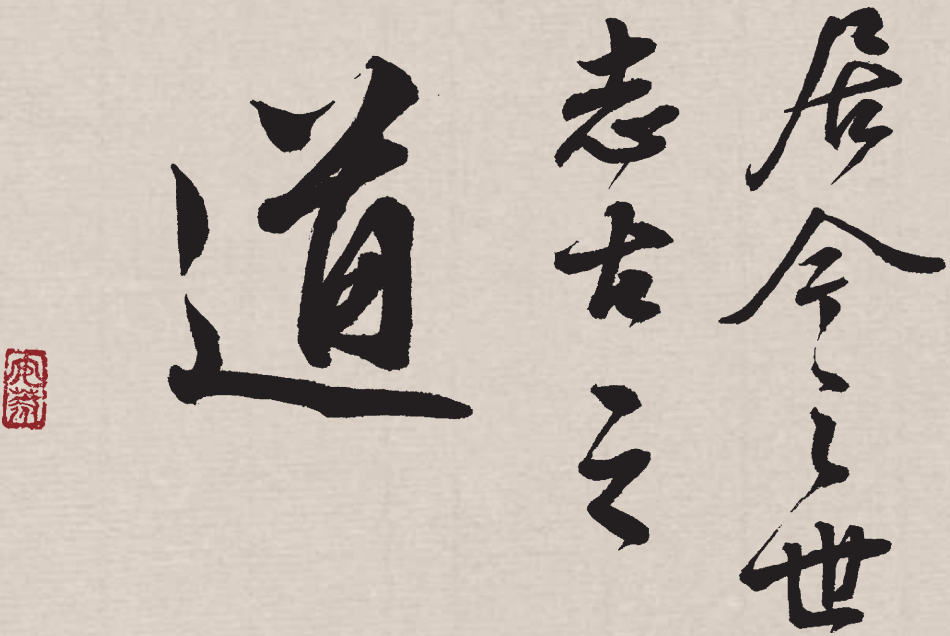


**Settled in the Present,
Committed to the Past**



Festschrift for Achim Mittag

Edited by
Fei Huang,
Dorothee Schaab-Hanke
and Martin Hanke

OSTASIEN Verlag

Deutsche Ostasienstudien 54

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on the Occasion
of His 68th Birthday

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The calligraphy on the cover, created by Dan-wei Zhu-Mittag (2024), 居今之世，志古之道, alludes to a passage in Chap. 18 of the *Shiji* 史記 ('The Scribes' Records) that serves as the governing word of this volume. For more details, see the introduction.

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The Localization and Rediscovery of the Boxer Fort Hophu

Sebastian DEMUTH*

Introduction: The Puzzle of Hophu

In January 1901, during the Boxer Uprising (*Yihetuan yundong* 義和團運動, 1899–1901), German troops searched the region north of Beijing for Boxer hideouts. Locals in Liubinbu 劉斌堡,¹ a village in today's Yanqing 延慶 District, reported a Boxer position called Hophu near the mountain pass of Sihaikou 四海口. Accordingly, in the early morning hours of January 3, a German unit set out to locate the stronghold.² Hidden in a narrow valley, the site featured a collapsed tower and remains of walls atop a mountain spur.³ A brief but intense firefight ensued, reportedly involving 500–600 Boxers.⁴ After about 50 minutes of combat, the position was taken.⁵ Estimates of Boxer fatalities following the battle range from 140 to as many as 170.⁶ Losses among the German troops amounted to one man killed and six wounded.⁷

Despite numerous early 20th-century records of the engagement, the precise location of Hophu has long evaded identification. In fact, the fortification is scarcely mentioned in modern scholarship. The toponym itself is absent from Chinese maps and sources and hence ambiguous in terms of its transcription and underlying Chinese characters. This article therefore addresses two main questions: (1) what was the original Chinese name and transcription of Hophu, and (2) what was its exact location.

Drawing on historical accounts, maps, and especially the visual documentation of the battle painter Theodor Rocholl (1854–1933), this article aims at reconstructing the events and proposes both a localization of the site and a new transcription of its name in Pinyin and Chinese characters. It also presents the results of a recent field visit.

My interest in the topic began during my Master's studies in Sinology, when I first learned of field letters from China written by my great-grandfather, then a member of the German East Asian Expeditionary Corps.⁸ His correspondence sparked my interest in the Boxer Uprising and the Battle of Hophu. Against this backdrop, my research developed in parallel with my dissertation and is thus closely linked to the years of academic mentorship I received from Professor Achim Mittag, under whose supervision I pursued my doctoral studies. It is a privilege to contribute these findings to a volume honoring his inspiring guidance, unfailing encouragement, and the generous attention he devoted to his students' paths.

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1 Liubinbu, located 26 km east of Yanqing, is now a township (*xiang* 鄉). It was originally part of Ming-era military colonies (*juntun* 軍屯) and later incorporated into Yanqing Prefecture in the early Qing dynasty. See Liu et al. 1993, 221.

2 Obst 1902, 236.

3 Binder-Krieglstein 1902, 74.

4 Zabel 1902, 361; von Rauch 1907, 224; Binder-Krieglstein 1902, 75.

5 Zabel 1902, 360.

6 Zabel 1902, 361, resp. von Rauch 1907, 224.

7 Müller 1901, 515.

8 German name: "Deutsches Ostasiatisches Expeditionskorps".

1 The Boxer Uprising and the Battle of Hophu

The Boxer Uprising erupted from mounting frustration over foreign intrusion, missionary activity,⁹ and natural disasters that devastated northern China.¹⁰ Anti-foreign secret societies, most notably the “Righteous and Harmonious Fists” (*Yihetuan* 義和拳),¹¹ or “Boxers” as dubbed by Western foreigners,¹² gained momentum, eventually receiving support from the Qing court.¹³ After the German minister Clemens von Ketteler (1853–1900) was killed in Beijing on June 20, 1900, the Qing declared war on the foreign powers, leading to the intervention of the Eight-Nation Alliance.¹⁴

Following the relief of the besieged legations in Beijing in August 1900,¹⁵ German forces remained active in northern China under Field Marshal Count Alfred von Waldersee (1832–1904). These punitive expeditions aimed to eliminate remaining Boxer resistance.¹⁶ In early January 1901, German troops stationed in Liubinbu received reports of a Boxer stronghold near Sihaikou.¹⁷ What followed was an engagement at a site referred to in Western sources as Hophu¹⁸ – a location whose precise position gradually faded from memory. The following sections examine the battle fought there between German troops and the Boxers, and explore what historical and modern sources reveal about its location and nature.

