:397.)

Boxer did not wish to write his memoirs or bother about his biography, nor
did he like interviews. And 'Quand un vieillard meurt, c'est une bibliothèque qui brûle'. The man and his work are one. In the words of the Chinese historian Lo-shu Fu (as cited by Cummins, 1984:xvii):

These are my works
These works my soul display
Behold my works
When I have passed away.

Boxer's voice in the story of the encounter between human beings from Europe and the Far East, Africa and South America was unique. He was a passionate intermediary and interpreter in the ongoing exchange of ideas and emotions between humans in the past and present. He viewed the so-called sciences, the humanities and the arts as one interdependent whole, and believed in diversity before everything. Buffon once said 'Le style c'est l'homme même [Style is the man himself]' (Buffon 1992:30). Style is certainly what Boxer had – but then, one cannot explain everything. He had no qualms about disturbing his fellow humans and could not be bothered about polite clichés or ideas of political correctness. He lived as a scholar in accordance with the eighteenth-century ideal of a Republic of Letters, or 'a community of intelligence' (Marcus Aurelius, Book XII, § 26), without national and political boundaries.

Charles Ralph Boxer was an outstanding human being.

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7 'When an old man dies, it is a library going up in flames' (quotation from the Malinese author Amadou Hampâté Bâ).

8 For a full bibliography of the publications of C.R. Boxer, see West 1984.
Frank Lequin


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