

Did the West bring aid to China in the nineteenth century?

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

Christian missionaries aimed to bring aid to China. They set up orphanages, schools and hospitals. They also provided famine relief and medicines for the poor. However, their mission was to convert the Chinese people to Christianity. Some Christian activities were viewed with suspicion by locals, and hostility towards the 'hairy barbarians' grew. Christian churches were seen as being weighed down by their high steeples and were a threat to the spirits of the earth. The Chinese did not understand why missionaries opened orphanages for unwanted children who were bound to die anyway. They readily believed rumours that the **missionaries** were using the children's bodies for magical potions. The missionary practice of offering money for unwanted children led to criminals kidnapping children for the cash. Sometimes the missionaries attempted to look more Chinese – but dressing like the locals offended them too.

The religious ceremonies of the missionaries were alleged to include cannibalism, as encouraged by the practice of eating the body and drinking the blood of their god. Their converts, 'secondary devils', were said only to pretend to believe in order to get rice.

Indeed, the Chinese were warned that:

- missionaries extracted the eyes, marrow and heart of the dead to make medicines
- drinks offered by missionaries were poison
- those who attended their religious services would become 'bewitched'
- children in orphanages were killed.

Suspicion and fear of the missionaries at times led to attacks on them. There was a massacre of nuns and priests at Tientsin in 1870.



■ **Figure 3.12** Boxers heading for the city of Tientsin

i The Boxer Rebellion

Tensions between the Chinese and foreigners exploded in The Boxer Rebellion, which started in 1900. An anti-foreign movement known as The Boxers aimed to remove all 'foreign devils' from China. They attacked foreigners' businesses and Chinese businesses that sold foreign goods. The rebellion ended in a siege of Europeans in a European compound in Beijing. However, the Boxers, who believed that they were invincible to foreign weapons and were armed with only basic weaponry, were defeated by a force of 2000 troops from Britain, France, Russia, Japan and America.