1.1 The Course of Events at Hophu

The main account of the Battle of Hophu is found in a comprehensive record of German military activities during the Boxer Uprising, the large-format chronicle *Deutschland in China: 1900–1901*, edited by Adolph Obst (1869–1945) and published in 1902 in Düsseldorf. Alongside numerous photographs and contributions from members in the East Asian Expeditionary Corps, the volume is richly illustrated – primarily by the German painter and artist Theodor Rocholl.¹⁹

Other detailed accounts of the Battle of Hophu are Rudolf Zabel’s (1876–1939) *Deutschland in China*, published in 1902 by Georg Wigand in Leipzig,²⁰ and Eugen Binder-Kriegelstein’s *Die Kämpfe des deutschen Expeditionskorps in China und ihre militärischen Lehren*, published in 1902 in Berlin.²¹ As war reporters, Zabel and Binder-Kriegelstein had a journalistic background. Both devote extensive passages to the Battle of Hophu, offering many important details.

Although several other works describe or mention the battle, Fedor von Rauch’s book stands out for its level of detail and precision. His work is titled *Mit Graf Waldersee in China: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen* and was published in 1907 in Berlin.²²

9 Hsü 2000, 387ff.

10 Hsü 2000, 390.

11 The original name was *Yibequan* 義和拳, later changed to *Yihetuan* 義和團 (The Righteous and Harmonious Society) and adopted by modern Chinese historiography. See Kuss 2015, 200.

12 Liu 2004, 174.

13 Hsü 2000, 393.

14 Hsü 2000, 395.

15 Hsü 2000, 397f.

16 Obst 1902, 229f.

17 Obst 1902, 236 and 239.

18 Obst 1902, 235ff.

19 Obst 1902, preface, n. p.

20 Zabel 1902.

21 Binder-Kriegelstein 1902.

22 von Rauch 1907.

On December 28, 1900, Lieutenant Colonel Pavel, with elements of the 1st Brigade, departed from Beijing to secure the Yanqing area and verify local compliance. Pavel was also tasked with confirming the absence of Chinese troops beyond the mountains.²³ Harsh conditions added to the difficulties, with temperatures dropping sharply and Beijing reaching almost -15° Réaumur in early January, accompanied by strong winds.²⁴

By December 31, Pavel's troops reached Yanqing, where he received new orders to block Chinese forces from retreating along the Baihe 白河. He advanced north to Jing'anpu 靖安堡, arriving on January 1, 1901, without encountering resistance.²⁵ Bitter cold and fresh snowfall on January 2 slowed the troops on their way back. In Liubinbu, residents reported a well-armed band in the mountains at Hophu, led by a man who had imposed near-total control over the area – collecting taxes, recruiting fighters, and assembling a force of around 1,000 men.²⁶ Binder-Krieglstein records a Boxer leader called Yaolandsio, who is said to have commanded the local forces from headquarters in Sihaikou,²⁷ 12 km east of Hophu.²⁸ According to Obst's account, interrogations later revealed the leader's intentions to expand influence through raids into Yanqing and Changping 昌平. To intercept him, Pavel departed at 3 a.m. on January 3.²⁹

Heavy snow and a narrow mountain path forced the detachment to lead horses on foot through difficult terrain. At dawn, the troops spotted a guard fire, and shortly after, they captured fleeing villagers, triggering alarms, bugle calls, and gunfire from Hophu. At 6:45 a.m., Pavel ordered his lead company to advance, where intense fighting began. As daylight increased, the Boxers' fortification became visible. Two companies and mountain artillery moved into position and opened fire shortly after 7 a.m.³⁰

The defenders offered fierce resistance from the fort's walls using outdated cannons, traditional wall guns, and modern rifles, forcing close combat. Two mines exploded during the assault but caused no casualties. Boxer riflemen on the left flank were quickly dispersed by mounted infantry. Resistance soon crumbled, and within half an hour, the German companies stormed the fort, prompting the Boxers to flee. By 7:30 a.m., the 2nd Battalion's flag flew over Hophu.³¹

The enemy briefly regrouped on a nearby hill with an old watchtower but scattered under artillery fire as the German forces moved forward. Pavel sent patrols to pursue the fleeing men and search nearby villages, including the Boxer leader's base in Sihaikou.³² However, the aforementioned Yaolandsio had already fled south.³³ After the clash, the detachment stayed in Sihaikou overnight. Encountering no further resistance, they marched back on January 4.³⁴

On the return march, Pavel ordered the destruction of villages, including Sihaikou. The detachment passed through Liubinbu and reached Yanqing on January 5. On the way back to

23 Obst 1902, 230f.

24 Obst 1902, 234. -15° Réaumur corresponds to -18.75° C or approximately -1.75° F.

25 Obst 1902, 235.

26 Obst 1902, 236.

27 Binder-Krieglstein 1902, 79.

28 Obst 1902, 239f.

29 Obst 1902, 236.

30 Obst 1902, 238.

31 Obst 1902, 238f.

32 Obst 1902, 239f.

33 Binder-Krieglstein 1902, 79.

34 Obst 1902, 239f.

Beijing, the detachment patrolled various areas but met no further resistance, and on January 14, the unit re-entered the capital and was received by Field Marshal Count von Waldersee.³⁵

1.2 Information on Hophu's Site

Binder-Krieglstein notes that Hophu stood on a hillock about 12 meters high, connected to the eastern mountains. The immediate topography of the site is shown in Fig. 1. The fort was rectangular, with a decayed tower (approx. 6 m high) and 2-meter-high stone walls.³⁶ Obst's chronicle, however, describes the fort Hophu as having high earthen walls, seemingly repurposed from an old dam.³⁷ Besides that, about 120–150 meters in front of the stronghold, a well-crafted abatis – a dense barricade of branches – blocked the approach.³⁸ Defensive strength was further reinforced by trenches and gun emplacements at the sides and base of the earthen walls, enabling a three-tiered line of fire. The chronicle remarks that this setup showed “how systematically the enemy had prepared their defenses”.³⁹

Obst's work is the only source that includes visual depictions of Hophu, all drawn by Theodor Rocholl. Chapter 8 opens with an illustration showing several Boxer rebels on the fort, dated January 3, 1901. The page features a decorated initial letter at the beginning of the main text. Moreover, one figure in the picture's background fires a wall gun, while another in the foreground aims a rifle. An entrance gate of the fort and trees appear behind them.⁴⁰

A similar but more detailed version of this scene is printed across page 237 in Obst's chronicle, captioned “Defense of Ho phu by the Chinese”.⁴¹ German troops are faintly visible on the left, ascending a slope. Several Boxers occupy the foreground, some firing wall guns, others rifles. On the right, behind the wall, a structure resembling a sharply tapering rock or earthen mound rises clearly above the wall's height.⁴²

On the next page, Rocholl explicitly identifies the structure as a crumbling tower. Beneath an illustration of the fort drawn on a military reporting card (see fig. 2), he wrote: “The earthen pyramid at the top of the valley barrier is the interior of the old tower.”⁴³ This sketch offers the most informative view of the fort's layout. It shows Hophu from a lower vantage point, looking up the slope. The half-profile perspective reveals two walls forming a 90-degree angle, suggesting additional walls that complete a rectangular shape. In front stands a low wall with battlements and gunports. Below the rise, the abatis is shown. In the lower right corner, a note further reads: “The ‘valley barrier,’ fort of the Boxers. In the foreground: abatis. Last 100 meters from the valley barrier.”⁴⁴

35 Obst 1902, 242.

36 Binder-Krieglstein 1902, 72.

37 Obst 1902, 238.

38 Whereas Binder-Krieglstein estimates the distance at 120 meters. In Obst's chronicle, it is put at 150 meters. See Binder-Krieglstein 1902, 74, and Obst 1902, 238.

39 Obst 1902, 238.

40 Obst 1902, 229.

41 The original German text reads: “Verteidigung von Ho phu durch die Chinesen”. See Obst 1902, 237. The word Hophu is usually written in Obst's chronicle in separate syllables as Ho phu.

42 Obst 1902, 237.

43 For Rocholl's note along with the sketch, see Obst 1902, 238. The original German text reads: “Die Erdpyramide oben in d. Thalsperre ist das Innere des alten Thurmes.”

44 The original German text reads: “Die ‘Thalsperre’, Festung der Boxer. im Vordergrund: Verhau.” See Obst 1902, 238. In Rocholl's note, “Thalsperre” (valley barrier) is placed in quotation marks. While the

Rocholl included another illustration of the fort, once again showing the wall with the gate, but now also revealing the previously unseen rear wall – together with the tower structure. In the foreground, German troops are shown engaging in combat with the Boxers. The image is titled “Storming of the Ho phu Fort”.⁴⁵

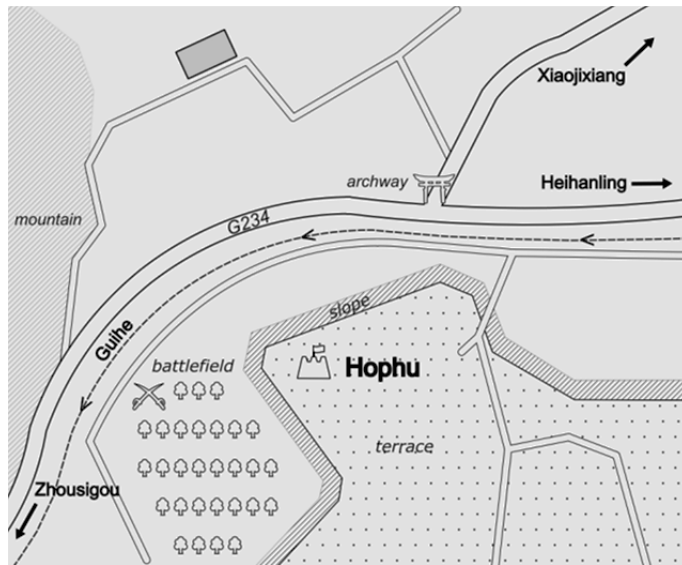


Fig. 1 Annotated map of the Hophu site with topographical features (map by the author)

2 Hophu's Localization and Rediscovery

Several contemporary accounts provide helpful details regarding the site and structure of Hophu. In Obst's *Deutschland in China*, Rocholl sketched a landscape on a military reporting card, showing an arrow pointing toward a pass between the mountains in the background. Two notes in German cursive read:⁴⁶ “The pass that we took a day before from the Peiho”⁴⁷ and “On top a temple”.⁴⁸ These descriptions refer to the route taken by Pavel's men to reach Jing'anpu at the Baihe (i.e. Peiho).⁴⁹ In front of the mountains, a wall and rooftops are depicted. Another note reads: “Wall of the town from which the battalion set off at 3:15 a.m. for the battle with the

German term is typically associated with a dam, it was also used in military contexts to refer to a barrier or outpost in a valley. In the sense of a valley barrier, it is also used in other chronicles on the Boxer Uprising (e.g. see Zabel 1902, 342, Binder-Kriegelstein 1902, 74), but also in military records (e.g. *Militär-Wochenblatt* 90.1 (1905), 1509). I am grateful to Klaus Homrighausen, an experienced reader and teacher of old German script and handwriting, for his assistance in deciphering parts of the note.

⁴⁵ The original German text reads: “Erstürmung der Feste Ho phu”. See Obst 1902, 239.

⁴⁶ German cursive (Ger. Kurrentschrift) is an old form of German handwriting used until the early 20th century. See Süß, 8ff.

⁴⁷ The original German text reads: “Der Paß, den wir d. Tag zuvor vom Peiho gegangen waren”. See Obst 1902, 236.

⁴⁸ The original German text reads: “Oben ein Tempel”. See Obst 1902, 236.

⁴⁹ Obst 1902, 235.

Boxers.”⁵⁰ The sketch therefore shows Liubinbu, the starting point of the German troops’ march toward Hophu.⁵¹ Liubinbu appears on modern maps and can thus be clearly identified as a fixed reference point.⁵²

Rudolf Zabel states that Hophu was situated approximately 15 km from Liubinbu,⁵³ and in Obst’s chronicle it further reads that Sihaikou was located 12 km east of Hophu.⁵⁴ Based on this information, it can be concluded that Hophu lies between Liubinbu and Sihaikou. It is only in Fedor von Rauch’s diary that the location of the Boxers’ stronghold is further specified. He notes: “A [...] Chinese stated that two fortifications lay between Dso shi go and Chei chan lin.”⁵⁵ The places mentioned by von Rauch can be identified as the villages Zhousigou 周四溝 and Heihanling 黑漢嶺, which still exist and can be clearly located today. Zhousigou lies approximately midway between Liubinbu and Sihai 四海, while Heihanling is positioned halfway between Zhousigou and Sihai.⁵⁶ Sihaikou corresponds to modern Sihai, formerly Sihaiye 四海冶. In the *Yanqing zhou zhi* 延慶州志 (Geographical Gazetteer of Yanqing Prefecture, 1742), Sihaiye and Zhousigou are both described as passes (*kou* 口) and “strategic gateways” (*menhu* 門戶).⁵⁷

Although these sources allow for a regional narrowing of Hophu’s presumed location, they do not suffice to determine an exact position within the mountainous landscape. The subsequent section details the approach employed in this research: beginning with a critical analysis of the toponym’s transcription in order to trace its possible appearance in Chinese records, followed by the identification of two potential coordinates based on geographical and historical indicators, and culminating in a field investigation that, in conjunction with a comparison to Rocholl’s visual documentation, ultimately led to the fort’s exact localization.

2.1 The Toponym Hophu and Its Chinese Transcription

A correct transcription of the toponym Hophu in Pinyin and Chinese characters is crucial, as it enables the search for the fort on Chinese maps and in historical sources. In her 2008 dissertation *Feldpostbriefe aus China*, published by the Ch. Links Verlag in Berlin, Dietlind Wünsche records the transcription Hefu 河府 for Hophu in an appended toponym index.⁵⁸ Jean-Jacques Wendorff adopted this transcription from Wünsche’s work in his 2014 dissertation *Der Einsatz der deutschen und französischen Expeditionskorps in China während des Boxeraufstandes 1900–1901*.⁵⁹

Although the German sources name some of the villages through which the German troops passed, the exact course of their march can only be inferred. Regarding Hophu’s position, the most precise information is provided by von Rauch who notes that the fort was located halfway between

50 The original German text reads: “Mauer der Stadt, von der das Bataillon nachts 3 Uhr 15 M. aufbrach zum Gefecht mit den Boxern”. See Obst 1902, 236.

51 Obst 1902, 238.

52 Obst 1902, 239.

53 Zabel 1902, 354.

54 Obst 1902, 239.

55 The original German text reads: “Ein [...] Chinese gab an, zwischen Dso shi go und Chei chan lin lägen zwei Befestigungen.” See von Rauch 1907, 221.

56 Google Maps.

57 *Yanqing zhou zhi* 8.1a.

58 Wünsche 2008, 473.

59 Wendorff 2014, 530.

Zhousigou and Heihanling.⁶⁰ In 1901, however, paths in the region may not have been as clearly established as today. It is therefore possible that Lieutenant Colonel Pavel took an alternative route rather than following the modern Yanliu Road (*Yanliu lu* 延琉路), now part of national highway G234, which connects the investigated stretch between Liubinbu and Sihai.⁶¹

Nonetheless, for localization purposes, it seems reasonable to assume that by 1901, the most practical route already followed the same course as today's road through the valley. Yet it could not be ruled out that Hophu lay significantly north or south of this presumed route. A close examination, however, reveals that a place named Hefu, as suggested in Wünsche's index, is absent along the route of Pavel's mission on both late imperial and modern maps.

The transcription of Hophu as Hefu is problematic in itself, as the character *fu* 府 in the Qing dynasty was reserved for officially designated prefectures subordinate to the province (*sheng* 省).⁶² No prefecture named Hefu ever existed in Zhili 直隸 province throughout Qing administrative history. The character *fu* is therefore unsuitable for designating a village or a fortified site such as Hophu. Doubts about the transcription deepen upon examining the source from which Wünsche obtained it. The Chinese rendering Hefu was taken from an article by Xu Yifan 許逸凡 published in 1980 in a volume of Chinese translations of Western sources on the Boxer Uprising.⁶³ In it Xu translated passages about Tianjin from the second volume of Lewis S. Palen's *Decennial Reports on the Trade, Navigation, Industries, etc., of the Ports Open to Foreign Commerce in China and on the Condition and Development of the Treaty Port Provinces*, published in 1906 by the Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs.⁶⁴

Xu based his Chinese rendering Hefu 河府 on the Wade-Giles transcription *Ho-fu* from the English article.⁶⁵ The rationale behind this particular character choice, however, remains unclear. That Hophu may have been incorrectly transcribed as Hefu is essentially acknowledged in the "Editors' and Translators' Note", which concedes: "Due to the translators' limited knowledge, many shortcomings and errors in the translations as well as in the selection of content are possible." The note further adds: "We hope that readers will provide their criticism for improvement."⁶⁶

The Wade-Giles transcription *Ho-fu* in Palen's report appears to stem from an already inaccurate romanization.⁶⁷ However, the first syllable *ho* seems to be correctly transcribed. It appears in both English and German sources and clearly corresponds to *he* in Pinyin, as evidenced by other examples such as the transcription of the river name *Peiho* for the Baihe.⁶⁸ The *ph* in *phu* was apparently understood in Palen's report as representing an *f* sound (voiceless labiodental fricative), as in the name Philip.⁶⁹ According to war correspondent Rudolf Zabel, who witnessed the Battle of

60 von Rauch 1907, 221.

61 For the location of the G234 between Zhousigou and Sihai, see Google Maps or Baidu Maps at coordinates 40.554087, 116.310022.

62 Zurndorfer 1995, 173.

63 Xu et al. 1980.

64 Palen 1906.

65 For the transcription in Palen, see Palen 1906, 527. For the transcription in Xu, see Xu 1980, 430.

66 Xu et al. 1980, "Bianyizhe shuoming" 編譯者說明, n. p.

67 Notably, Winterhalder also transcribed Hophu as Hofu in his work. See Winterhalder 1902, 524.

68 For the transcription *Peiho* or *Pei-ho* for Baihe, see, for instance, the map in the attachment in Obst 1902 "Skizze zu den Kapiteln 7, 8 und 9", n. p., and the map of the A. Hartleben's Verlag in the attachment in Winterhalder 1902, n.p.

69 Hewlett & Beck 2006, 35.

Hophu, this pronunciation is mistaken. Zabel explicitly states that Hophu is pronounced *ho-pu*, remarking in a footnote in German: “Sprich ho-pu” (Eng. “pronounced ho-pu”).⁷⁰ He clearly indicates that the *ph* in Hophu corresponds to the German *p* sound—equivalent to the unaspirated *p* in Pinyin. Based on this evidence, the transcription Hefu must be considered incorrect; the correct Pinyin form is Hepu.

The remaining question is which Chinese characters correctly represent the toponym. The following analysis suggests that Hophu corresponds to the Pinyin transcription Hepu 河堡. Rudolf Zabel noted that the route to the Boxer fort leads through the valley traversed by the Guihe 嬌河,⁷¹ also known as Guishuihe 嬌水河.⁷² Fieldwork conducted during this research – as outlined in section 2.3 – confirmed that the stronghold is located directly on the riverbank.⁷³ It is therefore plausible that the toponym’s initial syllable *ho* refers to the river and corresponds to the character *he* 河, meaning “river”.

Zabel’s statement that the second syllable in Hophu is pronounced *pu* in German – thus corresponding to the Pinyin syllable *pu* – is further supported by terminology used in contemporary German sources. In various military reports and chronicles, Hophu is consistently referred to as a “Feste” or “Fort”.⁷⁴ These designations appear to reflect the semantic content of the Chinese toponym, specifically the syllable *phu*. In light of Zabel’s footnote, it seems plausible that *phu* corresponds to the character *pu* 堡, which means “fortified place” or “fort”. While the character 堡 has multiple readings – *bao*, *bu*, and *pu* – further evidence, apart from Zabel’s footnote, suggests that *pu* was the pronunciation used in Hophu.

Manchu transcriptions in Qing-era sources, for example, offer contemporaneous, phonetically informed representations of Chinese place names, predating standardized romanization systems such as Wade-Giles and Pinyin. These renderings reflect the pronunciation as perceived at the time of names, especially in the context of northern Chinese toponymy. In Wu Yuanfeng’s 吳元豐 compilation *Dorgi yamun asaraha manju hergen i fe dangse* (Collection of Manchu Old Chronicles Stored by the Grand Secretariat) published in 2009 by the Liaoning minzu publishing house, the character 堡 is transcribed as *pu* in Manchu. A relevant example is modern Baihebao 白河堡 – a locality reached by the Pavel mission and not far from Hophu – referred to in the chronicles as Jing’anpu.⁷⁵ The Manchu chronicles provide numerous other examples of northern Chinese toponyms ending in 堡, all consistently rendered as *pu* in Manchu.⁷⁶ Today, the character 堡 is still pronounced *pu* in certain toponyms, as for example the Beijing subway stations Majiapu 馬家堡 and Shilipu 十里堡.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Zabel 1902, 355.

⁷¹ Zabel 1902, 354.

⁷² Liu et al. 1993, 389.

⁷³ See sections 2.2 and 2.3.

⁷⁴ Both “Feste” and “Fort” are German terms referring to a fortified site and can be translated as “fort” in English. The term “Feste” is used, for instance in Obst 1902, 235 and in von Rauch 1907, 222. The term “Fort” is used, for instance, in Obst 1902, 235, Zabel 1902, 355.

⁷⁵ Liang 2022, 139. For the history of Baihebao, see Liu et al. 1993, 210.

⁷⁶ For a transcription of toponyms with the character 堡 into Manchu, see Liang 2022, 72, 74, 75, 78, 79, 82, 83, 108, 112, 139, 175, 176.

⁷⁷ Majiapu Station is part of Beijing Subway Line 4, and Shilipu Station is served by Line 6. See Beijing shi ditie yunying youxian gongsi.

In German sources published shortly after the Boxer Uprising, the Chinese character *pu* 堡 is frequently transcribed as *phu* in various toponyms.⁷⁸ German transcription systems at the time were not standardized, and authors typically followed existing methods such as the widely used Wade-Giles system. However, they often combined these with adaptations reflecting German pronunciation. The syllable *phu* does not appear in Wade-Giles, where the equivalent is written *p'u*. In German sources, the letter *h* usually served the function of the Wade-Giles apostrophe, marking aspiration of the preceding consonant. Accordingly, the German transcription *phu* corresponds to the Pinyin syllable *pu*. Conversely, when the *h* is omitted – resulting in *pu* – it typically aligns with *bu* in Pinyin or *pu* in Wade-Giles.

The pronunciation of the character 堡 as *pu* is primarily found in northern China. Historically, many places that today end with 堡 were originally “relay stations” (*pu* 鋪), which later developed into fortified settlements (*bu* 堡 or *bao* 堡). This evolution led to a merging of meanings and a blending of the pronunciations of these characters, complicating efforts to determine the correct transcription of Hophu.⁷⁹ Yet the evidence presented here strongly supports the conclusion that the toponym Hophu should be written and pronounced in Chinese as Hepu 河堡.

2.2 Locating Hophu: Pinpointing the Site on the Map

Although the stream running through the valley where Hophu is situated is today classified as the Xinquaying River (Xinquayinghe 新华营河), it forms part of the headwaters of the Guihe and has historically been considered part of the broader Guihe system.⁸⁰ The source of the Xinquaying River lies in the village of Dajixiang 大吉祥⁸¹ administratively part of Sihai and located north of Hophu. The river passes through Sihai, Heihanling, Liubinbu, Xiangying 香营, and Yongding 永定, where it eventually merges with the Guihe. The Guihe, in turn, is a tributary of the Yongding River (Yongdinghe 永定河).⁸² Thus, the Hophu fort lies within this upper catchment area, and Rudolf Zabel's reference to the Guihe therefore reflects a topographically valid interpretation. The Xinquaying River is not represented on all maps;⁸³ where it appears, it is sometimes depicted as a dashed line – likely indicating that the stream carries little or only intermittent water.⁸⁴ During fieldwork at the site in January 2020, the riverbed running through the valley was clearly visible, although the river itself carried no water at the time.⁸⁵

Only two locations in the region exhibit even partial phonetic similarity to the toponym Hophu. The first is the village of Heshangou 河山沟, due to its initial syllable *He* 河 and its resemblance to *Ho* in Hophu. The second is the place Dongpu 東鋪, located farther south, whose

78 Obst, for instance, transcribes Jing'anpu as “Tsing an phu”, Binder-Kriegelstein as “Tsinganphu”, and von Rauch as “Sing an phu”. See Obst 1902, 235, von Rauch 1907, 220, and Binder-Kriegelstein 1902, 63.

79 Zheng 2024, 67f.

80 An informational sign titled River Chief Information Disclosure Board (*Hechang xinxi gongshi pai* 河长信息公示牌) located on the riverbank opposite the ornamental entrance gate to the village of Xiaojixiang 小吉祥 (see fig. 1), at the approximate location of the former Hophu fort, identifies the stream with the more general name *Guihe* 媯河.

81 Liu et al. 1993, map inserted between pages 386 and 387.

82 Liu et al. 1993, 391.

83 For instance, it is neither labelled as a toponym nor visibly indicated in the satellite imagery provided by Baidu Maps, Google Maps, or Bing Maps.

84 See, for instance, Liu et al. 1993, map inserted between pages 386 and 387.

85 For the course of the river, see fig. 1.

relevance stems from its second syllable *pu* 鋪. However, Heshangou can be ruled out as a candidate for Hophu. The village lies relatively far north of the Yanliu Road – approximately 2.5 km – and, more importantly, it is situated on the northern side of the Great Wall. In German sources, however, all maps place Hophu south of the Great Wall, specifically at the junction formed by one section of the wall running south to northeast and another running east to northeast.⁸⁶ Moreover, the toponym Heshangou shows no documented historical development that would support its derivation from Hophu.⁸⁷

Dongpu is not consistently marked on modern maps, but it appears on online satellite imagery provided by Baidu Maps (Baidu ditu 百度地圖) and Google Maps. On both platforms, the toponym is displayed southeast of Zhousigou.⁸⁸ As is common with publicly available digital maps in mainland China, place names and road data are subject to mandatory coordinate distortion, leading to positional shifts of 100 to 700 meters.⁸⁹ Consequently, the displayed location of Dongpu may not reflect its precise historical position. According to the late Qing-era *Yanqing zhou xiangtu zhi yaolüe* 延慶州鄉土志要略 (Outline Gazetteer of Local Life and Conditions in Yanqing Prefecture), Dongpu was located ten *li* east of Zhousigou and ten *li* west of Nanwan 南灣, a village on the route to Sihai.⁹⁰ This information places Dongpu in close proximity to Hophu. Nevertheless, the toponym Hophu does not appear to derive from Dongpu, as the latter was already known by that name in Qing sources. It is recorded as such both in the *Yanqing zhou xiangtu zhi yaolüe* and in modern scholarly literature.⁹¹ Apparently in connection with the Battle of Hophu, Dongpu was reportedly destroyed, and forty villagers were killed after local Christians accused them of being Boxers.⁹²

Despite the evaluation of maps, spatial data, and contemporary accounts of the battle, a precise identification of Hophu's location could not be established due to vague and inconsistent information.⁹³ Another layer of uncertainty arose from the ambiguity regarding the nature of the site itself. While some sources – particularly the chronicle by Obst – refer to Hophu as a village, others describe it merely as a small military fortification.⁹⁴ This discrepancy is of no small

86 See, for instance, Bülow 1930, 53.

87 Liu et al. 1993, 235.

88 For the location of Dongpu, see Google Maps or Baidu Maps at coordinates 40.54744083235351, 116.30282359569159.

89 On Baidu Maps and Google Maps, the toponym is shown at the coordinates 40.54744083235351, 116.30282359569159. See Baidu Maps and Google Maps. In mainland China, publicly available digital maps are subject to a mandatory coordinate distortion known as GCJ-02, which shifts positions by 100 to 700 meters from the global WGS-84 standard. As mapping services like Google Maps and Bing Maps rely on official Chinese data for their cartographic layers, this distortion is also visible in their representations of Chinese territory. Satellite imagery, however, typically remains correctly georeferenced. See Encyclopedia.

90 *Yanqing zhou xiangtu zhi yaolüe*, 88a.

91 See *Yanqing zhou xiangtu zhi yaolüe*, 80a and the work's maps, 57 ("Yanqing zhou quanjing zongtu" 延慶州全境總圖, "General Map of the Entire Territory of Yanqing Prefecture") and 66 ("Dongqu fentu" 東區分圖, "Map of the Eastern Section"). For a modern treatise referring to Dongpu, see Xu 2006, 22.

92 *Yanqing zhou xiangtu zhi yaolüe*, 27b-28a. See also Li 2006, 20f.

93 For maps indicating the location of Hophu, see Obst 1902, in the attachment "Skizze zu den Kapiteln 7, 8 und 9" as well as the general map at the end of the volume, n. p. For other maps, see also Winterhalder 1902, in the attachment, n. p. and von Bülow 1930, 53.

94 Obst 1902, 238.

importance, as it influences assumptions about the site's scale and features – factors that directly impacted the search and added to the difficulty of identifying the location.

To determine Hophu's position, various references from contemporary German accounts of the battle were evaluated and cross-referenced. These include, for example, Binder-Krieglstein's remark that Hophu lay 50 kilometers southeast of Jing'anpu,⁹⁵ and Zabel's observation that the fort was situated in the Guihe valley, approximately 15 kilometers upstream from Liubinbu, near the junction of the old and new Great Wall at Sihaikou.⁹⁶ Obst's chronicle further notes that Sihaikou lies twelve kilometers east of Hophu,⁹⁷ and von Rauch locates the fort between Zhousigou and Heihanling.⁹⁸ Further, the records describe a three to four kilometer march across open plains before the valley narrowed, the passing of occasional villages, a steep ascent over a ridge into a gorge about 50 meters wide,⁹⁹ and finally a widening of the valley to 200 meters before reaching Hophu. The fort itself was reportedly built on a hill about twelve meters high, connected to the eastern range by a shallow mountain spur. The route through the valley ran along the western slope, opposite the fort.¹⁰⁰

While detailed, these accounts present several difficulties. It remains uncertain whether the reported distances were precisely measured or merely estimated, and it is not always clear which specific routes they refer to. Given this ambiguity, it was hypothesized that the modern road through the valley likely follows the same path that would have already constituted the easiest and most direct route in 1901. However, the possibility that the historical path differed could not be excluded.

Topographical descriptions – such as the narrowing of the valley or mentions of unnamed villages – remain ambiguous, particularly in light of possible changes in settlement patterns and terrain over the past century.¹⁰¹ The landscape itself may have undergone considerable transformation due to terrace cultivation, road construction, and broader structural changes that took place in rural China over the last decades. Moreover, the Guihe, an important geographical marker mentioned in the sources, was not visible on satellite imagery, as it does not consistently carry water.

The area between Liubinbu and Sihai was systematically analyzed using methods akin to aerial archaeology, including the identification of landscape features in historical accounts and maps – such as terrain bottlenecks, elevation changes, and valley widths. Based on this examination, two coordinate points – approximately four kilometers apart – were identified as the most plausible locations for Hophu and selected for field verification. The first point (40.548726, 116.290802) lies along the road to Sihai, at the entrance to Zhousigou. The second point (40.555434, 116.328156) is located further east, near the turnoff to Xiaojixiang 小吉祥 Village, also along the road to Sihai.¹⁰²

95 Binder-Krieglstein 1902, 71.

96 Zabel 1902, 353f.

97 Obst 1902, 239.

98 von Rauch 1907, 221.

99 Binder-Krieglstein 1902, 73.

100 Binder-Krieglstein 1902, 74.

101 See, for example, Zabel 1902, 356.

102 OpenStreetMap.

2.3 Finding Hophu: A Field Investigation

A field investigation was conducted on January 5, 2020 – almost exactly 119 years to the day after the Battle of Hophu. One central question was whether any visible traces of the fort could still be found. Given the pace of infrastructural and environmental transformation in China in recent decades – and the fact that Obst's compilation records that Lieutenant Colonel Pavel had the fort at Hophu destroyed following the battle – it remained uncertain whether any traces of the structure might still be discernible.¹⁰³

The first coordinate point (40.548726, 116.290802), considered a potential location of Hophu, was examined near the entrance to Zhousigou. The site lies on a narrow mountain spur approximately 30 meters above the modern road.¹⁰⁴ From this elevated position, there is a clear view of the surrounding valleys, both toward Zhousigou and in the direction of Liubinbu – making it a location that would have offered strategic advantages. However, the slope appears too steep to correspond to the type of assault described in contemporary German sources and illustrated in Rocholl's drawings. Furthermore, no definitive evidence could be found to confirm that this was indeed the historical site of the Hophu fort.

In contrast, the second coordinate point (40.555434, 116.328156) clearly corresponds to the actual site of the former fort. Even from the road, the structural outline of what remains of Hophu is discernible on a mountain spur directly south of the road, despite dense vegetation. The site lies directly opposite the access road to Xiaojixiang Village, now unmistakably marked by a large traditional archway (*paifang* 牌坊; see fig. 1). The fort occupies a spur projecting into the valley, rising about 20 meters above the valley floor (figs. 2 and 3).

The fact that the fieldwork took place in winter aided visibility, as the absence of foliage left the site less obscured. The visible contours of the fort closely match those depicted in Rocholl's sketch drawn on a military reporting card (fig. 2) and are still recognizable today (fig. 3). A particularly striking and distinctive feature is the split form of the old tower. The gap likely resulted from erosion and may have widened over time. Although the stronghold's outer walls are no longer extant, the soil at the site of the former tower contains a notable concentration of clay and small stones, likely remnants of *hangtu* 夯土, the "rammed earth" core once forming the interior of the structure.¹⁰⁵ Upon ascending to the hilltop, a level platform can still be discerned in front of the former tower, presumably used as a firing position by the Boxers, as seen in Rocholl's illustrations.¹⁰⁶

In capturing the photograph, an attempt was made to approximate Rocholl's perspective taken in his sketch on the military reporting card, although this could not be definitively verified during the limited time on-site. Judging by the position of the door opening in Rocholl's drawing, it would have been strategically reasonable for the entrance to face south-southeast – away from the road and instead oriented toward the mountain ridge extending to the southeast. This would have prevented a direct line of fire from both the road and the open field below, which constituted the battlefield during the engagement at Hophu.

¹⁰³ Obst 1902, 240.

¹⁰⁴ The estimated elevation is based on contour lines as shown in OpenTopoMap. See OpenTopoMap, <https://opentopomap.org/#marker=15/40.54400/116.28749>.

¹⁰⁵ Knapp 2019, 101.

¹⁰⁶ For the illustrations, see Obst 1902, 229, 237.

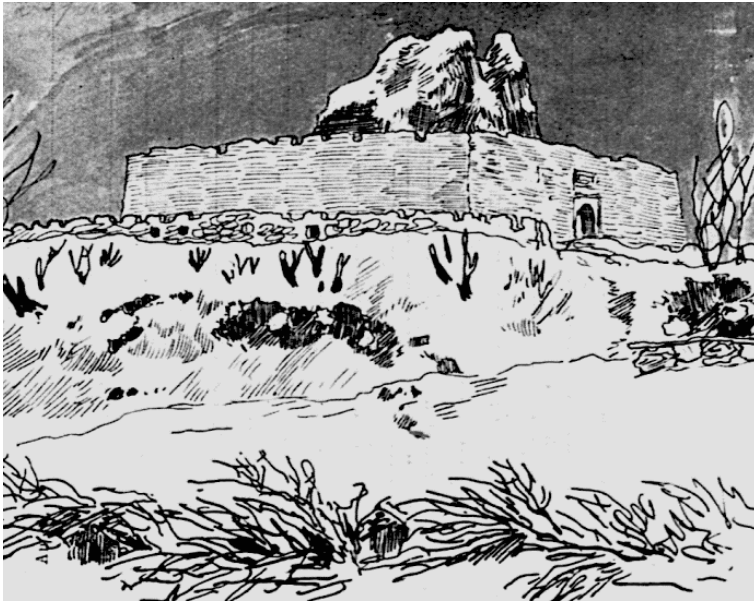


Fig. 2 Sketch of the Hophu fort by Theodor Rocholl, 1901¹⁰⁷



Fig. 3 Photograph of the Hophu site taken in January 2020

Conclusion

The rediscovery and localization of the Boxer fort Hophu sheds light on a site that, although often referenced in historical German sources, had not yet been precisely located in modern research. A key initial step taken was to identify the correct Chinese characters and Pinyin transcription for Hophu. The transcription Hefu 河府, as found in later secondary literature, proved to be misleading – both linguistically and historically. Hophu is neither the name of a present-day village nor attested in Chinese sources, and the character *fu* 府 – reserved for

¹⁰⁷ Obst 1902, 238. The sketch has been cropped and color-adjusted for clarity.

prefectural units – makes this transcription implausible. The alternative rendering Hepu 河堡, meaning “river fortress”, suggested in this article is supported not only by linguistic reasoning – including the phonetic compatibility of *pu* for 堡 and parallels in Manchu transcription – but also by geographical features, most notably the site’s position along the Guihe. This interpretation is compellingly corroborated in von Rauch’s report, where the pronunciation of Hophu is explicitly stated in German as *ho-pu*, corresponding to the modern Pinyin rendering Hepu.¹⁰⁸

Although the transcription issue could be clarified with considerable certainty, the precise location of Hophu remained elusive. Even with the use of georeferencing techniques, no available map revealed a location that matched the toponym or geographical features attributed to Hophu. As a result, the search had to proceed based on additional clues drawn from the German chronicles – such as distance estimates, topographical descriptions, and references to nearby settlements.

However, the information was often vague, inconsistent, or contradictory. For instance, references to sections of the valley that narrow or widen, or mentions of villages passed without naming them, do not allow for a precise mapping of the route – thus hindering a clearer determination of Hophu’s exact position. Given these limitations and the likelihood of significant landscape changes over time – due both to natural processes and recent rapid development – two coordinate points approximately four kilometers apart were identified based on a synthesis of these clues and detailed satellite image analysis, in a method bordering on aerial archaeology.

Ultimately, however, it was the detailed visual documentation provided by the German painter and war correspondent Theodor Rocholl – particularly the sketch on his military reporting card – that offered the decisive evidence that made the fort’s definitive identification on-site possible. During the fieldwork in January 2020, the remains of the tower and surrounding structures were recognized on a small mountain spur near Xiaojixiang at the coordinate point (40.555434, 116.328156), matching Rocholl’s drawings. Despite the limited time there, the visit provided a clear confirmation of the presumed location. Thanks to Rocholl’s sketches and the detailed records by other German participants, it ultimately enabled the rediscovery of the former stronghold. At Hophu, it can be assumed, the Boxers appear to have repurposed a decaying outpost, likely one of the military posts once connected to the nearby Great Wall.

Although the location and identity of Hophu can now be regarded as largely elucidated, future research may still benefit from exploring local oral traditions. Interviews with residents in surrounding villages or local historians may yield anecdotal knowledge or undocumented traces that further enrich our understanding of the site’s past. Moreover, at least one unresolved question still remains: Binder-Krieglstein mentioned a Boxer leader called Yaolandsio, who is said to have organized the men involved in the Battle of Hophu and later fled south. To date, no definitive identification of this figure has been possible, so it remains, at least for the moment, an unsolved question in the narrative of Hophu.

108 Zabel 1902, 355.

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The essays assembled in this volume have been contributed by long-standing collaborators, colleagues and friends, students and former students of Achim Mittag. The contributors are from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Austria, North America, Mainland China and Taiwan, who came to know him through conferences, research projects, and sustained scholarly conversations, as well as through the daily university work, and they all have enriched his life and academic career.

If one reads the 29 articles contributed by altogether 30 contributors attentively, one will find that most of them discuss topics that Achim Mittag himself has already explored in one way or another and that the authors explicitly refer to these talks or publications. What holds the contributions together is a shared interest: a curiosity to know more than was hitherto known or thought, and to scrutinize a detail that turns out to be a piece of the puzzle that makes up the bigger picture.

The volume is divided into eight thematic sections, namely Part I: "Macrohistory Versus Microhistory", Part II: "Between Historical Geography and Travelogue", Part III: "Working on Texts", Part IV: "Society versus Individual", Part V: "Intellectual Debates in China's Past and Present", Part VI: "Memory Culture and Identity", Part VII: "Early Cultural Encounters with China and the Beginnings of Sinology", and Part VIII: "China Expertise and 'Greater China'".

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